

GUERRILLA LESSONS FROM NICARAGUA



Gen Megee retired 1 Nov '59 after more than 40 years active service, including duty in Nicaragua during the era of which he writes. He joined the Marines in 1919, was commissioned in 1922, received his wings in 1932 after returning from Nicaragua. His reasons for writing about Nicaragua: "A continuing professional interest in the Corps, and a wish to be helpful to the present generation of Marines who, until Viet-Nam, have had little experience in jungle warfare. Gen Megee makes his home in Austin, Texas.

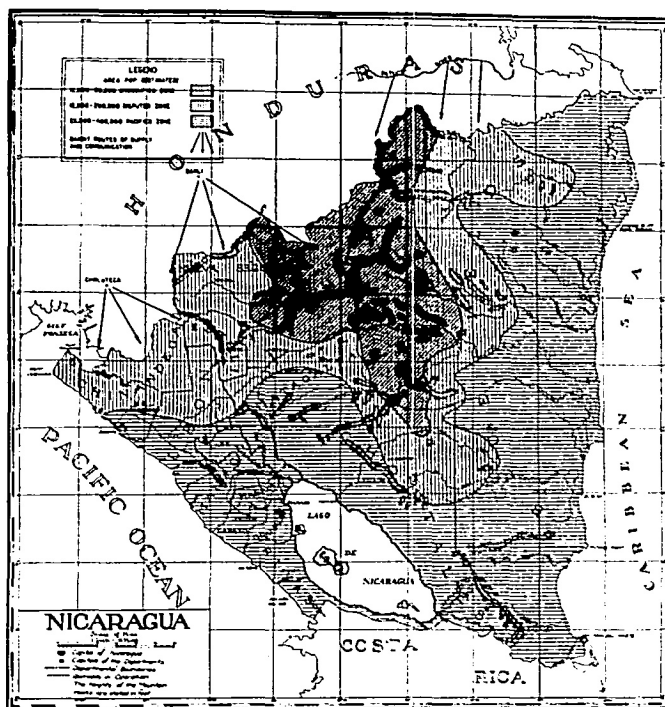
THE current operations in Viet-Nam and the Dominican Republic recall previous Marine experience in the field of guerrilla warfare. The Marine officers of the amphibious era of major warfare, suddenly confronted with a new environment, might well turn for guidance—if not for solace—to the experience of their predecessors who made of the globe and anchor the distinctive badge of the jungle fighter.

This cumulative experience in "banana wars" reached its peak in the five year struggle against Sandino in Nicaragua—a region strikingly similar to Viet-Nam in terrain, climate, and indigenous political instability. Since we learn most from our mistakes, it is my purpose to provide a critical commentary based on the salient crises of the campaign, rather than give a detailed recital of operational reports, available elsewhere.

After some preliminary skirmishing in the spring of 1926 between the Conservative forces, the Nicaraguan civil war erupted on a country wide scale during August. The government forces were victorious in the west, but the main force of rebels, under Gen José Moncado, soon gained control of the eastern towns.

In accordance with the then well established formula, the United States intervened. Marines from the obsolete cruisers of the Special Service Squadron landed to enforce a neutral zone in the Bluefield area—ostensibly for the protection of American lives and property.

The rebels then turned westward in pursuit of the retreating government forces. Meanwhile, yielding to the increasing clamor for protection by American and foreign nationals, further neutral zones were established along the east coast. By



By Gen V. E. Megee, (Ret.)

A critical commentary based on the salient crises of one of America's early foreign involvements

the end of December the available United States naval forces had been stretched to the limit of elasticity and the Navy was calling for help. The 2nd Battalion, 5th Marines, embarked at Guantanamo, arrived in Bluefields on 10 January 1928, and immediately established yet another neutral zone at Rama, on the Escondido River—the very midst of the Liberal stronghold. After voluble but futile protest against the “un-neutral” action of United States forces, Gen Moncado marched westward toward the coffee *fincas* of the Jinotega—Matagalpa area—to the further alarm of foreign subjects resident in his path.

On 6 June a detachment of Marines and bluejackets from *Galveston* re-established the Legation Guard in Managua—to the obvious relief of the frightened citizenry. The 2nd Battalion, 5th Marines, was shifted from Rama to Corinto for the

protection of interior points in the Managua-Granada area.

Meanwhile, a Liberal force attacked and practically destroyed the railroad town of Chinandega, interrupting traffic and causing great alarm in Managua. Moncado had now reached the Matagalpa area, sharply defeating the government forces in the battle of Muy Muy. The situation was fast becoming critical for the Nicaraguan government, now under President Díaz. He asked for more effective American assistance. In response, President Coolidge directed the despatch of re-enforcements consisting of the 5th Regiment, but recently relieved from mail guard duty, an observation squadron, (VO-1M) and a brigade headquarters.

Meanwhile an emergency force of 800 Marines and bluejackets was landed from the cruisers,

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Galveston, Milwaukee, and Raleigh to guard the Corinto-Managua railroad pending the arrival of the expeditionary brigade; which completed debarkation on 7 March and immediately entrained for Managua and way stations to relieve the ships detachments. BGen Logan Feland billeted his staff in Managua and assumed the command ashore.

For the first time during this hesitant and reluctant piecemeal intervention there appeared to be sufficient force at hand to assure success. The United States government, defending its action as a necessary part of the Monroe Doctrine, was faced with considerable political opposition, at home and abroad. Strictly military considerations were secondary to political expediency—a situation which appears to prevail in Viet-Nam. There had been a reluctance to face up to the issues—a refusal to recognize the Nicaraguan civil war as being more than the usual banana revolt. Thus the policy of progressive containment, always with insufficient force, which served only as the prelude to major participation in hostilities.

Fortunately, the hastily assembled expeditionary brigade, further re-enforced by the 11th Marines and a second air squadron (VO-AM) was allotted a shake-down period pending the outcome of the Tipitapa truce conference. On May 15th a somewhat optimistic Mr. Stimson, President Coolidge's special envoy, reported to Washington that "the civil war in Nicaragua is now definitely ended . . ." Some of the senior officers of the brigade concurred in this opinion.

They reckoned not with Augusto Sandino, a hitherto obscure subordinate leader of the rebel army, who chose not to abide by the terms of the truce and refused to lay down his arms. At the head of a well armed and ruthless band of some 200 hard core insurgents, Sandino disappeared toward the jungled fastness of Nueva Segovia, leav-

ing behind him a trail of depredation and terrified peasantry. Almost simultaneously there arose throughout the country other leaders of marauding bands, bent mainly on brigandage under the guise of "liberty." The impotent Nicaraguan government, having disarmed and disbanded its army, now called on the Marines to restore order. The fight was on!

In retrospect, the escape of Sandino must be blamed on the failure of military intelligence, and to wishful thinking on the part of the Stimson Truce Committee. For instance, the Conservatives, who had been steadily losing the war, turned in 10,976 rifles and 308 machine guns; the Liberals checked in only 3091 rifles and but 30 machine guns. A reasonably astute intelligence officer should have spotted this discrepancy. None did, for the record. It must be confessed that brigade intelligence was embryonic in the beginning, and so remained throughout the campaign. Failure to properly evaluate and disseminate the items of intelligence which did reach brigade headquarters was partly responsible for much of the confusion and ineptness which characterized early operations in the field.

Sandino, on the other hand, was never at a loss for information regarding the movement or intentions of the Marine patrols. This advantage is inherent to a guerrilla force operating in friendly territory, and can only be countered by superior equipment and technique—neither of which was available to brigade headquarters.

The Marines were catapulted into full scale hostilities on 16 May by Cabulla's night attack on La Paz Centro, a Marine defended town.

Following these encounters the brigade deployed to outlying districts for the task of policing the country prior to the 1928 elections—a truce commitment. No one knew what had become of Sandino and his band; the rainy season effectively shrouded his movements from the air observers. Native intelligence was contradictory and mislead-



Seated, Col Robert Dunlap, CO, 11thMar, flanked by Nicaraguan officials, including Jose Moncada who later was elected president. Other Marine officer is LtCol J. A. Rossell.

ing. In fact no one seemed to have taken him too seriously, although the Marines did some sporadic patrolling and established small garrisons in the towns of Ocotol and Telepanaca. This early patrolling was not very effective. Sandino's forces readily eluded the Marines, there being but two minor contacts reported between May 27 and July 16.

The lull in activity, and the lack of definite information regarding Sandino, led to a false sense of security and talk of a reduction of force in Nicaragua.

Early in June the 2d Marine Brigade mustered some 3300 officers and men, scattered over Nicaragua in 43 separate garrisons. Communications were difficult but acceptable. In effect, the deployment for pacification was complete and workable. Ample military force was available for the task then at hand. Sandino's small band could have been contained in the mountainous area along the Honduran border. With some luck he could have been destroyed.

Yet at this critical moment—incredible as it must appear from the perspective of thirty-five years—a movement was started to withdraw the greater part of the Marine force. Although the Marine Corps was hard pressed for men to meet other commitments, the tasks assigned the Marines at the Tipitapa Conference had scarcely begun. Gen Feland, under pressure or not, expressed the belief that he could do the job with half the number of Marines. Accordingly, plans were laid to withdraw the 11th Marines and one of the two aviation squadrons. By the end of June the force had actually been reduced by almost 1000 men, requiring that several of the smaller garrisons and outposts be withdrawn.

More than any other factor this premature withdrawal contributed to the later difficulties of the Marines. It unduly prolonged the campaign and added greatly to the overall cost in lives. Again,

this grave error in judgment was due, in part at least, to lack of reliable intelligence. Possibly due in part to wishful thinking, abetted by an understandable desire to clear out of what had become an uncomfortable political and military situation. What was really needed to clear the air in Managua and Washington was some sign of a shootable enemy. On 16 July, at Ocotol, Sandino obliged.

The attack on Ocotol and the subsequent rout of Sandino's force by air action is too well known to students of Marine Corps history to repeat here. Suffice to say that while Hatfield, the Marine garrison commander, was trapped within the town without outpost dispositions and physically separated from his supporting *guardia* detachment, he managed to hold out for sixteen hours against heavy numerical odds, suffering but minor losses.

Perversely enough, this near disaster at Ocotol failed to awaken the senior American authorities to the seriousness of the situation in northern Nicaragua. Sandino's bold stroke was considered by these optimists to have been his last, which opinion was strengthened by the failure of Maj Floyd's subsequent patrol to uncover any major opposition. Air reports to the contrary were apparently discounted in Managua.

At this time the *Guardia Nacional*, on which would eventually fall the task of policing the country, mustered but 230 men, mostly recruits in training. Nevertheless, by the end of July the Marine brigade had actually been reduced to about 1700 men. By early August the authorities were convinced that Sandino's revolt had been quelled. Garrisons were redistributed on the basis of a further reduction to 1200 men. After that the Marines became incapable of sustained offensive action. They were hard put to garrison the principal towns and keep their supply lines open.

Sandino returned from his Honduran refuge with vastly increased prestige and a well armed

Sandino's Chief of Staff Simon Jiron (holding machete) and typical Sandinista rebels . . . marauding bands, bent mainly on brigandage under the guise of liberty.



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and equipped force of at least 1000 men. He immediately went on the offensive, using his superior mobility to strike the attenuated Marine garrisons and patrols at will. Even heavily re-enforced relief columns and supply train escorts were ambushed by superior bandit forces. The culminating disasters for the year 1927 were the devastating attacks made on the converging Quilali columns, commanded by Lts Livingstone and Richal. Although the Marines fought themselves clear in each instance they were badly battered and somewhat demoralized. Something obviously had to be done to restore the situation. Washington sent down 200 replacements—a futile gesture.

Between the battle of Ocotal and the uncoordinated air-ground attack on Chipote, which took place in January, 1928, the Marines had twenty-two separate contacts with bandit forces, without fighting a single decisive battle. Sandino remained the elusive fox, unbagged. Conditions in northern Nicaragua were officially reported as having “deteriorated from banditry to a state of insurrection.”

Lacked Jungle Training

Any assessment of Marine performance during this first year must recognize the fact that although the older officers and NCO's who went to Nicaragua were largely veterans of similar campaigns in Haiti and San Domingo, the junior officers and the rank and file had no such advantage. Nor had they received any specialized training in tropical warfare. The Marine Corps then assumed—quite erroneously—that every Marine *per se* was a jungle fighter, and that every company officer was endowed with superior military qualifications as a patrol leader. Failure to provide for proper indoctrination cost us many casualties and was largely responsible for these early reverses.

Admittedly, grave errors had been made in underestimating the Sandino movement, and in the appreciation of terrain and weather obstacles within the combat zone. There had been—according to some of the harassed field commanders—too much uninspired direction from the comparatively comfortable brigade headquarters in Managua. Few of the senior commanders had troubled to visit the more remote outposts or to familiarize themselves with the formidable physical obstacles to movement and supply with which the field commanders had to cope. These field commanders were generally of junior rank, some of the patrol leaders being but newly commissioned lieutenants. Few officers above the grade of major appear to have gone beyond Ocotal or Matagalpa; in fact, few of the majors—due to overage—were in physical condition to withstand the rigors of tropical campaigning.

Due to faulty and improvised organization at

the lower unit level, and to the lack of adequate prior training in guerrilla warfare, march and camp discipline on the trail was frequently lax—at least until the men had suffered through an ambush or two. Mortars and heavy machine guns were a burden on the muddy trails; too often they were left behind, or were entrusted to pack animals prone to stampede at the first shots. The value of these weapons in breaking up suspected ambushes was not fully realized early in the campaign.

In a country entirely dependent on animal transportation few Marines could ride a horse or pack a mule. They had to learn on the trail what they should have been taught earlier. There were a few officers and sergeants who were competent woodsmen, able to live off the country by their rifles if need be. These proved to be the more successful patrol leaders. Their men learned quickly the art of staying alive in jungle warfare. Unfortunately these were all too few in Nicaragua.

Yet, despite their shortcomings as jungle fighters, the enlisted Marines could and would fight to the death when the chips were down. Careless though they might have been on the march, they used their weapons to deadly advantage. This much they had been taught well to do. We should not overlook this compensating virtue, which in the end was always decisive.

Gradually, through experience, the survivors learned the requisite skills—by which time they had been relieved and sent home. Later, many of these experienced jungle fighters returned to Nicaragua. There were no such repeaters available in 1927.

We must then, in all honesty, attribute much of the failure to terminate the campaign in 1927 to the Marines themselves. They grossly underestimated Sandino, and they overestimated their own ability to operate successfully on Sandino's home grounds. After 1927 the Marines acquired a measure of humility. By the end of 1928 Marine operations in Nicaragua bore the professional stamp which the American public had learned to expect.

From this initial failure in Nicaragua we may draw two salient conclusions from which to formulate lessons for the future. First, the force committed must be adequate in size, composition, and equipment for the assigned task. Second, the individual Marines or soldiers must have received specialized training for guerrilla warfare, under conditions of terrain and climate prevailing in the combat zone. This may be accomplished prior to arrival on the scene of hostilities, preferably, as the Army trains its Special Forces in Panama; or it may be done inside the occupied country, prior to entry into the combat zone, as the Marines did in Haiti. Such training cannot, with impunity, be omitted.

The Quilali fiasco, at the turn of the year, did have a silver lining. The news shook the Navy Department and Marine Headquarters out of their complacency, and expedited the return of an adequate force to Nicaragua. The 11th Marines were ordered back to the field. Pending their arrival, Marines and sailors from the cruisers were again landed to protect the railroad.

An already tense situation was not improved by the mutiny of a *guardia* garrison in mid-January. This was but the first of a series of mutinous outbreaks, some of which cost the lives of the Marine officers commanding the *guardia* units. Investigation usually disclosed infiltration into the ranks by Sandino sympathizers, who sought in this manner not only to discredit the swaddling organization, but to capture arms and ammunition for the 1500 men Sandino was now reported to have.

11th Marines Turn Tide

The arrival of the 11th Regiment, under its able and energetic commander, Col Robert Dunlap, turned the tide in the Northern Area. Additional towns and villages were occupied and a system of vigorous patrolling was initiated. Sandino shifted his base of operations southward toward Jinotega during the month of February, only to be forced back by a battalion of mounted Marines marching north out of Matagalpa. He then turned eastward and disappeared in the jungled foothills of the coastal plain. One of his lieutenants, Ferrera, ambushed an empty ration train and its escort of thirty-five men at Bromaderas, inflicting serious casualties. The beleaguered Marines were rescued the next day by a strong column from Yali, covered by aggressive air patrols. Ferrera was shot out of his saddle and his band dispersed some six weeks later by a mounted detachment. Thereafter the bandits became more wary; they moved only at night and avoided contact, keeping themselves well dispersed except when assembling for a surprise attack on some particular target. Other remaining groups followed Sandino eastward, or took temporary refuge in Honduras. Contacts with them became increasingly infrequent, and by 10 April the bandit situation in the Northern Area could be reported "more nearly under control . . . than at any time since the beginning of hostilities." Col Dunlap was of this opinion after returning from an eleven-day patrol covering some 250 miles of the most dangerous trails in his sector of responsibility. His staff officers had also been kept in the field leading patrols—"in order to familiarize themselves with the combat situation."

Within two months a highly competent commander and an adequate force had fully restored the tarnished image of the Marines and driven organized banditry out of Nueva Segovia. But Sandino was still at large and still dangerous. In due time he showed himself in the familiar foot-



Augusto Caesar Sandino

hill mining region, raided the La Luz and Neptune mines, collected loot, took prisoners and vanished again into the jungle. Marine patrols from the coastal area were already moving to intercept him, and might have succeeded save for the excessive timidity of one of the patrol commanders, which earned for him the wrath of the Eastern Area commander, and ultimate professional oblivion. Other Marine patrols took to the river routes, covered by their amphibian air support, and eventually forced Sandino's forces back toward the Segovias. The advent of the heavy rainy season stopped further pursuit.

In a final attempt to head off Sandino's forces before the rains made the trails impassable, Col Dunlap sent a patrol of thirty-seven men under Capt Robert Hunter into the remote area along the Cua River, forty-five miles northeast of Jinotega, where the trails were so bad that mules could not be used; oxen or native bearers being the only means of transport.

Late in the afternoon of 13 May, Hunter's column was effectively ambushed by a strong force of bandits. Hunter was mortally wounded early in the action, the command then passing to Lt Earl Piper. He beat off the attackers and made bivouac on the spot. As the column moved westward the following morning it was again attacked heavily, the bandits apparently trying to capture the pack train. This attack was repulsed with the loss of one *guardia*, but as the column resumed the march the bandits again struck from a flank. This attack was repulsed by close fighting in which the Marines used hand grenades to good advantage. Piper then moved on to the village of La Flor,

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where Capt Hunter died of his wounds while his command waited for relief.

The area was so densely forested that the air patrols had difficulty locating and maintaining contact with Piper; but Maj Rockey's ground patrol from Quilali finally effected Piper's relief late on the 20th. This was the last engagement of any consequence in the Northern Area for 1928. Both ground and air patrols continued to fight the sodden weather and the muddy trails as best they could. Dunlap was determined not to give Sandino a further breathing spell.

The Managua air patrol had located a concentration of bandits at Poteca, up the Coco River from Bocay, but inaccessible to Dunlap's forces during the rainy season. Capt Edson undertook to ascend the river from its mouth near Cabo Gracias a Dios with his patrol of forty-seven men embarked in dugout canoes. After a six-week adventure on the rain-swollen river, with frequent fights, Edson reached Poteca on August 17, only to find the main bandit camp abandoned.

Hazards for Aviation

Edson moved and fought under conditions of terrain and weather which made overland operations impossible, depending in the later stages of his advance solely on amphibian air support for supply and evacuation. The aviators, operating from Puerto Cabezas, experienced difficulty and hazard in meeting their commitments. There were sodden days when Edson's Marines did not eat well. Edson protected his slow moving boat column against ambush by the habitual use of flanking patrols along the river banks. His unexpected arrival on the upper Coco at such an unseasonable time drove Sandino from his last refuge and scattered the bandit forces into small marauding groups. These could offer no serious opposition to the Marine patrols during the remaining months of 1928. Sandino crossed into Honduras and was not seen again in Nicaragua for more than a year.

In a tropical country of few roads and many rivers, patrols embarked in small boats supported by amphibian aircraft will usually be able to penetrate deeper into insurgent territory with greater tactical mobility than would otherwise be the case. With modern equipment, readily available on the civilian market, speed of advance would greatly exceed the laborious progress of Edson's hand paddled *pitpans*, and might even outrun the enemy's grapevine intelligence. Edson's pioneering saga suggests interesting possibilities for operations in places such as the Mekong delta.

The Marines and their supporting Navy units had also utilized sea power to good advantage in shuttling re-enforcements between the Northern and Eastern Areas to better meet the threat posed

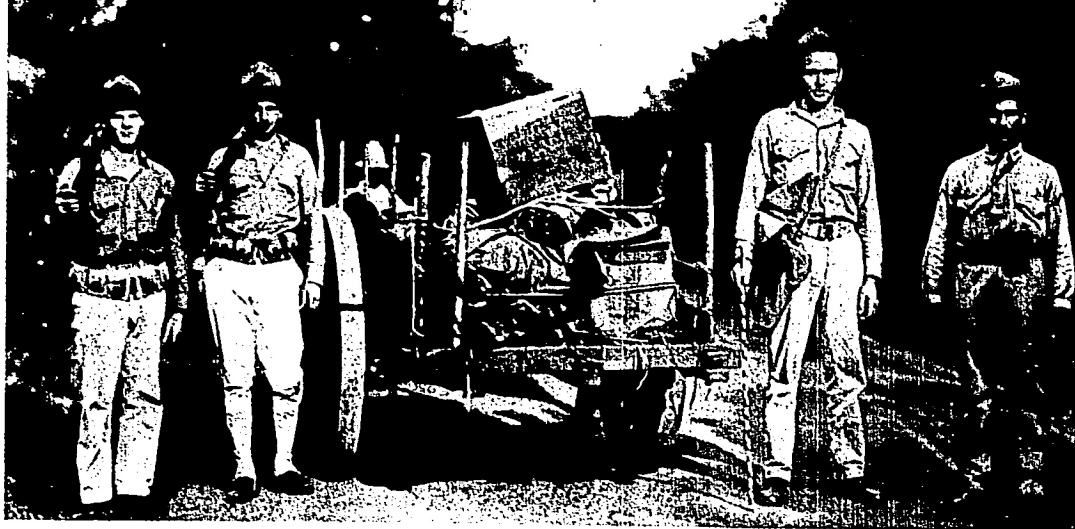
by Sandino's repeated shift of base. These modest sized forces could be transported by cruiser or destroyer between Corinto and Puerto Cabezas, or vice versa, via the Panama Canal, faster than even Sandino could move over the execrable mountain trails. In this instance, at least, the Marines enjoyed superior tactical mobility.

The lessons learned in the hard school of experience had also taught the Marines that their standard issue arms and equipment were not necessarily the best for jungle warfare. For instance, the famous Springfield rifle, with its precision target sights, gave way in popularity among trail-wise Marines to faster firing short-range weapons, such as the Thompson SMG and sawed-off repeating shotguns loaded with buckshot. Ambush ranges seldom exceeded fifty yards; well aimed volume of fire became of greater immediate importance than slow-fire precision at ten times the distance. The Browning Automatic Rifle and the portable Lewis were more useful on patrol than was the heavy Browning Machine Gun. Hand grenades were more apt to be immediately available than the cumbersome Stokes Mortar. Wheeled artillery pieces, even the one pounder, were impracticable on the jungle trails, so air bombing replaced artillery as a supporting weapon. Other items of individual and organizational equipment proved unsuitable for the conditions.

Another innovation of note was the increased use of mounted patrols, utilizing native animals which could live off the country, and conserving the energy of the trail weary Marines for the more important business of fighting. There are still remote mountain and jungle trails where jeeps and other mechanical transport may not travel. Perhaps equitation and pack techniques may again find a place in our training schedules.

Freed of Sandino's pressure, the Marines could now turn their attention to support of the Electoral Mission which was to supervise the November presidential elections in Nicaragua. The result of what was likely the first honest election in the history of the republic was a sweeping Liberal victory, in which General Moncado was elected president. Thus the Liberals, and José María Moncado, accomplished legally what they had been unable to do by revolution and civil war. The United States government might have preferred a different outcome, but in the event made no attempt to interfere with the choice of the people. This strictly neutral attitude helped to reconcile the Nicaraguan citizenry to the Marine occupation, and facilitated subsequent military operations. There appears to be a lesson here to guide possible future intervention in the domestic politics of occupied countries. If we must intervene, favor the side of the electoral majority.

To summarize the results of the second year of operations in Nicaragua: By the end of the



Marines bringing in the ballot box from a remote village

year the unrelenting pursuit of Sandino had broken up organized guerrilla operations, the Marines were in firm possession of the habitable portions of the country, the election was safely behind them, and only minor bandit activity troubled the more remote areas. Military operations had definitely prospered, small war tactics, techniques, and weapons had been refined in the crucible of hard experience; and there was present throughout the command an air of confidence not apparent a year earlier. True, the Marines had not caught Sandino—nobody ever fairly caught him—but they had definitely pulled his stinger, and driven him into foreign asylum.

The successes of 1928, as weighed against the failures of 1927, may be attributed to: (1) a more nearly adequate force; (2) better organization with decentralized control of operations to the area commanders; (3) more competent leadership; and (4) a better supply system which included improved air transport. The increasingly important part played by the aviation arm in both combat and logistics was a determinate factor, not to be overlooked.

There were still important deficiencies which continued to hamper efficient operations in Nicaragua. No preliminary individual training in guerrilla warfare had been organized. Young officers and new recruits were still being fed green into the combat organizations—to repeat the same mistakes and court the same disasters. The organization and training of the *Guardia Nacional* had so far produced but token assistance to the hard pressed Marine combat units, although the few small cadres which had been in action at the side of their Marine mentors fought well and bravely. Although aviation equipment and armament had been considerably improved, no air-ground means of radio communication was as yet available in combat aircraft—nor would there be for some years to come.

Aside from a few minor contacts early in the year, 1929 was the quiet year in Nicaragua, the year of transition from Marine to *Guardia* opera-

tions. The 11th Marines were again withdrawn from Nicaragua in May, turning the outposts and small garrisons over to the relieving *guardia* units. *Guardia* patrols also gradually replaced the Marines, the latter holding only the larger towns, in reserve. The absence of Sandino was felt by the subordinate insurgent leaders who were barely able to keep the movement alive during this period. Without serious opposition patrol operations became routine, with the inevitable relaxation of vigilance.

Increased and aggressive bandit activity during the spring of 1930 heralded the return of Sandino to his native Segovias. Sandino's main force eluded the combined Marine and *guardia* patrols from Condega, Telepaneca, and Quilali which converged on the Silencio area, scene of his latest depredations. He then turned south toward Jinotega, only to be thwarted at Saraguasca Mountain by combined air and ground opposition.

After his escape, wounded, from the Saraguasca affair, Sandino did not personally participate in combat, contenting himself with the overall direction of his several bands. The activities of his subordinate leaders, however, strained the patrol resources of both Marine and *Guardia* commands for several months. There were numerous contacts, some of them reminiscent of the ferocity of 1927. The *guardia* acquitted themselves well when with the Marines, or in separate commands under outstanding leaders like Lts George Good and Lewis Puller. Alone, under less competent leaders, they suffered a series of minor setbacks which raised some doubt as to their ability to ever cope with Sandino.

The United States was determined, however, to pull the Marines out of Nicaragua. The massacre of a small group of Marines on the last day of the year, while engaged in the obviously non-belligerent task of repairing a telephone line, added public impetus to this announced policy. As a result, the Marines were withdrawn from the outlying districts and concentrated in Managua, Matagalpa and Ocotal, where they would be able

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to support *guardia* operations, as a reserve.

The initial efforts of the *Guardia* command to mount a major offensive during the dry season of early 1931 were largely ineffectual, since the interdiction of known trails could not stop Sandino's supply agents; only an effective occupation of the entire northern border could have accomplished this—a task patently beyond the capacity of the entire *guardia* strength. Nor was the *Guardia* command successful in bringing to battle any significant force of the *sandinistas*. These elusive partisans were tied to no base of supplies, had no specific terrain to defend; they took their food where they found it, laid ambushes, fired briefly, and faded into the jungle. The *Guardia* command reported 141 separate contacts for 1931, but these had availed them little in their efforts to pacify the country. At the end of the year the Sandino movement appeared stronger than ever.

During April of 1932 the pendulum swung heavily in favor of Sandino. The *Guardia* troops suffered a series of disasters calculated to seriously impair their morale, and to again raise the question of their military competence and political reliability. The month began with a serious mutiny at Kisalaya, and ended with the worst military defeat of the campaign in which *guardia* patrol under Marine leaders was repeatedly ambushed and decisively routed after their commanders were killed. The *sandinistas* redoubled their pre-election efforts to terrorize the country, from the Atlantic to the Pacific. Despite the countering activity of the redoubtable Puller and Lee and their famed Company "M", banditry continued largely unabated during the last six months of the Marine occupation, the *Guardia* reporting ninety-six separate contacts.

Aside from continued air and logistic support, without which operations would not have been possible, the Marine command did not take the field in support of the *Guardia* during 1931 and 1932. The infant protégé was left to sink or swim, on the premise that Nicaragua must now be left to her own resources. Native officers were gradually substituted for the Marines who had trained and led the *guardia*, so that no Marines remained in Nicaragua after the departure of the once strong Second Brigade, on January 2, 1933. President Somoza reached a truce agreement with Sandino in February, which spared the emancipated *Guardia Nacional* the crucible test of major combat under its new and largely unproven leadership. Professional Marine opinion credited the new president with acute perception in successfully avoiding the issue.

Throughout these pages Sandino has been referred to as a bandit, an insurgent, and a guerrilla leader. He was all these things, and more, to the lawfully constituted government of his native

land, and to the Marines who supported that government. He was also characterized in liberal circles as a patriot, a George Washington, a Bolívar, a liberator, an intellectual, a political idealist, and a socialist. To some contemporaneous writers and their befuddled disciples, Sandino was surrounded by an aura of romantic mysticism—the lone wolf howling his protest against hopeless odds, the patriotic underdog snapping at the heels of the invading Colossus. Sandino cleverly exploited this image to gain foreign support for his crusade against the Marines.

Don Quijote or Bandit

We are concerned, in this paper, only with the military evaluation of Sandino as an opponent in the field. His motivation, however suspect, was constant; his methods, however unlawful and irregular, were effective. He was certainly an able guerrilla strategist, a natural leader of turbulent men, a clever planner, and a ruthless foe. He was not a good field commander; he was a better general than he was a colonel or a captain. He managed his logistical problems surprisingly well; he exploited his superior mobility to give him numerical preponderance at the point of chosen contact; and he so planned his forays to avoid concentrations of strength on the part of his opponents. After the first year, he confined his troop movements to overgrown jungle trails, or to periods of darkness or inclement weather—thus countering the Marines' one advantage of supporting air. Furthermore, Sandino was able to control the civilian population within his zone of operations, either through political adherence or well-founded fear of savage reprisal. He lived off the country, necessarily, either through voluntary contributions or requisition—it mattered little which. He operated adjacent to a zone of refuge—into which his pursuers were politically forbidden to follow. In short, Sandino was the classic guerrilla leader; and his not inconsiderable success is worthy of close study by those who might in the future have to contend with his like.

Sandino could have been vanquished. It would have required a full division of Marines operating under a system of military government or martial law. To the attenuated expeditionary brigade, restricted by considerations of humanity toward the local populace, and circumscribed by political hindrance inherent in such a state of fictional nonbelligerency, the task proved impossible of accomplishment. In the end, Sandino proved the victor. By reason of this unpalatable truth the frustrated Marines have come to realize that Sandino—bandit, patriot, or a Don Quijote—was a foeman worthy of their steel; a master of jungle warfare, a guerrilla leader of stature. His final exit, through fraternal treachery, was not applauded by those who had fought him on his own grounds.

USMC