

The Mounted Expedition to Matagalpa

By J. C. JENKINS

PERHAPS no more unique undertaking has ever been conceived, nor more successfully carried out, than was the combined Mounted Expedition of marines and sailors to the city of Matagalpa, Department of Matagalpa, interior Nicaragua, in the year 1912 when the Sea Soldiers in the course of their many and varied duties again saw fit to take to the saddle.

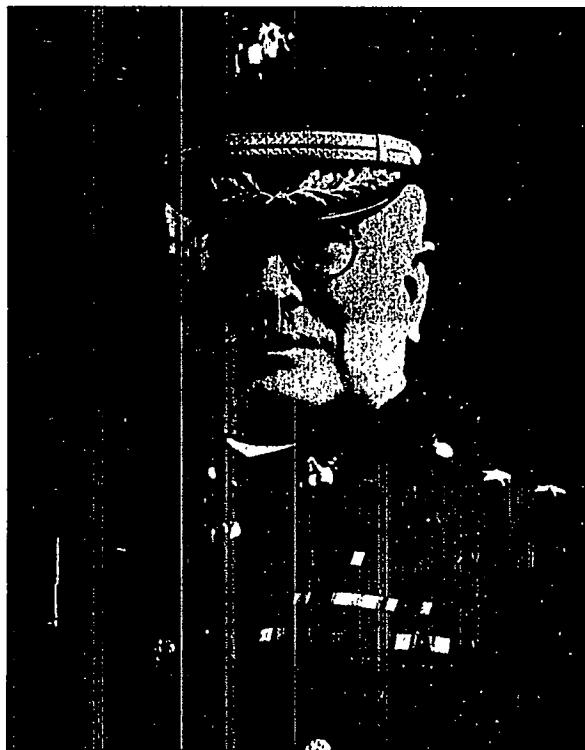
Ever since the days and deeds attributed to the legendary "Captain Jinks," the adventures of the "Horse Marines" have been told in song and story; and somehow their alluring charm is inescapable. Truly the legend or tradition, despite the punning allusions to Captain Jinks, has long been upheld and supported in fact by the United States Marines.

Horses "fed on corn and beans," however, have not always served as mounts for the Marines. As early as the year 1805, in their memorable treks across the north African desert from Alexandria to Derne, when horses were unavailable, or their use was impracticable, "ships of the desert" were employed by the Marines to bear them to their destination. A century later, when they visited the capital of Abyssinia, mules had the honor of transporting the Marines all the way from the Red Sea to the court of King Menelik.

In many far-flung countries of the world—Egypt, Tripoli, Mexico, Abyssinia, Haiti, Santo Domingo, and in China—mounted Marines have galloped, regardless of where such duty arose or whether the mounts at hand were horses, camels, mules, "demi-mules," or what not. In this connection, with Kipling in mind, may it be said that in view of past performances and the means at times adopted, one indeed may well wonder if there be anything under the sun capable of thwarting the versatile Marines when they set their heads to any given task.

The campaign of the First Provisional Regiment of Marines in Nicaragua, in the fall of 1912, under the command of Colonel Joseph H. Pendleton (now Major General, U.S.M.C., retired), in which naval contingents from the ships of the fleet cooperated, after some seven or eight weeks of difficult operations, was drawing to a close. This campaign, though comparatively brief, nevertheless was a "tough" campaign while it lasted. The decisive battle of Coyotepe had become a matter of history; the occupation of Masaya, Chichigalpa, Leon and other strategic places had been accomplished; peace and order had been restored generally and everybody, including the majority of the Nicaraguans themselves, seemed glad that the ordeal was over.

Conditions by this time seemed to warrant a "change



Major-General Joseph H. Pendleton, U.S.M.C., retired (then Colonel)

of diet" so to speak—some sort of friendly gesture leading to a better understanding and improved relations. Apparently the time was ripe for a new manifestation of friendship on the part of the Americans for the Nicaraguan people, with the opportunity for reciprocation on their part. At the same time it was the desire of the Commander-in-Chief to gain additional information as to the topography and nature of the surrounding country; also, to impress the Nicaraguans by showing the American Flag and demonstrating the power of the United States in another and novel way. The Expedition to Matagalpa was the answer.

On October 8, 1912, Rear Admiral W. H. H. Southerland, as Commander-in-Chief of the United States Pacific Fleet—Commanding U. S. Forces in Nicaragua, from the headquarters at Leon, issued the orders to Colonel Pendleton stationed at Camp Weitzel, Managua, for the formation and conduct of the expedition. While leaving much to the judgment and discretion of Colonel Pendleton as to time

and other features, the Admiral did designate the exact number of bluejackets to accompany the "one company of Marines," specifying the particular ships' battalions from which they were to be taken, and stressed the importance of selecting "only officers and men in good physique and who are competent horseback riders." In another letter of same date in regard to the detail of naval personnel for the expedition, Admiral Southerland wrote to Lieutenant Colonel C. G. Long, U.S.M.C., commanding at Leon, Nicaragua; as follows:

"You will please have the commanding officer of the *California* and *Colorado* bluejacket battalions select two squads of bluejackets from each battalion, with an officer in charge of each, to report to Colonel J. H. Pendleton, Commanding First Provisional Regiment, on Saturday, October 12th, as a part of a mounted detachment to make a trip into the interior of this country, and you will make it clear that all of the men so detailed are able to ride horseback."

On October 11, 1912, Colonel Pendleton, in a letter to battalion commanders—Majors W. N. McKelvy and G. C. Reid—in regard to the organization of the Marine Corps force for the expedition, and its administration, directed those officers to organize a force of 111 enlisted men, taken equally from the three battalions composing the Regiment; that the commissioned personnel be the Regimental Commander, and his Staff, including Major S. D. Butler, Captains E. A. Green, F. A. Ramsey and E. P. Fortson; that Captain J. C. Beaumont and Lieutenants R. S. Geiger, R. E. Messersmith and C. G. Sinclair have charge of the topographical work; and that Captain R. B. Putnam act as Quartermaster and Commissary.

In accordance with the orders of Admiral Southerland, twenty-five enlisted marines and nine bluejackets were finally selected for the expedition and assembled two weeks later at a place called La Paz Viejo. The bluejackets were selected from the battalions of the U.S.S. *California*, *Colorado*, and *Annapolis*, that had been serving ashore. All three battalions of the regiment were represented.

Besides Colonel Pendleton—in command, the following officers and civilians formed part of the mounted force: Major Smedley D. Butler, Lieutenants R. S. Geiger, Alfred McC. Robbins, and George C. DeNeale, Pay Inspector Thomas H. Hicks, Ensign Harold C. Train, Mr. Ignatius O'Reardon, and Mr. J. A. Willey. It is further recorded that two officers of the Nicaraguan forces—Colonel Diaz and Colonel Vargas—together with a number of native packers accompanied the expedition.

The riding and pack animals, furnished by the Nicaraguan government for the expedition, had previously been used by the Nicaraguan troops, and were in such poor condition that many of them were unable to complete the trip over the difficult roads and trails, and had to be replaced by others.

Everything having been placed in readiness, the expedition started from La Paz for Matagalpa, at noon of October 19th. The sight of such an outfit, especially that of the bluejackets jogging along aboard the "four-legged schooners," was a source of no small wonder and amazement on the part of the on-lookers—all in all a spectacle long to be remembered.

The people of Matagalpa, who had been apprised of the forthcoming visit, were looking forward to the event with much anticipation; and, as subsequent events revealed, exceeded themselves in the matter of receiving and entertaining the expedition during its stay of several days in that city.

The first day's march of twenty-one miles came to an end when the party reached Santa Rosa where they went into camp for the night. The next day the town of Panama was reached at 6 p.m., after a march of some twenty-five miles. It was at this stage of the journey that the horses furnished by the Nicaraguan government gave out, and were replaced by fresh animals, which fortunately had been sent forward from Matagalpa. From Panama the expedition again set out, on the morning of the 21st. Thus far the weather was good, but owing to the "sticky" condition of the roads, and the effect of the two or three days of horseback riding on some members of the party, only seventeen miles were traversed on that day. Upon reaching the village of Real de la Cruz, where the party went into camp the third night out, a fine stream of water near that place provided means for bathing and swimming; and full advantage was taken of the opportunity. Early on the morning of the following day the party, feeling greatly refreshed, resumed the journey—Matagalpa now being little more than thirty miles away.

Upon reaching Sebaco, the party indulged in a brief rest preparatory to the last lap of less than twenty miles which was to place them at their destination.

So enthused were the residents of Matagalpa at the approach of the Americans that a large delegation from that city, all mounted, headed by the *Jefe Político*, went forward to meet, and receive, and escort the party into town.

At about 4:30 p.m., of the 22nd, Matagalpa, described as "that most picturesquely situated city," was sighted; and after a most cordial reception by the combined delegation of Nicaraguans and American residents, Colonel Pendleton's party was escorted into the city, with the Nicaraguan flag, carried by a squad of Nicaraguan soldiers at the head, in the fore. Our flag was carried at the head of the American column by a Marine sergeant and one sailor. It was an impressive and unprecedented occasion.

Rear Admiral Southerland, in his message of October 25 to the Navy Department, stated:

Colonel Pendleton received most enthusiastic welcome, a large mounted party of officials and foreigners meeting him and escorting him into the city; general effect of the expedition will be excellent.

During the stay of more than a week at Matagalpa the *Jefe Político*, other prominent officials and citizens, and the entire populace extended every courtesy to the Americans, furnishing them with provisions, including beef, water and firewood, refusing to accept any compensation.

The three senior officers were quartered in the residence of the house of the Acting U. S. Consular Agent, and the four junior officers in the Masonic Temple. The men, who were comfortably quartered in what was called a "jefatura," with free range of the city, were reported as having greatly enjoyed swimming in the Matagalpa River.

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NEW LUMINOUS AND REFLECTOR CHAIN IDEAL FOR DEFENSE PRECAUTIONS

"America hasn't reached the 'black-out' stage as yet, and we hope she never will," says O. H. Hershman, president of the Star-Lite Co., of Indianapolis, Indiana, "but if that time ever comes, army camps, munitions factories and other defense establishments will be prepared. Many of them, according to the numerous orders reaching our plant, will be equipped with luminous Reflecto-Chain, which is distantly visible in an approaching focused light, however, *due to being luminous, they are also visible at short distances in total darkness.*"

Reflectorized signs have been so greatly improved in recent years that they will "pick up" and reflect exceedingly dim lights, such as would be used on automobiles under blackout precautions. Only recently has it been made possible also, by a special process, widely used in England, to make these signs and markers luminous in the dark, at reasonable cost. Provisions have been made also for making these reflected lights invisible from overhead except where and if required for landings.

"Reflecto signs and traffic markers are now used almost universally for dividing traffic lanes on highways, for direction signs, road side danger signals, etc. When car lights are not approaching, they are invisible, except for a luminous glow at short distances, yet provide the most dependable markers under traffic conditions, as they have no electrical connections to get out of order, consume no current and are so sturdily made as to withstand a surprising amount of punishment in service.

"Traffic lane markers are made in numerous sizes and designs, with single, double or triple 'lights,' with different reflectionizing colors, etc. They are scientifically designed to minimize tire wear and dangers of skidding. In addition, our company manufactures 'REFLECTO-CHAIN,' a patented product consisting of a series of reflectors mounted in a *flexible luminous or non-luminous chain* which can be bent or curved to form letters and figures.

"We hope the advantages of luminous reflectorized traffic markers and signs will never be put to the test in 'blackouts' in America. There is ample need for our products in normal peace time, but our industry is ready to place all our facilities at the command of defense authorities, should the emergency arise."

THE MOUNTED EXPEDITION TO MATAGALPA

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From first to last, the party was lavishly entertained and dined by the Matagalpans, who were referred to by Colonel Pendleton in his report as "our new found friends."

The activities included trips to near-by coffee plantations and the big American and foreign-owned mines, following which came a banquet at the mines, "which approached a Roman feast in the quantity, quality, and di-



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versity of its viands, where the best of good feeling prevailed, and the action of the Commander-in-Chief in sending this force of Americans was enthusiastically toasted and sincerely applauded." Indeed, by now, it seems that the Americans were as much impressed by the hospitality of the Nicaraguans as were the Nicaraguans through the purpose of the expedition. The last day of the social activities (Saturday, October 27,) included in the evening a reception and ball given in honor of the visiting American officers, at which "about one hundred and twenty men and ladies remained until three o'clock in the morning."

Sunday, the party rested for the next day's start on the return trip.

Ruefully, the expedition left Matagalpa (9:30 a.m., October 29). The *Jefe Politico*, and the *Mayor de Plaza*, and at least fifty of the residents, native and foreign, mounted and rode with the expedition for five miles out, where good-byes were said. Sebaco, a distance of 19 miles, where the party stopped for the night, was reached at 2:30 p.m. The heavy rains which had begun to fall the previous Saturday continued, with the trail to Tipitapa rendered impassable.

It was at this stage of the return trip that Colonel Pendleton decided to go via the San Francisco Trail—over the mountains, 2,800 feet in altitude—described as "very picturesque, but very difficult." On the following day the expedition arrived at Trujillo, 14 miles, at 1:45 p.m., "after five hours of hard going," and there spent the night. Leaving at 7:10 a.m., the next day, they marched 18 miles over rough mountain trails and deep sticky adobe llanos to San Francisco on the shore of Lake Managua, in a heavy rain, arriving at 1:45 p.m.—the pack train coming up about an hour later.

The steamer *Managua*, which had been sent by the Nicaraguan government to meet the party, reached San Francisco at 7:00 p.m., but without enough wood for the return voyage. The rain came down in torrents nearly all night, and everyone was "soaked to the skin" for the second time in twenty-four hours. Finally, after acquiring the wood for the steamer, the expedition reached Managua at 11:00 a.m., November 1—thus ending the Mounted Expedition to Matagalpa.

* * *

Colonel Pendleton, in his final report, under date of 2 November, 1912, stated in part; as follows: "I believe this trip did a great deal of good. It has taught something to every member of the expedition. It has shown the Nicaraguan people that the American is a versatile personage, who may be depended upon to go anywhere, at any time, if necessity demands. . . . I wish to add a word of commendation for all the officers and men engaged on this expedition, their cheerful demeanor under trying circumstances was most noticeable, and their readiness and adaptability would astonish anyone who had not learned by years of experience and association the remarkable characteristics of the American military men—particularly those of the Navy and Marine Corps. They all fully deserve the confidence that the Commander-in-Chief reposed in them when he planned this expedition—THE FIRST OF ITS KIND IN THE HISTORY OF THIS COUNTRY.

MOBILITY OF BASE DEFENSE ARTILLERY

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consideration, that by normally employing numerous fixed five-inch installations, the great majority of defense battalion movements would be executed without any seacoast guns at all, whereas, if the GPF's were made standard for all situations, the seacoast artillery group would always be forced to move more or less encumbered by heavy materiel. Thus, the project of 155mm "reserve guns" coupled with normal fixed five-inch installations, lends to the defense battalion the greatest mobility in the greatest number of situations.

To render efficiently operative such a plan, a number of requirements would have to be met. First, all five-inch artillery personnel would have to be trained not only with their own weapon, but equally with the GPF. Second, fire-control equipment would have to be so designed as to be equally adaptable to either weapon (not a prohibitive requirement, since each is governed by the basic principles of seacoast gunnery). Third, existing reserves of five-inch guns would be depleted by installation of such batteries in all sites now under U. S. control and deemed worthy of defense. Fourth, at the outset of such a scheme, five-inch units designated for survey and preparation, would be required to move from site to site until all had been so prepared.

The advantageous results of this plan follow logically. In the majority of defense-battalion movements, five-inch artillery units would not be forced to carry their guns with them; the saving of time and effort, and resultant increase in the battalion's mobility would be very great. In the minority of movements, the five-inch artillery would be forced to travel equipped—but with the logically flexible 155mm gun. Fire-power of the battalion would be potentially capable of being doubled in many instances when GPF's could augment existing installation (in this instance, additional personnel would be required—their training and source would present a problem to be met as the occasion demanded, either by drafting provisional or Marine Corps Reserve companies for the duty, or by employing the nearest available post troops of other Marine Corps activities). A very considerable gain from such an arrangement as has been proposed is that the excellent pioneering and engineering talents usually developed and encountered in the five-inch artillery group would be normally available to the entire battalion in the course of a movement, for the five-inch alone would be unencumbered, and thus would constitute a trained reserve of pioneer-troops, a great asset to any battalion.

Success of this plan hinges, in the last analysis, upon availability of material, i.e., of a large number of Navy five-inch guns plus an allowance of six GPF's per defense battalion. It also hinges upon an allowance of uninterrupted time sufficient to establish and prepare positions in the many sites which defense battalions would probably be called upon to occupy. Whether, in these disturbed times, either of these contingencies would in-