

MARINE CORPS SCHOOLS
MARINE BARRACKS QUANTICO, VA.

THE SUMMARY OF THE ORGANIZATION,
TRAINING AND OPERATIONS OF THE
GUARDIA NACIONAL de NICARAGUA TROOPS
OF THE CENTRAL AREA UNDER AMERICAN
SUPERVISION WITH CRITICAL ANALYSIS
THEREOF.

RECORD SECTION
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At the time of the formation of the Guardia Nacional under command of officers of the United States Marine Corps Nicaragua had completed a little more than a century of national independence. The government consists of a president, a congress of two houses and a supreme court. While completely democratic in theory the government in fact has consisted of a series of dictatorships, in which the President has exercised arbitrary power, bending both the congress and the courts to his will. National elections have been a farce and the party in power had never failed to turn in a majority of votes counted for their candidate, and with the exception of the supervised elections of 1928 and 1932, which were under the supervision of the U. S. Marines and Guardia Nacional, a complete change of government had never come about, except through revolution.

Nicaragua, lying in the heart of Central America with Honduras and San Salvador on the north and Costa Rica on the south, occupies 51,000 square miles of terrain, about the size of the state of Arkansas.

The Central Area of Nicaragua furnishes ideal terrain for guerilla warfare. Vast in extent it consists of almost unbroken chains of mountains, whose rugged peaks afford ideal lookouts and whose densely forested slopes and secluded valleys furnish numerous hiding places secure from observation and attack by airplanes, and inaccessible to all but the most lightly equipped of ground troops. This section covered in the main with dense tropical jungle, impenetrable except by the few narrow trails, crossed by numerous rivers, passable only at certain seasons; interspersed here and there with small towns. This country affords ample food for roving bands of outlaws, but will not support troops in sufficient numbers to overrun the country and stamp out banditry.

To organize a Guardia Nacional was no small task. Regulations for discipline and training had to be prepared in the Spanish language. A system of pay and supply had to be devised and placed in operation.

Service record books and muster rolls had to be designed. Most important was the recruiting of desirable men from among the Nicaraguan populace, seventy per cent of which were illiterate, which presented added difficulties. Scarcely before the Guardia Nacional was organized their services were much in demand to assist in the suppression of banditry. Companies were dispatched to the more vulnerable points as quickly as they were recruited.

Although the Guardia Nacional was organized on 12 May 1927 the Central Area was not established until 1, June 1929. After the termination of the Civil War it was naturally expected that peace would follow in Nicaragua. However several bandit groups, including Sandino's continued their practice of banditry in the remote sections of the country. To better cope with the bandit situation the President of Nicaragua authorized an increase in the Guardia Nacional which necessitated a complete reorganization which occurred during the latter part of May 1929. This reorganization of the Guardia Nacional was decided upon to better permit the conducting of operations in the field and to centralize the organization in Managua. This reorganization remained in effect until 31 December 1932 when the American officers and enlisted personnel were withdrawn to be evacuated to the United States, 2 January 1933. However during the years 1931 and 1932 the officers and enlisted personnel strength of the Central Area varied from time to time due to the financial difficulties of the country, and the number of towns garrisoned and the troops assigned to the different departments and districts likewise varied with the changing bandit situation.

For tactical, administrative and police purposes the Central Area was divided into the following Departments and Districts; each under the command of the senior officer therein.

From the Map and Chart (appendix "A" and "B") you will see that there were two Departments in the Central Area, they are the Department of Jinotega and the Department of Matagalpa. Included in these Departments are districts and subdistricts (outposts). In the Department of Jinotega there are five districts, namely:

- District 1. . . Jinotega
- District 2. San Rafael--Yali and La Concordia
- District 3. Embocaderos (Co. "M")
- District 4. Corinto Finca and Sajonia
- District 5. Las Camelias, La Fundadora and Aran Juez.

In the Department of Matagalpa there are seven districts, they are as follows:

- District 1. Matagalpa--San Ramon--San Dionicio and La Cumplida
- District 2. Dario and Terrabona
- District 3. Muy Muy--La Pineda, --Esquipulas and Matiguas
- District 4. El Consuelo
- District 5. Algovia, Buena Vista and Las Lajas
- District 6. Navarro, La Isla and Cuatro Esquinas
- District 7. San Isidro, Sebaco

The above area was in command of an area commander. His staff consisted of an area executive officer, who was also the area intelligence and plans and training officer; an area adjutant, and an area quartermaster.

During the early stages of the Guardia Nacional, its training was confined mostly to being brigaded in the field with Marine units, thereby affording it the opportunity to learn through emulation as well as through the instruction given by their officers, when they were not patrolling. This served as the ground work for further development. There was, however much still to be accomplished before the Guardia Nacional could be considered to be a living entity and capable of standing on its own feet.

The adolescent period of its growth from 1927 to the latter part of 1929 and the early part of 1930 gave it the experience and confidence it needed to take over from the Marines, which was realized by the Summer of 1930.

Patrol leaders quickly learned how to get the most out of their men and how to win their devotion and loyalty. For the most part

the Guardia enlisted were honest, cheerful souls, but illiterate who would endure hardship without complaint if they were adequately fed and given fair treatment. If their leader proved himself to be valiant in battle his men followed him with unwavering devotion. Their admiration for courage was boundless. To gain the admiration and confidence of the Guardia enlisted was a big advantage to the patrol leader.

The times when the patrols were not actually engaged in patrolling, various schools, practical and theoretical were held in order to improve their field training. At practically all districts and outposts, where facilities were available, a small range, even tho this was crude was set up and used to improve the individuals marksmanship. Scouting and patrolling was stressed--instructions were given in sanitation and hygiene so that in the event of casualty in the field necessary first aid could be administered. Extended order and close order drill were taught, more time being given to extended order.

After the Summer of 1930 it was seldom that the Marines took the field in offensive operations. AS a matter of fact in May 1931 all Marines in the field were ordered concentrated in the city of Managua, leaving the entire patrolling and policing of Nicaragua in the hands of the Guardia Nacional. The Marines being kept in Managua only in case of extreme emergency and for the supervision of the election in 1932.

The main objective of all Guardia Nacional forces in the Central Area was the suppression of banditry. Armed bandits were to be attacked wherever found and relentlessly pursued wherever they might go and no effort was to be spared to effect their complete destruction.

In order to carry out the main objective, operations in the Central Area consisted of defending critical points and leaving as large a number of troops as possible free for offensive purposes with the area divided into departments, districts and outposts, the commander of each charged with the responsibility of carrying out the necessary measures for both the local defense and the offensive operations in

the territory under his command. All district and outpost commanders operated frequent rural police patrols, reconnaissance patrols and became familiar with all roads and trails in the vicinity of their respective headquarters and particularly those of neighboring Guardia stations. For temporary operations the district Commanders were authorized to combine all or part of the forces in their district as the situation may require.

Vali, San Rafael, Corinto Finca, Navarro, El Consuelo and Muy Muy were designated as combat patrol posts, and in addition to the operations specified in the above were instructed to be prepared to clear strong combat patrols to any part of the Central Area either for independent action or to participate in combined operations under the direction of the Area Commander.

Posts of La Concordia and San Isidro were especially charged with the policing of the Colon Valley and cooperated with each other and with patrols from the Department of Estali, Northern Area, for that purpose.

Company "M" had no defensive operations as it had no station to defend but operated offensively out of Jinotega under orders from the Area Commander. Their patrolling area included territory in and north of Embocaderos. This patrol was known as the "Roving Patrol" and although most of its patrolling was in the Central Area many times it was authorized to go into another area when it was pursuing bandits or when purposely ordered to do so by the Area Commander.

Company "D" Jinotega and part of the Eighth Company stationed at Matagalpa constituted the area reserve. They were ordered to carry the casualties of their respective departments, perform municipal and rural police operations, furnish administrative patrols and each be prepared to furnish one mounted patrol to quickly reenforce any part of the Central Area.

To this end it was the duty of all post and Guardia forces of the Central Area to act aggressively at all times, to cooperate with each other and with the Guardia of adjoining areas, to march immediately

to the assistance of any post or patrol that may be engaging combat and to keep neighboring post as well as the Department and Area Headquarters informed of the military situation.

CRITICAL ANALYSIS

My remarks concerning the critical analysis of the organization, training and operations of the Guardia Nacional de Nicaragua of the Central Area will be given from my personal observation combined with various articles written about the Central Area and the Guardia of Nicaragua in general.

Due to the lack of personnel and equipment, which was the direct result of insufficient funds, the organization of the Central Area had to be held to a minimum, progressing piece meal until December 1932, when it reached its height under U. S. Marine Corps supervision and was believed then, capable of operating alone. With such restrictions the Area Commander had an arduous and tedious assignment. On various occasions just about the time the area was functioning satisfactorily adjustments were ordered in the officer and enlisted personnel, which handicapped the organization to no little end, as those being relieved had just about acclimated themselves to the local conditions.

The methods of transportation for enlisted personnel and supplies from General Headquarters at Managua to Jinotega via Matagalpa was a nightmare, there being no landing field at Jinotega to accommodate the landing of transport planes. As a result all enlisted personnel and the majority of supplies had to be transported by truck to Matagalpa, then by bull-cart to Jinotega. This was the method of travel during the dry season. During the rainy season, which is from about May through November these modes of transport had to be substituted by bull-cart from Managua to Matagalpa and then by pack mule from Matagalpa to Jinotega. Truck transportation was afforded personnel from Managua to Matagalpa during the dry season, the balance of the trip being made by foot.

The mode of transportation of supplies from departments to districts and outposts in the dry season was by bull-cart and pack mule. In the rainy season supplies were transported via pack mule only. Personnel traveled by foot regardless of the season. This delay in personnel and supplies resulting from the above methods of transportation curtailed operations considerably.

The signal communication was in its infancy in the Guardia as a whole, especially was this realized in the districts and outposts. The reason being lack of qualified personnel and proper equipment.

The operations of the Marine Corps aviation is hard to analyze-- its potential power was always recognized in the Central Area. For instance it was well known that no group of bandits, however large could continue its attack on towns after the planes had arrived. No bandit group would stand a machine gun and bombing attack from the air without scattering and taking cover. With the aid of aviation it was possible to leave exposed towns with small garrisons. Bandit groups usually stayed clear of open country and worked in the dense and jungle areas.

The terrain features in this area reflected aviation's capabilities. In open country aviation was used for reconnaissance and liaison purposes-- in the dense and jungle area little could be accomplished other than to warn of the approach of the bandits.

As I observed the training of the Guardia it was intended that this training more or less be confined to a larger degree at the Area and Department headquarters. The enlisted personnel of the Guardia received their initial training as recruits at Managua. This training had to be held to a minimum because they were transferred as soon as they were recruited and outfitted to Area and Department headquarters for further assignment to districts and outposts. Even at Department Headquarters the training was restricted because of the various duties which had to be performed, such as police patrols, administrative patrols and other special duties necessary to maintaining the department. As

a result of this restriction placed on training at the departments, district and outpost commanders were confronted with the difficult task of completing the training of enlisted personnel while carrying out their operations in the field. However with such opposition facing them the officers in these districts and outposts accomplished much in molding them into a fighting combat unit, considering the type of personnel and the time at their disposal.

With due respect to all officers who had duty with the Guardia-- on various occasions junior officers were ordered to the Guardia either directly from the United States or from the Brigade at Managua and was sent to the hills to perform duty, without a speaking knowledge of the language, without any conception of bush warfare and without any psychological approach to the ordinary life and customs of the Guardia enlisted. It was only by the grace of God and the lack of marksmanship on the part of the bandits that the casualties were held to a minimum.

Operations performed by the Guardia of the Central Area were outstanding when you stop to consider the large area that had to be patrolled, the mountainous and rugged terrain, with swamps interspersed here and there, no road net or trails to assist the patrolling, the lack or insufficient information of the bandits and the little knowledge of the ground you had to patrol in order to contact the bandits. As far as the basic operations were concerned, having in mind the area to be covered, the towns and coffee plantations to be protected and the avenues of approach of the bandits, the scheme of maneuver was undoubtedly the best that could be put into effect. The plan adopted as was explained in the summary of operations was well executed.

My outstanding criticism of the entire campaign of the Central Area was the operation of the Intelligence Section, which was not directly their responsibility, because they lacked the necessary agencies; what agencies they did have very seldom brought in reliable information or else if they did bring in information it was too old to be of any value. When the Intelligence Section received reliable information the method of transmitting this to districts, other than those equipped with radio

was by telegraph or runner. The telegraph line was usually cut by the bandits or if sent by runner he was intercepted, which necessitated a follow up message and by the time the second or third copy of the original message was received the information it contained was of no value because it was too old.

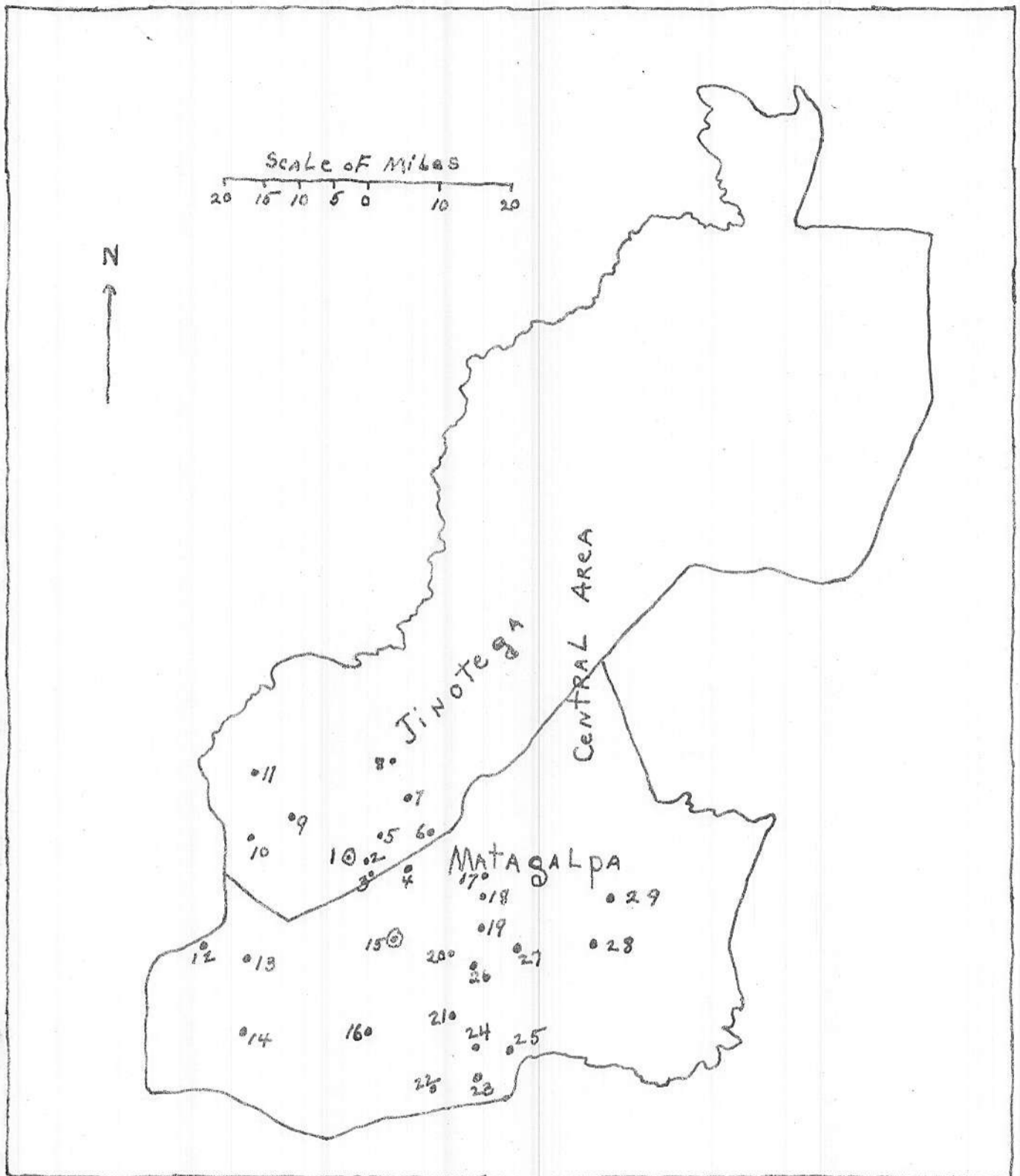
In closing, remembering my critical analysis of the organization, training and operations of the Central Area do not overlook the fact that although I have criticized certain phases of this campaign, from a personal observation, I do not intend to infer that our ultimate objective of organizing a Nacional Guardia was not accomplished-- it was, and a job well done despite the fact that we had to labor under trying conditions and difficulties.

Appendix "A"

Appendix "B"
Bibliography:

A Review of the Organization and Operations of the Guardia Nacional de Nicaragua.

The Marine Corps Gazette (Years 1931- 32-33 and 37.)



- | | | |
|--------------------|------------------|-----------------|
| 1. Jinotega | 10. La Concordia | 19. Algovia |
| 2. La Fundadora | 11. Yali | 20. San Ramon |
| 3. Aran Juez | 12. San Isidro | 21. San Dionico |
| 4. Cuatro Esquinas | 13. Sebaco | 22. Esquipulas |
| 5. Las Camelias | 14. Dario | 23. La Pineda |
| 6. Sajonia | 15. Matagalpa | 24. La Cumplida |
| 7. Corinto Finca | 16. Terrabona | 25. Muy Muy |
| 8. Embocaderos | 17. Navarro | 26. Las Lajas |
| 9. San Rafael | 18. La Isla | 27. Buena Vista |
| | | 28. Matiguas |
| | | 29. El Consuelo |

Appendix "A"

~~STRENGTH-DISTRIBUTION-CENTRAL AREA NICARAGUA~~ STRENGTH-DISTRIBUTION-CENTRAL AREA NICARAGUA JULY 1932.

| Station | District | Officers | | | Officers | | Total | |
|---------------------------------|----------|----------|-------|------|----------|-----|---------------|-----|
| | | Line | Radio | Enl. | Medical | Enl | Officers-Enl. | |
| Area Headquarters | | 3 | 3 | 2 | 3 | 2 | 9 | 4 |
| Co. D Jinotega | 1 | 6 | | 77 | | 1 | 6 | 78 |
| Co. M Jinotega (Embocaderos) | 3 | 3 | | 30 | | 1 | 3 | 31 |
| Co. A Corinto Finca | 4 | 3 | 1 | 42 | 1 | 1 | 5 | 43 |
| Co. A Sajonia | 4 | 1 | | 14 | | | 1 | 14 |
| Co. B San Rafael | 2 | 3 | | 37 | 1 | | 4 | 37 |
| Co. B Yali | 2 | 4 | | 37 | | 1 | 4 | 38 |
| Co. B La Concordia | 2 | 1 | | 20 | | | 1 | 20 |
| Co. C La Fundadora | 5 | 1 | | 20 | | 1 | 1 | 21 |
| Co. C Las Camelas | 5 | 1 | | 15 | | | 1 | 15 |
| Co. C Aran Juez | 5 | 1 | | 15 | | | 1 | 15 |
| Dept. Matagalpa | | | | | | | | |
| Matagalpa | 1 | 9 | 2 | 71 | 1 | 1 | 12 | 72 |
| San Ramon | 1 | | | 3 | | | | 3 |
| San Dionisio | 1 | | | 3 | | | | 3 |
| La Cumplida | 1 | | | 5 | | | | 5 |
| Barrio | 2 | 1 | | 9 | | | 1 | 9 |
| Terrabona | 2 | | | 5 | | | | 5 |
| Luy Muy | 3 | 3 | | 30 | | 1 | 3 | 31 |
| La Pineda | 3 | 1 | | 7 | | | 1 | 7 |
| Isquibulas | 3 | 1 | | 10 | | | 1 | 10 |
| Matiguas | 3 | 1 | | 13 | | | 1 | 13 |
| El Consuelo | 4 | 3 | 1 | 28 | | 1 | 4 | 29 |
| Algovia | 5 | | | 9 | | | | 9 |
| Buena Vista | 5 | 1 | | 15 | | | 1 | 15 |
| Las Lajas | 5 | | | 9 | | | | 9 |
| Javarro | 6 | 3 | | 37 | | 1 | 3 | 38 |
| La Isla | 6 | 1 | | 8 | | | 1 | 8 |
| Cuatro Esquinas | 6 | | | 12 | | | | 12 |
| San Isidro | 7 | 2 | | 27 | | 1 | 2 | 28 |
| Seoaco | 7 | | | 5 | | | | 5 |
| Grand Total | | 53 | 7 | 615 | 6 | 12 | 66 | 627 |

Appendix "B"

