

THE COCO PATROL

Operations of a Marine Patrol Along the Coco River in Nicaragua

MERRITT A. EDSON, *Captain U. S. Marine Corps*

FOREWORD

■ During the past six years I have been asked several times to write the story of the Coco Patrol and its experiences along the northern border of Nicaragua in 1928 and 1929. I have given several informal talks on this subject before the Marine Corps Schools. As I am even less of an able author than I am an accomplished speaker, I have approached the idea of committing the story to writing with considerable fear and trepidation. It is one thing to hold the interest of an audience for an hour or so, especially with the aid of pictures flashed upon a screen and by the expedient of answering a few questions; it is quite a different thing to commit the experiences of fourteen months to a sheet of paper; to select the really important things from the unimportant; and to hold the interest of the reader in events which concerned me vitally at the time as a participant but which will undoubtedly prove dull and commonplace to those who have campaigned in Nicaragua, Haiti, Santo Domingo, and other innumerable places that Marines have been.

To tell the real story of the Coco Patrol, I have felt it necessary to begin with those activities ashore of the Marine Detachment, *USS Denver*, which preceded it; to me, they are so inter-related that the story of one is incomplete without the other. This is not an "article." So far as possible, I have tried to avoid any technical discussions within the story itself. In retrospect, reading the records of events, the field messages, the letters which make up the record of the Patrol, I find many sins of commission and of omission. With the knowledge of the country and of the people, which could be gained only by experience, and with those bits of information which came to us days and weeks too late to be of value, there is hardly an act which could not have been modified to our advantage. Such errors will be as apparent to others as they are to me, and I offer no excuses for them. I have simply attempted to chronicle the things which happened to us in such a way that the reader may catch a glimpse of himself under similar conditions some place in the tropics. After all, it was just another task to be accomplished; a task which, with the unfailing and constant support of the Eastern Area Commander, Lieutenant Colonel Harold H. Utley; the assistance of aviation in fair weather or foul; and the spirit of the officers and men who made up the patrol, was simplified and made easy; a task which I believe attained the end for which the patrol was organized.

SECTION I—INTRODUCTION

It was the twenty-sixth of December, 1927. The *USS Denver* was steaming north from Colon to Cape Gracias á Dios at the northeastern tip of Nicaragua. Our Christmas holiday in the Canal Zone had been disrupted by orders to proceed immediately to investigate reports of banditry against an American citizen residing

in Cape Gracias. I had joined the ship at Boston on the last day of November before she sailed for Panama and this was to be my introduction to Nicaragua.

Everyone in the Special Service Squadron was interested in the attempts of the Fifth Marines to combat Sandino's bandit operations in Nueva Segovia. A Christian Brothers' map hung on the bulkhead in the Exec's office and daily we plotted all reported movements of both Marines and bandits and tried to foretell what would happen next. Two things on this map impressed me: the Coco River, its source only a few miles from the Gulf of Fonseca, flowing eastward through all of Segovia and emptying into the Caribbean at Cape Gracias; and Santa Cruz, in the heart of Sandino's territory, labelled as the limit for boat transportation on that river. It seemed to me that here was a feasible supply route for the outlaw forces or, in case our Marines made things too hot for them, an excellent way for them to escape from the country. We had no information about the Coco River or the country through which it flowed. Why not send a reconnaissance patrol upstream from Cape Gracias, using the ship's boats if necessary. Would it not be advisable to garrison the lower river valley to deny it to the bandits? And if the river was in fact navigable to Santa Cruz, why not send a combat patrol from the east coast to operate in conjunction with our forces already in Segovia? Such was the drift of conversation between the ship's officers and myself. Again in January, the same ideas were discussed with Major Harold H. Utley, (now Lieutenant Colonel, Retired) as we carried him north from Colon to assume command of the newly created Eastern Area in Nicaragua. It is doubtful if any of us expected all these things to happen; and yet within two months' time the reconnaissance patrol was a "fait accompli." By the middle of April Marines were garrisoned along the lower river, and July found the Coco Patrol headed for Santa Cruz via Cape Gracias and the river route.

It was my good fortune to command all three of these successive steps which culminated in the advance of the Coco Patrol upstream during the very height of the rainy season to Poteca, a distance of over four hundred river miles, where a permanent base was established from which continual patrolling was carried on to the south and west into bandit territory. During these operations we utilized almost every conceivable mode of transportation; coast-wise schooner; gasoline motor boats and barges; native boats with outboard motors; poling boats, sometimes right side up and almost as often bottom side up; old shank's mare with our food and clothing, if we had any, packed in shoulder rolls; the same old mare with mules to carry the food and clothing roll although the mule in turn had to be carried through the mud or pushed up hill; and finally, by air from Jinotega to the East Coast. Bull carts and automobiles are omitted because such things as bull-cart trails did not exist in the area in which we operated; and automobiles were to northeastern Nicaragua what rocket ships are to us—dreams of the future.

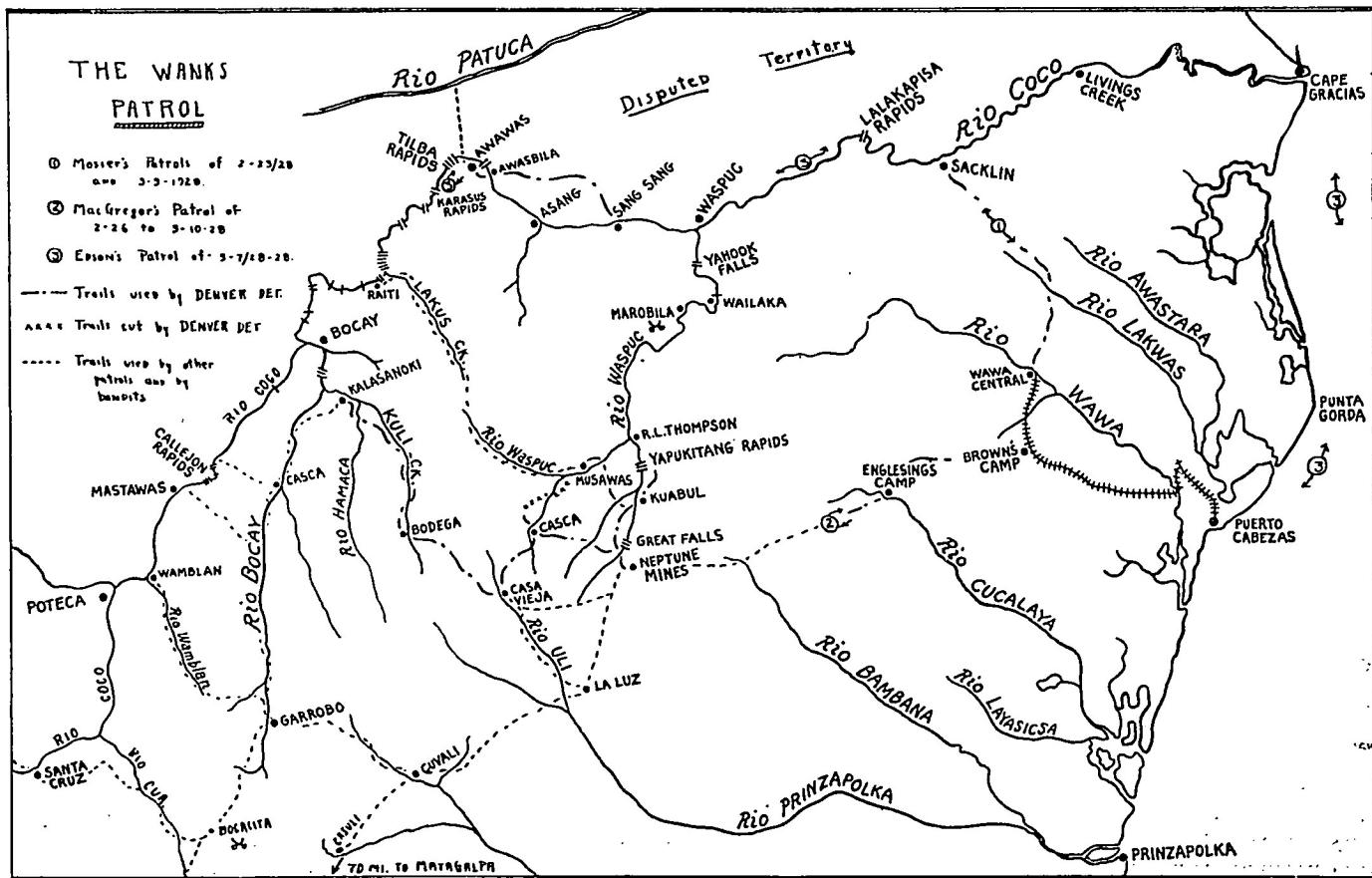
Nicaragua is approximately the size of New York State. Considering the winding courses of the rivers, the boundary between Nicaragua and Honduras is rough-

ly seven hundred miles long, three-fifths of which is formed by the Coco River from its confluence with the Poteca River to its mouth at Cape Gracias á Dios. This boundary is not definitely established.¹ Nicaragua claims the territory as far north as Patuca River while Honduras insists that the Poteca and Coco Rivers establish the real boundary between the two countries. Nicaragua undoubtedly exercises a more stable and continuous government of the territory immediately north of the Coco River than does Honduras; the inhabitants claim Nicaraguan citizenship, vote in Nicaraguan elections, pay Nicaraguan taxes, and many of the local officials live on the north bank of the river. It makes no attempt to control the valley of the Patuca. On the other hand, Honduras exercises its sovereignty intermittently by sending annual or semi-annual patrols under the command of an army officer along the lower Coco valley to collect Honduranian taxes and mete out Honduranian justice. Upon the approach of these patrols, Nicaraguan appointees take to the jungle and hide until their departure. Lumber and other dealers operating in this section protect themselves by obtaining dual concessions and by paying double taxes when necessary.

The Coco is the largest river in Central America. It rises in western Honduras less than fifty miles from the Pacific Ocean, flows east through the province of Nueva Segovia to Santa Cruz and thence north and east to its mouth at Cape Gracias á Dios at the extreme northeastern tip of Nicaragua. The river has a variety of names.

From its source to Santa Cruz it is known as either the Nueva Segovia or the Coco; from Santa Cruz to Bocay it is universally called the Coco; and from Bocay to its mouth the natives call it the Wanks or Wanki. For the purpose of uniformity in this story I shall refer to it generally as the Coco. Entrance to the river by sea going vessels is difficult. There is the usual sand bar a thousand yards from shore, with a mean depth of from five feet to nothing. Breakers are always present. The main channel through the bar shifts its position with every change of wind or with each new flood of the river. Only local inhabitants and the skippers of coast-wise schooners who put in there regularly can guarantee a safe passage, always at high tide and invariably touching bottom. Once inside the bar, the river is wide and sluggish in the dry season with a depth of fifteen feet for a distance of fifty miles from its mouth. In the rainy season it has three times that depth, overflowing its banks and the surrounding country. It is navigable the year round by shallow draft motor launches as far as Waspuc and, except for the months of April and May, to Awasbila, two hundred fifty miles from Cape Gracias. There are a few rapids in this lower river but none of them offer serious obstacles to navigation, the largest requiring only a three hour portage. Between Awasbila and Bocay there is one bad rapid after another, every one of which has to be portaged. Pistalkitang is the worst of them all; unless the water is just right even the Indians will not ride through it; and Tilba is the longest, its narrow tortuous gorge requiring a portage of a mile and a half. Although there are but three real rapids between Bocay and Santa Cruz, the swift current and numerous short stretches of bad water offer plenty of difficulties

¹THE UNITED STATES AND NICARAGUA: A Survey of the Relations from 1909 to 1932: Dept. of State, Latin American Series No. 6; pp. 109-111.



to the inexperienced boatman. Above Santa Cruz the river rises rapidly through a narrow deep canyon and it is not considered navigable except by small native boats during certain short periods of the year.

Eastern Nicaragua, in which are located ninety per cent of the American investments in the country, is divided into two major geographical divisions, the eastern littoral and the central divide.

The eastern littoral is comparatively level, with open sabanas and some pine and other marketable timber. It is the center of the fruit and lumber industries of the country. It is intersected by innumerable rivers and lagoons, infested with alligators and poisonous snakes, which overflow their banks in the rainy season, making the entire coast an almost impassable swamp. There are no roads and very few trails which may be used in the dry season. Most of the travel in this section is by sailing and motor propelled schooners along the coast and by native cayucos and pitpans along the rivers. There are only two settlements of importance: Bluefields, the east coast political center, and Puerto Cabezas, built and controlled by the American owned Bragman's Bluff Lumber Company, Incorporated, a subsidiary of the Standard Fruit and Steamship Company. Small villages are found at the mouths of each of the larger rivers as at San Juan del Norte, Rio Grande and Cape Gracias a Dios. The population comprises only seven per cent of the total in Nicaragua. It is composed of a few whites, of many Jamaican negroes, and of Rama, Suma and Miskita Indians. English is the commercial language; the native tongue is Indian dialect, with the Miskita predominant. Some Spanish is used in the villages along the coast but is an unknown language to most of the Indians along the lower Coco River.

The central divide is the back-bone of the country. It enters Nicaragua at the western part of Nueva Segovia and runs southeasterly through the departments of Esteli, Matagalpa and Chontales. Extending eastward from this main range of mountains are knife-like ridges which divide the canyons of the large rivers and which taper off into the foothills of the Atlantic littoral. Most of the watershed drains into the Atlantic Ocean. The eastern slope of this divide is a mountainous jungle, covered with a dense growth of hardwoods and tropical under-brush. It is a country rich in gold, mahogany, pine and balsa and is extremely fertile. There are no roads and only a few trails, which must be kept open by constant use else they rapidly become overgrown. Except for the Pis Pis mining area, Bocay, and a few scattered Indian villages, this entire section may be said to be uninhabited. On some maps it is shown as "Montañas Inexploradas." The language of the few people who live there is Indian and Spanish. In going west from the Atlantic seaboard one moves progressively from an all English speaking populace to a combination of English and Miskita dialect; thence to all Indian speaking peoples; then to Indian and Spanish; and finally to an all Spanish speaking population.

There are only two seasons in Nicaragua, the wet and the dry season. In the eastern area one does not find the long dry season which exists in the western part of

the country, for even during this part of the year daily showers are not uncommon. These usually fall in the daytime and the nights are clear and dry. The rainy season begins the latter part of May and lasts until the end of December. It is much more severe than in western Nicaragua with rains every day and an occasional steady downpour of ten days or two weeks or more. The heaviest rainfall is in June and July, with October and November a close second. There are six or eight weeks of comparatively dry weather between these two periods of extreme rainfall. Because so much of the central divide drains into the Caribbean, the effect of the wet season on transportation in the eastern area is even more pronounced than in central or western Nicaragua. Dry ravines become full sized streams over night; an innocent looking stream becomes a wild unruly river; and the rivers, with the accumulation of all the waters of their tributaries, become raging torrents many times their original depth, the swift current sweeping trees and debris before it and making boat travel an impossibility or at best a hazardous thing. They overflow their banks, sometimes cutting new channels, obliterating the few trails of the dry season, and making of the whole coastal plain a veritable swamp.

In the latter part of January, 1928, the 2nd Marine Brigade under command of Major General Logan Feland was organized in Nicaragua with its headquarters at Managua. It consisted of the 5th and 11th Regiments and numerous ships' detachments. The country was divided into three, and later four, military areas. The 5th Regiment was assigned to and occupied the Southern Area around Jinotega, Matagalpa and the lake regions. Its easternmost garrison was at Tuma. The 11th Regiment occupied the Northern Area with its easternmost garrisons along the line Jalapa-San Albino-Quilalí. There was no Marine outpost on the Coco River below Telpaneca.

The only Marine Corps organization on the east coast of Nicaragua was the 51st Company, 5th Regiment, stationed at Bluefields, with outposts at Rama, Puerto Cabezas and Wawa Central. On the twenty-first of January, Major Harold H. Utley, arrived at Bluefields and assumed command of the Eastern Area which included "The east coast of Nicaragua and such Nicaraguan territory inland as can be controlled by troops supplied from the east coast of Nicaragua."² It is interesting to note that no western boundary was ever established for this area and that during the year which followed it grew to include approximately two-thirds of the entire country.

The turn of the year found Sandino and his bandit groups concentrated in the vicinity of El Chipote, a high mountain north of Quilalí. At this time his force was undoubtedly at the maximum strength ever attained. Following combined operations of aviation and ground units against Chipote during the period of January 14 to 27, the outlaws moved south into the Jinotega-Matagalpa area. Actual contact with the main group of bandits was temporarily lost. Rumors as to Sandino's movements were numerous, one of the most persistent being that he would cross overland to the Pis Pis mining area and Puerto Cabezas where a successful raid would result in much money, food stuffs and merchandise. Reports made to Headquarters, 2nd Brigade, also indicated that Sandino expected to receive supplies through Puerto Cabezas early in March.³

²Combat Operations in Nicaragua; by Div. of O&T; p. 170, Marine Corps Gazette, Vol. XIV, No. 3, Sept., 1929.

³CO EASTERN AREA dispatch 8611 (11 Feb., 28)—1200 to CO PUERTO CABEZAS, Nic.

The *USS Denver* had been lying off the eastern coast of Nicaragua for a month. On the eighteenth of February, 1928, she was at Bluefields ready to get underway for Colon where she was to re-fuel, re-supply and return to station. About two o'clock in the afternoon, a radio dispatch was received directing her to proceed to Puerto Cabezas immediately, there to land her Marine Detachment for the purpose of protecting American lives and property at that place and then to carry out her original schedule. At ten o'clock the following morning she dropped anchor a thousand yards off the end of the pier at Bragman's Bluff. Debarcation of the detachment under my command began at once and was completed at noon. The first step in the story of the Coco Patrol had been taken.

SECTION II—THE WANKS RECONNAISSANCE

The Marine Detachment of the *Denver* consisted of one officer and fifty-seven enlisted men. It was organized and equipped as a war strength platoon of six squads plus a headquarters section of first sergeant, detachment clerk, music and two cooks. One pharmacist's mate and a radioman were attached from the ship's complement. One marine, the ship's mail clerk, was left on board to perform his regular duties. Each man was armed with a rifle except the first sergeant and the trumpeter, who were armed with the automatic pistol, and one man in each squad equipped with the Browning automatic rifle. There were no rifle grenadiers; we had no grenade dischargers nor were rifle or hand grenades available. About half of the detachment had been on board for over a year; the remainder had joined the ship just before she sailed from Boston the preceding December. Non-commissioned officers' school and instruction in such weapons as we had available had been held almost daily. Two Lewis machine guns, 18,000 rounds of caliber .30 ammunition (all M-1906, wartime manufacture), 2,000 rounds of caliber .45 ammunition and rations for fifteen days were landed in addition to tentage, mess equipment, a small amount of clothing replacement, and a small radio set built by the ship's radio crew from salvaged material and installed in a modified field desk. As stated above the *Denver* was under orders to return to the east coast of Nicaragua after refuelling and resupplying at Colon so two weeks' supplies were considered ample nor was it thought advisable to put ashore the sea-bags and complete personal equipment of the men.

The landing, being unopposed, presented no difficulties. It was simply a case of disembarking via the ship's boats to the dock where transportation was arranged to carry both troops and equipment to the selected camp area. The *Denver* sailed for Colon late the afternoon of February 19th; there her orders were modified and she proceeded to Corinto on the west coast of the country. She did not make Puerto Cabezas again until the latter part of April when her Marine Detachment was two hundred miles in the interior and I did not see the ship again until the first of July, 1929, at Balboa.

Puerto Cabezas is the settlement built and maintained by the Bragman's Bluff Lumber Company for its employees and for the conduct of its business. It is built on the promontory from which it gets its name, one of the most healthful and delightful spots in Nicaragua. Facing the water front is a group of about fifty well constructed, screened-in bungalows, modern in every respect, with

running water, bathrooms, showers and electric lights. These were occupied by the foreign colony. Adjacent to this group of buildings were the Standard Foreign Club, tennis courts, a baseball diamond, the company's two-story hospital, a radio station, an hotel for transients and unmarried white employees, the administration building, commissary, ice-plant, power-plant, saw mill, machine shops and other industrial buildings, all owned and operated by the company. A half mile inland were the barracons for native laborers. To the north and entirely surrounded by the company's holdings was the native village of Bilway. A wooden pier extended eight hundred yards from the shore to a mean depth of over eighteen feet permitting ships of that draft to come alongside. A standard gauge railroad eighty-eight kilometers long served the logging camps and banana farms of the company between Puerto Cabezas and Wawa Central. It was to protect this American investment of several millions of dollars and the foreign colony, mostly Americans, of between three and four hundred men, women and children that the Marine Detachment from the *Denver* was landed.

There was already a detachment of twenty-one men of the 51st Company, 5th Marines, under the command of Lieutenant (now Captain) George W. Shearer at Puerto Cabezas. These men were comfortably housed in a combined squad room, mess-hall and galley, a temporary building of the cantonment type which had been constructed gratuitously by the Bragman's Bluff Lumber Company for their use. It was located on the bluff overlooking the water. A camp site for my detachment was selected adjacent to this building; tents were pitched; galley fires started in our own field ranges; additional sentries were posted; a combined guard roster established; and a defense plan drawn up. The fact of landing was reported by dispatch to the Eastern Area Commander at Bluefields and to the Brigade Commander at Managua.

Prior to our coming ashore and as an inducement for assigning additional forces to that vicinity, Mr. Veitch, resident manager of the company, had promised to furnish any number of buildings required to properly house such troops. Once the landing force was established under canvas ashore and the ship had passed out of sight over the horizon, the tendency was, of course, to think of the current expense account and to regret such open-handed generosity. Conversations were immediately begun with Mr. Veitch and on the afternoon of February twenty-third an agreement was reached whereby the Bragman's Bluff Lumber Company was to furnish us with sufficient material to build a barracks adjacent to and of the same size as that occupied by the 51st Company detachment, the necessary labor to be furnished by my organization. Work was started at six o'clock on the morning of the twenty-fourth. The building was completed and the command moved in on March third. It was not at all a pretentious building. The lumber furnished was pine, of little or no marketable value. Galvanized iron roofing, salvaged from another building, covered all but about twelve feet of one side of the roof, where tar paper roofing was utilized. It was wired for electric lights, the electricity furnished gratis by the company. Wire screening was used not only at the windows but also to cover the numerous knot holes in the siding. The building proved to be waterproof, reasonably mosquito and fly proof, and was a vast improvement over canvas. The galley and mess hall in the building occupied by the 51st Company were enlarged to care for the combined commands.

Our relations with Mr. Veitch, an Englishman of extensive experience in Central and South America, and the personnel under his control were most cordial during his entire stay at Puerto Cabezas as resident manager. He was always willing to assist us. Besides the two barracks buildings, a fully furnished house adjacent thereto was set aside for the use of Captain Shearer and myself. Our hospital corpsman was given access to the company's hospital and an agreement made to care for such men as might require hospitalization. The company's radio was made available for our use outside of their regular scheduled service, resulting in much better communication with the *Denver*, Bluefields and Managua than could possibly have been obtained with our portable radio set. Transportation over the railroad was furnished as required and arrangements made for animals for mounted patrols.

On the morning of February twenty-fourth, Major Utley, accompanied by his entire staff (one music) disembarked from a north bound coastal schooner from Bluefields and established the command post of the Eastern Area at Puerto Cabezas. According to all indications this would be the immediate center of activities of the area.

In the meantime, plans had been perfected for sending two small mounted patrols inland. There was no active organized banditry in the Eastern Area although there were numerous Sandino sympathizers or Sandinistas. Rumors of bandit movements towards Puerto Cabezas by way of the Pis Pis mines or the Coco River persisted. It was considered imperative that information be gained of existing trails and of conditions to the north and west. It was learned that Sandino had transported a shipment of arms for the Liberal Army from Cape Gracias to Jinotega via the Coco River in 1927 so he was entirely familiar with that route and its use for supplying his bandit groups or as a means of escape from Marine forces operating in the vicinity of Chipote seemed probable. A good trail (this was the dry season) was found to exist between Wawa Central, at the terminus of the Bragmano Railroad, and Sacklin, one hundred and ten river miles from the mouth of the Coco. There was also a surveyor's trail, thought to be in good condition, leading west from Puerto Cabezas to the Pis Pis mining area.

A patrol of four men under the command of Sergeant Melvin Mosier cleared Wawa Central for Sacklin on February twenty-third; another patrol of four men under Sergeant Dougald K. MacGregor left Puerto Cabezas in the direction of the Pis Pis mines on February twenty-sixth. Both patrols were mounted; each was armed with three rifles and one Browning Automatic Rifle with the full allowance of ammunition therefor; ten days' rations were carried. Neither patrol had a guide as there were no funds available for such a purpose, but maps furnished by the Bragman's Bluff Lumber Company were carried. The mission assigned was purely reconnaissance: to note the condition of the trails and general type of country traversed; to gain information of known or probable bandit activities or of anything which would be of value in arriving at a decision concerning future actions; and in the case of attack to withdraw immediately to Puerto Cabezas.

Mosier's patrol returned to the main body on the afternoon of the twenty-eighth, having spent three days in the vicinity of Sacklin. He reported a good well-defined trail, mostly over pine ridge, between Wawa Central and that place. His arrival at Sacklin was unexpected and took the natives entirely by surprise, although they already knew of the landing of additional

Marines at Puerto Cabezas. The inhabitants, favorably inclined towards Sandino, were not hostile to our forces. It was learned that occasional malcontents and fugitives from justice had passed through Sacklin on their way up the Coco River to join the bandit forces. There was no known system of supply along the river, although Sandinista agents had recently been to Cape Gracias seeking recruits and levying assessments for the cause. There had been no organized banditry nor was there any evidence that outlaw forces were expected in that sector.

MacGregor's route led through low lying, swampy terrain, over a trail partly overgrown and seldom used. He was forced to turn back before reaching the mining area because of high water, short rations, and no guide, but the information gained was of considerable value when two Marine companies were later ordered inland over this same trail. He rejoined the main body at Puerto Cabezas on March tenth.

In order to gain a more definite knowledge of the Coco River valley and to prepare for possible future operations which would effectively deny it to the bandits, Major Utley ordered a reconnaissance patrol under my command to proceed on March seventh up the river via Cape Gracias to Waspuc and as far beyond that point as appeared advisable to obtain information of the terrain, to learn of such outlaw activities as might exist, and to establish cordial relations with the inhabitants.

The situation confronting the patrol was not a difficult one. Although we had no knowledge of the territory to be traversed after leaving Cape Gracias there were, so far as we knew, no organized bandit forces in that section of Nicaragua and contact with armed forces was not probable. Tentative arrangements for transportation for the patrol had already been made with one William (Kid) Green, an American resident at Cape Gracias, so that final arrangements only would have to be made upon the arrival of the patrol thereat. As the mission was one of reconnaissance only, the patrol was limited to five enlisted men, all from the *Denver* detachment. This was considered ample to provide security without undue fatigue; in case of attack it was deemed strong enough to take care of itself until it could withdraw down river under cover of darkness; and that number of men could be transported comfortably on the boat which was to be furnished. A larger force would require additional supplies, additional transportation, with consequent loss of mobility and there were no compensating advantages.

Armament consisted of four rifles, one Browning automatic rifle and one pistol, with one hundred rounds of ammunition per rifle, two hundred twenty for the automatic rifle and twenty-one for the pistol, all carried on the person. A reserve of twelve hundred rounds of caliber .30 and sixty rounds of caliber .45 was carried with the thirty days' ration supply. Each man carried a roll containing a shelter half, poncho, mosquito net and a complete change of clothing. One man carried a fully equipped first aid kit with the ordinary bandages, disinfectants and medicines. Communication was to be by radio from Cape Gracias and by runner above that point. A patrol of six men under Sergeant Mosier was ordered to proceed overland to Sacklin to establish an outpost for the purpose of receiving and relaying messages between the reconnaissance patrol and Area Headquarters.

Intelligence or quartermaster funds available at Puerto Cabezas were limited. Hire of the boat transportation

and crew at Cape Gracias was effected by the usual government contract and later paid by the area quartermaster. Such money as I might need for emergency purchases, hire of runners, payment for information, etc., had to be advanced out of my personal funds with the hope of future reimbursement. On the advice of local inhabitants, I converted my last monthly pay check into leaf tobacco, bills and silver coin of small denominations and hoped that it would meet all requirements.

Neither the Ham or Christian Brothers maps were suitable for our use. The Bragman's Bluff Lumber Company had in its possession a map of northeastern Nicaragua compiled by the Moravian Missions, blue prints of which were made and used on this patrol. So far as the Coco River valley from Cape Gracias to Awawas was concerned, this map was found to be extremely accurate although serious discrepancies were discovered when later operations took us away from the lower river.

Considerable difficulty was encountered in obtaining a satisfactory guide and interpreter. A native named Dixson, resident of Bilway, was finally hired. Dixson had at one time been a river merchant between Cape Gracias and Sang Sang. His knowledge of the country and its inhabitants was expected to be an asset to the patrol. He spoke Spanish, the Miskita dialect and fairly good English. He was recommended to us by the white inhabitants of Puerto Cabezas and although neither Major Utley nor I were satisfied with the man, there was no other applicant and it was a case of taking him or none.

The patrol left Puerto Cabezas late in the afternoon of March seventh via the Bragman's owned motor launch *North Star*. We dropped anchor off Cape Gracias at two-thirty the following morning and lay to for dawn and high water before crossing the sand bar at the mouth of the Coco. Even then we touched bottom several times but with no ill effects other than a severe shaking up of the boat and its passengers. At six-thirty we docked at the Customs House and began transferring our supplies to Kid Green's motor launch, the *Zambita*, and the accompanying bateau which was lashed alongside her.

The *Zambita* was a flat bottomed craft about sixteen feet long with a beam of five feet or so. It was powered with an engine salvaged from a Model "T" Ford, the propeller shaft and propeller being housed in a tunnel to protect them from the river bottom. Its maximum speed was probably ten knots per hour. The mid-section, containing the motor, wheel, etc., was covered with a canopy to protect the pilot from sun and rain, the deck space fore and aft being open. After leaving the tide water, a member of the crew was constantly stationed at the bow, armed with a long pole which he used to take occasional soundings, to fend the bow of the boat away from rocks or sunken snags, and to add his strength to that of the Ford motor when passing

"(Special cable to THE NEW YORK TIMES) MANAGUA, Nicaragua, Oct. 27—Cape Gracias a Dios and other smaller towns along the Wanks River have been wiped out by wind and floods. Many have been drowned and there is great suffering among the survivors. At orders of President Juan B. Sacasa help is being rushed from Puerto Cabezas and Bluefields. Probably much of the loss of life at Cape Gracias a Dios resulted from flooding of the flat country. The wireless operator there escaped in a boat after his station was destroyed. It is not known whether the Custom House, close to the river, was destroyed or whether the collector, a Nicaraguan, is safe. There have been heavy rains in Managua as a result of the hurricane on the east coast." (THE NEW YORK TIMES, 27 October, 1935.)

through short rapids where the speed of the current was often equal to that of the *Zambita*. Watching the bowman pilot us up the main channel, avoiding obstacles by inches, picking just the right passage in navigating the rapids, keeping to that part of the river where the craft would make most headway against the current, all by carefully observing the breaks, ripples and speed of the water, was an education in itself and the knowledge gained then was later to prove of inestimable value. To provide room for the patrol of six, the Indian crew of three, and our rations, gasoline and oil, an open boat of the dug-out type was lashed alongside and carried all of our stores.

The settlement of Cape Gracias is built on an island on the north side of the main channel in the Coco delta. With the exception of the stuccoed radio station, all of the buildings are tin-roofed frame structures of one or two stories. The streets are boardwalks and all the houses are built on stilts to keep them above the water which entirely covers the ground during the rainy season. There were not many mosquitoes because of the constant off-shore breeze, but sand fleas were many and vicious. During the early days of the Pis Pis mining operations this village was a thriving metropolis as the point of entry for prospectors and mining supplies. An unknown American erected a pretentious hotel and advertised it widely in the States as a winter resort. He also built a palatial river steamer to make the gold runs to Waspuc. The hotel was burned by a jealous rival and, in 1928, the remains of the steamer were still tied up along the south bank of the river, rotten and broken through years of disuse. Later Cape Gracias became an important shipping point for mahogany, over twenty thousand logs having been loaded there in 1927; the following year, after Sandino had obtained control over the mahogany country, less than eighteen hundred logs were exported. Its chief importance to us was as a re-shipping point for such troops and supplies as we might later decide to send inland and as a source of information of bandit movements through friendly Americans resident thereat.⁴

While our supplies were being transferred to the *Zambita* and her accompanying bateau, I interviewed the more influential of the citizens, most of whom I had met in previous visits while on board the *Denver*: Fagot, an American merchant and owner of the largest fincas at Waspuc, self admitted jefe of the permanent residents; Lopez, a conservative, recently appointed Juez de Mesta for the Comarca of Cape Gracias and chiefly interested at that time in the appointment of local Agente de Policia in the river settlements and in levying and collecting taxes to reimburse him for his six months' exile from civilization; Antonio Salaveri, collector of customs, from whom I learned that Guadalupe Rivera, owner of Santa Cruz, had been a colonel with Sandino during the battle of Quilali (30 December, 1927), that he had then retired from active banditry and was acting as Sandinista agent and informer and that he maintained contact with the lower Coco valley and the east coast by means of his brothers Abram, who was then operating in the vicinity of Cape Gracias and Sacklin armed with letters from Sandino and empowered to enlist recruits and levy funds, and Raphael, who was working for the Bragman's Bluff Lumber Company and was suspected of being an active Sandinista agent on the

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kept sealed in a cool dry place. Only munitions as needed should be broken out and issued and each lot should be periodically tested to see if they are still serviceable. Gas masks should be kept in their inert containers as long as possible as rubber and the canister contents soon become useless.

In summary we can make a few observations. The disadvantages arising from the use of chemical agents in guerrilla warfare appear to be (1) Increasing the weight of the load carried by the soldier or pack animals by the weight of the munitions and in the event of the use of CN, DM or lethal agents by the addition of a gas mask. (2) Complaints from home and abroad of the use of chemical agents. (3) Destructive effect of tropical weather on chemical munitions and gas masks plus the generally unfavorable weather conditions such as heat and humidity which affect chemical cloud travel.

Advantages appear to be (1) The maintaining of the superiority of regulars by the use of a new weapon, (2) The immobilizing of the irregulars by the use of CN and DM, (3) The casualty effect plus the effect on the morale of bandits caused by WP, (4) Flanking movements may be carried out in unfavorable terrain by the correct use of a chemical screen with the added effect of reducing accurate fire by the enemy, (5) After the reduction of one or more positions which the outlaws consider impregnable their morale will suffer and thereby reduce their activities, (6) The added fire power that we can give to our base of supplies—the outposts—will allow us to attack the guerrillas with vigor when knowing that our bases are secure.

In conclusion we can deduce that lacrimators, toxic smokes, notably WP, are the best chemical agents to use in brush warfare. That hand and rifle grenades, plus the 2 inch hand mortar are the best methods of projecting these agents by small mobile patrols. That large patrols, pack train guards and outposts can use in addition the 4.2 inch and 81 mm. mortars.

Furthermore, chemical agents will be of immense value to the regulars in maintaining their superiority over the increasingly better equipped irregulars, as they have no protection against chemical agents. But it must be always remembered that these new weapons cannot be used as a substitute for rifle, machine gun and automatic rifle fire and that they should be used when no other weapon will take their place in order not to add materially to the problem of supply or affect the fire power of the patrols.

THE COCO PATROL

(Continued from page 23)

company's farms; Assmussen, a German merchant with a branch store at Waspuc; Alfred Webster, an Englishman, resident and patron of Bocay, who had left there in January with a small mahogany run and who told me that the local alcalde at that place was an appointee of Sandino's who levied and collected taxes for him, enforced his decree that no more mahogany should be cut in that area and who shipped occasional consignments of food to the interior for the bandit commissary; Benny Müller, American, owner of Sawa Boom where the annual mahogany run was boomed and sorted according

⁵FIELD MESSAGES, from Wanks Reconnaissance Patrol to CO, Eastern Area, Nicaragua, Mar. 7-28, 1928.

to ownership; and Harry Carlos, owner of the motor launch *Palpa* and competitor of Kid Green for river transportation.

Just before we left Cape Gracias, Benny Müller, having nothing to do for the nonce, voluntarily joined the patrol in an unofficial capacity. He had been in Nicaragua since 1895, having lived since that time along the lower Coco River and he knew it and its inhabitants as far as Awawas like a book. His services were invaluable. Through him, I learned facts about the terrain, the people and their customs which I would have had great difficulty in obtaining otherwise and his presence with us was a big factor in gaining the confidence of the Indians. Later, when I found that our hired interpreter, Dixson, was using the threat of my patrol to enforce payments of past debts owed him by the natives from his merchant days, I quickly dispensed with his services and used Müller as guide and interpreter to our advantage.

The *Zambita* cleared Cape Gracias at 0935, March 8, 1928. We made good some sixty river miles along the wide, deep and sluggish lower river until we were forced to tie up, at 1530, at Livings Creek because of a burned out bearing. A message was sent immediately to Kid Green asking for babbit and other articles necessary to repair the motor. Livings Creek was well named, for it was certainly alive with red bugs and sand fleas during the day, with lice and mosquitoes during the night. I found no other place during my stay in Nicaragua to equal it. While here two men of the patrol made their first attempt at navigating a native dugout with a pole and paddle as they had seen the Indians do. They pushed out into the river, both paddling frantically, first on one side, then the other. The boat went round and round in circles until finally the current washed it ashore a mile or so down stream and the two men gave up the attempt and walked back. It was ludicrous enough but it was a fair example of what might be expected from men whose only experience with water craft had been as passengers in a ship's motor sailer. A year later, both these men were fair boatmen and could handle pole or paddle creditably.

Because of this motor trouble we did not arrive at Sacklin until the morning of the twelfth, two and a half days behind our schedule. Here we found Sergeant Mosier and his patrol encamped in a good position to cover the river, all land approaches and the village. He had arrived as originally planned on the evening of March ninth.

Before leaving Sacklin the following message was forwarded via runner to the Commander, Eastern Area:

"8612 Arrived SACKLIN 0800 this date. Mosier reached here about 1430, 3/9/28. Has excellent location for camp. I have lost 2½ days thru engine trouble—burned out bearings and ignition . . . Commandante reports 40 armed men SANG SANG and 150 to 300 BOCAY. Am going BOCAY if possible. Cockburn knows nothing about them or at least denies knowledge. Due to slow travel thus far and previous information, we are expected by natives as far up river as SANG SANG. Mosier's trip was an entire surprise to inhabitants. Health of all hands excellent. . . . 1030."⁵

I have quoted this message to illustrate two points: the difficulty of obtaining reliable information under conditions which existed in Nicaragua; and to combat the

fallacy that all movements made by Marine Corps forces in that country were known by the inhabitants.

The difficulties of obtaining reliable information in small wars have been stressed in every publication on the subject, but one does not realize just what these difficulties are until experience teaches him to take into consideration the character of the informant, his political affiliations and local conditions which may and do influence all reports. The Commandante referred to above, Gabriel Garay, was a Conservative who had recently come to Sacklin from the central part of the country upon being appointed Agente de Policia by the Jefe Politico of the department. He was not well liked by the local inhabitants; he disliked and despised them and was afraid of them as well. Under these circumstances he frankly hoped to see Marine Corps forces posted along the river and his information, most of which had a basis of truth, was greatly exaggerated in every particular with this aim in view. On the other hand, Adolfo Cockburn, patron of the settlement, was a Liberal and a permanent resident. He was the antithesis of Garay in political belief and by nature. There was no assurance that we would ever garrison the river valley or, if we did, that we would stay long enough to eradicate the bandit element from Nicaragua. Although Sandino did not occupy that section of the country and, up to that time, his cohorts had not invaded it, his influence was distinctly felt through agents and propaganda. The probability of bandit reprisal for assistance to us outweighed in his mind the advantages to be gained thereby since he had every intention of living there long after our withdrawal from the country. Although Cockburn often helped our patrols in a material way, to his financial benefit it is true, I do not believe that he ever gave us information of value.

Bucking the current of such a river as the Coco is slow and tedious work. The river winds and bends in its course so that trails from village to village are shorter and can be traversed quicker than by the ordinary river craft. In one place we traveled around a big bend, three and a half miles of it, while the intervening bit of land was only a few hundred yards, less than a quarter of a mile. Not only on this patrol but in the majority of those along the river, report of our progress was always ahead of us. But in those cases where we abandoned the river and used the trails instead, we invariably surprised the natives. This was especially true where shore patrols were combined with boat patrols. Their attention was focused on the river—the more usual route—so that a patrol like Mosier's, coming in from an unexpected quarter, was never anticipated. This lesson, too, was later used to good advantage.

One other bit of information picked up at Sacklin, interesting chiefly because it anticipated Sandino's actual movements by one month, is quoted from the daily Record of Events: "Sandino is now supposed to be in PIS PIS district where he has taken over gold mines. He is reported to have about 200 men all of whom are mounted. Sandino is kept informed of activities at PUERTO CABEZAS by agents located there who go up via WANKS RIVER. He is securing arms and ammunition and is reputed worth \$125,000.00."⁶ Just one month later, April twelfth, "Sandino's forces of about 150 arrived

at La Luz y Los Angeles mines in the eastern central part of the country (Pis Pis area) and took complete possession. They seized all monies, gold amalgam, merchandise and live stock. . . . The bandits were well armed and mounted but poorly clothed."⁷

Between Sacklin and Waspuc, which we reached late in the afternoon of the fourteenth, we passed through several sizable rapids. The largest was that of Lalakapisa, meaning "Lost Money," so named by the Indians because of the large number of gold-laden boats from the Pis Pis mines which had capsized there. This was not a particularly bad rapid but it required nearly three hours to portage it and to drag the Zambita and its bateau through it. The water in the river was fairly low, too, and we were often forced to get into the stream to help the two boats through stretches of shallow water so that our feet were wet from morning to night.

By this time we had learned the art of clearing away the larger stones from the top of the sand-bars, uncovering the fine soft sand beneath in which we dug depressions for hips and shoulders, and thus making a comfortable bed in the open free from the mosquitoes, sand fleas and red-bugs which infested the grass covered banks and native houses. The nights were clear, with no rain, so that shelter halves were never used.

Waspuc was a settlement of seven well built frame houses with a two story store situated at the confluence of the Coco and Waspuc Rivers. Trails led north into Honduras, northwest along the Coco as far as Awawas, and south along the Waspuc to the mining area. We were informed that this last trail was seldom used, the Indians normally traveling by water. The north bank of the Coco was well cleared and offered a good site for a camp which would control traffic on both rivers and along the trails.

On the fifteenth we went ten miles south along the Waspuc River to Yahook Falls while the boat crew overhauled the motor of the Zambita which again had developed an ominous sound in its bearings. We spent the night of the sixteenth at Sang Sang, a clean native village built around the Moravian Mission of a German, Otto Schramm and his family; then on to Asang and Awashila, which we reached soon after noon of the eighteenth. This was the limit of motor boat travel, at the foot of the Kiplapine Rapids, the first real rapid of the river, with its half mile of bad, turbulent water, rushing down a gradient of forty degrees through rocks and boulders which churned the water into good sized waves and whirlpools and eddies and gave us some idea of what we might expect as we went inland.

I had received information that one Colonel Ramos with an Honduran patrol—one of those I have mentioned as making annual trips along the river to collect taxes—was at Awawas above Kiplapine, having crossed from the valley of the Patuca along a good twelve mile trail which joins the two at that place. Leaving three men with the Zambita, I proceeded overland hoping to interview him. He also had news of us so all that I found was a letter in which he offered to cooperate with us in preserving law and order and the information that he and his seven men had departed for the north.

On the way back to the Zambita I had my first experience at shooting a real rapid. There is no thrill like it: the acceleration of the boat; the rush and roar of the water; waves tumbling around one, often half filling the boat before it reaches the end of its run; the tenseness of the boatmen as they crouch in the bow to fend the boat

⁶RECORD OF EVENTS. Wanks Reconnaissance Patrol of March 7-28, 1928.
⁷EVENTS IN NICARAGUA SINCE FEBRUARY 28, 1928; p. 145. Marine Corps Gazette, Vol. XIII, No. 2, August, 1928.

away from rocks, crags and hidden debris; the shouts and cries of the Indians as they wager their skill, quickness of eye and deftness with pole and paddle against the river; and the breath-taking excitement of missing rocks and a ducking, if nothing worse, by inches. I later learned that all Indians disliked to carry white men through bad water; they would usually become excited, capsize the boat and often drown, and the Indians would be blamed for the accident, but during the next few months I rode every rapid on the river.

We returned to Waspuc on the evening of April twentieth. There was still the urge to go on to Bocay. So far as I had been able to learn, no one had come down river from there since the first of January. Just what was the nature of the country above Awawas? Was Bocay actually controlled by Sandino, and were the rumors which still persisted that there were armed forces at that place true? Having come thus far I decided to try to find out.

The Zambita was of no further use to us and it was sent back to Cape Gracias with its native crew. Three men were left at Waspuc with instructions to remain there until the thirteenth of the month when, if no word was heard from me, they were to return to Puerto Cabezas by way of Sacklin. The other two men and myself started up river. At Sang Sang I secured a native poling boat and a small boat crew which were towed as far as Awasbila by an out-board motor launch, the property of a native merchant, Martinez. Above that point we would proceed by poling. The plan was not so rash as one might think. The Miskita Indians who lived along the river might not be actively friendly to us but they had an inborn hatred of the Spanish-speaking Nicaraguans which removed any real danger from that source. Any report of our movements would be interpreted as a part of a much larger body of troops and by the time it reached Bocay, our three men would have become thirty or more. And the river was always a source of escape for we could float down stream as easily and as quickly as any one else.

But we did not reach Bocay. About noon of the twenty-third, at the head of Karasus Rapids, we met an English-speaking creole en route to Puerto Cabezas with his entire family and belongings. He had left Bocay three days before. He confirmed the stories of Sandino's influence at that place and that numerous men had passed through on their way to join the outlaw forces, some with the expressed intention of later returning with a large force to raid the Coco River valley; but he denied that there were any armed men then at Bocay. His story seemed straight enough and my opinion of it was confirmed by a Cuban living near-by whom I knew to be distinctly unfriendly with the bandit element. We therefore turned back, reaching Waspuc late the following afternoon and Cape Gracias at ten thirty on the night of the twenty-sixth. A radio was sent to the Commander, Eastern Area, reporting our arrival, some of the results of the patrol, requesting further instructions and indicating our readiness to return to the interior immediately if such action was deemed necessary or advisable. On the twenty-eighth the *North Star* arrived with orders for our return to Puerto Cabezas which place we reached just before midnight.

During this three weeks' reconnaissance we had traveled inland a distance of some two hundred sixty river miles from Cape Gracias. We had gained a thorough knowledge of the river, its transportation facilities and

the terrain through which it flowed. Most of the bandit information was negative although there were certain positive elements. In his journey up river in 1927, Sandino had treated the inhabitants of the river in a friendly and conciliatory manner so that the feeling not anti-American, was certainly not anti-Sandinista. Through his agents, Sandino exerted a distinct influence throughout the whole valley and he received tribute of both money and food from as far east as Bocay. There was no apparent regular traffic upriver to the outlaw forces although there was a continual drift of malcontents and petty bandits along that route to the interior. The forty armed men reported to be at Sang Sang had dwindled into none before our arrival at that place. In February, however, the Agente de Policia, Marcos Aguerro, had been deposed upon the arrival of Lopez at Cape Gracias and had gone up river with a few followers with the expressed intention of joining Sandino, securing a commission, men and arms and returning to raid that part of the country. The people expected such a raid in the near future. There was a persistent rumor that Sandino would soon move eastward through the Pis Pis area or down the Coco River, or perhaps by both routes. Because they were not sure of Sandino's control over the numerous outlaw leaders whom he had gathered around him, the more influential people along the river frankly expressed the hope that Marines would garrison the Coco to protect them against such raids.

Perhaps the most important result of this patrol was the contact made with the inhabitants of the lower Coco valley. It was my belief that, if we were to succeed in our mission of eradicating the bandit element in Nicaragua, we should make every effort to gain the friendliness and cooperation of the peaceful citizenry. On our way up the river, nearly every native village would be deserted upon our arrival. At the end of a half hour or so, two or three women would appear from the brush. When nothing happened to them or to their belongings, other women and children came out from hiding and finally a few men would show up. Through Müller, I met all of the influential people in this section and the chiefs of the larger settlements, and they in turn assisted in inculcating the ordinary Indian with the idea that we meant them no harm and were there with the intention of helping, not injuring them. Such people as Alverado at Waspuc and the Reverend Schramm at Sang Sang controlled the country and it was to our interests to cultivate their good-will. It did not detract from my position as commander of the military force operating in that vicinity and without their cooperation my task would have been infinitely more difficult if not impossible.

Except for a few Americans, the German missionary at Sang Sang, and three or four Spanish-speaking patrons, the inhabitants were all Miskita Indians. These people were extremely primitive. They lived in thatched huts, open on three sides, the fourth side towards the prevailing wind being thatched or covered with split bamboo to keep out the rain. Cooking was done over an open fire laid in the center of the hut. Dogs, pigs and chickens occupied the huts jointly with their owners. They were a short people, the average height being about five feet. All were infected with hook and stomach worms and apparently tubercular. Any one of more than forty years of age had exceeded the normal span of life. Boys were universally naked; young girls were clothed in breech clouts only; while adult males wore

trousers and the females skirts which were never removed before a white man, even when bathing. Upon our approach, the women would rush into their huts and don short circular upper garments slipped over their heads which gave them the feeling of being completely clothed above the waist, but which in effect did little to cover their nakedness. The river was a part of their life. They were taught to swim as soon as they were taught to walk, and once they could stand erect they found a pole and paddle thrust into their hands so that they could learn to navigate the native pitpan. The native language consisted of some four hundred words. To these had been added some English words and a few of Spanish origin. They could count from one to six by naming the fingers of one hand plus the thumb of the other; there was a word for both hands together indicating ten, and one for both hands and both feet indicating twenty. Anything over twenty was simply "a great many" and was naturally very inaccurate. Their knowledge of money consisted of the dime (a ten cent piece), shilling (a quarter) and dollar. Any piece of paper money was a dollar which meant that only dollar bills were really suitable for financial transactions. Like all primitive peoples, a leaf of tobacco, a little sugar or salt, a cake of soap, or any similar article would purchase more and was more acceptable to them than its equivalent in coin. The Miskitas are naturally a peaceful people, fighting only when forced to do so and then unwillingly. They were inculcated from the time of their birth with a hatred of the Nicaraguans whom they called "Spaniards" and so were potential allies if properly approached and handled. During all of my activities along the river I found these Indians to be entirely loyal and dependable to me. By learning enough native words to make my wants known to them; by showing an interest in them and their mode of living; and by always treating them fairly, I believe that I succeeded in that part of my mission "to establish cordial relations with the inhabitants."

All of the above was reported to the Commander, Eastern Area, with the recommendation that the lower Coco River be garrisoned with a base at Waspuc, which I considered the critical point, and in sufficient strength to patrol the valley as far as Awawas to deny that section to bandit operations. I also recommended that Johnson outboard motors be procured for use on the native boats as essential to efficient communication and that rubber covered sacks be used by each individual in place of the regulation pack and for perishable provisions as the only satisfactory method of keeping them dry. These recommendations were approved and initial steps taken to put them into effect.

SECTION III—THE WANKS PATROL

Hardly had I reached Puerto Cabezas before I went on the sick list with malaria, the first of four attacks within the next year. During my absence, the Eastern Area had continued to grow. Additional men had joined the 51st Company at Bluefields and Puerto Cabezas and, prior to leaving the latter place for the States for overhaul, the *USS Tulsa* had disembarked her Marine Detachment under the command of Captain John A. Tebbs. Lieutenant Jesse S. Cook, Jr., had reported for duty. An additional barracks building had

been erected so that all troops were comfortably housed.

Arrangements were being made to garrison the lower Coco valley by the middle of April. In the meantime, Major Utley decided to send a reconnaissance patrol into the Pis Pis district by way of Prinzapolka and the Rio Bambana. It was finally determined that this task would be undertaken by the *Tulsa* Detachment and that the *Denver* Detachment would go to the Coco sector. The Pis Pis patrol left the first of April.

About eleven o'clock on the morning of April sixth, 1928, a radiogram was received from Brigade Headquarters reporting increased native rumors that the main outlaw force was moving towards the east coast. Scarcely a half hour later, and within a few minutes of each other, came two reports to the effect that Marcos Aguerro had made his threatened raid along the Coco and that bandits were then in Sang Sang and expected farther down river. One of these reports came overland by messenger from Sacklin; the other by radio from Cape Gracias.

About four o'clock that afternoon the Wanks Patrol, consisting of two officers, thirty-seven enlisted Marines and one enlisted Navy, had been organized and was embarked on board the *USS Galveston* for transportation to Cape Gracias á Dios. Its mission was to advance to Waspuc, establish a base in such a position as to close the Waspuc and Coco Rivers at their junction and to operate up either at discretion.

This patrol was composed entirely of men of the *Denver* detachment except for Lieutenant Jesse S. Cook, Jr., attached from the 51st Company as second in command. It was organized into a patrol headquarters and two sections of two squads each. As on the reconnaissance patrol, each squad was armed with seven rifles and one Browning automatic rifle, with no grenades of any description. One hundred rounds of ball ammunition was carried on the person of each rifleman and four hundred forty rounds carried in each squad for the automatic rifle. Twenty-one rounds of pistol ammunition was carried on the person of each man armed with that weapon. A reserve of seven cases (8,400 rounds) of caliber .30 and one case (2,000 rounds) of caliber .45 was carried with other supplies. Besides the regular infantry platoon armament, the two Lewis machine guns brought ashore from the *Denver* were also taken. Each man carried his poncho, shelter half, mosquito net, one complete change of clothing and at least four pairs of extra socks. The regular garrison shoe was worn as no field shoes were available. There was a thirty day ration supply, with an understanding that Area Headquarters would start replenishment not later than April twenty-fifth. Communications were to be by radio from Cape Gracias and by runner above that point. A new Johnson outboard motor was carried to be placed in commission once the base camp was established to maintain liaison with the patrol. As was the case on the previous reconnaissance patrol, necessary cash had to be advanced from my personal funds.

The *Galveston* lay to until four o'clock the following morning so as to arrive off Cape Gracias at high water, dropping anchor at 11:30 on April seventh. Disembarkation was carried out by boat and barge belonging to Kid Green. A good sea was running which made this a slow and difficult process. It was not until two hours later that the last man was put ashore at the Custom House dock.

The inhabitants at Cape Gracias were greatly excited and upset. They reported that the bandit raiding party had consisted of twenty-one Spaniards and many Indians recruited at Bocay; that they were armed with rifles and some revolvers but with little ammunition; and that it was supposed to be the advance party of a group of about two hundred who would raid the entire river. A rumor was current that our reconnaissance patrol had learned of the advance of this band of outlaws and had returned to Puerto Cabezas because of it. Doubting our ability to cope with the outlaws if they returned in force and fearing bandit reprisals, the local citizens who before had freely offered any amount of assistance which we might need now refused to give us any help whatsoever. It was impossible to hire boats or barges for the move up river, and we were frankly told that even though we might commandeer the necessary transportation, we could never navigate the Coco to Waspuc without native crews who were familiar with the river. The single exception to this lack of coöperation was a Spanish-American, Philip Martinez, who turned over to us his bateau and outboard motor without charge but with the understanding that they would be returned to him in a serviceable condition after we had finished with them. A barge belonging to Assmussen, large enough to carry the entire patrol and its supplies, and a motor boat belonging to one Caesar which had a more shallow draft and more powerful motor than the Zambita were requisitioned. It was already apparent that the knowledge of boats and the river which had been gained on our previous patrol would stand us in good stead.

The Jefe Politico and the Collector of Customs both requested that a guard of ten men be left at Cape Gracias. As there was no apparent necessity for such action with our patrol operating along the river above them, this request was refused.

We left Cape Gracias by six o'clock that evening. Almost immediately we were confronted with engine troubles which were to delay us for an entire day. The outboard motor which had been turned over to us gratis was found to have a leaking water jacket. By nine o'clock the motor in Caesar's boat had burned a bearing and was no longer serviceable. Another boat on its way to the Cape from Sacklin was commandeered and the advance resumed, only to develop a burned bearing in its turn around midnight which left us tied up in the middle of the low swamp country where millions of mosquitoes made life miserable for us until dawn. As soon as it was light enough, we uncrated the new Johnson outboard motor brought from Puerto Cabezas and rigged it on the bateau. With two men, I returned to Cape Gracias where we took over the Zambita and again started up stream. The Zambita might not be so powerful as the other boats but I was sure that it would get us through. The barge was lashed alongside her, with the outboard motor boat on the other side, and the advance resumed. We traveled until four the next morning, when darkness and low water forced a halt until after breakfast.

The river was much lower than during the previous month so that many short stretches of bad water which we had navigated before with little trouble now had to be portaged or the Zambita and its barge had to be towed through with lines from the bow. Lalakapisa was worse than before. Here, while directing the passage of the patrol, I slipped on a rock and, never a

strong swimmer, was caught in the undertow and carried down stream in the strong current, finally being pulled out by Corporal Nunn. Events such as this occurred two or three times a day and prevented the movement from becoming at all monotonous. The outboard motor was a help but because of a lack of spare parts such as propeller shaft pins and propeller nuts, often broken and lost when the propeller hit obstructions in the bottom of the channel, we did not get the maximum benefit from it. The distinctive noise of its exhaust could be heard a considerable distance in advance. This would have been a distinct disadvantage if we had been moving into territory occupied by hostile forces but the value of the motor for maintaining communications after we became established along the river was apparent.

In spite of the native prophecy that we could not navigate the river without the help of local crews, we had no more trouble and made as good time as we had done on the previous patrol. A relay post in the line of communications consisting of one corporal and four men was established at Sacklin on April tenth. On the fourteenth we reached Waspuc and located our main camp so as to control both the Coco and Waspuc Rivers and the trails which led into that place.

We were informed that Aguerro's outlaws had raided Awasbila, Benny Müller's place above Sang Sang and Sang Sang itself, ostensibly because all three had given us information and assistance during the reconnaissance patrol of March. Believing that Marines were still in Waspuc, they had stayed in Sang Sang only a short while, nervously watching the river for our approach the while, and had then hurriedly gone back upstream taking with them three large bateaux and several Indians impressed into service as boatmen. There was now believed to be transportation available at Bocay for an outlaw force of at least a hundred. Aguerro had stated that his was the advance party of a much larger force which would come from the interior about the twentieth of April to raid Waspuc and other points along the river. Besides the main camp at Waspuc, it was decided to place outposts at Sang Sang and Awasbila to intercept the bandits expected from Bocay and to send occasional patrols along the Waspuc towards the mining area so as to keep informed of conditions in that direction.

The above information together with the following messages regarding supply were sent to Major Utley at Puerto Cabezas:

"Due to difficulties of transporting gas, oil and other supplies overland, it is recommended that they be forwarded to Cape Gracias and then up the river. Have arranged with Harry Carlos (native of Cape Gracias) to bring our supplies up river every fifteen days. His price is two dollars (\$2.00) per hundred. He will take six cases gasoline, five gallons Mobile 'A,' and five lbs. lubricating grease as part payment each trip, the remainder in cash, gas, etc., at trade prices at the Cape. For the next trip he also wants a battery, 9 volt, 30 amps, to be credited for next trip or until it is paid for. Capacity Carlos boat is 4,500 lbs. . . . Health all hands excellent. 10:30."

"My number eleven (11). Recommend that four men and one NCO, total five enlisted men, be stationed CAPE GRACIAS for purpose of supervising

receipt and expediting shipment up river of stores and supplies which may be sent that way. . . . Am sending list of spare parts for outboard motor which should be ordered from New Orleans and shipment expedited. Also urgently recommend two additional motors, same type as one now on river, model P-40, be purchased and shipped here as soon as possible. Such motors are best transportation available for use on river. Wire Kendall that standard shafts are best for this territory. The long propeller shafts would be of no value here. . . ."

The original plan had been to forward supplies, communications, etc., by rail from Puerto Cabezas to Wawa Central and thence overland by pack train to the outpost at Sacklin which would arrange for further shipment to Waspuc, a plan which seemed especially necessary because of the fear and lack of cooperation of the inhabitants at Cape Gracias. Carlos would no more have made this agreement with us at the time we landed at Cape Gracias than any other of its citizens but by the fourteenth we had demonstrated our ability to navigate the river without native assistance, the bandits had not waylaid and massacred us, and we had stated definitely that we were there to stay so it was worth a gamble on his part to get in on the ground floor of what might well prove to be a long and profitable business. The advantages of an all water route for our supplies were apparent and with the establishment of an outpost at Cape Gracias the five men then at Sacklin would be released for duty with the main body of the patrol.

An outpost was established at Sang Sang by noon of April seventeenth. It was the largest and most important village on the river and, through the Moravian missionary, exerted a great deal of influence among the natives. It had been more affected by the recent raid than any other settlement. For these reasons it was felt that the presence of a small outpost there would restore confidence and establish liaison with the river people as quickly as at any place on the river although otherwise it had little military value and would have been hard to defend against attack.

The rumor still persisted that the outlaws would return not later than the twentieth. As soon as our outboard motor could be rigged onto Martinez' boat, I started with a patrol of seven men for Awasbila with the intention of laying an ambush at the foot of the rapids. A half mile above Sang Sang there was a short stretch of bad water. As we reached the very crest of the rapid, the motor sputtered and died. Before we could get the boat under control, the current had caught the bow, turned it across the stream, and we were carried backward against a snag of uprooted trees deposited in the middle of the current by the last high water. The boat hit broadside, swamped, rolled over, and was held fast against the debris. "Lost all provisions, one case rifle and 200 rounds pistol ammunition, one BAR, two rifles, majority of clothing and equipment, and all loose material in boat."⁸ There was a tree stump projecting about three feet above the water some distance below the point at which we capsized. As I was swept down stream, I grabbed onto this and climbed aboard. Even now I can see myself, sitting there for the next two hours directing the Zambita, brought up from Sang Sang, in the work of picking up the other members of the patrol, the out-

board motor, and such articles as could be salvaged. The pressure of the current was so great that we could not free the bateau from the snag on which it was caught and there it remained, so far as I know, until it rotted away.

The following morning brought Arthur Kittle, a youngster of nineteen years, half American and half Miskita, who volunteered his services as guide and interpreter. He was intelligent, could speak English, Miskita and some Spanish, had been reared along the river and in the woods and was without doubt the best man on the trail that I saw in Nicaragua. His first task was to recover the Browning automatic rifle and the two rifles which had been lost the night before. He then told me of a trail which went overland from Sang Sang to Awasbila. That afternoon my one squad patrol again got under way carrying blanket shoulder rolls with clothing and provisions. If the outlaws were in fact on their way down river, the best place to stop them was as they entered or debouched from the Kiplapine Rapids where a few well placed men could demoralize any force. We reached our destination the next morning and established a well hidden camp in such a position as to ambush the trail and the foot of the rapids. When the bandits failed to materialize, this outpost was placed under the command of Lieutenant Cook and I returned to Sang Sang and Waspuc.

A few days later an incident occurred which again illustrated the fact that surprise can be obtained by avoiding the regular routes of travel. It was learned that some of the Indians who had been impressed as boatmen by Aguero had returned to their homes. One of these men lived at Asang. Taking a small patrol of three men, I went to that village only to find that the native whom I wanted had gone into the bush upon our approach. There was no use searching for him so, late in the afternoon, we headed back for Sang Sang. I knew that there was a trail connecting Asang and Krasa, a settlement a mile and a half or so down the river. At that place I left the boat, sent my patrol on its way, located the trail and returned to Asang. I entered the village just before dark to find the entire populace, my man included, assembled in front of the chapel. These people seldom express an emotion of any kind, but there was no mistaking the outlook of surprise which greeted my approach. I gained little information except that Aguero and his band had gone south from Bocay, ostensibly to join a larger force of outlaws, but the effect produced among the natives by this move was worth the effort involved.

In the meantime two Jamaican negroes had come into Waspuc from the mining area reporting the raiding and destruction of Neptune Mine on Sunday the fifteenth by one hundred twenty-five mounted, well armed, but poorly provisioned men. The outlaws had stayed there only a short while and then moved eastward towards Tunki to await further orders. A patrol was immediately sent from Waspuc which went as far as the mine and returned, reporting: "Bandits at Neptune Mine took about \$5,000.00 in gold and all supplies available, destroyed mine and left. Seventy-five (75) mounted men reported headed for TILBA. Fifty (50) foot soldiers, armed with shotguns and machetes, reported breaking into small groups and going to BILWI (Puerto Cabezas). Mounted men, well mounted and armed."⁸ This patrol had no contacts, saw no bandits and suffered no casualties.

I knew of no trail leading from the Pis Pis area to

⁸RECORD OF EVENTS, DENVER Detachment, 17 Apr., 28.

Tilba, the only settlement of that name which I could locate being the one just above the Tilba Rapids. It was possible that such a trail existed and, although I could see no reason why they should choose Tilba as their objective unless it was with the intention of crossing into Honduras at that point, I informed my outpost at Awasbila of this report, added a few men to its garrison, and again inspected their position and disposition.

Reporting the above information by native messenger to Major Utley, I asked for additional men if they could possibly be furnished. I was trying to cover some two hundred miles of river with a force of thirty-seven men. Awasbila and Waspuc were both critical points. Although they were not within supporting distance of each other, I considered that both of them should be garrisoned if I was to carry out my mission. I was not particularly worried about Waspuc. The post was small but it was well located with a good defense plan in which the men were trained daily and there was no indication that the outlaws intended to move directly north from the mining area. Schoneberger was further instructed to send daily patrols south along the Waspuc River a sufficient distance to uncover any bandit advance. The outpost at Awasbila was not so well located. Any position which effectively covered both trail and river was not adaptable to good defense. The outpost commander was instructed that in case of attack by a superior force he should attempt to hold his position until dark and then withdraw down the river by boat. I, myself, kept continually on the move in the area, visiting first one outpost then the other. During the month of April, I spent exactly two consecutive nights in the same place.

On the twenty-eighth of the month we had our first airplane contact. While proceeding up river from Sang Sang, I heard the distinctive sound of airplane motors above the noise of our own outboard. A moment later, two Corsairs came into sight from the west, flying low and following the course of the river. There was a sand bar on the south bank of the river. I reached it just in time to retrieve a drop message from Lieutenant Schilt asking if the beach was suitable for a landing. It was quite narrow, but long and straight, with a good hard surface free from obstructions. I gave him an OK signal and in he came, followed by Lieutenant Guymon, pilot of the second plane. Schilt handed me the following message:

"Headquarters, Aircraft Squadron, 2nd Brigade,
Managua, Nicaragua. 28 April, 1928

Dropped Message—0900

To: C. O. WASPUK.

1. Situation as known at present is as follows:

(a) Planes reconnoitered SAN PEDRO—NEPTUNE MINE, BONANZA MINE, EDEN MINE and vicinity on 25 April, 1928. Found no evidence of outlaws in the area. Men, women and children were seen in the streets at SAN PEDRO and NEPTUNE MINE but no signs of armed men or animals. Three saddle horses were seen at YAPUWA but no armed men appeared.

(b) 27 April, 1928, planes patrolled LA LUZ MINE and landed at PUERTO CABEZAS. LA LUZ MINE was deserted and no bandits were found. Major Utley had heard rumors from PUERTO CABEZAS that you have been attacked and defeated. Major Utley believes

bandits are still in PIS PIS AREA. They came in from SOUTH (via LA LUZ) with about 200 men and 200 horses and mules. He believes a third column of about 100 men have joined up since. Lieut. Carroll with 20 men and a radio set left PUERTO CABEZAS yesterday morning by boat to re-inforce you. No news has come in from the Army Reserve Major who is scouting, for several days. A two company battalion arrives at PUERTO CABEZAS via *USS Cleveland* tomorrow. The troops will be immediately sent into the field. Two amphibian planes are en route to the east coast via the *USS Nitro*. They will base at PUERTO CABEZAS.

(c) The planes making this patrol desire to verify your security and learn any information possible. They are out from OCOTAL and therefore have very little gas. They will check on SANG SANG and BOCA.

(d) The following panel signals are desired in the order named:

- (1) Whether or not everything is well with you.
- (2) What information you have relative to enemy location.

(g) Working you by plane is very difficult and extremely hazardous. We will have fuel in PUERTO CABEZAS tomorrow and can operate temporarily from there, pending arrival of the amphibians, if the situation is serious enough to warrant.

(h) The General is a little worried about your security in view of the number of outlaws reported, especially your small outposts.

/s/ ROSS E. ROWELL.
Major, U. S. Marine Corps."

Schilt and Guymon took off from their sand bar after about a half hour. Beyond dispelling one good rumor of an outlaw victory and my own recent decease and burial, I had been able to give them very little information, nor could they add to that contained in Major Rowell's message. It seemed that once again the main body of outlaws had temporarily dropped out of sight.

The reason for this plane patrol and the sudden anxiety concerning our security can best be given in Colonel Utley's own words:

"In Eastern Nicaragua in 1928 before sufficient radio equipment had been received to equip patrols, Captain Edson operating up the Wanks, based on Waspuc, reported by runner his intention of making a reconnaissance with a single squad. Several days later Area Headquarters received four reports through four different channels of a fight in which Edson and nine men had been killed. These reports differed slightly in detail but the gist was the same. Coming, as they did, four ways and with Edson's intentions known, it was feared at Area Headquarters that Edson and his patrol had been wiped out. Reinforcements were promptly rushed to Waspuc and aerial reconnaissance requested. For technical reasons the air mission had to be delayed, but within a few days Lieutenants Schilt and Guymon patrolled the area, located the ground patrol, made a difficult landing on a sandbar and talked to Edson. Their report was a great relief at Headquarters. Subsequently it developed that one man, a native, traveling down the Wanks River, had told the story of the mythical fight to a paid agent of ours, to a missionary, to a native civil official and to a party led by an American civilian. Each had transmitted it to Area Headquarters through a different channel as a fact and without giving the source of his information."⁹

The coming of these two planes, the sending of am-

⁹THE TACTICS AND TECHNIQUE OF SMALL WARS, PART II; by Lieut. Colonel Harold H. Utley, USMC; p. 46, Marine Corps Gazette, Vol. XVIII, No. 2, August, 1933.

phibians to be permanently based on the east coast, and the arrival of two additional companies, portended that for the immediate future, at least, the role of bandit hunter would devolve upon the Eastern Area. What would be the task assigned the Wanks Patrol in the coming field activities? Would we move south into the mining area? Or, if the bandits had left there as I really believed, would we continue on up the Coco to Bocay and the interior? Or would we be left where we were while the others carried on by trail? The answer was not long delayed.

On the afternoon of May first, Lieutenant Carroll arrived at Waspuc with his reinforcements of twenty Marines and a Pharmacist's Mate, 2nd Class. He brought with him the portable radio set which had been landed from the *USS Denver*. Communications were established with Puerto Cabezas and three schedules arranged daily. For the first time in the month we were brought into immediate and daily contact with the rest of the area, we could keep in touch with events as they occurred and, from messages received and intercepted, could make a creditable estimate of future events.

For example, we learned that a patrol known as the Prinzapolka Patrol was proceeding by boat up that river to La Luz and the Pis Pis area, and that platoons of the 59th and 60th Companies under Captains Wesley W. Walker and Henry D. Linscott were en route overland via Brown's Camp to Eden and Neptune Mines. These were the two companies mentioned in Major Rowell's drop message as due to arrive at Puerto Cabezas on the *USS Cleveland*. The location of the main body of outlaws under Sandino was unknown but it was reported from Area Headquarters that there was a force of 200 mounted men at Casa Vieja and probably other groups still in the mining area. Local rumors still persisted that a large band of them would soon be down the river from Bocay.

Late on the night of May second, I received a code message from Puerto Cabezas. It was so garbled that it was impossible even to guess at its contents, and it was not until noon the next day that I was able to get a repeat of the message and decode. It was a field order, the gist of which was that my patrol should move south along the Waspuc to its junction with Kuabul Creek and there block such trails as existed leading to the north and west to prevent their use by outlaws who might be driven out of the mining area by our forces advancing from Puerto Cabezas.

This movement had to be by water. The trail leading south was in poor condition and there were no pack animals of any kind available in the neighborhood. I had already ear-marked all the suitable boats along the river so I knew where the necessary transportation would come from; but what about the boat crews? My men had successfully brought the Zambita and its barge up the Coco. I was confident that, if necessary, they could also navigate the Waspuc, in spite of its swift current and many short, bad rapids, even though poling boats and not motor propelled ones would have to be used. But to use Marines meant loss of time—my orders were to reach Kuabul as soon as possible—and with half my force acting as laborers I would not have over twenty men available in case of attack. The alternative was to obtain native crews. Under similar circumstances any Nicaraguan force—outlaw, revolutionary or national—would resort to conscription, giving the Indians plenty of abuse but no pay and very little food for their labor. I had

gone to a great deal of trouble to gain the confidence and friendliness of these people. I could count on them for any assistance I might need along that section of the river which we occupied and controlled but I was well aware that any attempt to hire them for a movement into unoccupied territory which might result in contact with the outlaw forces was doomed to failure. Under the circumstances, however, I decided that I was fully justified in using Indian boatmen, if I could get them. Knowing that one word or the slightest suspicion as to our projected movement would result in the exodus of the entire male population to the bush, no visible preparations were made until late in the afternoon by which time enough Indians had volunteered their services for a couple days' labor to meet our requirements and had arrived in camp bringing their duffel in the inevitable rubber sack. At dawn they were informed of their true destination. Having no money—my personal funds were exhausted—I could only promise them pay when and if I got it, provided they worked faithfully and obeyed all orders given to them. Although they were guarded during the entire move to make sure that none of them deserted, they were fairly treated and well fed, as well fed as we ourselves were; and I never had a more willing or harder working crew of Indians while I was in Nicaragua.

Lieutenant Carroll and twelve men were at Awasbila; Lieutenant Cook and thirteen at Waspuc; the outpost at Sang Sang was abandoned. The remaining thirty-one Marines, one pharmacist mate and myself made up the Waspuc River patrol. We cleared Waspuc at eight thirty on the morning of the fourth of May. A small bateau carrying a corporal and four men was sent forward as an advance guard. Behind this boat came a large pitpan with myself and runner and the remainder of the advance guard squad; then, in column, three large bateaux with the rest of the patrol. Packs were placed in boats with the men to which they belonged; rations for eight days were divided among the three boats of the main body and the radio with its three storage batteries was also carried there. Boats moved in column, either on the same side of the river or staggered on both sides depending on the current of the stream or the nature of the bottom, and at a variable distance depending upon the nature of the terrain and the distance between bends in the river.

Prior to our departure, I had stressed the need for speed in reaching Kuabul but I failed to emphasize the equal necessity for maintaining liaison between units in the column. As a result, the lighter advance guard boat soon lost contact with the slower moving main body and continued to gain distance throughout the entire day. Soon after dark it approached the two house settlement of Marobila where it intended to halt for the night and await the remainder of the patrol. While the boat was still in mid-stream, it was fired upon by a group of men near the larger of the two huts, armed with rifles and dynamite bombs. At the first shot the Indian crew dove over the side and the boat started drifting down stream with neither poles nor paddle to guide it. The men in the advance guard returned the fire as best they could, resulting, it was later learned, in the wounding of four of the outlaws. The current carried them to the right bank of the river some distance below Marobila where they spent the remainder of the night.

At that time the main body was going into camp at the head of the Walaika Rapids, the noise of the water effectively drowning the sound of the firing. When it

reached Marobila the following morning, the outlaws were gone. As there were no signs of any number of men along the trails leading into the settlement, it was assumed that they had come by boat from and had retreated up the river.

It was learned from Pedro Leon, resident at the junction of the Waspuc and Pis Pis Rivers, that about seventy men, under command of the same Marcos Aguerro who had raided the Coco River the preceding month, had spent the night of May second there and had proceeded down river in the direction of Waspuc with the expressed intention of sacking that settlement. He did not expect to find more than a half dozen Marines, if any, in Waspuc. The bandits were poorly armed, with a few old rifles, revolvers, some shot-guns, and several dynamite bombs. There was very little ammunition. They were moving in fourteen or fifteen pitpans, two of which were filled with supplies looted from the mines. They had come into the Pis Pis area on foot from the west after the main body of outlaws had left, picking up anything of value which had been overlooked by the larger force. They had then moved north to Musawas where they had commandeered pitpans and Indian crews, evidently planning to return to Bocay and the interior by way of Waspuc and the Coco River. This plan was frustrated by the contact with our advance guard at Marobila. They were last seen by Leon, poling as fast as possible up the Waspuc River in the direction of Musawas and about five hours ahead of us.

Because Musawas was about the limit of travel for my larger bateaux, I had slight hopes of catching the bandits if there might be some means of escape for them above that point. The natives at Leon's and my boatmen all denied the existence of any trail leading from Musawas towards Bocay or the west and stated emphatically that the bandits would have to return by the same route they had followed coming into the mines. By continuing up the Pis Pis Creek, I could, with good luck, reach Kuabul in time to ambush the Great Falls—Musawas trail before the outlaws could pass over it. Hoping against hope that the information I had was correct and that Aguerro would have to march south, I headed for Kuabul. Corporal Goodling with one squad was left at Leon's in such a position as to cover by fire the Waspuc River, with orders to keep that river under observation until dawn the following morning when he was to rejoin the main body.

Darkness caught us half way through Yapukitang

Falls, a deep, narrow, half-mile long gorge, with its swift, turbulent current and precipitous, unscalable cliffs on either side. There we spent the night, on a flat topped rock, some thirty feet long by twenty wide, scarcely above the water boiling around it. We were glad enough to find even that much to sleep on. The place was so narrow and so deep, and so little light filtered through the overhanging trees that to continue on in the absolute blackness was impossible. Some of the newcomers preferred the smooth hard rock for a bed to the numerous stones which dug into the back and sides of the uninitiated who has not learned to properly prepare a bunk on the sand bars of the river.

We reached Kuabul early the morning of the seventh. I had received a radio from Major Utley that aerial liaison would be established that date by amphibians from Puerto Cabezas. Leaving a small boat guard with the train at Kuabul, the main body of the patrol moved out the Great Falls—Musawas trail to the point where it crossed the Kuabul Creek and there an ambush was laid. Turning immediate command over to Sergeant Russell Schoneberger, I went back to Kuabul for the expected aerial contact. Two amphibians came over, made a drop message, and then asked where were the bandits. We had no panels but with undershirts we laid out signals indicating the general direction of the outlaws and that there was a Marine patrol on the trail. Both of these signals were acknowledged and the planes took off.

Our trap brought no results. We pushed on over the trail to the Waspuc River, forded it, and searched the north bank thoroughly for some sign which would give an inkling of their whereabouts. We found the camp at which the bandits had embarked in their pitpans on the way towards Waspuc but nothing to tell us where they had stopped nor where they had gone on their way up the river, fleeing before us. Probably the information given me about the trails towards the west was as false as other "good dope" had often turned out to be. I was certain that they would not stay in that vicinity, especially after the aeroplane reconnaissance of that morning. I did not believe that they would again move towards Waspuc, and if they did they would be met by Lieutenant Donald H. Taft and forty men of the Marine Detachment of the *USS Galveston* who I had learned by radio and drop message were already on their way to that place; they had not passed over the Great Falls—Musawas trail; so the only other assumption was that they had abandoned their pitpans above Musawas and left the Waspuc Valley by some trail leading to the south or west. At any rate, they were then so far ahead of us that there was no possible hope of again making contact.

On the way back to Kuabul, we found ourselves enveloped in the inky blackness of a tropical jungle night. It was literally impossible to see one's hand in front of his face. To keep the patrol together, each man held on to the belt of the one in front while the leader—one of our Indian boatmen acting as guide—kept to the trail only by feeling for it with his feet before each step. This boy was wearing a white shirt and, an arm's length directly behind him, I could not see where he was. After a half hour of this, a halt was called and we stretched out on the trail until, about ten o'clock, the moon came up to give us enough light to continue the march. Even then we missed the direct trail to Kuabul. Not long after midnight I realized that we were following a different trail than the one we had traversed earlier in the day but my compass and sense of direction told me that our

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general direction was not far wrong. But at three thirty I called another halt. There was no need for going on indefinitely when we should have reached our destination at least an hour before that. At the break of day, there was a rifle shot just the other side of the hill to the east; Flook, the patrol cook, was slaughtering a beef for our day's ration. Kuabul was some three or four hundred yards away. We had followed the two legs of a right-angled triangle instead of its hypotenuse and had stopped moving just ten minutes too soon. But such is the vagary of night movements in a strange country, over strange trails, and without a guide who knows every path and by-way in the area to be traversed.

I do not believe that this experience was exceptional nor that the results should be unexpected under similar conditions; rather we were extremely lucky not to have gotten entirely away from our objective. From the experiences of this march and from several made later, I am thoroughly convinced that night movements in bush warfare should be confined to exceptional circumstances, where the objectives to be gained are clearly defined and can be gotten in no other way, and that such movements will be successful only by the greatest of luck in new and strange territory. The uncertainty as to one's whereabouts, the slipping and stumbling along dimly lighted trails, the straining of eyes trying to penetrate the darkness, the slow rate of march; all these are trying to both man and beast and will soon demoralize the best outfit if continued night after night. In my opinion the supposed advantages of night marches in bush warfare can not begin to equal their disadvantages. The greatest advantage claimed is that of secrecy; but in bush warfare we are confronted only with terrestrial observation and the grape-vine telegraph, not with aerial reconnaissance. A single night's march to a known objective and over familiar terrain can be carried out secretly; but if the point to be reached requires two night marches, the move will be spotted and reported just as fully—if not more so—than would be the one day's march necessary to cover the same distance in daylight. I do not believe that information of a series of night marches made in unfamiliar territory where one is dependent upon native guides, rough and inaccurate sketches, and local information, can be kept from the enemy. The fact that such movements were made without hostile attack means to me only that the area traversed was not occupied in force by the bandits or, as was more probably the case, they were not alert enough nor well enough led to turn such moves to their advantage by springing a couple of night ambushes. As for a successful night attack in bush warfare: such a thing is to be talked about and visualized but hardly to be hoped for under the conditions which existed in Nicaragua. In that thick country, it was hard enough to control an attack in the daytime; such control would be almost impossible at night. The advantage in a night attack is with the defender. To have a chance of success, the attacker must be thoroughly familiar with the enemy dispositions and, more especially, with the lay of the land. These conditions seldom occurred in Nicaragua. A night attack might be made successfully against a small group of outlaws who had huddled into an isolated ranch house whose location and approaches were known, but not against a bandit encampment in such jungle country as Monchones or Oconguas or Poteca.

But I am digressing!

Goodling's squad had reached Kuabul the afternoon before. My patrol was at the place designated in the



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Area Commander's order; but if we were to effectively carry out our mission of blocking all trails in that area, more information, both of trails and of bandits, was necessary.

It was apparent that since my reconnaissance patrol from Waspuc had visited Neptune Mine on the twenty-fifth of April, one bandit group—Aguerro's—had entered the area. Aguerro had been driven to the west and contact with him lost; but were there other outlaws still in the mines? What had actually happened there? Where had the bandits come from; how many were there; where had they gone? Were the 200 bandits reported by Major Utley as being at Casa Vieja heading towards the Pis Pis or away from it? Just where was Casa Vieja and what was its position relative to the mining area? It did not appear on any of the maps we had, nor did these maps show any trails in that section of the country. Also I realized fully that my boats and the river had, overnight, ceased to be assets and had become liabilities. Taft and his *Galveston* Detachment were at Waspuc in a position to continue the move up the Coco to Bocay. Linscott, Rose, Walker, Whaling were moving in from the east and they had animals with which they could keep right on moving, into Matagalpa if necessary. And there was I, in the middle. The outlaws were just ahead of me; the scent was still warm. At the moment I was closer to them than anyone else; but they were traveling overland, and my flat bottomed scows had no wheels. Some kind of pack animal—any kind—was an absolute necessity unless I wished to find myself sitting at Kuabul, twiddling my thumbs, while the chase went merrily on. There was a possibility that I might find the answers to some of these questions as well as the transportation I needed in the Pis Pis. As soon as breakfast was over, I turned the command of the main body again over to Sergeant Schoneberger and, taking Goodling's squad—the only one which had had a good night's rest—started for Great Falls and Neptune.

Great Falls gets its name from the sheer drop of over a hundred feet which the Pis Pis Creek makes at that point. Here there was a power plant which generated the electricity needed for Neptune Mine, some ten miles further south. The plant was deserted, but it had not been destroyed nor tampered with by the bandits.

Before reaching the mine itself, I came to the home of an English speaking prospector, Christian Hansen. Besides confirming the report brought back to Waspuc by

¹⁰Author's foot-note: Although Hansen distinctly told me that Sanchez's new headquarters would be in the mountains northwest of Bocay and actually sketched on the ground the place he thought would be its probable location, the outlaws moved from the mining area to Garrobo, a mountainous country southwest of Bocay.

my reconnaissance patrol of the latter part of April, I learned that at least four bandit groups had operated in the area, two of them under Sanchez and Jiron being well-mounted, well-armed, and with plenty of ammunition. Bandit headquarters had been established at the Lone Star Mine during the week that they had remained in the vicinity. Sandino was supposed to have been there and to have personally conducted the raiding and destruction of La Luz. The main body had left for the west in two groups; one via the LA LUZ-CUVALI-MATAGALPA trail; the other over the NEPTUNE-SAN PEDRO-CASA VIEJA trail. Sandino had gone by the former route. He was reported to be moving to a newly prepared stronghold in the mountains northwest (southwest?) of Bocay.¹⁰ Aguerro and his ragamuffin vagabonds had appeared from the west after the main body of bandits had left, swinging south and east to Tunki and then northward through Neptune. Although he had a written commission as Colonel signed by Sandino, at that time he was not directly connected with him and was acting as a free lance, evidently with the idea of proving his worth before being regularly admitted to the noble band fighting "por patria y libertad." From Hansen I also gained considerable information regarding the numerous trails leading north, west and south from the Pis Pis. Casa Vieja was quite definitely located and it seemed probable that the 200 bandits reported there were those under Jiron who had taken that route when evacuating the mines. So far as Aguerro was concerned, he had undoubtedly taken the trail which Hansen assured me existed from the headwaters of the Waspuc River to Lakus Creek and thence to Bocay; or he might have swung south through Augustine Rivera's ranch on the Casca River and thence to Casa Vieja and the west. He was not certain about a trail from Musawas to Casca, but there was no doubt of one from the latter place to Casa Vieja. Hansen, himself, had no pack animals; but he thought that there were some which had been used by Aguerro for packing his loot from Neptune to the Waspuc River and which belonged to a couple of local residents. He also believed that Rivera must have a pack train at Casca. There was a trail from Great Falls to Casca which was in good condition and could be covered in about six hours. So far as Hansen knew, there were now no outlaws in the area and all was quiet. He already had news of the Prinzapolka Patrol on its way up that river, but he had not known of our advance south from Waspuc nor was he aware of Linscott's and Walker's approach from Puerto Cabezas.

(To be concluded)



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