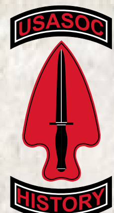
Journal of Army Special Operations History
PB 31-05-2 Vol. 2, No. 4, 2006

Veritas

ARSOF in Colombia



The Azimuth of the USASOC History Office

Veritas, phonetically pronounced (vair'-eh-toss), is Latin for "truth."

Senior active duty personnel and many Special Forces veterans will recognize many of the topics in this campaign issue on Colombia. They were part of the Mission Area Analysis that was previously done annually by the Special Forces groups updating regional contingency (CONPLANs) and operational plans (OPLANs). This is a large issue of *Veritas*, but the violence (*La Violencia*) that has been integral to Colombia for almost sixty years is crucial to understanding the people, politics, and the U.S. role since the late 1950s. To say that the environment in Colombia is very complicated would be a gross understatement, but it has proven to be a challenge to understand.

Despite the publication date, this is the fourth *Veritas* issue for 2006, and there will be four issues in 2007. The "ARSOF in Iraq" poster was prepared to accompany *All Roads Lead to Baghdad*, therefore it only spans the period of the book, now called the 1st Rotation. *All Roads* will be republished commercially in early 2007 by Paladin Press.

If a forthcoming article does not appear as advertised, it was not ready for publication. Reader feedback is very positive, so our azimuth remains true. We appreciate constructive comments and suggestions, especially for future articles.

CHB

160th SOAR SB(SO)(A) 95th CAB 4th POG 75th RANGER RGT USASFC USAJFKSWCS

Editor's Note:

Colombia traditionally views 1957 as the end of *La Violencia.* Based on our research and U.S. involvement, we have adopted 1966 as the drawdown of *La Violencia.* When we refer to *La Violencia II*, that period begins with the emergence of *"Los Pepes"* and is exacerbated by a resurgence of rightist paramilitaries and fueled by the narcotics economy.

Veritas

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Our Thanks

THIS issue of *Veritas* would not have been possible without the assistance of a great many people who contributed their time and effort. The staff of the USASOC History Office would like to recognize the various staffs and individuals who contributed to this magazine. First and foremost, the men of the 7th Special Forces Group supported the deployment of the USASOC History Office personnel to Colombia and gave unstintingly of their time both in and out of country. BG Charles T. Cleveland and his SOCSOUTH staff provided a wealth of information as did COL Kevin Saderup, LTC Michael Brown, Mariá del Pilar Cubillos Rozo, and the MILGRP in Colombia. Kevin Higgins, Bruce Yost, James Roach, Stanley Brown, Anthony Santiago and Dreher Kinney, all "Old Hands" in Colombia, were invaluable sources. General (ret) John R. Galvin, and COL (ret) Ralph Puckett were generous with their time and materials concerning the founding of the *Lancero* School. LTC (ret) Ted Mataxis shared his father's photos of *Batallón Colombia* in Korea. BG Simeon Trombitas, SOCKOR, gave a sanity check on the formation of the PATT program. LTC Reginald Bostick, the civilians, and the soldiers of the 1st Battalion, 4th PSYOP Group provided materials and support in the telling of the PSYOP story, as did LTC Eulalio Medina and the soldiers of CAT-A 733 from the 97th CAB with the Civil Affairs story. John Wyrick at Department of the Army, Nan Kutulas of the Marquat Library in the John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School, Cyn Hayden and Monet McKinzie in the USASOC Archives all made valuable contributions. Special thanks to Betsy Adams and Monica Ruíz Peñalba for their assistance in correcting our Spanish. Thanks are due to General Carlos Alberto Ospina Ovalle and Colonel Jose Oscar Garcia Batte. Two publications provided by the Government of Colombia, *Rostros e Imágenes del Ejército* and *Fuerzas Militares de Colombia* proved to be excellent source material. To everyone connected with this project, our heartfelt thanks.

VERITAS: *Veritas* is published quarterly by the United States Army Special Operations Command, Fort Bragg, North Carolina (ISSN 1553-9830). The contents are not necessarily the official views of, nor endorsed by, the U.S. government, Department of Defense, USSOCOM, or USASOC. The contents are compiled, edited, and prepared by the USASOC History Office. All photos not credited are courtesy of the USASOC History Office.

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SUBMISSIONS: Submit manuscripts, art, illustrations, and photos to the address above. Digital format is preferred. Please provide complete contact information for all submissions. The USASOC History Office reserves the right to edit all copy presented for publication.

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Colombia

by Kenneth Finlayson

THIS special campaign issue of *Veritas* is devoted to Army Special Operations Forces (ARSOF) in Colombia. The nation of Colombia has a unique and long-standing relationship with the United States dating from the Korean War. Today, both nations are united in an effort to counter the problem of narco-terrorism as part of America's Global War on Terrorism. The purpose of this issue is to present the historical background of that long-term relationship, describe the Colombian military and police forces and their overseas experiences, provide an overview of the U.S. military commitment in Colombia, explain what ARSOF soldiers are doing in Colombia, and discuss improvised explosive devices (IEDs).

The issue opens with a description of the special relationship between the United States and Colombia, one that dates from the U.S. recognition of the newly independent nation in 1822. The country's modern history, specifically post–World War II internal problems associated with *La Violencia* and the regeneration of insurgent groups (rural and urban) while the illegal drug trade was expanding, are addressed in the article. The theme of internal strife, most notably *La Violencia,* which periodically recurs throughout Colombia's modern period, plays a prominent role in all aspects of Colombian life. One very positive experience during the post-war years was the performance of the Colombian military in the Korean War.

The Colombian Army formed and deployed the *Batallón Colombia* while the Navy rotated a frigate to fight alongside the United Nations forces in Korea. The *Batallón Colombia* fought valiantly with the 24th and 7th Infantry Divisions in numerous engagements and was involved in the brutal fight for Old Baldy in March 1953. Colombian Navy frigates bombarded and blockaded the Korean Peninsula. Combat in Korea was a seminal event for Colombian officers that led to the professionalization of the armed forces. Following the Korean War, two U.S. Army officers were instrumental in the establishment of the Colombian *Lancero* School, the oldest Ranger course in Latin America. The more than fifty years of American military professional exchanges and the increased numbers of such exchanges are indicative of Colombia's importance to U.S. strategic interests in Latin America.

The commander of the U.S. Army Special Warfare Center, Brigadier General William P. Yarborough, visited Colombia and provided recommendations that were incorporated in *Plan Lazo* (lasso) designed to eliminate the violence caused by bandits and quasi-guerrillas in the countryside. The recurrent themes espoused in *Plan Lazo* are still relevant and are important to understand Colombia today. *Plan Lazo* pre-dated the modern-day *Plan Colombia*, the heavily U.S.-funded national campaign to rid the country of the narco-terrorists. *Plan Colombia* and its successor *Plan Patriota* are explained before the "enemy order of battle"—the insurgent groups. An overview of the Colombian armed forces, both military and police, constitutes the "friendly order of battle." Colombian Special Operations Forces (SOF), supported by the U.S. ARSOF "economy-of-force" approach, are treated separately. The Colombian National Police, an integral part of the Ministry of Defense, and its close relationship with the military in the fight to counter narco-terrorism is a third theme that is prevalent in this issue. U.S. forces who work with both security forces must continually deal with the complexities of this integration.

The U.S. SOF mission originates with the U.S. Southern Command (SOUTHCOM) and is executed by Special Forces ODAs (operation detachment alphas) of the 7th Special Forces Group, the Psychological Operations elements from the 4th Psychological Operations Group, and the 95th Civil Affairs Brigade teams who advise and train Colombian Army and National Police paramilitary units and assist national assets. Topics covered explain what the ARSOF soldiers are doing, training-wise, in Colombia with SOF, National Police, and, in the case of the conventional divisions and brigades, what planning assistance and training teams (PATTs) do in support of the counter-insurgency campaign. The soldier his-

tory articles are based on the perspectives of the ARSOF teams and are largely told in their own words. The issue then returns to the Colombian Army.

The Colombian Army has a long history of peacekeeping in the Sinai that dates to 1956. This commitment to international security operations stems from the Korean War experience. It demonstrates Colombia's commitment to collective security and international peace. The issue concludes with an article on IEDs, the overwhelming cause of U.S. military casualties in Afghanistan and Iraq. IEDs are a major problem in Colombia, now third in the world for landmine victims.

Three major themes run through this issue and are crucial to understanding Colombia. They are the impact of *La Violencia,* in its several forms over almost sixty years on the people and country, a military solution alone is insufficient to restore law, order, and confidence in the democratic government; and the relationship with the United States is tightly entwined with the counter-drug war and the growing threat of regional terrorism. In Colombia, the United States has a partner that is willing to pursue a national internal defense strategy that is in concert with its own.

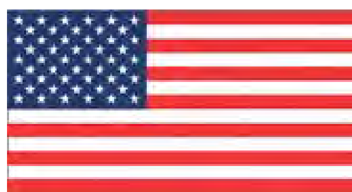
Kenneth Finlayson is the USASOC Deputy Command Historian. He earned his PhD from the University of Maine, and is a retired Army officer. Current research interests include Army special operations during the Korean War, special operations aviation, and World War II special operations units.

Colombia: A Special Relationship

by Kenneth Finlayson

THIS issue of *Veritas* is devoted to the nation of Colombia and the long-standing involvement of the United States in that Latin American country. The United States Army Special Operations Forces (ARSOF) have a history of engagement with the Colombian military reaching back more than forty years. This issue provides an introduction to the history of Colombia, describes the nature of the conflict within the country, and looks at the forces on both sides. The goal of this issue is to provide a primer on Colombia and capture the history of ARSOF in this complex and troubled nation.

In studying the history of the United States, the term "Special Relationship" is generally applied to the nations of Great Britain and the Philippines. The term connotes the unique connection between the countries—in the first case, it is rooted in the U.S. beginning as a British colony, and in the second, the status of the Philippines as America's one true colony. In terms of the U.S. involvement in Latin America, the commitment of the United States to the country of Colombia qualifies for the status of a special relationship. Over the last sixty years, in the often checkered history of Colombia, the presence of the United States has been a significant factor.



United States of America Flag

Colombian Flag

In November and December of 1959, a joint State Department and Central Intelligence Agency defense team visited Colombia to conduct an assessment of conditions in the country brought about by the steadily escalating cycle of murder known as *La Violencia*. The team's analysis recommended a comprehensive package of nation-building incentives to attempt to halt the wide-spread killing that had taken the lives of 200,000 Colombians over the preceding ten years.[1] The lack of government control of large areas of the country, entrenched poverty and lawlessness, inequitable land distribution, and a growing threat from left- and right-wing insurgents posed a serious danger to the viability of the Colombian nation. The 1962 visit by Brigadier General William P. Yarborough resulted in the formulation of *Plan Lazo*, which emphasized the need to protect the outlying municipalities with some type of civil defense force.

The United States chose to concentrate on the security aspects of the problem and, over the next fifty years, the conflict grew into a large-scale war fueled by narcotics trafficking, petroleum revenues, and a state of ever-increasing violence.

An in-depth analysis of the complexities of the Colombian situation is beyond the scope of this article. In essence, in the 1970s and 1980s, two elements, narcotrafficking and anti-government insurgents, grew in tandem to the point where each became a viable threat to the stability of the government. The Colombian government chose to approach the issue as a criminal one using the National Police to combat the problem. The Colombian Army deliberately did not get involved and the result was

Brigadier General William P. Yarborough's 1962 visit to Colombia resulted in the formulation of Plan Lazo.

Colombian National Police Flag

A dedicated program of eradicating the coca and opium poppy crops is a cornerstone of Plan Colombia.

the ceding of large areas of Colombia to the insurgency. The subsequent rise of right-wing paramilitary forces resulted in a situation in which the life of the people in the rural areas was intolerable.[2] In combination, these three factors threatened to destroy the third-most populous country in Latin America. Despite the eventual destruction of the powerful Medellín and Cali drug cartels in the 1990s, Colombia still remains the largest producer of cocaine in the world and is the second-largest supplier of heroin to the United States.[3] The U.S. war on illicit drugs and, post-9/11, the increased emphasis on counter-terrorism have inextricably linked America and Colombia in a special relationship.

In 1987, the United States launched Operation SNOWCAP, an initiative of the Drug Enforcement Agency. A coordinated twelve-country effort to disrupt the growing, processing, and transportation systems supporting the cocaine industry, SNOWCAP put the majority of the interdiction effort in Bolivia, Ecuador, and Peru.[4] While included in the operation, there was not a significant decrease in cocaine production in Colombia.

"The drug trade has a terrible impact on the United States. There are 50,000 drug-related deaths yearly in the United States—with 19,000 directly attributable to drugs," noted Paul E. Simóns, Acting Assistant Secretary of State for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs during testimony before the Senate Drug Caucus in 2003.[5] "Directly linked to the illicit drug trade is the scourge of terrorism that plagues Colombia. Colombia is home to three of the four U.S.-designated foreign terrorist organizations in this hemisphere."[6] The result of this two-fold problem is a long-standing American presence in Colombia, in particular ARSOF and personnel from the Department of State engaged in counter-narcotics activities. Most of this support is manifested in the U.S. support for *Plan Colombia*.

The Colombian government developed *Plan Colombia* as an integrated strategy to address the most pressing of Colombia's problems. Targeting the "illegally armed groups" within the country, combating the narcotics industry, strengthening the government's presence in outlying areas, and bolstering the Colombian economy are the fundamental precepts of *Plan Colombia*.[7] The $7.5 billion plan requires $4 billion from Colombia and $3.5 billion from the international community. The United States pledged $1.3 billion to support the projected six-year plan as part of the U.S. Andean Counterdrug Initiative.[8] The U.S. assistance falls into five areas.

New troop barracks built with money provided under Plan Colombia.

The first of the five components is support for human rights and judicial reform in Colombia. $112 million from the U.S. part of the *Plan Colombia* assistance is earmarked for a broad program designed to heighten awareness of the principles of human rights, strengthen democracy and the rule of law, and assist with a comprehensive program of judicial reform.[9] The second component concerns the expansion of counter-narcotics operations in southern Colombia. It funded two more counter-drug (CD) battalions to form a CD brigade in the Colombian military. The remaining money was to procure and maintain fourteen UH-60 Black Hawk helicopters, thirty UH-1H Huey II helicopters, and fifteen UH-1N helicopters.[10] Other components include alternative economic development to assist small farmers growing coca to transition to legal economic activity and increase capability for the Colombian military to protect the vital Cano–Limon petroleum pipeline. To better interdict narcotics flow, the Colombian National Police were provided two additional UH-60 Black Hawks, twelve UH-1N Hueys, and $20 million to purchase Ayers S2R T-65 agricultural spray aircraft.[11]

UH-1 Huey helicopters purchased with funds for Plan Colombia *provided much needed mobility for Colombian forces.*

Developed by Colombian President Andrés Pastrana (1998–2002) and presented to the U.S. Congress in 1999, *Plan Colombia* emphasizes the eradication of the coca and opium poppy fields, the destruction of the narcotics laboratories, and supports a package of extensive upgrades to the capabilities of the Colombian military and the National Police. In 2001, $760 million of the U.S.-$1.3 billion established a CD brigade headquarters in the Colombia Army with fourteen organic UH-60 Black Hawks and two more Black Hawks for the National Police.[12] This program has been expanded by the present regime.

The current president, Alvaro Uribe Vélez, was elected on a platform that promised to take a tougher stand with the illegally-armed groups. Uribe initiated *Plan Patriota*, an extensive military campaign designed to wrest control of rural areas of the southern and eastern portions in the country from the insurgents. U.S. support for these initiatives has been divided between the State Department and the Department of Defense.

Military operations in southern Colombia are part of Plan Patriota.

Within the Department of State, the Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (INL) provides the structure and authority for the U.S. effort to combat narcotics trafficking worldwide. At the embassy-level, the Narcotics Affairs Section (NAS) "administers bilateral counter-narcotics agreements and advises the Ambassador and U.S. government on counter-narcotics policy."[13] Established at the U.S. Embassy in Bogota in 1985, the NAS personnel work closely with the Colombian National Police Directorate of Anti-Narcotics. The NAS provides counter-narcotics policy and strategy to the ambassador as well as funding, and supports counter-narcotics activities of other U.S. government agencies such as the Drug Enforcement Agency within the U.S. embassy.[14] The largest NAS in any American embassy, the section's efforts complement that of the Defense personnel working with their counterparts in the Colombian military.

U.S. Southern Command is responsible for the training assistance provided to the Colombian military. U.S. forces, predominately the 7th Special Forces Group, provide training in command and staff procedures, basic soldier skills and reconnaissance. U.S. trainers have been a fixture in Colombia for decades and continue to provide training in garrison and planning support to headquarters at all levels.[15] The U.S. troops work with the Colombian military and the National Police, both of which are part of the Colombian Ministry of Defense. Post 9/11, the role of the U.S trainers has shifted somewhat from strictly counter-narcotics to counter-narco-terrorism (CNT), although the training in counter-narcotics is integral to the counter-terrorism mission.

U.S. Southern Command shoulder patch

As stated in the publications of the INL, "Counter-narcotics and anti-crime programs also complement the War on Terrorism, both directly and indirectly, by promoting modernization of and supporting operations by foreign criminal justice systems and law enforcement agencies charged with the counter-terrorism mission."[16] This combination of counter-narcotics and counter-terrorism shapes the approach taken by the Colombian military and the U.S. troops that train and work with it.

Just as the American military has its own Rules of Engagement (ROE) for Afghanistan and Iraq versus a domestic emergency, one cannot gauge the willingness of the Colombian military and police to take the fight to the narco-terrorists in their country, by U.S. norms. The ROE for the Colombian armed forces (military and police) is the National Legal Code. Similar restrictions apply to U.S. forces employed at home (to restore order during riots or to combat an internal insurgency) without a declaration of martial law or being granted exemption to civil prosecution (*posse comitatus*, 18 USC§1385).

In this issue of *Veritas*, the history and scope of the U.S. involvement with Colombia will be examined. A history of Colombia highlighting the post-war years and articles on the friendly and enemy order of battle will establish the basis for an in-depth study of the U.S. role in Colombia. A look at the experience of the Colombian Army and Navy in the Korean War and the effect on the Colombian military from that war provide a framework from which to assess the Colombian approach to international collective security. The key headquarters and elements of the U.S. military presence and the experiences of ARSOF units reflect how CNT missions are carried out by ARSOF. After reading this issue of *Veritas* it should be apparent why a special relationship exists between Colombia and the United States..

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Colombia's Troubled Past

by Troy J. Sacquety

NAMED for Christopher Columbus, though he never set foot there, Colombia is a land long wracked by internal conflict, banditry, and insurgent warfare. It has been called a "nation in spite of itself."[1] The United States has been involved in Colombian affairs since the turn of the last century. The relationship morphed from being an obstacle to U.S. government policy—when the government thwarted U.S. plans to build a canal through the Colombian province of Panama—to becoming an asset during the Korean War. The Colombia of today is an important American partner in the Global War on Terror and in its war on drugs. To understand Colombia, and U.S. policy involved, one must know a little about its history. Then, the current situation can be placed in context. The purpose of this article is to provide a brief historical overview.

Simón Bolivar, "The Liberator," led the army that wrested Colombia from Spanish control. He was also the first president of the Republic of Gran Colombia, made up of modern-day Colombia, Ecuador, Panama, and Venezuela.

Although long inhabited by native groups, the first permanent European settlement in Colombia was in 1525. To put this into perspective, Jamestown, Virginia—the first permanent English settlement in what is now the United States—was founded eighty-two years later in 1607. Colombia's capital city of Bogotá was founded in 1538. Independence from Spain was proclaimed in 1813, although it took several years of bitter fighting for this to become reality. In 1822, the United States was one of the first nations to recognize the new state of "Gran Colombia," made up of the modern countries of Colombia, Ecuador, Panama, and Venezuela, and parts of neighboring Brazil, Guyana, and Peru. Eight years later, the territories that make up the modern day states of Venezuela and Ecuador broke away from Gran Columbia.

After a series of minor internal clashes in the nineteenth century, the country underwent two major civil wars in the twentieth. Both were caused by differences between the two primary political factions, the Liberals and the Conservatives. These wars were the War of a Thousand Days and *La Violencia* (The Violence).

La Violencia (1948–1966) claimed somewhere between 100,000 and 250,000 lives and ranks as one of the bloodiest wars in the Western Hemisphere.[2] This period of domestic turmoil set the tone for Colombia for the remainder of the twentieth century and has carried forward into the new century. Prior to *La Violencia*, there were underlying political and economic tensions between all classes of Colombian society, but especially so with the peasants. Between 1946 and 1947, the working class staged more than 600 demonstrations and organized strikes.[3] In May 1947, violence broke out a when some 1,500 striking workers were arrested. When government troops moved in to repress the agitators, 14,000 were killed in the subsequent confrontation.[4]

However, the main escalation in *La Violencia* occurred after Liberal leader Jorgé Eliecer Gaitan was assassinated on 7 February 1948. Gaitan was a populist with strong support among union members and the lower classes. After his murder, large segments of the urban population filled the streets in protest. A massive rebellion, referred to as the *Bogotazo*, broke out in the capital. Then it spread into the provinc-

The 7 February 1948 assassination of popular Liberal leader Jorgé Eliecer Gaitan prompted the Bogotazo, two-days of riots in Bogotá. His assassination also signaled the start of La Violencia, Colombia's bloody eighteen-year civil war.

es, where the Conservatives had already formed armed groups to handle the insurrectionists. The Conservative-led government action forced much of the rural opposition to flee their homes. Many armed themselves and formed bands for self-defense. Several of these early bands adopted tenets of communist and socialist philosophy. They became the basis for some of today's insurgent groups.[5]

In 1957, former President Alberto Lleras Camargo effected a power-sharing agreement between the Liberals and the Conservatives. This arrangement, called the National Front, alternated the presidency between the two leading parties every four-years for the next sixteen years. The National Front also dramatically changed how the armed forces in Colombia operated. For the first time, the police, who had largely been responsible for fighting the insurgent groups, were placed under the control of the Ministry of Defense. This meant that the Army, that had the mission of territorial defense, and which had managed to stay out of internal conflicts, was given the authority and mission to pacify the troubled areas.[6]

However, the National Front was a pact only between mainstream Liberals and Conservatives. Communist and socialist groups and radical Liberals had no representation in government. This condition provoked a return to violence. The civil war moved into an "unofficial" second phase that continued until 1966. Another 18,000 people were killed during this period.[7]

American military assistance to Colombia started during *La Violencia*. In 1948, the United States, Colombia, and the majority of Latin American states signed the Charter of the Organization of American States (OAS).[8] The OAS charter included a mutual defense–assistance protocol. It would be the Korean War that prompted Bogotá to request training for Colombian military officers in the United States, and material assistance. Colombia was the only Latin American country to offer armed forces to the UN after the North Koreans invaded the South. In Korea, Colombian Army officers gained valuable experience that they later applied in counter-insurgency operations. By 1955, the first Colombian officers had graduated from the U.S. Army Parachute and Ranger Schools at Fort Benning, Georgia. In 1962, a U.S. Army Special Forces contingent led by Brigadier General William Yarborough came to Colombia on the invitation of President Camargo to make recommendations on how to fight the insurgency.[9] Many of these ideas were adopted by the Colombian military and incorporated in *Plan Lazo*, the first national strategy to restore law and order to the countryside.[10]

In 1964, the Colombian Army attacked the

1899–1903: The War of a Thousand Days and the Panama Canal

COLOMBIA'S first twentieth century civil war was fought between the Conservatives and the Liberals. Both parties represented the interests of elites and had only minor differences. The Liberal Party was composed primarily of small coffee plantation owners and merchants of the upper middle class who favored decreased government control over the economy and greater decentralization of government. The Conservatives, led by large landowners, advocated a strong central government. The Conservatives were heavily influenced by the Catholic Church which, in addition to its religious nature, was also a powerful financial institution. The Conservatives had gained power and excluded the Liberals from government. Their poor fiscal policies caused high inflation and a destabilized economy. Compounded with low coffee prices, the Liberals resorted to arms to overthrow the government. After suffering setbacks fighting conventionally, the Liberals changed tactics. Establishing the *modus operandi* still prevalent in Colombia today, the Liberals waged a highly destructive unconventional war in the rural areas.[1] After two years, with both sides weary of the war, the Liberals accepted Conservative peace overtures. The final number of dead was estimated at 100,000.[2] But, more importantly, the war left the government of Colombia impotent. When the United States supported isthmian separatists in 1903, the Bogotá government was unable to prevent Panama's secession from Colombia. The U.S. immediately recognized the new government of Panama. Both countries then negotiated a treaty that allowed the United States exclusive rights to build the Panama Canal.[3]

1 David Bushnell, *The Making of Modern Colombia: A Nation in Spite of Itself* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 150.

2 "Background Note: Colombia," U.S. Department of State; October 2006, www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/35754.htm; Geoff Simons, *Colombia: A Brutal History* (London: Saqi Books, 2004), 151.

3 Frank Safford and Marco Placios, *Colombia: Fragmented Land, Divided Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 247–51.

The United States contracted to start work on the Panama Canal in 1904, and it was opened ten years later. The project cost nearly $375 million at the time and 5,609 lives due to illness and construction accidents.

rural enclave of Marquetalia. There, communist and Liberal forces had set up an "independent republic" where they had originally gathered to weather *La Violencia.* Although the Colombian Army employed new weapons in the assault, including jet fighters and helicopters, most of the rebels escaped the government cordon and fled into the surrounding jungles. The attack at Marquetalia drove the disparate groups of radical Liberals and communists to join together under the leadership of a radical former-Liberal guerrilla named Pedro Marín.[11] In 1966, this semi-united group adopted the name *Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia*, better known as the FARC. The following year, a second communist-inspired insurgent group, the *Ejército de Liberación Nacional* (ELN) [National Liberation Army] was formed in the northern region of Santandar.

In 1966, Pedro Marín, better known by his nom de guerre, *Manuel Marulanda, or his nickname,* Tirofijo *("Sureshot"), founded the* Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia, *better known as the FARC.*

During this period, rightist paramilitary units began to evolve. Colombia has a long history of "self defense" militias, dating to the colonial period when small "armies" were formed to protect citizens, landowners, and businesses in rural areas from guerillas and bandits. In 1965, the government accorded them legal status to compensate for the lack of police and military forces in outlying regions.[12] They would later be accused of gross human-rights violations.

FARC flag

The government escalated the war against the insurgents in 1965. President Guillermo Valencia declared a national "state of siege." This gave the Army "expanded authority" to arrest and try civilians for subversive activities.[13] Since the authorities were broad and general, the Army interpreted this to include physical suppression of strikes, protest marches, and critics of the military, who in their estimation became threats to law and order.[14] In essence, the government had granted the Army *carte blanche* authority to use whatever force was necessary to suppress the insurgency. The only condition was that the military would not intervene in politics.

The Army "crackdown" on civilians prompted the creation of another insurgent group, "The 19th of April Movement," or M-19, in the 1970s. In contrast to the FARC and the ELN, the M-19 was largely an urban group and its membership was filled by the children of the privileged classes. M-19 achieved prominence on 27 February 1980, when it seized the Embassy of the Dominican Republic during an official function. The group captured fourteen ambassadors, including the American, and numerous minor diplomatic personnel and civilian guests. After being held captive for weeks, the hostages were released unharmed in exchange for a sum of money, transportation, and the unhindered escape of the kidnappers to Cuba.

By the mid 1980s, M-19 was Colombia's second largest insurgent group, behind the FARC. Desperate for funding, M-19 tried to emulate the FARC, which was profiting from the drug trade. But unlike the FARC, M-19 was not integrated into the drug trade. Assuming that they would simply pay, M-19 decided to kidnap family members of drug traffickers for ransom. M-19 committed a grievous error in killing the victims when the narcotraffickers were slow in paying. Unwilling to be extorted, the drug traffickers undertook extreme counter-measures and formed a band called *Muerte a Secuestradores* (MAS), meaning "Death to Kidnappers," which received tacit government support. M-19 suspects captured by the police were turned over to MAS, who tortured them for information and then killed them. The M-19 membership was quickly cut in half.[15]

M-19 flag

Based on the radical example provided by MAS, other groups were formed and funded by narcotraffickers to provide security and to protect their interests. The narcotraffickers dealt with their "enemies" ruthlessly. From the mid-1970s into the mid-1980s, the narcotraffickers had increased their business so much that their profits had mushroomed to billions of dollars. Narcotraffickers purchased huge estates in the Colombian countryside and selectively used their wealth to gain popular support. Thus, the most wealthy and powerful narcotraffickers became quasi-political figures in their own right.

In 1984, the Colombian government negotiated a cease-fire with the insurgent groups. Only the ELN refused to join. The FARC renounced armed struggle and, in 1985, started a political party—the *Unión Patriótica* (UP)—to compete for representation. The UP easily won fourteen national-level political posts as well as numerous provincial and municipal positions. However, within months of being elected, several of the UP legislators were assassinated. In the next several years, hundreds of UP supporters were systematically murdered. These excesses destroyed the cease-fire and renewed the violence.

On 6 November 1985, M-19 conducted a last, desperate large-scale action. Thirty-five M-19 insurgents seized the Palace of Justice in Bogotá, taking some 300 office workers, lawyers, judges, and supreme court justices hostage. Resolution of the crisis was turned over to the Colombian Army. Despite repeated pleas for restraint from the hostages, the Army attacked with overwhelming force. During the chaotic assault, the building caught fire and eleven supreme court justices and ninety civilians died. The majority of the insurgents also were killed. It was the most audacious but final action of the M-19.

Colombia's Exports: Coffee, Oil, and Cocaine

COLOMBIA has long been an important trading partner with the United States. Although Colombia has many valuable natural resources—gold, emeralds, and coal—the three best-known exports to the United States are coffee, oil, and cocaine. As an industry, coffee has the longest history. Colombia's mountainous regions are ideal for coffee cultivation. First introduced in the late eighteenth century, it was a cash-crop by the early nineteenth century and its production competed with Brazil. Today, Colombia is second only to Brazil, who remains the world's number one coffee producer. As late as the 1970s, coffee was Colombia's most important export, with the majority going to the United States. However, with the decline in coffee prices in recent years, because of increased production in Africa and Central America, the export power of coffee has been marginalized.

Worldwide, Colombia is one of the few net exporters of oil. Although Colombia's oil reserves are far below those of neighboring Venezuela, they are very important to the national economy. In 2003, oil exports from Colombia accounted for nearly 30 percent of export revenues and contributed 10 percent of the government's revenue.[1] Although the country has limited reserves, it will likely continue to be an oil exporter through the decade.[2] However, the industry does have problems. Much of the oil production infrastructure is located in remote areas of the northern lowlands, called *llanos*, with a low population density. Many of the delivery pipelines are exposed and unprotected. Since many oil companies are foreign-owned and represent outside influences, the Marxist guerrillas feel justified in "taxing" them. As a result, the petroleum industry in Colombia loses millions of dollars in production annually to extortion and by insurgent attacks severing the pipelines. In 2004, there were 103 attacks on oil pipelines.[3] The resulting spillage and environmental damage makes the *Exxon Valdez* disaster appear insignificant in comparison. Illegal siphoning is also a problem. Faced with these problems, several of the foreign oil companies routinely make their helicopters available to speed the military response to guerrilla attacks on the pipelines.

Illegal groups in Colombia also derive a significant income from illicit exports. Colombia is the world's leading cocaine producer. In 2004, some 440 square miles of coca were under cultivation.[4] Coca has a long history in the region. The coca plant has been used for thousands of years for medicinal purposes—as a tea to ward off altitude sickness and as a mild stimulant by chewing the leaves. Some plants are still legally grown in South America for this purpose. The process of deriving cocaine from coca leaves was not discovered until the late nineteenth century. Cocaine was not declared illegal in the United States until 1914.[5]

Two factors in the 1970s promoted Colombia to prominence in the cocaine trade: first, the United States curtailed Colombian shipments of marijuana, forcing a "need" for narcotraffickers to find a new product; second, Chilean President Augusto Pinochet cracked down on his own country's involvement in the cocaine trade.[6] Prior to this, Chile had been the dominant world supplier. Compounded by growing popularity in the United States, the Colombian cocaine trade had grown into a multi-billion dollar industry. By the late 1980s, several high profile drug lords wielded enormous power in Colombia. Included among them was Pablo Escobar, whose position in the cocaine trade made him one of the world's wealthiest individuals.[7] In recent years, Colombia's insurgent groups have moved into the cocaine trade to fund their activities. They have also expanded into the opium trade—and in particular, its derivative of heroin—and now Colombia ranks as a leading producer.

1 Connie Veillette, "*Plan Colombia*: A Progress Report," *CRS Report or Congress*, 11 January, 2006, 11.

2 "Background Note: Colombia," U.S. Department of State, October 2006, www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/35754.htm.

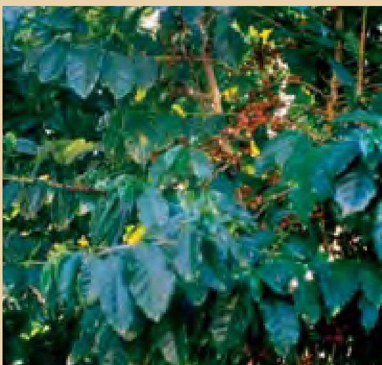
3 Veillette, "*Plan Colombia*," 12.

4 "The CIA World Factbook: Colombia," Central Intelligence Agency, 2006, www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/co.html.

5 U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration, "Cocaine," http://www.dea.gov/concern/cocaine.html, November 2006.

6 Geoff Simons, *Colombia: A Brutal History* (London: Saqi Books, 2004), 61.

7 For information on Escobar and his downfall, see Mark Bowden, *Killing Pablo: The Hunt for the World's Greatest Outlaw*, (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 2001).



Coffee beans come from a small bush or tree that thrives in the highlands. Colombia is one of the world's largest exporters of coffee.

Oil from northern Colombia is transported in pipelines, much of which are above ground and in rural areas. This makes them tempting targets for the insurgent groups.

Cocaine is a derivative of the leaves of the coca plant. It is often grown hidden in the coffee fields.

M-19: *Movimiento 19 de Abril* (Movement of 19 April)

ALTHOUGH the M-19 is now a part of a legal political party, the importance of its insurgent activities merits inclusion. The M-19 was also a leftist group, but unlike the FARC and ELN, was composed primarily of young urban intellectuals from the upper classes. M-19 traced its beginnings to the fraudulent presidential elections of 19 April 1970 (*Movimiento 19 de Abril*=M-19), when former dictator Gustavo Rojas Pinilla was denied victory. The group is best known for its characteristically bold exploits. In 1974, it stole one of the swords of Simón Bolívar from a Bogotá museum, pledging to return it only when the Liberator's ideals were accomplished.[1] In 1979, the group became a serious threat. It dug a 246-foot tunnel to steal several thousand weapons from an army warehouse.[2] On 27 February 1980, M-19 seized the Embassy of the Dominican Republic during a reception. The group captured fourteen ambassadors—including the American—and many others. In exchange for a large sum of money and unhindered transportation to Cuba, the final hostages were released by the M-19 on 27 April 1980.

By the mid 1980s, M-19 was Colombia's second largest insurgent group behind the FARC. It found itself short of operating funds. The group made the mistake of kidnapping family members of prominent narcotraffickers. When some of the kidnap victims were killed to speed ransoms, the narcotraffickers formed MAS in retaliation. With police and army help, MAS tracked down and killed M-19 members—until its numbers were reduced to half.[3]

The M-19's boldest operation occurred on 6 November 1985, when thirty-five insurgents seized the Palace of Justice in Bogotá. Three hundred clerks, lawyers, judges, and supreme court justices were taken hostage. The Army assaulted the Palace, killing the kidnappers. Eleven supreme court justices and ninety clerks, lawyers, and judges also lost their lives. This was M-19's last major action. By the end of the 1980s, M-19 had turned in its weapons and renounced further armed struggle. It returned the Liberator's sword and reorganized as a political party. The party existed separately through the 1990s—sometimes achieving a significant percentage of the vote at the local level—but merged with the Independence Democratic Pole coalition in 2003.

1 David Bushnell, *The Making of Modern Colombia: A Nation in Spite of Itself* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 246.

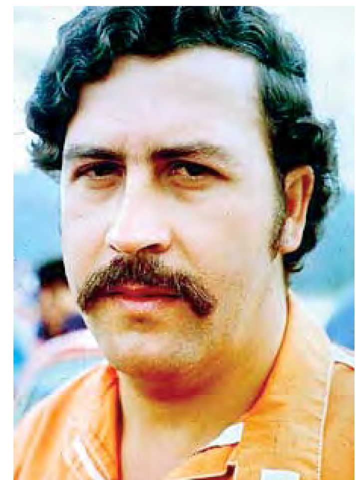
2 Robin Kirk, *More Terrible than Death: Massacres, Drugs, and America's War in Colombia* (New York: Public Affairs, 2003), 104.

3 Kirk, *More Terrible than Death*, 106–07, 112–13.

The aftermath of the 6 November 1985 M-19 seizure of the Palace of Justice in Bogotá. In a heavy-handed intervention, the Army cleared the building of insurgents, at a loss of over a hundred people; government workers, soldiers, guerrillas, and eleven Supreme Court justices.

By the end of the decade, the remnants of M-19 had surrendered their weapons and transformed the organization into a political party.

The FARC and the ELN kept up their ongoing war against the government but increasingly encountered the right-wing groups and the armed bands formed by the narcotraffickers. These groups exponentially increased the level of ruthlessness set by the FARC and ELN. The para-militaries massacred anyone or any group suspected of providing aid to the leftists. The leftist insurgents retaliated in turn. The vicious cycle of threats, kidnappings, disappearances, bombings, blatant killings, and outright massacres escalated.



The notorious drug-lord Pablo Escobar was a kingpin in the Colombian cocaine trade and was responsible for violence across the country. He was one of the world's richest men, but was hunted down and killed in 1993 by a confederation of Colombian paramilitaries, the Colombian government, and the United States.

In 1989, President Virgilio Barco formally renounced the paramilitary groups and tried to end military and police support. Having lost official sanction, the groups simply financed their activities with drug money. Tacit cooperation from the Army and Police continued. That same year, men working for narcotrafficker Pablo Escobar gunned down presidential candidate Luis Carlos Galán. This forced the government to confront Escobar and other narcotraffickers. Barco cracked down, declared a war on drugs, and advocated extradition of drug dealers to the United States for criminal trial.

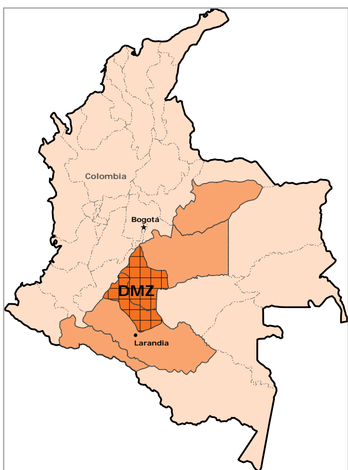
Escobar responded violently by ordering attacks on government officials who opposed him and/or advocated extradition. Escobar and the other narcotraffickers—banded together. The "extraditables" put so much pressure on the government by targeted killings and bombings that

President César Gaviria renounced extradition and tried to negotiate the surrender of the "extraditables." As an incentive, the constitution was rewritten in 1991, making extradition unconstitutional. This prohibition was later repealed.

Despite this latest protection, the violence continued. Escobar, who did surrender, later "escaped" from his private and lavish "jail." After another round of protracted violence, Pablo Escobar was tracked down and killed in 1993 by an alliance of the armed group *Perseguidos por Pablo Escobar* (Victims of Pablo Escobar), commonly known as *"Los Pepes,"* government forces, and the United States. Instead of slackening, the violence got worse. In 1995 alone, over 25,000 Colombians were murdered, many by self-defense groups that worked with the unspoken consent of the military and police. As a result of this, in 1997, the U.S. Congress attached the Leahy Amendment to the Colombian Appropriations Bill. This amendment stipulated all U.S. military assistance to Colombia could go only to units cleared of human rights violations. In 1997, the various self-defense forces—still tacitly accepted by the government—formed themselves into a confederation called the *Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia* (AUC) because the government "affair" with the self-defense forces was at an end. Faced with pressure from human rights groups, denial of visas to Colombian military officers by the U.S. Department of State, and the conditions for U.S. funding, the government declared the AUC—at least on paper—illegal.

AUC logo

The current president of Colombia, Alvaro Uribe Vélez.

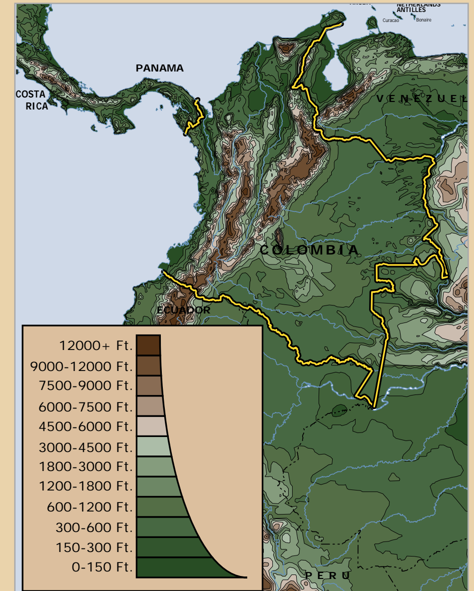


Map of despeje area.

Seeing no end to the violence, President Andrés Pastrana took a radical step. He solicited negotiation with the FARC. In 1999, Pastrana expanded the effort by ceding a demilitarized zone the size of Switzerland, known unofficially as "FARClandia," and officially as the *Zona de Despeje* (the open land). Pastrana also was an architect of *Plan Colombia*, a $4.5 billion effort co-funded by the United States to end Colombia's

Colombia: A Land of Geographic Extremes

THE isthmus that geographically separates Panama from South America connects the two continents at Colombia. It is the only South American country with coastlines on the Pacific Ocean and the Caribbean Sea. In addition to Panama, Colombia is bordered by Venezuela, Brazil, Peru, and Ecuador. It is the fourth largest country in South America with a total area of some 440,000 square miles, making it about three times the size of Montana.[1] A population of forty-three million ranks Colombia as the third most populous country in Latin America, behind Mexico and Brazil.[2] The population is a mixture of native, European, and African extraction. Ninety percent of the population is Roman Catholic.



The topography of Colombia ranges from coastal plains along the western seaboard to the Andes Mountain chain that traverses the entire western half of the country. This chain is further bisected by three mountain ranges that create deep valleys and rugged highlands. The waterlogged eastern lowlands, called *llanos*, are the largest contiguous area and constitute some 50 percent of Colombia's landmass. However, they are virtually cut off from the rest of the country by the Andes chain. The lowlands are sparsely populated and home to only 3 percent of Colombia's population. Ninety-seven percent of the population lives in the mountains, valleys, and western coastal plain. Even here, the majority of the population is concentrated in the three largest cities; Bogotá, Cali, and Medellín. While politically, Colombia is divided into thirty-two administrative departments, the country has been traditionally divided into regions by geography.

1 *The World Factbook 2005* (Washington D.C.: Central Intelligence Agency, 2005), 122–24.

2 "Background Note: Colombia," U.S. Department of State; October 2006, www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/35754.htm

internal conflict, eliminate drug trafficking in six years, and to promote economic and social development.[16] The current president, Alvaro Uribe Vélez, having observed the futility of negotiating with the FARC, took a tough stance. He refused to negotiate with any insurgent groups until they committed to a cease-fire and disarmed. He increased the size of the military and police force and gave them "expanded authorities." This was followed by *Plan Patriota*, a military campaign to regain control of guerrilla-dominated territory.[17] It began with the dismantling of FARClandia.

The results of *Plan Colombia* are promising. A key part of this strategy—though controversial—has been aerial eradication of drug crops. Thousands of hectares are sprayed every year, the effect of which greatly reduces potential yields of illicit drugs. According to the Congressional Research Service, the U.S. street price of cocaine and heroin—the two primary drugs involved in the illicit Colombian drug trade—has increased. At the same time, the purity and availability of the drugs have fallen, indicating that the amount being imported into the United States may be decreasing.[18] Now, the cultivation of opium poppies in hard to reach mountain areas has grown significantly in the past few years.

Plan Colombia has also increased security in the rural areas, long the domain of insurgent and bandit groups. The Colombian National Police now have a fixed presence in all municipalities, with more than 9,000 *Granaderos* and *Carabineros* deployed to rural areas.[19] The increased police and military presence has helped to lower the number of kidnappings. Still, Colombia has the world's highest rate. The plan has also helped reduce the number of insurgents by attrition, surrender, and peace negotiations. Promoting the premise that increased government pressure negated their need to operate against the FARC and the ELN, the AUC entered into negotiations with the Uribe government to demobilize.[20] *Plan Colombia* also provides the framework needed to expand U.S. military assistance. This has helped to raise the effectiveness of the Colombian military and paramilitary police in conducting counter-insurgency operations, especially since they are no longer "out-gunned" by the narcotraffickers, FARC, or ELN.

Colombia has long been a country wracked by divisive politics and feud-like violence. At times, the level of violence has threatened to tear the country apart. Still, Colombia remains a country in transition facing serious problems with narcotrafficking and insurgent warfare. Despite these threats, it is a dynamic country with many valuable natural resources. Under *Plan Colombia*, the country appears to be moving in the right direction to regain control of its future and curb the violence that has stained the twentieth century and threatens the twenty-first century.

Troy J. Sacquety earned an MA from the University of Nebraska–Lincoln and is completing his PhD in Military History through Texas A&M University. Prior to joining the USASOC History Office staff he worked several years for the Central Intelligence Agency. Mr. Sacquety has previously contributed articles to Studies in Intelligence: Journal of the American Intelligence Professional. *Current research interests include Army and Office of Strategic Services (OSS) special operations during World War II, and Camp Mackall, North Carolina.*

Endnotes

1 David Bushnell, *The Making of Modern Colombia: A Nation in Spite of Itself* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), front cover.

2 Only the American Civil War (1861–1865) and the War of the Triple Alliance (also known as the Paraguayan War 1864–1870) produced greater casualties. Estimates on the number of casualties vary; Bushnell, *The Making of Modern Colombia*, 205, places the number at between 100,000 and 200,000. Geoff Simons, *Colombia: A Brutal History* (London: Saqi Books, 2004), 38, places it at more than 250,000. Other sources place the number of killed even higher. Official Colombian history usually marks the end of *La Violencia* in 1957 with the formation of the National Front.

3 Geoff Simons, *Colombia: A Brutal History* (London: Saqi Books, 2004), 40.

4 Simons, *Colombia: A Brutal History*, 40.

5 Robin Kirk, *More Terrible than Death: Massacres, Drugs, and America's War in Colombia*, (New York: Public Affairs, 2003), 27–31.

6 Kirk, *More Terrible than Death*, 44–45.

7 Simons, *Colombia: A Brutal History*, 42.

8 The text of the charter can be found at the OAS website at www.oas.org/main/main.asp?sLang=E&sLink=http://www.oas.org/juridico/english/charter.html.

9 Ibid, 42, "Visit to Colombia, South America, by a Team from Special Warfare Center, Fort Bragg, North Carolina," 26 February 1962, ARSOF history files, Fort Bragg, NC.

10 For more on the U.S. assistance to Colombia in this period, see Dennis M. Rempe, "The Past as Prologue: A History of US Counter-Insurgency Policy in Colombia 1958–1966," March 2002, Strategic Studies Institute Monologue, available at http://www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pdffiles/PUB17.pdf.

11 Kirk, *More Terrible than Death*, 53–55.

12 Kirk, *More Terrible than Death*, 56.

13 Kirk, *More Terrible than Death*, 56.

14 Kirk, *More Terrible than Death*, 56.

15 Kirk, *More Terrible than Death*, 106–07.

16 Connie Veillette, "*Plan Colombia*: A Progress Report," *CRS Report for Congress*, 11 January, 2006, 1.

17 Veillette, "*Plan Colombia*," 3.

18 Veillette, "*Plan Colombia*," 3–4.

19 Veillette, "*Plan Colombia*," 8.

20 Connie Veillette, "Colombia: Issues for Congress, " *CRS Report for Congress*, 19 January 2005, 5–6.

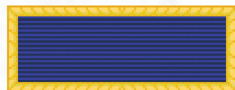
Barbula and Old Baldy, March 1953:

Colombia's Heaviest Combat in Korea

by Charles H. Briscoe

COLOMBIA provided an infantry battalion and a frigate to serve with the United Nations Command in Korea from 1951–1955. It was the only Latin American country to provide forces.[1] The *Batallón Colombia* bravely fought the Communist Chinese in numerous engagements in 1951 and 1952, earning a U.S. Presidential Unit Citation during the Kumsong Offensive. However, it was the heavy fighting in March 1953, while the peace talks were in progress, that truly tested the mettle of the South Americans. This article will focus on the two most significant actions of the *Batallón Colombia* in Korea, Operation BARBULA and the fight for Old Baldy. In a period of ten days, the Colombians suffered 114 killed, 141 wounded, and 38 missing in action, the equivalent of two rifle companies.[2] The purpose of this article is to place those two battles in proper context in order to show how earlier success in Operation BARBULA created conditions that contributed later to a controversial loss.

UN Service Medal



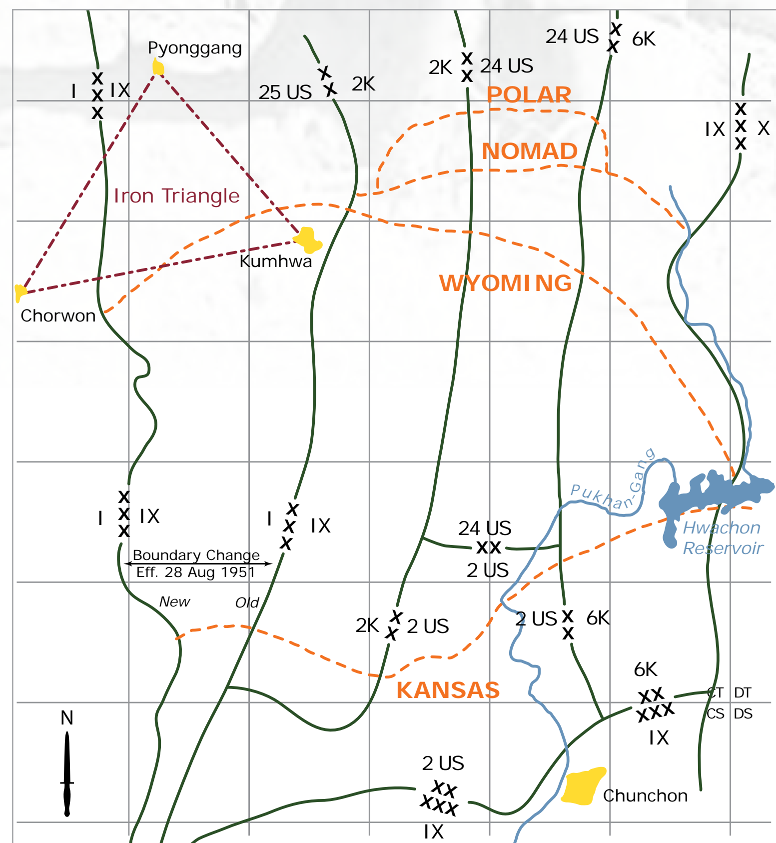
U.S. Presidential Unit Citation

Colombia's "Rampant Lion of the Infantry" insignia

This study is relevant because the Korean War was key to the development of a professional Colombian armed force and was a benchmark in the social and political transformation of the country. Because Colombia was the only Latin American country to support the principles of international, collective security in Korea, the *Batallón Colombia* and its naval frigates became "showcase" elements for their military services, the nation, and the Americas.[3] When the *Batallón Colombia* reached the front lines on 1 August 1951, the war was a stalemate.

The UN objective in Korea had shifted from military victory to a political settlement. The Eighth Army commander, U.S. General James A. Van Fleet, concluded that "continued pursuit of the enemy was neither practical nor expedient. The most profitable employment of UN troops . . . was to establish a defense line (Line Kansas) on the nearest commanding terrain north of Parallel 38, and from there push forward in limited advances to accomplish the maximum destruction to the enemy consistent with minimum danger to the integrity of the UN forces."[4]

That meant Line Kansas was to be fortified in depth. Hasty field fortifications would be constructed along the



Friendly Situation—August 1951 highlighting Lines Kansas, Wyoming, Nomad, and Polar.

Colombian positions on the main line of resistance while attached to the 24th Infantry Division near Chup'a-ri overlooking the Kumsong Valley, 1951.

24th Infantry Division shoulder patch

21st Infantry Regiment (Gimlets) Distinctive Unit Insignia

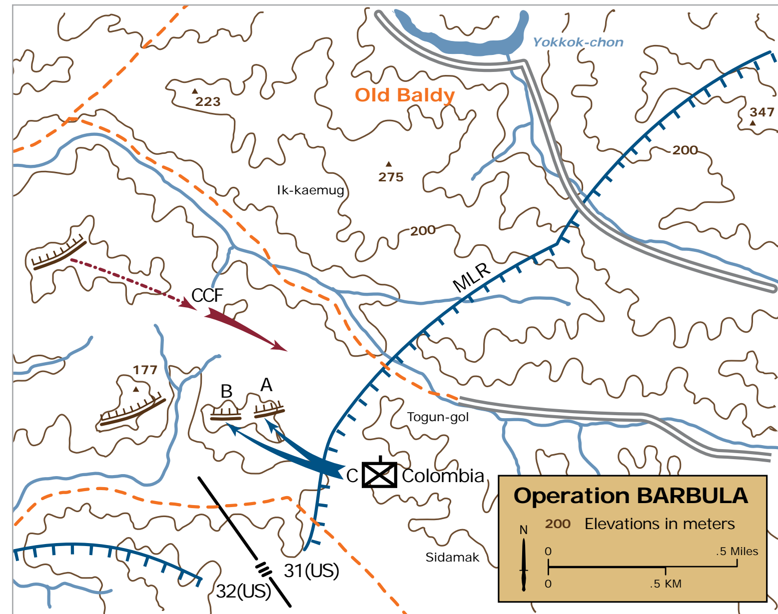
IX Corps shoulder patch

forward slopes of Line Wyoming [Combat Outpost Line (COPL)] to blunt enemy assaults and delay them before they reached Kansas, the main line of resistance (MLR). Having trained to fight offensively, the *Batallón Colombia* would primarily defend. Only limited attacks would be conducted against the Chinese forces.[5] Attached to two different U.S. divisions (21st Infantry Regiment, 24th Infantry Division until late January 1952; then to 31st Infantry Regiment, 7th Infantry Division until October 1954), the Colombians would defend the MLR and conduct patrols and raids between the lines until the armistice on 27 July 1953. However, while peace talks were ongoing at Panmunjom, the Chinese launched a major offensive in the spring of 1953, to capture several UN outposts on dominant terrain that overlooked the MLR.[6]

When the 7th Infantry Division returned to the MLR the end of February 1953, it had been reassigned from the IX Corps to the I Corps sector. The *Batallón Colombia* was operationally ready. The battalion's intense integrated training of 201 replacements from the 8th contingent was key to Colonel William B. Kern awarding it a top performance during regimental maneuvers in late November 1952, and again in February 1953.[7] Operation BARBULA placed the Colombians back into the ground war.

On 10 March 1953, Lieutenant Colonel Alberto Ruíz Novoa, third commander of the *Batallón Colombia,* sent C Company (-), commanded by Captain Gustavo Acevedo, to attack two enemy strong points on Hill 180. They were about five hundred meters in front of the 31st Infantry sector. These two strong points screened the Chinese MLR five hundred meters to the rear. After the two

Captain Jorgé Robledo Pulido briefed Operation BARBULA (right to left) to General Mark W. Clark (UN Command), General Maxwell D. Taylor (Eighth U.S. Army), Colonel William B. Kern (31st Infantry), Lieutenant General Paul W. Kendall (I Corps), and Major General Wayne C. Smith (7th Infantry Division) with a sand table terrain model.



Operation BARBULA (10 March 1953)

7th Infantry Division shoulder patch

31st Infantry Regiment (Polar Bears) Distinctive Unit Insignia

I Corps shoulder patch

Batallón Colombia *defensive positions on the reverse slope of the Main Line of Resistance.*

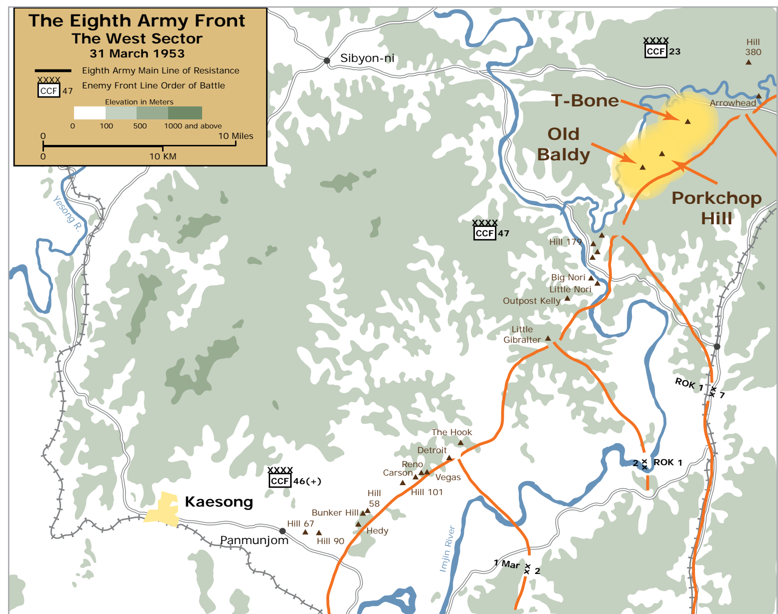
Colombian platoons crossed a narrow valley, the element commanded by Second Lieutenant Andrade was to attack Strong Point A. Simultaneously, Second Lieutenant Miguel Piñeros Grimaldi and his platoon were to assault Strong Point B. Intelligence estimates were that both strong points were defended by infantry platoons. In the early morning darkness, the two Colombian platoons managed to get within fifty meters of their objectives undetected.[8]

Then, at 0700 hours, the platoons simultaneously charged the strong points with fixed bayonets. The courageous Colombian infantrymen jumped into the trenches throwing hand grenades. Bloody hand-to-hand fighting ensued as more Chinese rushed out of bunkers and fighting positions. Numbers of Colombian wounded quickly exceeded the capacity of litter bearers. The Korean Service Corps personnel brought along to carry the wounded fled when the attacks began. After an hour of intense fighting, it became deathly quiet as the dawn arrived.[9]

Observing the fights with binoculars, CPT Acevedo spotted two Chinese platoons rushing toward Hill 180. He quickly called in artillery support. The counterattack was blocked, but the enemy stayed within small-arms range and directed heavy machinegun fire on the strong points. At 0950 hours, LTC Ruíz Novoa ordered the immediate withdrawal of both platoons. Lieutenant Piñeros Grimaldi pulled his platoon back, but 2LT Andrade had radio problems and kept his platoon in place. Observing that some Colombians were withdrawing, the Chinese concentrated their fire on Andrade's platoon. As their casualties mounted, 2LT Andrade was wounded. Litter bearers had been reduced to crawling among the wounded and dead. CPT Acevedo requested that his third platoon be sent to retrieve the wounded and dead.[10]

Under heavy enemy fire the third platoon led by Second Lieutenant Luís A. Bernal (Silver Star, 21 June 1952) rushed forward to begin a search and rescue. By 1100 hours, most of the casualties had been evacuated to an emergency aid station on the MLR. Operation BAR-

Unarmed Korean Service Corps personnel carrying hot food to the Combat Outpost Line.



The Eighth Army Front 31 March 1953 showing the Old Baldy, Porkchop Hill, and T-Bone outposts.

Initial Fights for Old Baldy (June–September 1952)

WHEN the 6 June 1952 assault to seize Hill 266 was halted by enemy fire, the 45th Infantry Division artillery fired another 500 rounds on the Communist defenders. The second heavy bombardment enabled A Company, 180th Infantry Regiment to finally seize control of Old Baldy shortly after midnight on 7 June 1952. The adjacent outpost on Porkchop Hill (Hill 255) had also been captured after an intense fifty-five minute fight.

As the enemy resistance crumbled, the infantrymen of A Company, 180th Infantry, 45th Infantry Division pushed their way toward the crest of Old Baldy on the late afternoon of 6 June 1952. Then, enemy artillery and mortars began to rain down on them. "There were no bunkers or trenches to get into," said Master Sergeant Gerald Marlin, "so we started digging while the shells burst around us. I almost crawled into my helmet."[1] Despite the heavy indirect fire, A Company held on and cleared Old Baldy of enemy.

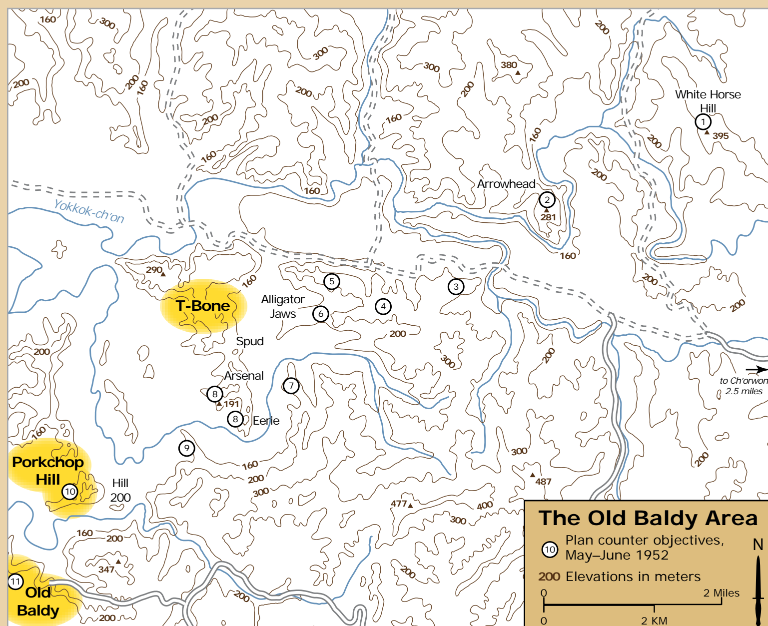
Once the Old Baldy and Porkchop Hill outposts had been seized, the men of the 180th Infantry, aided by Korean Service Corps personnel, worked through the night to man-carry construction and fortification materials up the hills. Bunkers were dug and covered with sandbags. This would allow defenders protected inside to call friendly artillery on top of themselves (air bursts with proximity fuses) when enemy attackers drew close. The outposts were ringed with varieties of barbed-wire obstacles. Land mines were placed in enemy avenues of approach and covered by automatic weapons. Signalmen laid wire to adjacent posts and back to the MLR. Korean Service Corps personnel brought in stockpiles of ammunition. The blocking force unit behind the MLR had the mission to reinforce the outposts in the event of heavy enemy attacks. Elements of the 45th Infantry Division managed to fight off several determined enemy attacks during June and July 1952 until relieved by the 2nd Infantry Division. "Mostly they tried to get the hill by overwhelming us," remembered Private First Class Lee Keir, radio operator, Weapons Platoon, C Company, 179th Infantry Regiment. "Sometimes their infantry would come rushing in while their own artillery shells were still landing. When we raised our heads, there they were."[2] Taking advantage of the unit changeover, the Chinese launched a reinforced battalion against Old Baldy on the night of 17–18 July. Although the outpost was quickly reinforced with another rifle company, 23rd Infantry Regiment elements were eventually driven off Hill 266. Despite repeated counterattacks, the 2nd Infantry Division did not regain control of Old Baldy until 2 August. On 18 September 1952, the enemy launched another determined attack on Old Baldy. It took two days of heavy fighting with tanks to force an enemy withdrawal. The 2nd Infantry Division losses numbered 39 killed, 234 wounded, and 84 missing versus 1,093 Chinese dead. The constant fighting for control of Old Baldy was typical of the battles waged in the summer and fall of 1952—savagely contested, seemingly endless struggles for just another hill along the MLR.[3]

Setting up barbed-wire obstacles at the base of Old Baldy.

1 45th Infantry Division *News* (13 June 1952), 1, 4, cited in Walter G. Hermes, *Truce Tent and Fighting Front* (Washington, DC: Center of Military History, 1992), 287.

2 Gary Turbak, "Assaulting Suicide Hill," *VFW Magazine* (June 2002) at http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m0LIY/is_10_89/ai_87509634.

3 Hermes, *Truce Tent and Fighting Front*, 285, 286, 287, 290, 291, 293, 295, 296; Gary Turbak, "Assaulting Suicide Hill," *VFW Magazine* (June 2002) at http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m0LIY/is_10_89/ai_87509634.



The Old Baldy Area with Old Baldy as Objective #11, Porkchop Hill as #10, and T-Bone above Objective #8.

45th Infantry Division shoulder patch

2nd Infantry Division shoulder patch

180th Infantry Regiment Distinctive Unit Insignia

23rd Infantry Regiment Distinctive Unit Insignia

BULA against the Chinese outposts on Hill 180 inflicted more than 175 casualties on the enemy, but the *Batallón Colombia* suffered nineteen killed, forty-four wounded, and eight missing in action.[11] Significantly, the fights on 10 March 1953 were a portent of heavier combat to come and the casualties would be significant.

Three days after Operation BARBULA, the *Batallón Colombia* relieved the 1st Battalion, 31st Infantry Regiment on the MLR in the early morning darkness. They were defending the Togun-kol sector with a company-size outpost on Old Baldy (Hill 266), the high point of an east–west ridge that dominated the terrain to the north, west, and south. Hill 266 had been labeled Old Baldy by the 45th Infantry Division in early June 1952 after intense artillery and mortar fire had destroyed the trees on its crest. The Colombians, having guarded the T-Bone outpost to the east of nearby Porkchop Hill in January 1953, were familiar with the surrounding area when they occupied the center of the 31st Infantry defensive line on 13 March 1953. The 2nd Battalion was on the left while the 3rd Battalion on the right had another crucial outpost, the infamous Porkchop Hill (Hill 255). The 1st Battalion was in regimental reserve.[12]

On 20 March 1953, heavy artillery and mortar fire was directed on the outposts, marking an imminent Chinese offensive. The division G-2 confirmed that assessment after interrogating two Chinese deserters.[13] This major Chinese offensive was to improve the Communist position during the peace negotiations at Panmunjom. In the western sector of the MLR, the 31st Infantry Regiment would take the brunt of a series of regimental (-) assaults from elements of the 141st and 67th Chinese Divisions because they coveted those outposts on the most dominant terrain, Old Baldy and Porkchop Hill. Just behind the MLR, COL Kern put a rifle company of the 1st Battalion in a blocking position. LTC Ruíz Novoa posted B Company on Old Baldy and his A and C Companies on the MLR.[14]

In the early morning hours of 22 March 1953, the 141st and 67th Chinese Divisions began systematically pummeling Old Baldy with more than 300 rounds of 122mm artillery as well as 82mm and 120mm mortars and heavy machinegun fire.[15] Prior to this, the Colombians on Old Baldy had received about a dozen rounds of 122mm harassment fire daily. Under this heavy onslaught of fire, casualties started to mount as the bunkers and trenches on the outpost were seriously damaged. The *Batallón Colombia* counter-fired 1,500 rounds of 81mm mortar into likely enemy infantry assembly areas. When the heavy volume of enemy fire did not lessen by the late afternoon, ever-mounting casualties prompted the decision of COL Kern to relieve the battered company and reinforce the outpost that night.[16]

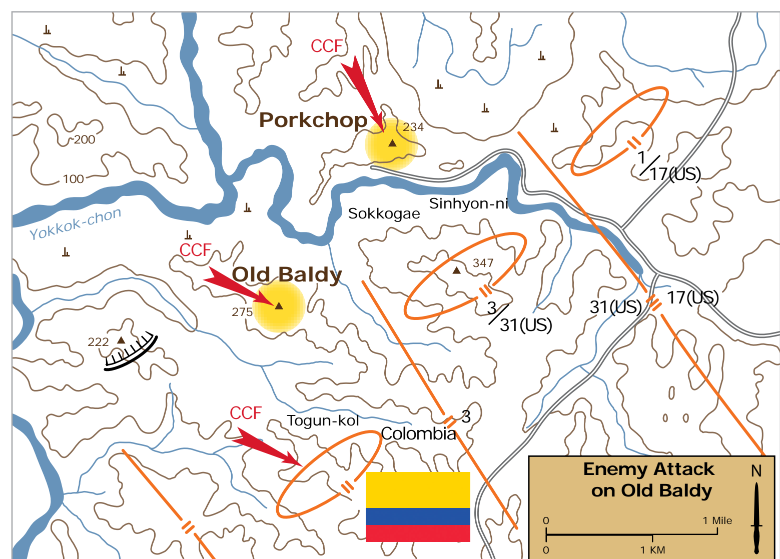
CPT Gustavo Acevedo, the C Company commander, after having an American rifle platoon from the 1st Battalion (his company suffered seventy-one casualties on 13 March) attached, was ordered forward to relieve Captain Irmer Perea's B Company. At 2030 hours, while C Company was moving toward the COPL, the Chinese attacked A Company manning the MLR. It was quite fortunate that Captain Augusto Bahamon and his company managed to beat off the assault because they were covering the entire battalion sector of the MLR. Large piles of determined Chinese lay dead or wounded in front of their positions.[17]

At 2105 hours, before the relief-in-place of B Company was completed on Old Baldy, the Chinese simultaneously launched double-barreled battalion-sized attacks against that outpost and Porkchop Hill. Both were preceded by intense artillery and mortar bombardments. The combined Colombian and U.S. elements on Old Baldy inflicted heavy losses on waves of Chinese advancing up the slope. Despite suffering massive casualties, the Communists kept throwing reinforcements into the fight for Old Baldy

Old Baldy

Porkchop Hill

T-Bone. All three of these outposts could only accommodate a rifle company each.



Enemy Attack on Old Baldy–Porkchop Hill Area (23 Mar 1953) with Chinese Communist Forces (CCF) arrows for the MLR attack and the simultaneous attacks on Old Baldy and Porkchop Hill.

while pressing the assault on Porkchop Hill to the east. Finally, after two hours of heavy fighting on Old Baldy, the rolling onslaught of Chinese infantrymen could not be stopped. The Communists managed to break through the outer defenses at several points, fighting their way inside the perimeter of bunkers. Fierce hand-to-hand fighting broke out. A direct artillery hit on the command bunker had cut communications to the battalion. A Company, manning the MLR alone, relayed messages from her sister companies embroiled on Old Baldy. [18]

Several battalion attempts to resupply ammunition to the beleaguered units on Old Baldy had failed. The Chinese had registered artillery and mortars on the only access—a narrow, bare ridge leading from the MLR. Colombian casualties on the outpost mounted rapidly. The interiors of the collapsed bunkers were catching on fire from sparking fuses of hand grenades.

Low on ammunition and down to 40 percent effectives (including wounded still capable of fighting), the two commanders began a withdrawal down the southeastern slope of the outpost. LTC Ruíz Novoa was busy assembling bloodied infantrymen at the base of the hill when an American rifle company from the 1st Battalion came to help "mend the situation" on Old Baldy.[19]

First Lieutenant Jack M. Patterson started B Company (-) toward the abandoned outpost at 2130 hours. As the Americans approached, the Chinese defenders engaged them in succession with artillery and mortars, then machineguns and automatic weapons, and finally with rifles and hand grenades. Despite the persistent heavy enemy fire, Patterson's determined soldiers managed to fight their way into the outer bunkers by 0200 hours on 24 March and began clearing them one by one.[20]

Progress finally ground to a halt when LT Patterson's company encountered the main body of Chinese consolidating their hold on Old Baldy. Shortly after dawn on 24 March 1953, Major General Arthur G. Trudeau, commander of the 7th Infantry Division effective 20 March 1953, intervened to pull the Colombians off Old Baldy and the MLR and put them in regimental reserve. The 1st Battalion, 32nd Infantry and B Company, 73rd Tank Battalion were made OPCON (under the operational control) to the 31st Infantry to counterattack the lost outpost from the southwest. When the lead rifle company quickly became bogged down by Chinese fire, COL Kern committed another two companies of the 1st Battalion, 32nd Infantry to push past them, link up with the remnants of LT Patterson's company, and establish a precarious foothold at the base of Old Baldy by evening.[21]

At 0430 hours, 25 March, COL Kern sent another company to flank attack the Chinese from the northeast. This effort was quickly pinned down by deadly enemy fire from Old Baldy. A detachment of tanks enabled the infantrymen to break contact. The 1st Battalion, 32nd Infantry counterattacked repeatedly without success. Finally, during the night of 25–26 March, the 32nd Infantry battalion was ordered to withdraw.[22] MG Trudeau pounded the outpost all day with Air Force, Navy, and Marine fighter bombers on 26 March. The Chinese on Old Baldy hunkered down in their bunkers allowing several Colombians who were trapped behind the lines to slip back to the MLR.[23]

Colombian casualties were high for their two and one-half days of intense fighting on Old Baldy. Ninety-five South Americans gave their lives, ninety-seven were wounded, and thirty more were missing. Combined, these losses amounted to more than an entire rifle company. Chinese casualties were estimated to be more than 500. The Communists had been determined to capture and retain possession of Old Baldy. Thus, in just ten days, the *Batallón Colombia* had suffered 313 casualties, the equivalent of two rifle companies. In regimental reserve, LTC Ruíz Novoa reorganized the remnants of his battalion into two understrength rifle companies, a heavy weapons platoon, and a command and control platoon. More amazing was that on 27 March, four days after the Old Baldy battle, the shrunken *Batallón Colombia* moved back to the MLR. That same afternoon, MG Trudeau awarded LTC Ruíz Novoa the Bronze Star for Valor for outstanding leadership during the Old Baldy battle.[24]

This photo of U.S. soldiers carrying barbed wire up to Old Baldy shows the exposed, narrow ridge available to resupply the beleaguered Colombians with ammunition.

Photo courtesy of LTC Ted Mataxis

Batallón Colombia *soldiers gathered after memorial service for their Old Baldy dead in April 1953.*

Batallón Colombia *award ceremony for Operations BARBULA and Old Baldy. Note the Colombian "Rampant Lion of Infantry" sign to the right.*

Lieutenant Colonel Alberto Ruíz Novoa being congratulated by General Paik Sun Yup, Chief of Staff, Korean Army, after being awarded the "Ulchi Order of Military Merit" at the 7th Infantry Division headquarters on 19 June 1953.

Lieutenant General Paul W. Kendall, the I Corps commander, ordered that Old Baldy be retaken on either 27 or 28 March. MG Trudeau planned and rehearsed the 2nd Battalion, 32nd Infantry for this mission using similar terrain. Then, General Maxwell B. Taylor, the new Eighth Army commander, cancelled the I Corps counteroffensive on 30 March. Old Baldy was no longer deemed essential to the defense of the sector.[25]

The price for Old Baldy was heavy for Colombia—192 killed or wounded during the battle and thirty missing, presumed prisoners of war. U.S. casualties after multiple fruitless efforts were equally high. American officers estimated that the Chinese suffered 600–800 killed during the battles for Old Baldy.[26] Although the Chinese initially overran the 3rd Battalion company on Porkchop Hill on 23 March, a quick counterattack regained a portion of the outpost that night and the position was restored the next day.[27] Porkchop Hill was attacked frequently afterward. Artillery forward observers on Old Baldy (Hill 266) enabled the enemy to place devastating indirect fire on the lower Porkchop Hill (Hill 255). A three-day assault that started on 16 April 1953 was the most determined. It was finally stopped when several companies of the 17th Infantry Regiment counterattacked and drove the enemy away from the hill.[28] By that time, American casualties in the 7th Infantry Division for the fights on Old Baldy and Porkchop Hill exceeded 300 dead, wounded, and missing.[29] In the meantime, an exchange of sick and wounded prisoners had been agreed upon at Panmunjom.

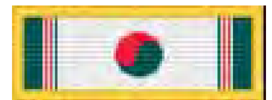
During Operation LITTLE SWITCH (20–26 April 1953), six Colombian soldiers were repatriated.[30] On 19 June 1953, General Paik Sun Yup, Korean Army Chief of Staff, conferred the "Ulchi Order of Military Merit" on LTC Ruíz Novoa at the 7th Infantry Division headquarters.

Less than a week later, Lieutenant Colonel Carlos Ortíz Torres became the fourth commander of the *Batallón Colombia*.[31] Colonel Ruíz Novoa left Korea to be Minister of War for General Gustavo Rojas Pinilla, who had overthrown President Laureano Gómez Castro on 13 June 1953.[32] By then, the tempo of military operations in Korea had slowed dramatically.

While the Colombian Navy maintained a frigate in Korean waters until 11 October 1955, the fighting phase of the war ended with the armistice.[33] During Operation BIG SWITCH from 5 August–6 September 1953, an additional twenty-two Colombian soldiers were repatriated.[34] The *Batallón Colombia* left Korea on 29 October 1954, carrying home the remains of 141 soldiers.[35]

The veterans received a heroes' welcome when they arrived at Buenaventura, Colombia, on 25 November 1954. Five days later in Bogotá, the *Batallón Colombia* paraded proudly before thousands of people.[36] In addition to U.S. and Republic of Korea Presidential Unit Citations, the UN Service Medal for Korea, and the Republic of Korea's War Service Medal, the Colombian Army veterans were awarded the Colombian *Valour* Star for Korea. By the end of the war, the United States had awarded eighteen Silver Stars, thirty-four Bronze Stars (twenty-five for valor and nine for meritorious service) to Colombians.[37]

The Colombians fought well in Korea and earned considerable respect among the United Nations and throughout Latin America. Like



Republic of Korea Presidential Unit Citation

Colombian Infantry Combat Badge for Korea

Republic of Korea War Service Medal

Colombian Valour Star for Korea

many wars, the bloodiest fighting took place while armistice negotiations were ongoing as combatants sought to gain advantages at the peace table. The Colombian defense of an outpost on dominant terrain in front of the main line of resistance took on epic proportions. While Old Baldy was finally lost on 23–24 March 1953, it should be remembered that several 2nd Infantry Division battalions struggled for two months to regain the outpost in August 1952. The fighting for Old Baldy's sister outpost on Porkchop Hill (Hill 255) would seesaw back and forth until July 1953, when the Chinese applied the same level of determination against an American rifle company as had been mustered against the Colombians on Old Baldy four months earlier. While the price for the outpost was heavy on both sides, the Chinese, who were willing to sacrifice more, prevailed.[38]

The Battle for Old Baldy was the *Batallón Colombia's* largest and most costly action in the Korean War. In some respects, it symbolizes Colombia's coming of age in the modern world. A large rocky terrain monument memorializing that epic combat rightfully dominates the central courtyard of the Colombian Armed Forces headquarters building in Bogotá.

President Rojas Pinilla honored the Korean War veterans with a special issue of stamps in 1955 commemorating Colombian Forces in Korea. A ten *centavos* postage and twenty *centavos* airmail stamp contained the UN emblem and flags of Korea and Colombia, all superimposed on a Korean landscape.[39] The Colombian government further memorialized the contribution of its veterans to the Korean War by erecting a large monument at Gaejong-dong, Seo-gu, Inchon, South Korea. The inscription on the monument reads: "Colombian warriors were born of the spirits in the Caribbean Sea! Holding the United Nations flag high in the sky, they fought in the interest of peace. During the campaign, 213 soldiers sacrificed their precious lives. This monument was created to commemorate those who fought for peace in Korea. It is a permanent reminder of the selfless sacrifice made by these soldiers."[40]

The Old Baldy monument in the courtyard of the Colombian Armed Forces headquarters building in Bogotá.

Monument to the Colombian Forces in the Korean War at Gaejong-dong, Seo-gu, Inchon, South Korea.

The Korean War was key to the development of a professional Colombian armed force. It also marked a phase in the social and political transformation of the country. Having forged their leadership in combat, the officers of the *Batallón Colombia* led the country through some of its most trying times in the postwar period. Today, the legacy lives on as the *Batallón Colombia* serves as part of the Multinational Force and Observers in the Sinai.

Charles H. Briscoe has been the USASOC Command Historian since 2000. He earned his PhD from the University of South Carolina and is a retired Army special operations officer. Current research interests include Army special operations during the Korean War, in El Salvador, and Colombia.

Endnotes

1 Carlos Horacio Urán, *Colombia y los Estados Unidos en la Guerra de Corea* (Notre Dame, IN: Kellogg Institute, University of Notre Dame, May 1986), 22–24. While military forces were offered by Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Cuba, and Ecuador, only Colombia provided them. The contributions from the rest of Latin America amounted to money, foodstuffs, and use of military bases. Most countries applied economic sanctions.

2 Republic of Korea, Ministry of National Defense, *History of the UN Forces in the Korean War,* III (Seoul; War History Compilation Committee, 1974), 161–64, 166, hereafter *History of the UN Forces in the Korean War,* III.

3 Daniel Davison, "The Colombian Army in Korea: A Study of the Integration of the Colombian Battalion into the 31st United States Infantry Regiment Based on the Experience of Major General Lloyd R. Moses," unpublished Masters Thesis, University of South Dakota, August 1972, 37.

4 *History of the UN Forces in the Korean War,* III, 136.

5 *History of the UN Forces in the Korean War,* III, 137; United States, U.S. Army in the Korean War, Walter G. Hermes, *Truce Tent and Fighting Front* (Washington, DC: Center of Military History, 1992), 283–84; Davison, "The Colombian Army in Korea," 22.

6 Bradley L. Coleman, "The Colombian Army in Korea, 1950–1954," *The Journal of Military History* 69 (January 2005), 1169, 1170–71.

7 *History of the UN Forces in the Korean War,* III, 157.

8 *History of the UN Forces in the Korean War,* III, 161–64. Lieutenant Colonel Ruíz Novoa commanded the Juanambu No. 16 and Bolivar No. 1 Battalions before being selected as Director of the Colombian Infantry School. Before taking command in Korea, he attended a special refresher course in battalion tactics at the U.S. Army Infantry School, Fort Benning, Georgia. Ruíz Novoa later became Minister of Defense and Chief of Staff of the Colombian Armed Forces. Russell W. Ramsey, "The Colombia Battalion in Korea and Suez," *Journal of Inter-American Studies* IX (October 1967), 547–48; Davison, "The Colombian Army in Korea," 37.

9 *History of the UN Forces in the Korean War,* III, 161–64.

10 *History of the UN Forces in the Korean War,* III, 161–64.

11 *History of the UN Forces in the Korean War,* III, 161–64.

12 *History of the UN Forces in the Korean War,* III, 161–64.

13 *History of the UN Forces in the Korean War,* III, 164.

14 Coleman, "The Colombian Army in Korea, 1950–1954," 1169, 1170–71.

15 "Periodic Operation Report," Colombian Battalion, 20–23 March 1953, 31st Infantry Regiment, 7th U.S. Infantry Division cited in Coleman, "The Colombian Army in Korea, 1950–1954," 1170. The Americans on Porkchop Hill received a commensurate barrage.

16 Coleman, "The Colombian Army in Korea, 1950–1954," 1170–71.

17 Coleman, "The Colombian Army in Korea, 1950–1954," 1170–71.

18 Coleman, "The Colombian Army in Korea, 1950–1954," 1170–71.

19 Coleman, "The Colombian Army in Korea, 1950–1954," 1170–71, 1172.

20 Hermes, *Truce Tent and Fighting Front*, 393; Coleman, "The Colombian Army in Korea, 1950–1954," 1170–1171, 1172.

21 Coleman, "The Colombian Army in Korea, 1950–1954," 1173–74.

22 *History of the UN Forces in the Korean War,* III, 164–65; Hermes, *Truce Tent and Fighting Front*, 394, 395.

23 Coleman, "The Colombian Army in Korea, 1950–1954," 1172; Hermes, *Truce Tent and Fighting Front*, 395.

24 *History of the UN Forces in the Korean War,* III, 166; Despite awarding Lieutenant Colonel Ruíz Novoa the Bronze Star for Valor, Major General Arthur Trudeau, the commander of the 7th Infantry Division for just three days when the battle occurred, blamed Ruíz Novoa for the loss of Old Baldy after the war, although his division also lost Porkchop Hill to the Chinese in July 1953. More importantly, Colonel William B. Kern stated that the caliber and preponderance of the Communist Chinese forces, not Colombian shortcomings, decided the outcome on Old Baldy. "The enemy troops proved to be the best trained and disciplined that my regiment encountered in all Korean operations. The Communist forces outnumbered and outgunned the Colombian Battalion and its supporting regimental artillery assets. Old Baldy, as the main Chinese attack, received the most support from their divisions. The same caliber of troops managed to drive the Americans from Porkchop Hill in July 1953." Coleman, "The Colombian Army in Korea, 1950–1954," 1173–1175.

25 Hermes, *Truce Tent and Fighting Front*, 395. When negotiations at Panmunjom reached critical stages, the Chinese military was used to test UN will on the battlefield. As the action raged around MLR outposts, the battles took on political and propaganda significance far beyond their military value. James I. Marino, "Korean War: Battle on Porkchop Hill," *Military History* (April 2003) at http://www.historynet.com/wars_conflicts/Korean_war/3034286.html.

26 Coleman, "The Colombian Army in Korea, 1950–1954," 1173, 1174; Hermes, *Truce Tent and Fighting Front*, 395.

27 Coleman, "The Colombian Army in Korea, 1950–1954," 1172.

28 *History of the UN Forces in the Korean War,* III, 167.

29 "Third Korean Winter, December 1, 1952–April 30, 1953," http://korea50army.mil/history/factsheets/3rd_Korean_winter.shtml.

30 *History of the UN Forces in the Korean War,* III, 167, 170. During Operation BIG SWITCH (5 August–6 September 1953), an additional twenty-two Colombian soldiers were repatriated for a total of twenty-eight.

31 *History of the UN Forces in the Korean War,* III, 168, 169.

32 Ramsey, "The Colombia Battalion in Korea and Suez," 548.

33 Mark H. Danley, "Colombian Navy in the Korean War, 1950–1953," *The American Neptune* 58 (Spring 1998), 255, 256. On 22 April 1954, the *Almirante Brión* left the war theater for Colombia after being relieved by the *Capitán Tono* on its second tour. The *Capitán Tono* arrived at Yokosuka on 26 March 1954, and went into repair. The *Capitán Tono* operated chiefly along the west coast of Korea in the Yellow Sea until relieved by the *Almirante Padilla* on 11 March 1955. On 11 October 1955, *Almirante Padilla* left Korean waters for Colombia completing the country mission to the UN naval forces. *History of the UN Forces in the Korean War,* III, 178.

34 *History of the UN Forces in the Korean War,* III, 170.

35 The UN Command allowed remains to be either buried in South Korea or repatriated to the native country. When choosing internment in Korea, the contributing government retained the option to carry their fallen servicemen home after the war. It was decided that deceased Colombians would be cremated, their ashes placed in urns, and buried in cylinders in the UN Memorial Cemetery at Tanggok, near Pusan. The *Batallón Colombia* carried the remains home when they returned in 1954. Coleman, "The Colombian Army in Korea, 1950–1954," 1175, 1176; *History of the UN Forces in the Korean War,* III, 170; Ramsey, "The Colombia Battalion in Korea and Suez," 549.

36 Coleman, "The Colombian Army in Korea, 1950–1954," 1175, 1176; *History of the UN Forces in the Korean War,* III, 170; Ramsey, "The Colombia Battalion in Korea and Suez," 549.

37 Coleman, "The Colombian Army in Korea, 1950–1954," 1161.

38 "When the Chinese seized Old Baldy there was good military logic to abandon Porkchop," S.L.A. Marshall wrote. "That concession would have been in the interest of line-straightening without sacrifice of a dependable anchor. But national pride, bruised by the loss of Old Baldy, asserted itself, and Porkchop was held." James I. Marino, "Korean War: Battle on Porkchop Hill," *Military History* (April 2003) at http://www.historynet.com/wars_conflicts/Korean_war/3034286.html.

39 The South Koreans issued a 500-*weun* stamp in 1951 commemorating Colombia's role in the war. The Statue of Liberty and the flags of Korea and Colombia were overlaid on a Korean rural background. For the 15th Anniversary of the outbreak of the war, the Republic of Korea issued a 4 *weun* stamp with the UN emblem and flags of Australia, Belgium, Great Britain, Canada, and Colombia. In 1975, for the twentieth Anniversary, a 10 *weun* stamp was issued with flags of Luxemburg, Australia, Great Britain, Colombia, and Turkey represented. "Korean War Stamps," flagsonstamps.info/Colombia.htm.

40 "Colombia Monument," http://www.lifeinkorea.com/culture/Korean-War/Korean-war.cfm.

Across the Pacific to War:

The Colombian Navy in Korea, 1951–1955

by Charles H. Briscoe

Impresiones de un Tripulante del A.R.C. "Almirante Padilla" en Su Viaje a Korea (Bogotá, 1953) by Ernesto Hernández B.

SINCE 1950, Colombia has traditionally supported the United Nations collective security initiatives. The Colombian Navy and Army provided combat elements to serve with the UN Command in Korea. Both were "showcase" forces representing the best of each service and the nation.[1] Colombia was the only Latin American country to send military forces to support the UN effort to counter North Korea's invasion of South Korea on 25 June 1950.[2] The professionalism developed by Colombian military leaders in Korea enabled them to turn their armed forces into a respected modern military. This transformation also fostered social and political changes in Colombia. The purpose of this article is to show what the Colombian Navy did during the Korean War.

Coat of Arms of the Colombian Navy

Colombian Navy Surface Forces insignia

Just as the U.S. "first response" to Korea was its Pacific Fleet, so it was for Colombia in 1950. Within two days of the invasion, the Security Council had passed two resolutions that committed the UN to halt the aggression. The armed invasion of South Korea was deemed a "breach of peace." Member states were asked to refrain from assisting North Korea. The second UN Security Council resolution asked the member nations to provide military assistance to South Korea to repel North Korean aggression and to restore international peace and security. The Colombian delegation played a key role in garnering support for the resolutions. It proved most convenient that the Soviet Union delegation was boycotting the Security Council. The Soviet Union had absented itself since January 1950, to protest the seating of Nationalist China while excluding Communist China.[3] Stopping the aggression of North Korea became a test of the UN peacekeeping ability.[4]

In Bogotá, the editors of the Conservative newspaper, *El Siglo*, vied with those at *El Tiempo* in advocating Colombia's obligation to furnish military forces to the UN.[5] The decision to support the UN fight in Korea had to wait until the inauguration of Laureano Gómez Castro in August 1950. On 6 September 1950, the new president pledged a frigate to the UN Naval Command.[6] This was quite significant because the entire Colombian Navy consisted of two 1932-vintage Portuguese destroyers captured during the war with Peru, a 1944 U.S. *Tacoma*-class patrol frigate (former USS *Groton*—renamed *Almirante Padilla*) purchased in 1947, and

President Laureano Gómez Castro 1950–1953

USS Groton*—renamed* Almirante Padilla

ten river gunboats.[7]

The authority to dispatch the *Frigata Almirante Padilla* overseas was by Executive Decree No. 3230 (25 October 1950) because the national state of emergency declared by Mariáno Ospina Pérez, the predecessor of Gómez, was still in effect. The suspension of all congressional activities had been imposed to stem *La Violencia.*[8] On 1 November 1950, the frigate *Almirante Padilla,* with a crew of 190 (ten officers and 180 seamen), steamed out of Cartagena bound for San Diego Naval Base, California, for combat refitting.[9]

Though the Colombian government hoped the frigate would be in the war zone by the end of the year, the crew left knowing that neither they, nor their frigate was ready for combat. "Much to my surprise, two hours after leaving Balboa, Panama Canal Zone, for San Diego, I asked for fifteen knots. I was speechless when my chief engineer told me that the machinery was too bad and that we could only make ten knots," recalled Lieutenant Commander (Lt Cdr) Julio Cesar Reyes Canal. When the Korean War began, Lt Cdr Reyes Canal, a navy officer with thirty-two years of service, was in the process of resigning to protest cuts in the naval forces. At the time the entire defense budget amounted to a paltry 1.1 percent of the gross domestic product (GDP).[10]

When the *Almirante Padilla* arrived at the San Diego Navy Base on 13 November 1950, it was apparent that the fundamental systems of propulsion, communications, armament, and fire control were inadequate. With assistance from the U.S. Navy, Lt Cdr Reyes Canal contracted repair work at the Long Beach Naval Yard to begin on 12 December 1950. This overhaul made the frigate seaworthy but it was still not ready to fight. New guns and fire control systems were needed. That refit was so expensive that President Gómez had to personally authorize the work. Instead of fighting in Korea, the crew welcomed the New Year in California.[11] *Time* magazine praised the Colombian effort in its 19 February 1951 issue:

> *Judged by the acid test of deeds, Colombia (pop. 11 million) understands better than any other Latin American country that the Korean War is also its war. To date, Colombia has been the one Latin American government to promise acceptable fighting help for the U.N. forces. The 1,430-ton frigate* Almirante Padilla, *best ship in the Colombian navy, will sail from San Diego, Calif. next week; a specially-organized battalion (1,080 men) is in training in Korea.*[12]

The specially-organized battalion (1,080 men) was more than double the size of a typical Colombian infantry battalion. In February 1951, the battalion was still training with U.S. Army advisors in Colombia. The *Batallón Colombia* did not arrive in Korea until June 1951.

On 28 February 1951, the Colombian frigate sailed for Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, to spend four weeks training with elements of the Pacific Fleet. Practicing the latest antisubmarine patrol tactics, antiaircraft defense, and shore bombardment techniques with U.S. Navy frigates and destroyers got the Colombians ready for Korea. On 5 May 1951, the *Almirante Padilla* arrived at the U.S. Navy Base, Sasebo, Japan, where it was assigned to the Patrol and Escort Group of Task Force 95.13 operating in the Yellow Sea off the west coast of North and South Korea.[13] At home, President Gómez had increased Colombia's commitment to the UN by offering a battalion of infan-

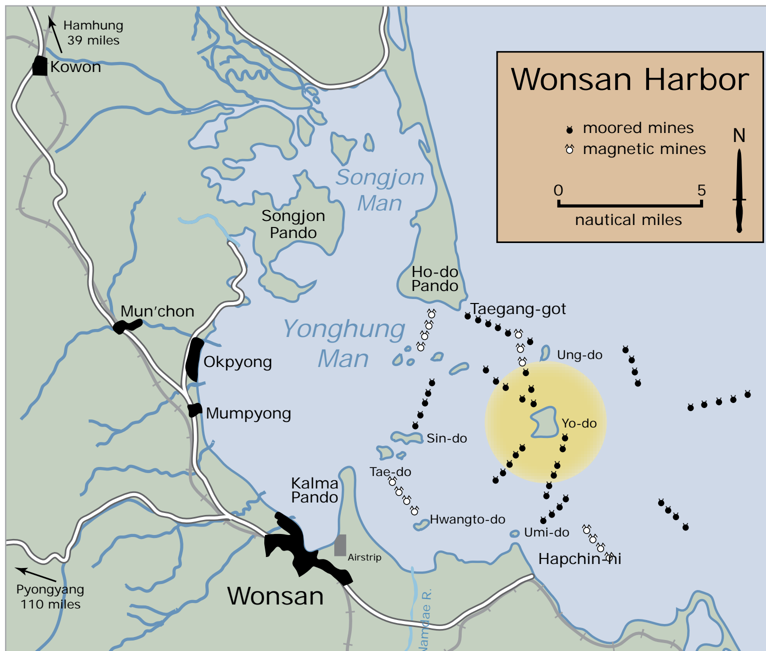
Ocean Distances from Pusan in Nautical Miles

Sasebo	165	Port Arthur	549
Wonsan	308	Yokosuka	655
Kobe	356	Hong Kong	1144
Inchon	402	Manila	1402
Shanghai	491	Pearl Harbor	3968
Chinnampo	496	San Francisco	4914
Vladivostok	514	Panama	8086

The Island War—Korea, July 1951–February 1952.

try on 14 November 1950 (Executive Decree No. 3927).[14] After three-months training with U.S. Army instructors, the *Batallón Colombia* (1,083 officers and soldiers) boarded USNS *Aiken Victory* at Buenaventura on 22 May 1951 for Korea, embarking on the Colombian Army's first overseas military operation.[15] By then, the offensive ground war in Korea was grinding down to a stalemate.

While the *Batallón Colombia* was sailing across the Pacific, the patrol frigate *Almirante Padilla* was performing coastal blockade patrols on the west coast of Korea with the British cruisers HMS *Ceylon* and HMS *Kenya*, the Canadian destroyer HCMS *Sioux*, and the U.S. frigate USS *Glendale*.[16] Since the hydrography along the west coast restricted the movement of heavy warships, the Colombian and American frigates and the South Korean minesweepers conducted the inshore patrols. On 14 June 1951, *Almirante Padilla* was shifted to the east coast to join the siege of Wonsan initiated by U.S. Navy Rear Admiral Allan E. Smith in February.[17]



Wonsan and its infrastructure was the focal point of the UN Naval east coast blockade.

Stalemate Phase—Korea, March 1952–February 1953.

This east coast siege lasted until the armistice. The North Korean cities of Wonsan and Songjin were attacked by aircraft and bombarded daily by UN naval vessels that ranged from rocket launching craft to battleships. The naval blockade extended to the far north, including Chongjin. All road and railroad bridges leading south from Chongjin received naval gunfire regularly. During its three-month patrol, the *Almirante Padilla* dropped off and retrieved Special Mission Group (SMG) agents and raiding parties offshore of North Korean targets. Yo-do (island) in Wonsan harbor was their forward operating base.[18] In the midst of the fighting, a group of UN veterans were flown to Washington DC to meet President Harry S. Truman and to tour the United States.

On 24 October 1951, President Truman graciously received them at the White House. The soldiers, airmen, marines, seamen, and noncombatants represented the nations supporting the UN in Korea. The Colombians, Army Private Oscar Ramírez and Seaman Second Class Francisco M. Guzman, presented the American president with a flag that had flown over the frigate *Almirante Padilla* while patrolling Korean waters.[19]

By then, the Colombian frigate was in Yokosuka, Japan, for refit and maintenance. This was standard procedure for all warships operating around the clock at sea for sixty to ninety days, refueled by fleet tankers, and provisioned from supply ships alongside. During its final two patrol periods (November–January 1952), *Almi-*

Colombian Navy Gunner Régulo Farfán, a Mariáchi singer from Magdalena, entertained soldiers of Batallón Colombia *when they visited the* Almirante Padilla *in Pusan, South Korea.*

Seaman Rodrigo Barrientos Pérez posing with soldiers from Batallón Colombia.

USS Bisbee *in Yokosuka, Japan, September–October 1950, before its transfer to the Colombian Navy as the* Capitán Tono.

rante Padilla bombarded Wonsan targets, sunk numerous contact mines with gunfire, rescued several downed UN pilots, and supported an SMG intelligence collection force sent into the island of Yang-do, near Songjin, before being relieved by the newly arrived Colombian frigate *Capitán Tono.*[20]

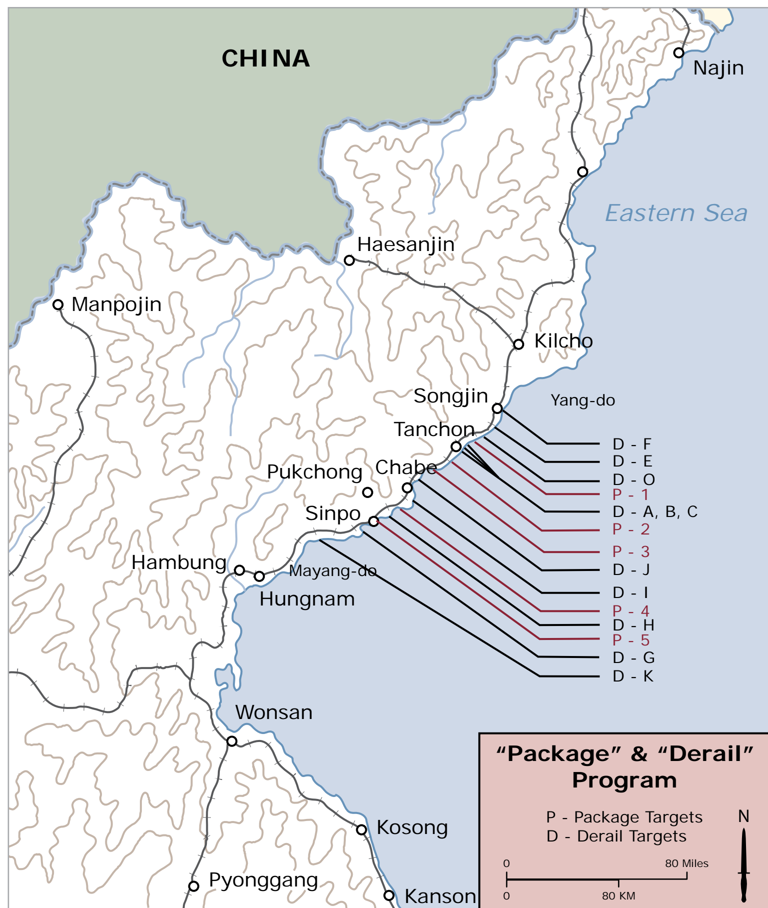
Citing the difficulty of continuing routine training at home with its best ship and men in Korea, the government of President Laureano Gómez asked to buy two more naval vessels comparable to the *Almirante Padilla.* On 24 January 1952, the Colombians purchased the USS *Bisbee*, another *Tacoma*-class patrol frigate that had just completed a patrol tour with the UN naval forces in Korea. A Colombian crew led by Lt Cdr Hernando Berón Victoria and many of the senior officers, department heads, and petty officers who transferred over from the *Almirante Padilla* took charge of the renamed *Capitán Tono* (to memorialize another naval hero of the War of Independence) in Yokosuka, Japan, on 31 January 1952. Relieved on 12 February 1952, the *Almirante Padilla* departed for home via Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. The Colombian frigate arrived at Bocachica, Colombia, on 20 March 1952.[21]

Following the standard overhaul, Lt Cdr Berón Victoria directed an extensive training period for the crew. The *Capitán Tono* sailed for Pusan on 19 April 1952, and in early May was operating off the east coast. Shore bombardment, patrolling, and supply convoy escort were the assigned missions. Wonsan was considerably north of the 38th parallel. With the land war at a stalemate, the Communists had moved heavy artillery and mortars to shore batteries around the harbor and to nearby islands. Naval gunfire duels with the shore batteries became frequent as the frigates worked inshore to protect patterning minesweepers. Because of the accurate and intense coastal artillery counter-battery fire in the Wonsan harbor area, all UN ships had to display great skill in navigation and gunnery. Vessels had to steam faster, change course more frequently, and still provide accurate gunfire on roads and railways, day and night.

"Flycatcher" missions required the Colombians to

In his Pentagon office on 16 November 1951, Secretary of the Navy Dan A. Kimball (left) signed the Memorandum of Understanding transferring the USS Bisbee *(PF-46) to the Colombian government. Observing are Ambassador Dipriano Restrepo-Jaramillo (center) and Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs, Thomas G. Mann (right). The USS* Bisbee *served the Colombian Navy as the* Capitán Tono.

The Colombian frigate Almirante Padilla *returns from Korea without fanfare.* Colombia en Korea: Impresiones de un Tripulante del A.R.C. "Almirante Padilla" en Su Viaje a Korea *(Bogotá, 1953) by Ernesto Hernández B.*



Specific "Package" and "Derail" targets along east coast of North Korea.

interdict North Korean sampans at night. These close-to-shore operations were dangerous, but reduced waterborne infiltrations of Communist agents into the South. Antisubmarine training with the U.S. Navy paid off on 9–10 October 1952, when the *Capitán Tono* intercepted an unknown submarine and kept it "locked" for thirty hours before it managed to escape. UN Naval Command verified that it was not an allied submarine "testing" fleet security.[22] After that short stint of excitement, the *Capitán Tono* returned to the primary mission of the blockade force—shore bombardment.

The air and sea bombardment effort was focused mainly on "Package" targets—difficult-to-repair shoreline targets along the Songjin–Hungnam railroad. Using radar reflector buoys that had been placed offshore of the targets to assist navigation and gunfire accuracy at night, frigates could close to 1,500 to 2,000 meters offshore to engage targets. All patrolling ships had to fire a specified number of rounds every day and night. When bad weather prevented airstrikes, the UN navy assumed all targets. The "Derail" targets along the northeast coast were "Navy only." These were to be destroyed solely by naval gunfire.[23] The *Capitán Tono* returned to Yokosuka, Japan, for maintenance on 12 November 1952. That marked the end of its first tour of duty in Korean waters. Its relief ship, the USS *Burlington* (soon to be *Almirante Brión*), having just completed a Korean tour, was already in Yokosuka. On 12 January 1953, Lt Cdr Carlos Prieta Silva took command of the vessel. On 27 January 1953, the *Capitán Tono* sailed for Colombia with most of the senior Colombian naval officers, some returning after almost two years of service in Korea. Only Lt Cdr Jaime Parra Ramírez (Admiral and commander of the Colombian Navy, 1968–1974) stayed for a third tour as executive officer. The *Almirante Brión*, like her predecessors, required major repair work before active operations and the mostly "green" crew needed training. It was not until 18 July 1953 that the *Almirante Brión* sailed for Korea, arriving just a few days before the Armistice.[24]

While the Colombian Navy maintained a frigate in Korean waters until 11 October 1955, the fighting phase of the war ended with the armistice.[25] The *Almirante Padilla* and the *Capitán Tono* returned for second tours with the UN fleet, the last leaving Korean waters on 11 October 1955.[26] The *Batallón Colombia* had left Korea almost a year earlier (29 October 1954).[27]

Colombia's commitment to Korea was regaled by newspapers as "a symbol of fraternal friendship" with the United States. In addition to providing naval and ground forces to the UN Command, Colombia embargoed the shipment of strategic materials to Communist China and North Korea for the duration of the war. Since Colombia's second-ranking export was petroleum, this was a significant contribution.[28] Both the Colombian navy and army were used as instruments of foreign pol-

While a U.S. Navy band plays, the Colombian crew is assembled before boarding their new ship, the frigate Almirante Brión, *the former USS* Burlington, *at Yokosuka Naval Base, Japan, on 26 June 1953.*

The ARC Frigate 14 Almirante Brión.

The ARC F 51 Almirante Padilla.

icy. President Laureano Gómez demonstrated that Colombia believed in the principle of collective security and that it should be backed by armed force.

The naval combat experience had the potential for serious implications concerning latent territorial disputes with Peru and Venezuela.[29] Three Colombian frigates had practiced blockade operations, shore bombardment, and mine sweeping, as well as performed downed pilot rescues, escorted supply convoys, suppressed North Korean fishing, interdicted enemy coastal traffic, supported the capture of offshore islands, and delivered and recovered special operations groups.[30] After the war, the well-trained Colombian Navy was significantly enlarged, upgraded, and fully capable of protecting national interests.

The professionalism that accompanied the acquisition of combat experience in Korea enabled veteran officers to establish a modern armed force in the postwar years. Colombian seamen and soldiers fought well in Korea, earning the respect of the United States and United Nations as well as the Latin American world. Today, a German-built FS 1500 frigate bears the name *Almirante Padilla* as does the Naval Academy.[31] The UN Naval Mission in the Korean War from 1951–1955 is an important part of Colombian Navy heritage. *Almirante Padilla* serves as the link to that benchmark international combat service.

UN Service Medal

Republic of Korea War Service Medal

Colombian Valour Star for Korea

Endnotes

1 Daniel Davison, "The Colombian Army in Korea: A Study of the Integration of the Colombian Battalion into the 31st United States Infantry Regiment Based on the Experience of Major General Lloyd R. Moses," unpublished Masters Thesis, University of South Dakota, August 1972, 37.

2 Carlos Horacio Urán, *Colombia y los Estados Unidos en la Guerra de Corea* (Notre Dame, IN: Kellogg Institute, University of Notre Dame, May 1986), 22–24. While military forces were offered by Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Cuba, and Ecuador, only Colombia provided them. The contributions from the rest of Latin America amounted to money, foodstuffs, and the use of military bases. Most countries applied economic sanctions.

3 Samuel F. Bemis, *A Diplomatic History of the United States* (NY: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1965), 937; Davison, "The Colombian Army in Korea," 7–8.

4 Davison, "The Colombian Army in Korea," 90–91.

5 Russell W. Ramsey, "The Colombia Battalion in Korea and Suez," *Journal of Inter-American Studies* IX (October 1967), 546.

6 Bradley L. Coleman, "The Colombian Army in Korea, 1950–1954," *The Journal of Military History* 69 (January 2005), 1141–42.

7 Mark H. Danley, "Colombian Navy in the Korean War, 1950–1953," *The American Neptune* 58 (Spring 1998), 246–47, 252. On 24 July 1823, during the War for Independence, Colombian Admiral José Prudencia Padilla defeated a Spanish squadron in the battle of Lake Maracaibo.

8 Coleman, "The Colombian Army in Korea, 1950–1954," 1141–42; Ramsey, "The Colombia Battalion in Korea and Suez," 546; Republic of Korea, Ministry of National Defense, *History of the UN Forces in the Korean War,* III (Seoul, War History Compilation Committee, 1974), 173, hereafter *History of the UN Forces in the Korean War,* III.

9 Ramsey, "The Colombia Battalion in Korea and Suez," 546; Crew numbers vary: 12 officers and 177 men aboard the *Almirante Padilla*. *History of the UN Forces in the Korean War,* III, 173.

10 Danley, "Colombian Navy in the Korean War, 1950–1953," 245–46, 247–48.

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13 Danley, "Colombian Navy in the Korean War, 1950–1953," 248–49; *History of the UN Forces in the Korean War,* III, 173.

14 Coleman, "The Colombian Army in Korea, 1950–1954," 1141–42, 1145–46; Ramsey, "The Colombia Battalion in Korea and Suez," 546.

15 Coleman, "The Colombian Army in Korea, 1950–1954," 1146; Ramsey, "The Colombia Battalion in Korea and Suez," 547.

16 *El Tiempo* (Bogotá) 17 May 1951, 1, cited in Ramsey, "The Colombia Battalion in Korea and Suez," 547.

17 *History of the UN Forces in the Korean War,* III, 175–76; Danley, "Colombian Navy in the Korean War, 1950–1953," 251.

18 *History of the UN Forces in the Korean War,* III, 175–76; Danley, "Colombian Navy in the Korean War, 1950–1953," 251.

19 "The President's Day: Wednesday, October 24, 1951," http://www.trumanlibrary.org/calendar/main.php?currYear=1951&currMonth=10&currDa…

20 Danley, "Colombian Navy in the Korean War, 1950–1953," 252–54.

21 Danley, "Colombian Navy in the Korean War, 1950–1953," 252–55.

22 Danley, "Colombian Navy in the Korean War, 1950–1953," 255.

23 *History of the UN Forces in the Korean War,* III, 175–76.

24 *History of the UN Forces in the Korean War,* III, 177; Danley, "Colombian Navy in the Korean War, 1950–1953," 255–56.

25 Danley, "Colombian Navy in the Korean War, 1950–1953," 255–56.

26 Danley, "Colombian Navy in the Korean War, 1950–1953," 255–56. On 22 April 1954, the *Almirante Brión* left the war theater for Colombia after being relieved by the *Capitán Tono* on its second tour. The *Capitán Tono* arrived at Yokosuka on 26 March 1954, and went into repair. The *Capitán Tono* operated chiefly along the west coast of Korea in the Yellow Sea until relieved by the *Almirante Padilla* on 11 March 1955. On 11 October 1955, *Almirante Padilla* left Korean waters for Colombia completing the country mission to the UN naval forces. *History of the UN Forces in the Korean War,* III, 178.

27 Coleman, "The Colombian Army in Korea, 1950–1954," 1175–76; *History of the UN Forces in the Korean War,* III, 170; Ramsey, "The Colombia Battalion in Korea and Suez," 549.

28 Ramsey, "The Colombia Battalion in Korea and Suez," 548.

29 Danley, "Colombian Navy in the Korean War, 1950–1953," 243, 260.

30 *History of the UN Forces in the Korean War,* III, 174.

31 Adrian J. English, *Armed Forces of Latin America: Their Histories, Development, Present Strengths, and Military Potential* (London: Jane's Publishing, 1984), 180.

Colombian *Lancero* School Roots

by Charles H. Briscoe

Artist rendition of Simón Bolívar and the Colombian Lancers charging during the War for Independence from Spain.

LA *Escuela Militar de Lanceros* (The *Lancero* School) in Colombia is the most-respected Ranger Course in Latin America since its inception in 1956. The *Lancero* School, like the U.S. Army Ranger School, provides junior officers and enlisted men with the skills and attributes needed to be strong tactical leaders throughout the Colombian Army and in the *Lancero* Group that does special reconnaissance and direct action missions for the Army divisions. The *Lancero* badge is a mark of distinction worn by military leaders throughout the Americas.

The purpose of this article is to explain why and how two U.S. Army Ranger officers, initially on temporary duty (TDY), developed the *Lancero* training program for the Colombian Army in the mid-1950s. That initiative between Colombia and the United States resulted in one of the longest one-on-one professional military relationships. It ranks in the top three (duration) Military Professional Exchange Programs (short term PEP Program) in the U.S. Army, and has done more to instill professionalism in the Colombian Army than has any security assistance program. However, even the "can-do" Captain Ralph Puckett Jr. was not sure that he could get a Ranger course "off the ground" after his first six months in Colombia.[1]

The first *Lancero* shoulder patch was the Army School's brigade insignia (indigenous warrior with bow and arrow). It was replaced by a lance-bearing warrior, more appropriate to the title *Lancero.*

As a Second and First Lieutenant, Ralph Puckett, U.S. Military Academy, Class of 1949, recruited, organized, trained, and led the Eighth U.S. Army (EUSA) Ranger Company in combat. It was the first Ranger Company to fight in the Korean War. Lieutenant Puckett was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross for his heroic actions against the Chinese on 25–26 November 1950. After his combat tour Captain Puckett served in all phases of the Ranger Training Program at Fort Benning, Georgia, and the Mountain (Dahlonega, Georgia) and Florida (Eglin Air Force Base) Camps. These assignments prepared him for duties in the 65th Infantry Regimental Combat Team (RCT) in Puerto Rico, and his subsequent mission to establish a "Ranger" training program in Colombia in 1955.[2]

The 65th Infantry officers, NCOs, and soldiers of the traditionally Puerto Rican unit were being integrated into units throughout the U.S. Army in the post–Korean War days. The regiment was also losing some outstanding, combat-experienced NCOs and soldiers as the Puerto Rican *"insulares"* were replaced by U.S. soldiers referred to as *"continentales."* The 65th Regimental commander ordered Puckett to establish two training programs to prevent degradation of combat readiness. One was an Orientation School [basic combat training (BCT) refresher course] for incoming privates and privates first class. The other was an NCO Academy. The Academy's five-week course, which Puckett patterned after the Ranger School, was designed to prepare

65th Infantry Regiment Distinctive Unit Insignia

First Lieutenant Ralph Puckett Jr. is awarded the Distinguished Service Cross at Fort Benning, Georgia.

President Gustavo Rojas Pinilla, an avid helicopter pilot, established the Colombian Army helicopter school at Tolemaida.

soldiers to become NCOs and improve the skills and leadership of junior NCOs.[3]

At the same time, the Colombian Army generals were selecting five lieutenants to attend airborne training and Ranger School at the U.S. Army Infantry School at Fort Benning and the U.S. Army Mission in Bogotá was requesting an American Ranger–qualified officer for a six-month temporary duty (TDY) assignment to Colombia. Puckett was selected for the assignment shortly after the first class graduated from the NCO Academy.[4]

On the way to Colombia, Puckett spent a few days at the U.S. Army Caribbean Jungle Warfare Training Center in Panama. He needed to establish rapport, explain his mission, assess requirements for suitable training areas, collect relevant lesson plans, and the current program of instruction (POI).[5] Since no U.S. Army School of the Americas existed, all training material was in English and Spanish-English military dictionaries simply did not exist.

A Jungle Expert tab was added to the U.S. Army Caribbean Command shoulder patch to make the Jungle Warfare Expert pocket patch.

Colonel Robert G. Turner, the U.S. Army Mission commander, had recently been Director of the Weapons Department at the Infantry School. Turner explained the mission to CPT Puckett. According to the Colombian president, Lieutenant General (LTG) Gustavo Rojas Pinilla, Ranger training was "to develop to the maximum, by practical field training, the potential for military command and leadership of selected company-grade officers and noncommissioned officers throughout the Army in order to improve the leadership and training capabilities of all units."[6]

"He did that in ten minutes. Then, Turner said, 'Get to work.' The Colombian officers that were to help me were months away from finishing Ranger School. Nothing was mentioned about a training site. That's when I realized that once again it was up to me to make it happen . . . much like the EUSA Ranger Company mission in Korea," recalled Puckett. "It quickly became apparent that logistical support was going to be a problem. Although the president, General Rojas Pinilla, was enthusiastic about the training, the senior Army leaders at the time were not. A twelve-week POI [six weeks of individual Ranger tactical skills training followed by six weeks of unit training in the mountains and jungle (three weeks of each)] was whittled down to eleven weeks. But, the real challenge was a training site. A U.S. Army Lieutenant Colonel Mathew Santino and I spent several weeks roaming the country to look at possible locations for the new school."[7]

General Rojas Pinilla ultimately decided on a flat bluff above Melgar, on the Río Sumapaz, about a hundred and twenty kilometers south of Bogotá. He was familiar with the area because his family had a coffee *finca* (plantation) nearby. In 1958, the *Batallón Colombia* (veterans of Korea) relocated from Bogotá to the new base being established at Tolemaida. The commander of the Colombian Army Schools Brigade, Brigadier General (BG) Rafael Navas Pardo, selected Major Hernando Bernal to command their Ranger School. This was unusual because all other military schools were headed by colonels at the time. Colonel Turner, the Army Mission commander, realized

Lancero *School sign at Tolemaida.*

Lancero *student commando-crawling across a stream on one-rope bridge.*

Lancero *instructor Lieutenant Vallejo on rappel.*

Lancero *rappelling and climbing site.*

the significance of this maneuver. The Army was putting the onus for getting the school "up and running" on the Americans, namely CPT Puckett. While it was a priority for the president, General Rojas Pinilla, it was not for a Colombian Army that consisted of only eight to ten battalions at the time. Hence, one of the five Colombian lieutenants selected for parachute training and Ranger School at Fort Benning to cadre the new school was "milked off" by Lieutenant General Pedro A. Muñoz, Colombian Army commander, to serve as his aide-de-camp. By then, Puckett was already into his second six months of TDY in Colombia.

Once the training site was fixed, CPT Puckett compiled a list of equipment needed. "It had everything from machine guns to toilet paper. We had literally nothing. I went to the Army Mission in Bogotá every week to 'beg, borrow, and steal' necessities—and to insure that the U.S. Military Advisory Assistance Group (MAAG Colombia) requisitioned equipment from the U.S. Army in the Canal Zone and to solicit support from the Colombian Army," remembered Puckett. "When the four Ranger-qualified Colombian lieutenants arrived, our focus became the development of the POI, lesson plans, training sites, field exercise objectives, rehearsals—all those things required to set up a school from nothing. I cannot say that we concentrated on one thing. Impossible as it sounds, we focused on everything. In the midst of the frenzy to get the school established attitudes changed," recalled Puckett.[8]

Lancero motto:

"Para los Lanceros no existe la palabra 'imposible'"

(For *Lanceros* the word "impossible" does not exist).

"In the beginning the Colombian lieutenants often said, 'We can't do this or that because we are poor. We do not have the training facilities, sites, and aids that Fort Benning has.' Their time at Fort Benning had spoiled them. I countered the excuses by suggesting 'field expedients.' They started using their imagination and became innovative. We had no bleachers for classes. After building up a large mound of dirt, they terraced and packed it down, and then sodded it with grass to prevent erosion. We didn't have sawdust to cushion the ground in the hand-to-hand combat pit so they improvised with corn husks. They made stick figures from tree limbs, dressed them in old uniforms, and stuffed them with corn husks (like scarecrows) to serve as dummies for the bayonet assault course. I was so proud of them and their ingenious solutions. This attitudinal change just seemed to happen all of a sudden. They began to live what is today the *Lancero* motto, '*Para los Lanceros no existe la palabra 'imposible,'* (for *Lanceros* the word 'impossible' does

U.S. Military Advisory Assistance Group shoulder patch

Lancero *instructors demonstrate hand-to-hand combat.*

Colombian First Lieutenants Roberto Fernández Guzmán, Vallejo, and Muñoz (left to right) at tactical objective.

not exist)," said CPT Puckett.[9]

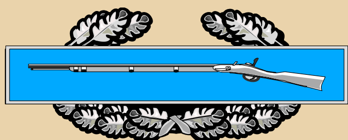
After nine months of "pushing and pulling," Major Bernal and the four instructors were ready to conduct a cadre training course with twelve lieutenants and sergeants to validate the eleven-week program of instruction. The American Ranger captain attended all training and accompanied the reconnaissance and combat training patrols into the mountains and jungle. Since quasi-guerrilla bandit groups roamed the rural areas, the *Batallón Colombia* aggressors carried live ammunition.

Just before classes began, Puckett solicited an appropriate Colombian name for their course from the Ranger-qualified lieutenants and sought ideas for a distinctive badge. Rather than copy the U.S. Army Ranger name and insignia, he emphasized the need to make the program truly Colombian. He felt that calling it the Colombian Army Ranger School was too American. Likewise, Commando was too British. Unaccustomed to being asked for advice or input, the Colombian cadre lieutenants provided little help. Nonplussed, the self-starting Ranger turned to the U.S. Army awards regulation for ideas.

By modifying the Combat Infantryman Badge (CIB) he came up with an acceptable design. After providing some history on American Rangers and explaining their methods of small unit tactics and training, Puckett asked an English language instructor at the War College for help. "Did Colombia have any comparable forces in its history?" Indeed, they had. The elite cavalrymen in General Simón Bolivar's army during the South American wars of independence from Spain were the *Lanceros* from Colombia. They had cleared the mountain passes in the Andes for "*El Liberador*" (the Liberator). MAJ Bernal, the school commandant, agreed with Puckett's ideas and recommendations and carried them to Bogotá. In the meantime, since the course name was linked to the ancient cavalry weapon, Puckett got to work on the bayonet assault course—where infantrymen wielding rifle-mounted bayonets practiced using their weapons like old-fashioned ground lancers, which they did regularly in Korea. From the specifications for an obstacle course in a U.S. Army Engineer manual they built the site.[10]

The underlying principle of *Lancero* instruction was based on the premise that to learn, one must do. From "Day One" of the course until graduation, *Lancero* students would "do, do, do." Practical exercises were planned on terrain similar to where the guerrillas operated—the jungle, the wet plains (*llanos*), and the mountains. Mental and physical stress from continual observation and evaluation accompanied the twelve- to fourteen-hour daily training days. Peer ratings maintained a competitive spirit and identified natural leaders.[11]

During the first six-weeks phase the students received marksmanship training in basic infantry weapons—from the M-1 Garand rifle to light machineguns and mortars. They practiced map reading and land navigation, communications, combat formations and small unit tactics, learned troop-leading procedures and operations orders, and rotated through leadership positions while doing river crossings, mountaineering, and small boat training. Hand-to-hand combat and bayonet assault was incorporated into physical training. Survival skills, field expedient methods, demolitions training, and mortar and artillery call-for-fire techniques were rounded out with how to present classes to soldiers. Physical train-



Notice how the World War II–created U.S. Army Combat Infantryman Badge (CIB) and the Colombian *Lancero* badge are similar.

Colombian Lancero *instructor Lieutenant Roberto Fernández Guzmán holding a boa.*

Colombian Lancero *School "Slide for Life" confidence test across the Sumapaz River.*

A Lancero *instructor climbing a bridge girder to demonstrate the "High Jump" confidence test.*

Colombian Lancero *student executes the "High Jump" confidence test into the Sumapaz River.*

ing (PT) started and ended every day. Students ran to instruction at a "double time" just as the Americans did in parachute training.[12]

Without a pause, students entered a second three-week phase of field exercises, day and night. Like the U.S. Army Ranger School "slide for life" confidence test ending in Victory Pond at Fort Benning, the Colombians installed a pulley and high wire cable to traverse the Sumapaz River from a hundred-foot cliff launch site. A second personal confidence test entailed climbing the girders of a high suspension bridge, and on command, jumping off into the same Class III level river. Daily night reconnaissance and combat patrols against Korean War veterans from the *Batallón Colombia* dominated the period. The final two weeks of training consisted of long-range patrols culminating in tactical exercises in the mountains and jungle. Travel was always done at night. Students established "hide sites" during the day and attacked "guerrilla" sites prepared by the cadre—the following evening.[13]

CPT Puckett with the twelve officers and NCOs that validated the eleven-week *Lancero* course POI were awarded the first *Lancero* badges in April 1956. Ranger CPT Ralph Puckett was "honored to be the first awarded the *Lancero* badge. It was pinned on by General Navas Pardo. Proud? You bet! I was pleased with what we had accomplished . . . but I was not satisfied. There would always be improvements to be made. But, *la Escuela Militar de Lanceros* had been established."[14] It had taken Puckett twelve long months of "pushing and pulling." Fortunately, both armies recognized the value of a keeping an American Ranger officer presence at the *Lancero* School. CPT Puckett was replaced in Colombia by another Ranger officer from the

Colombian Lancero *students are briefed for a night operation.*

A Colombian Lancero *is physically taken captive by aggressors from* Batallón Colombia. *Note: They adopted the* Lancero *tradition of tying their baggy trousers with string to reduce noise.*

Aggressors wore a dyed-blue one-piece mechanic coverall with a skull-head shoulder patch; khaki overseas cap; and a rolled, khaki-colored poncho over their left shoulder.

Captain Ralph Puckett Jr. (tall American in khakis with Infantry Cord around right shoulder) is awarded first Lancero badge by Brigadier General Rafael Navas Pardo.

Lancero *instructors, from the right, First Lieutenant Roberto Fernández Guzmán, First Lieutenant John R. Galvin, Lieutenants Negret, Rojas, and Burbano at Tolemaida. Note: All are wearing the original* Lancero *School patch.*

Lieutenant Jack Galvin in the Sumapaz Valley during a Lancero *exercise.*

65th Infantry RCT.

First Lieutenant (later General) John "Jack" R. Galvin had helped Puckett establish the NCO Academy for the 65th Infantry RCT and the Antilles Command at Salinas, Puerto Rico, in 1955. While serving there, Galvin had improved his fluency in Spanish and kept abreast of CPT Puckett's progress in Colombia. He wanted to be Puckett's replacement at the *Lancero* School. By then, the Army Mission saw the merit in keeping a Ranger-qualified officer at the school. The position was changed from TDY to a two-year PCS (permanent change of station). Instead of being an advisor, 1LT Galvin became an instructor—teaching map reading, leadership, and hand-grenade skills—and accompanied *Lancero* student patrols as an evaluator—to share the class workload with the four Colombian lieutenants.[15]

Antilles Command shoulder patch

"When I began to share the instructor load with the Colombian *Lancero* officers, we became co-equals. I then became part of the *Lancero* instructor team . . . just like being another lieutenant platoon leader in a rifle company. Because we were all bachelors during the week—living together in a farmhouse, and facing the same instructor issues—we, as peers, could discuss the quality of the POI, tactical exercises, ranges, and the realism, and solve mutual problems. Despite my Spanish, we got along well. We sat around a formica table at night, exchanging English for Spanish words, talking small unit infantry tactics and soldier skills, and sharing cultural experiences. They explained *La Violencia* and I talked about New York City and daily life in America because their impressions were based on movies and time spent at Fort Benning, Georgia. Eventually, I became 'one of the guys,'" remembered General Galvin.[16]

Batallón Colombia insignia

The *Batallón Colombia*, then serving as the Presidential Guard, provided one company to serve as aggressors for the *Lancero* School. Galvin served as the aggressor force coordinator for the company supporting the *Lancero* School at Tolemaida. A good part of his time was spent promoting the *Lancero* program to senior Colombian officers on behalf of BG Navas Pardo, who became the *padrino* (sponsor/benefactor) of the school. Galvin reminded each that the Colombian Army gained effective small unit leaders, but most importantly, the example set by each *Lancero* infused every combat unit with the aggressive *Lancero* spirit, "*Para los Lanceros no existe la palabra 'imposible.'*"[17] Another aspect of his job entailed working closely with the Army Mission in Bogotá to insure that training was supported.

Getting ammunition, equipment, and supplies was a constant battle. Because blank ammunition was critically short in the U.S. Army, innovative field expedient solutions were routine at the *Lancero* School. Cadre and students spent evenings carving wooden bullets to replace the copper-clad bullets for the M-1 Garand and German rifles. U.S. Air Force rubber survival boats were provided "in lieu of" engineer rubber assault boats. In the summer months, Galvin volunteered to serve at *La Carrera*, the summer training camp for Military Academy cadets, located in the mountains north of Bogotá. The U.S. Army Mission officers traditionally avoided duty at the equivalent to Camp Buckner

for West Point. But there in the mountain camp, LT Galvin emphasized the need for a professional NCO corps, based on how important the NCO Academy in Salinas was to the 65th Infantry RCT. Without NCO training, the *Lancero* school was essential to developing junior officers and sergeants in the Colombian Army. His constant proselytizing for the *Lancero* School made LT Galvin well known throughout the Colombian military.[18]

Still, in two years, the chief of the Army Mission, Colonel Daniel Cheston, only visited him once at the *Lancero* School, shortly before the president, General Rojas Pinilla, came to the base near Melgar. Galvin introduced live-fire exercises in the final two weeks of long-range patrols. Carrying live ammunition in the field and conducting live-fire exercises instilled reality, reinforced training, and ensured the operational readiness of the *Lancero* students.[19] By then, the graduation field exercise for the *Lancero* students consisted of combat patrols against local quasi-guerrilla bandits. The results from these *Lancero* patrols pleased the Colombian president sufficiently for him to reinforce the previous directive of BG Navas Pardo that all second lieutenants attend the course.[20]

When 1LT Galvin left Colombia in 1958, the *Lancero* School was annually producing 200 well-trained, extremely fit aggressive junior leaders for assignment to the combat units of the Colombian Army. The first permanent building had just been erected at the Tolemaida military base. By December 2005, more than 15,000 *Lancero* officers, sergeants, and soldiers had graduated from 290 courses. Over a hundred of these graduates were American officers and NCOs. Notwithstanding, it was still forty-five years after a U.S. State Department team recommended the formation of a 1,000-man *Lancero* battalion to fight insurgency and banditry, that separate *Lancero* companies were formed into a *Lancero* Group to support the Colombian Army.[21]

The mission to establish a Ranger program for the Colombian Army in 1955 evolved into the establishment of a U.S. Army Ranger officer exchange position at the *Lancero* School when it was approved by the State Department. The position became part of the Military Personnel Exchange Program (MPEP) managed by the U.S. Army Deputy Chief of Staff for Operations, G-3/5/7, Executive Agent for the Department of Army. The Army PEP program (official short title) grew from one officer in 1944 worldwide to a peak in 1990 of 132 officers and sergeants. Today, there are 121 personnel in the Army PEP.[22]

Colombia now has three Army PEP personnel assigned. The Army Section Chief of the U.S. Military Group, Colombia (that replaced the MAAG, Colombia in the late 1960s), monitors two officers [a Special Forces, Ranger, and *Lancero*-qualified Spanish-speaking Captain at the *Lancero* School; a Special Forces, Ranger, and *Lancero*-qualified Spanish-speaking Captain trained in counter-terrorism as an advisor to the CCOPE (*Comando Conjunto de Operaciónes Especiales*) and the COESE (*Comando de Operaciónes Especiales del Ejército*), the miniature JSOC and USASOC commands; and a non-commissioned officer [a Spanish-speaking Infantry sergeant first class (SFC) that is Ranger-qualified to serve as an instructor at the Colombian Army Sergeants School (*Escuela de Suboficiales*)]. All three are serving two-to-three-year PCS assignments in support of the U.S. Army Security Cooperation Strategy.[23] The longstanding tradition of U.S. Army Rangers and Special Forces attending *Lancero* School continues.

In March 2006, two U.S. Army Rangers were *Lancero* course students (SSG Fernando Monterossa*, Ranger Training Brigade, Fort Benning, Georgia, and SSG Jack Carney*, 2nd Battalion, 75th Ranger Regiment, Fort Lewis, Washington). CPT Roberto Goméz*, from the 7th Special Forces Group, Fort Bragg, North Carolina, was serving as the *Lancero* PEP instructor. Today, the *Lancero* course is seventy-three days. Students must get at least a 70 percent rating in each phase to graduate as *Lanceros*. The final field test is a Survival, Evasion, Resistance, and Escape (SERE) exercise conducted in the Department of Amazonia in the *llanos* region of Colombia along the Ecuadoran border because it has a large Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia [FARC *(Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias Colombianas)*] presence.[24] The course standards are as high as they were in 1956, when CPT Puckett and the Colombian Army cadre class were awarded the first distinctive *Lancero* badges. While the roots of this fifty-year-old junior leader tactical training course contain U.S. Army Ranger blood, the *Lancero* program and its spirit are totally Colombian, *"¡Para los Lanceros no existe la palabra 'imposible'!"*

Lancero *instructor badge*

Painted rocks at Tolemaida commemorate the 50th Anniversary of the Lancero *School (1955–2005).*

**Pseudonyms have been used for all military personnel with a rank lower than lieutenant colonel.*

Endnotes

1 http://www.nationalinfantryfoundation.org/advisor_puckett.shtml;Colonel (Retired) Ralph Puckett Jr., telephone interview by Dr. Charles H. Briscoe, 4 August 2006, Fort Bragg, NC, tape recording, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC, hereafter Puckett interview, 4 August 2006.

2 http://www.nationalinfantryfoundation.org/advisor_puckett.shtml;Puckett interview, 4 August 2006.

3 Colonel (Retired) Ralph Puckett Jr., e-mail to Dr. Charles H. Briscoe, 15 January 2007, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC, hereafter Puckett e-mail, 15 January 2007.

4 Puckett e-mail, 15 January 2007.

5 Puckett interview, 4 August 2006.

6 Captain Ralph Puckett Jr. and Lieutenant John R. Galvin, "Lancero," *Infantry* (July–September 1959), 21.

7 Puckett interview, 4 August 2006; Colonel (Retired) Ralph Puckett Jr., e-mail to Dr. Charles H. Briscoe, 20 November 2006, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC, hereafter Puckett e-mail, 20 November 2006.

8 Puckett interview, 4 August 2006; Puckett e-mail, 20 November 2006.

9 Puckett e-mail, 20 November 2006.

10 Puckett interview, 4 August 2006.

11 Puckett and Galvin, "Lancero," 22.

12 Puckett and Galvin, "Lancero," 22.

13 Puckett and Galvin, "Lancero," 22.

14 First Lieutenant John R. Galvin, letter to Director, Ranger Department, U.S. Army Infantry School, Fort Benning, GA, Subject: *Escuela de Lanceros,* 26 July 1957, hereafter Galvin, letter to Director; Puckett interview, 4 August 2006; Puckett e-mail, 20 November 2006; Puckett and Galvin, "Lancero," 21.

15 General John R. Galvin, telephone interview by Dr. Charles H. Briscoe, 7 August 2006, Fort Bragg, NC, tape recording, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC, hereafter Galvin interview, 7 August 2006.

16 General John R. Galvin, telephone interview by Dr. Charles H. Briscoe, 21 December 2006, Fort Bragg, NC, tape recording, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.

17 Galvin interview, 7 August 2006; Puckett and Galvin, "Lancero," 22.

18 Galvin interview, 7 August 2006. Mr. Hans Tofte (CIA), the leader of a joint State/Defense Department team to Colombia in late 1959, said this about the *Lancero* exchange officer: "The U.S. Army Military Mission provides 'U.S. Ranger' training advisor, who has attained substantial popularity with '*Lanceros*" and influential commanders within Armed Forces—'knows everybody.'" U.S. Department of State, Preliminary Report of the Colombia Survey Team, Field Survey Nov.–Dec. 1959, Lieutenant General William P. Yarborough papers, U.S. Army John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School Archives, Fort Bragg, NC, hereafter Preliminary Report of the Colombia Survey Team.

19 Galvin interview, 7 August 2006.

20 Puckett and Galvin, "Lancero," 22; In the first four classes, more than 60 percent were awarded the distinctive Lancero badge. Only 45 percent of the officers in the initial mandatory class were awarded the badge. Brigadier General Rafael Navas Pardo agreed completely with the results. Officers who completed the *Lancero* course without being awarded the badge were promoted. Galvin, letter to Director.

21 Galvin interview, 7 August 2006; Preliminary Report of the Colombia Survey Team.

22 This was in accordance with U.S. Code, Title 10, Section 168 (U.S. Department of Army G-35, Strategy, Plans, and Policy Directorate, G-3/5/7 Strategic Leadership Division, Military Personnel Exchange Program briefing) and Army Regulation 614-10 (United States Army Personnel Exchange Program with Armies of Other Nations: Short Title: Personnel Exchange Program, dated 1 July 1977, both in USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.

23 Lieutenant Colonel Michael E. Brown, U.S. Military Group–Colombia, interview by Dr. Charles H. Briscoe, 6 October 2006, Bogotá, Colombia, tape recording, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.

24 Patrick Forestier, "Commandos to the Limit," Paris *Match* (9–15 March 2006), 31–34, translated by Mark Jensen, 29 April 2006.

Plan Lazo:

Evaluation and Execution

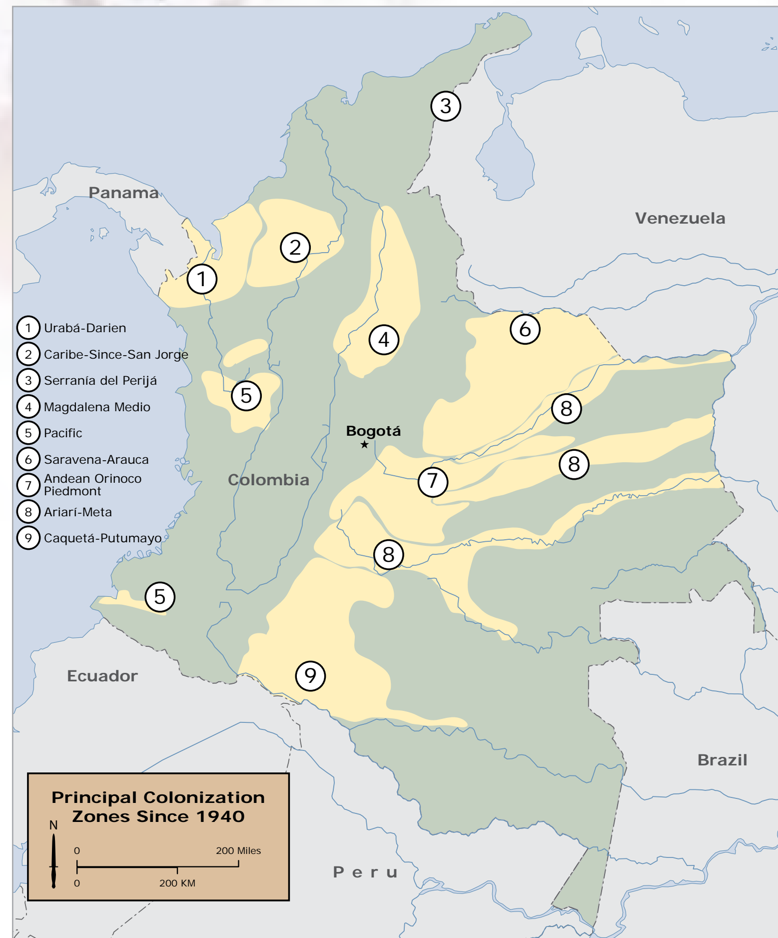
by Charles H. Briscoe

WHILE involvement of the two major "white-hat" players and one "black-hat" player in today's narco-terrorist war in Colombia dates to *La Violencia* of 1948–1966, the stakes for the insurgents have changed. They have dramatically shifted from trying to achieve political power to effect socioeconomic changes in the countryside to using economic power to control sociopolitical affairs in rural areas. *La Violencia* may have been officially declared as ended in 1966, but mass killings have continued as insurgent and self-defense elements competed to dominate the peasants and prosper from their source of economic power—the illegal drug production and extortion of the wealthy and government justices. This article will show how the U.S. government worked to assist Colombia with its insurgent and bandit problems during the early 1960s through 1966. The early recommendations to employ counterinsurgency measures had merit then and remain viable today in Colombia. Many now appear in *Plan Colombia* and *Plan Patriota*.

President Alberto Lleras Camargo, former OAS Secretary General, 1945–1946 and 1958–1962

The first phase of the post-*Bogotazo* and *Violencia* (violence) encompassed the first two National Front governments led by Liberal Alberto Lleras Camargo and Conservative Guillermo León Valencia (August 1958–1966). The National Front resulted from a 1957 bipartisan agreement to alternate the presidency and ministries every four years, effectively dividing power between the two major political parties for sixteen years. During this period extensive collaboration between the U.S. and Colombian governments led to the development of an internal security system to support one of the most successful counterinsurgency campaigns of the time.[1]

Shortly after his August 1958 inauguration, President Lleras Camargo requested "expert U.S. assistance" to



Principal regions of colonization in Colombia after 1940 are shown in yellow. Rural areas in Regions 7 and 8 (east and south of Bogotá) and in the northern part of Tolima (west of the capital) were those most affected by the bandits and quasi-guerrillas instigating La Violencia.

help with his government's highest priority, the National Emergency Issue. Lleras Camargo, the well-respected former Secretary General of the Organization of American States (OAS), had been the driving force behind the armistice between the Conservatives and Liberals that had united them in the National Front to restore order and end the bloodshed. In November and December 1959, a State Department–sponsored team was sent to Colombia to conduct an extensive survey of the violence problem to make recommendations to the White House before Lleras Carmago's official Chief-of-State visit to Washington in April 1960.[2]

The joint U.S. government team, chartered to survey the violence problem in Colombia, was organized and led by the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) with Defense and State Department representation. Hans V. Tofte, formerly Office of Strategic Services (OSS) in Europe, World War II and JACK [Joint Advisory Commission, Korea (CIA)], was the team leader. The other team members were retired Colonel (COL) Berkeley Lewis, an ordnance expert with broad logistics experience and a tour as a military attaché in Argentina; Lieutenant Colonel (LTC) Joséph J. Koontz, service with the U.S. Military Advisory Assistance Group (MAAG) Bogotá from 1952–1956; Major (MAJ) Charles T.R. Bohannon, former WWII guerrilla leader in the Philippines who also advised the government during the Communist HUK uprising; COL Napoleon Valeriano, Philippine Constabulary and former Police Chief, Manila, who was "rated the most successful anti-guerrilla fighter in the military campaigns against the HUKs"; and Bruce Walker, ex-U.S. Marine lieutenant with foreign service tours in Ecuador and Honduras. All were fluent Spanish speakers.[3]

Hans V. Tofte in World War II, the Joint Survey Team Chief

Sketch of Colonel Napoleon D. Valeriano and Major Charles T.R. Bohannon.

To collect information, the joint survey team interviewed "more than 2,000 officials and civilians in all walks of life during visits to more than 100 cities, townships, military garrisons, and talked with a number of guerrilla chiefs" across the country. Their assessment was pretty grim. According to the report, the violence situation was critical. It was worsened by a much more active Communist threat than reported. The "*Auto-Defensa*" armed militias in rural areas "bore watching."[4]

The social upheaval after more than ten years of political strife (of civil war proportion) had led to an estimated 250,000 deaths and had forced another 1.5 million Colombians to leave their homes and farms. The public confidence in government at all levels had been destroyed. The 35,000-man army was garrison-bound and the national police (33,000) were unable to stop the violence perpetrated by bandits and quasi-guerrilla gangs. The military and police were not popular with the rural people. Civilians generally avoided contact and did not report incidents of violence for fear of "terroristic reprisals" by the bandits or quasi-guerrilla elements. A traditional peasant saying applied: "The law, like a dog, bites only the man wearing a poncho."[5] The team made specific recommendations in several areas.

The Americans felt that the Army had to be proactive instead of taking pride in not being involved because it showed how "non-political" the military was. The armed forces had to demonstrate their integrity and a sincere desire to help and befriend the civilian population. Effective suppression of the violence would regain the popular prestige the Army had earned during the Korean War and restore confidence and respect for government. But, the armed forces had to fight the bandits and quasi-guerrillas like an insurgency instead of emulating U.S. Army conventional war doctrine that perpetuated a traditional external defense role.[6]

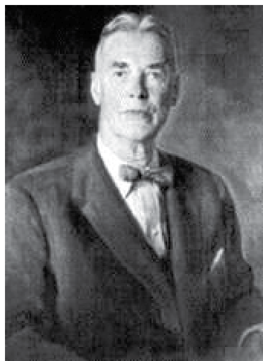
The report recommended that a special 1,000-man "*Lancero*" counter-guerrilla force be organized, trained, and equipped "to eliminate the quasi-guerrillas." The force had to be able to conduct operations in units as small as a fire team. Dedicated aerial reconnaissance and resupply assets were essential and they needed organic ground transportation to move 200 men. It was envisioned that the "*Lancero*" force would conduct special intelligence missions and combat operations under a military command that was focused exclusively on finding and eliminating the enemy.[7]

Original Lancero *shoulder patch*

Supporting measures included the establishment of an effective intelligence branch in the Armed Forces and a major reorganization of the civilian intelligence service. The government information program had to be aggressive and imaginative and capable of psychological warfare. The image of the Army and Police had to be rehabilitated to make them more "attractive" to the people. Critical to this was a broad reorganization and improvement of Police forces through better education, training, and equipment. Land settlement and civic action "self-help" projects were part of rehabilitation programs. The "*Lancero*" force was to receive paramilitary and civic action training and their activities were to be geared to support national rehabilitation efforts.[8]

Resettlement projects would serve as long-term

President Dwight D. Eisenhower, 1953–1961



Secretary of State Christian A. Herter

solutions if the government provided temporary support and the means to rapidly make families self-sufficient. Self-help projects started in the established rural communities, while insignificant contributions to the national economy, created immediate popular support. The civic action projects initiated by Army and Police units in the field had to be designed to improve the image of the security forces among the people. Those with the most potential were direct government-to-people efforts.[9] A key part of all recommendations was assignment of dedicated U.S. specialists to serve as advisors to the "*Lanceros*," national police, civil affairs, government information, psychological warfare, and intelligence elements.[10]

In the final 25 May 1960 report to Secretary of State Christian Herter, the joint survey team concluded that the present violence was primarily criminal activity by bandit gangs who operated like quasi-guerrillas. The team estimated that current violence perpetrated by these bandit groups could be quelled in ten to twelve months by "*Lancero*" forces, if they had qualified advisors and were supported with solid intelligence, psychological warfare, and civic action programs. They felt that the Colombian government could eradicate these bandit gangs more easily because unlike "real guerrillas," the bandits were not ideologically motivated and lacked popular support.[11] The long-term obstacle to eliminating future potential violence was more complicated.

To bring long-term stability to Colombia, significant reforms of the country's social, political, and economic structure were needed. Military efforts were largely a derivative of nation-building programs needed to anchor a popular, democratic government. Well-trained military and police forces alone were not sufficient to prevent a future recurrence of violence.

While the joint survey team provided the general essential elements, more like those in a broad contingency plan, the short- and long-term solutions were linked to achieve popular democratic government in Colombia. However, the broad social, political, and economic reforms, as they were proposed under the Alliance for Progress, proved unpalatable in Latin America.

Less than a month after President John F. Kennedy announced the Alliance for Progress program, the new administration was plagued with the Bay of Pigs fiasco on 21 April 1961. CIA covert support to a Cuban-exile force intent on overthrowing Fidel Castro was initially approved by President Dwight D. Eisenhower and then sanctioned by President Kennedy. The anticipated popular uprising in Cuba against Castro never materialized. Lacking air support, the "invasion fleet" was destroyed before the exiles could get ashore. The ease with which the Cuban dictator was able to crush the overthrow attempt demonstrated that he controlled the island. Kennedy accepted the blame for the failure. President Kennedy's recourse was to accelerate funding for the Alliance for Progress. Fidel Castro declared

Alliance for Progress

IN March 1961, President John F. Kennedy proposed a ten-year economic cooperation plan between the United States and Latin America that countered the announcement by Premier Nikita Khrushchev that the Soviet Union would support "wars of national liberation" worldwide. The U.S.-sponsored program was intended to counter Communist threats to American interests and dominance in the region. The mutual cost-sharing capital investment program was designed to promote social, political, and economic reform in the region to reduce the latent causes for insurgency. The objectives seemed reasonable: annual increase of 2.5 percent in per capita income; establishment of democratic governments; elimination of adult illiteracy by 1970; price stability; land reform; more equitable income distribution; and economic and social planning. Latin American countries were to pledge a capital investment of $80 billion over ten years in return for a U.S. agreement to supply or guarantee $20 billion. Comprehensive national development plans submitted by each country would be approved by an inter-American panel. Among the criteria for approval were land reform and new tax codes that demanded more from the wealthy. The reality was that almost all Latin American countries had accrued large international debts and service of those obligations used up the majority of U.S. aid. Reforms associated with the Alliance for Progress entailed monumental changes in social, political, and economic structures attendant to Latin American culture and way of life. The extent of social turmoil caused by the initiatives associated with the Alliance could be measured in the number of new military dictatorships that emerged during the early 1960s—six. By 1963, it was so significant that military aid had tipped the scales against Alliance for Progress foreign aid.[1]

U.S. 1963 "Alliance for Progress" postage stamp

President John F. Kennedy (1961–1963) announcing the Alliance for Progress.

1 "Alliance for Progress," http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alliance_for_Progress.

Kaman H-43B helicopter

deHavilland L-20A Beaver (STOL–short takeoff/landing) aircraft

Cuba a Communist state and turned to the Soviet Union.

A "special impact shipment" of $1.5 million dollars of military arms and equipment that included three U.S. Air Force Kaman H-43B medium helicopters and several deHavilland L-20A STOL (short take-off and landing) aircraft was delivered to Colombia in late 1961. The arms and equipment were to support military "public order" missions. The intent was to equip and mobilize the prototype "*Lancero*" force to eliminate the quasi-guerrilla bandits, thereby reducing violence in the countryside. It was the first tangible U.S. commitment to Colombia in its struggle against the continued *Violencia*.[12] An evaluation of how this military aid had been applied to the Colombian Army's counterinsurgency effort was the reason for a U.S. Army Special Warfare Center team visit.

Brigadier General William P. Yarborough, Commander, U.S. Army Special Warfare Center, Fort Bragg, North Carolina

Brigadier General William P. Yarborough, Commander, U.S. Army Special Warfare Center (SWC), Fort Bragg, North Carolina, accompanied by 7th Special Forces Group (SFG) commander, COL Clyde R. Russell, and LTC John T. Little, G-3, SWC, visited Colombia from 2–13 February 1962. General Yarborough's mission was to assess the violence problem, evaluate the effectiveness of military counterinsurgency efforts, and recommend appropriate mobile training teams (MTTs). The group traveled to four of the eight brigades to assess the situation. Their discoveries were not surprising.[13]

Yarborough reported that a lack of central planning, coordination, and intelligence dissemination and general fragmentation of resources were hindering the counterinsurgency campaign at all levels. Responsibilities had not been specified nor delineated between military and police forces. Civic action and psychological warfare activities were sporadic. The quasi-guerrilla bandit groups still had the initiative in rural areas. His findings, based on the HUK counter-insurgency model, reiterated those of the 1959 State Department joint survey team. General Yarborough recommended the use of MTTs (mobile training teams) for psychological warfare, civic action, air support, and intelligence) and five Special Forces teams [operational detachment alphas (SF ODAs)] to work with the battalions of the four brigades most engaged with the bandits and quasi-guerrilla groups. Using the "*Lancero*" force to fight the insurgency was not mentioned. Resolution of the broader social, political, and economic problems was considered remote.[14]

The Yarborough team recommendations supported the Kennedy administration's weighted emphasis on military assistance to Latin America versus socioeconomic aid through the Alliance for Progress. Though less focused on the broad nation-building elements, the U.S. Army Special Warfare Center report recommended professionalizing all security forces, collaborative intelligence sharing, and the development of rapid reaction forces. All were critical to the tactical and operational success of a military counterinsurgency campaign. Notably, Washington policymakers balked on sending Special Forces teams; Colombia's problems would have Colombian solutions. MTTs were acceptable.[15]

President Guillermo León Valencia, 1962–1968

Following the Yarborough visit, a Colombia Internal Defense Plan that focused on anti-violence was prepared. A draft plan, put together during May and June 1962, by a country team task force in the U.S. Embassy, Bogotá, integrated military efforts with the economic, social, and political aspects of the internal security problem. Ambassador Fulton Freeman hand-carried the plan to Washington for presentation at the White House. In August 1962, Ambassador Freeman presented the final recommendations and an implied offer of U.S. assistance to implement them to President León Valencia and his Minister of War as a formality. By then, General Alberto Ruíz Novoa, Commanding General of the Armed Forces (a former *Batallón Colombia* commander in Korea), Generals Rebeiz and Fajardo, Colonel Alvaro Valencia Tovar (a *Batallón Colombia* veteran), and a dozen other Army, Air Force, and National Police officers, with the assistance of a U.S. Army Counterinsurgency MTT, had prepared a military response to the violence problem. It was called *Plan Lazo* ("snare/noose/lasso").[16]

General Alberto Ruíz Novoa being awarded the U.S. Legion of Merit.

Plan Lazo ultimately became the basis for additional counterinsurgency plans. It called for broad civic action programs within the violence zones and an improved antiviolence system that, coupled with military action, would target for elimination the leading bandit elements

and quasi-guerrilla forces. The initial effort was to suppress. Follow-on operations would eliminate the insurgents. The primary components of *Plan Lazo* were:

1. Integrate the command structure of all forces engaged in public order missions to establish military responsibility for all operations;
2. Create more versatile and sophisticated tactical units capable of successful unconventional warfare operations;
3. Expand military public relations and psychological warfare units to improve civilian attitudes toward the military role in public order;
4. Employ the armed forces in civic action tasks that contribute to the economic development and social well-being of all Colombians, but especially those subjected to guerrilla-bandit activity.[17]

The Colombian Army began implementing elements of *Plan Lazo* in July 1962. One of primary objectives of *Plan Lazo* was "to eliminate the independent republics" created by leftist insurgents and bandit elements in the upper Magdalena Valley. The estimates for the latter were 1,600–2,000 men and 4,500 men for the former. There were also another 90–150 bandit gangs that numbered over 2,000 men who were primarily active in the coffee-rich Cauca Valley. A part of the ongoing military civic action programs was to target the enclaves of the bandit groups and communist insurgents. To free soldiers for the counterinsurgency missions, the Colombian Army organized civilian self-defense (*autodefensa*) units to improve popular support in the villages and to relieve the military of local patrolling and garrison duties. Radios linked the civil defense early warning networks to the security forces. From the inception of *Plan Lazo*, the counter-violence measures became more determined when seventy-five percent of the military was committed to the counterinsurgency campaign.[18] This increased military involvement followed up on earlier efforts by President Lleras Camargo.

General locations of the "Seven Independent Republics" identified by the Colombian Asamblea *(Legislature) in 1964 overlaid on a 1957 national map. The bandits were concentrated in northern Tolima department, west of Bogota, and the coffee-rich Cauca Valley south of Cali.*

The Colombian president had a dual-track policy against the quasi-guerrilla bandit zones. While the civil administration attempted to encourage peasants in these zones to participate in rehabilitation programs, the military focused on eliminating the guerrilla leadership that resisted government efforts to gain local support. This was the *modus operandi* in 1961, when Manuel Marín (*Tirofijo*–"Sureshot") and Communist Jacobo Arenas declared the separate "Republic of Marquetalia." In early 1962, the military launched a largely unsuccessful attack against the area.[19] It would be the *Plan Lazo* counterinsurgency strategy that "turned the tables" against Marín and Arenas later in the year. Meanwhile, the civic action track of Lleras Camargo's policy did make progress.

The Lleras Camargo government had instituted rehabilitation commissions at the national level and community welfare teams (*Equipos Polivalentes*) in the countryside. The rehabilitation commissions worked to track civic action programs in the designated violent zones, to coordinate relief efforts (particularly for abandoned children), to assist the refugees in finding work, to solve land title issues, and promote colonization of unused land. At the community level, thirty welfare teams composed of a doctor, nurse, several agrarian technicians, an engi-

Manuel Marín (Tirofijo—"Sureshot") and Jacobo Arenas.

President John F. Kennedy with President Alberto Lleras Camargo at an Alliance for Progress school dedication in Bogotá.

Alliance for Progress-funded adobe brick-making factory.

neer, veterinarian, home economist, and sometimes a public administrator served as advisors to community development projects. Most were small-scale undertakings using agrarian credit assistance and co-op systems of local labor to build rural schools, brick factories, medical clinics, and establish "model farms." These efforts produced the best propaganda and supported long-term administration objectives.[20] It was during Lleras Camargo's administration that Colombian military interest in civic action began to grow.

LTG Alberto Ruíz Novoa strongly advocated using military civic action in conjunction with counter-violence programs. Destroying guerrillas was simply not enough. The Colombian Army had to attack the social and economic causes as well as the political reasons for ongoing violence. Military efforts were sporadic until a U.S. Army Civic Action MTT was dispatched in April 1962. The MTT helped the Colombian military evaluate their short-range and long-term plans. Road construction and maintenance, health clinics, and communications networks became the core of the military program. Army infantry battalions, supported by combat engineers, dug wells, constructed potable water systems, established literacy programs, organized youth camps (somewhat like U.S. Civilian Conservation Corps camps during the Depression), and built rural schools.[21] Progress continued in Colombia despite the abrupt change of U.S. focus caused by the Cuban Missile Crisis in the fall of 1962.

By 1964, with substantial U.S Agency for International Development (USAID) funding, nineteen health care centers had been established. These were reaching approximately 100,000 people in those rural areas particularly impacted by the violence. The Air Force modi-

Cuban Missile Crisis

THE Cuban Missile Crisis was a Cold War confrontation between the Soviet Union and the United States regarding the Russian deployment of intermediate range (1,000–2,000 km) ballistic missiles [IRBM, today medium range ballistic missiles (MRBM)] to Cuba. The Soviet SS-4 "Sandal" and SS-5 "Skean" missiles were ostensibly provided to protect Cuba from further attacks by the United States. Premier Nikita Khrushchev rationalized the action as equivalent to the U.S. placing weapons with nuclear warheads in the United Kingdom, Italy, and Turkey. The crisis began on 16 October 1962, when U.S. reconnaissance photos revealing Soviet nuclear missiles in multiple locations on the Caribbean island were shown to President Kennedy. U.S. armed forces were put on alert. In conjunction with the Organization of American States (OAS) a naval quarantine (blockade is an act of war) of Cuba was established. Latin American nations overwhelmingly supported the regional defense measure because the lethal range of the IRBMs in Cuba covered Mexico, Central America, the Caribbean states, and the northern third of South America. The crisis peaked when Cuba used a SA-2 "Guideline" surface-to-air missile (SAM) to shoot down an American U-2 aircraft on 27 October. On the following day Premier Khrushchev announced that he had ordered the removal of Soviet missiles in Cuba. The Cuban Missile Crisis period was the closest the two world superpowers came to escalating the Cold War into a nuclear war.[1]

1 "Cuban Missile Crisis," http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cuban_Missile_Crisis; "The Cuban Missile Crisis," http://library.thinkquest.org/11046/recon/recon_room.html; "Cuba: Cuban Missile Crisis," http://www.fas.org/irp/imint/cuba.htm.

Countries within range of the IRBM in Cuba.

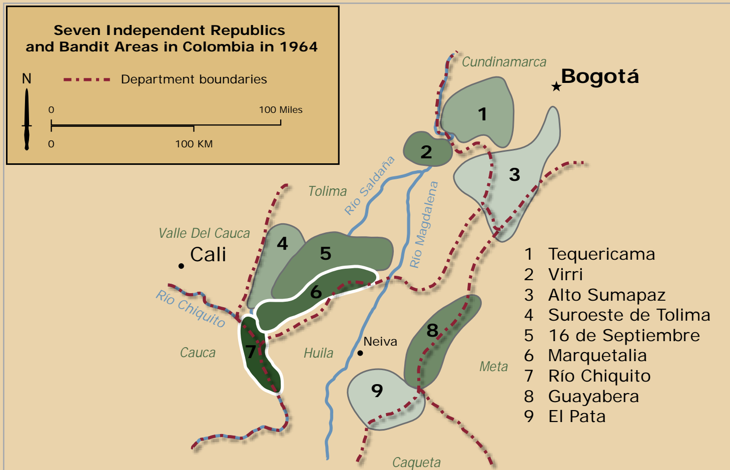
Map of Cuba with missile locations depicted.

Independent Republics

According to Jacobo Arenas, the Communist who shared the leadership of Marquetalia with Marín, the government attack to destroy the social and military infrastructure built-up under his leadership included the civilian bases of the rebel settlement. Arenas tried to create a form of primitive socialist commune in Marquetalia, based on the Paris Commune of 1871, and the 1949 Chinese revolution. It was described by him as a small socialist society or "commune" where not only peasant fighters and Communist Party ideologues lived, but also their families and friends. Everyone worked together as a community in Marquetalia for both common socioeconomic and military/defense purposes.[1]

Colombian Communist Party symbol

1 Jacobo Arenas, *Diario de la resistencia de Marquetalia* (Spain: Ediciones Abejón Mono, 1972) cited in http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Plan_Lazo.



Seven Independent Republics and Bandit Areas.

Colombian Navy floating riverine dispensary

fied one cargo plane to create a "Flying Dispensary" and the Navy installed two "Floating Dispensaries" along the Putumayo and Magdalena Rivers. The three mobile military health clinics enabled the military to reach colonists and indigenous populations in remote areas. All civic action projects were designed to improve internal security in the countryside. They reduced factors contributing to violence, opened areas to pacification by security forces, and

Manuel Marín (second from left) and survivors of Marquetalia.

projected state power into rural regions long overlooked by successive governments in Bogotá.[22] The continued success of civic actions to economically, socially, and politically reconstruct former violence zones after military pacification prompted the León Valencia government to launch a major offensive to eliminate the "independent republics."

The assault began on 18 May 1964, when Colombian security forces launched *Operacíon MARQUETALIA* against the enclave of Marín and Arenas. It was a joint operation involving the Army, Air Force, and National Police that began with vast military and police encirclements of villages and towns. The "cordon, search, and destroy" tactics of counterinsurgency warfare were employed. Aerial bombing and artillery preceded the infantry clearing operations as police kept the villages surrounded until the Army forces had gained control.

Paez Indians had been recruited to serve as military scouts and guides in the mountainous terrain. More than 3,500 soldiers and policemen conducted simultaneous sweeps through "independent republic" villages in designated zones while 170 elite troops helicopter assaulted directly onto Marín's hacienda redoubt. Marín lived on a commandeered 4,000 hectare (10,000 acre) *hacienda* (ranch) at the base of Mount Huila. Unfortunately, the local quasi-guerrilla intelligence network provided sufficient warning. Marín and most of his followers managed to escape the military and police cordons, fleeing to the neighboring "republic" of Río Chiquito.[23]

Two months later, Marín and other quasi-guerrilla and bandit groups from the Tolima-Cauca-Huila border areas gathered for the First Southern Guerrilla Conference. After declaring themselves to be "victims of the policy of fire and sword proclaimed and carried out by the oligarchic usurpers of power," the new coalition called for an "armed

FARC flag

Bandit William Aranguren, alias "Desquite" *(Avenger)*, killed with Jacinto Cruz Usma, alias "Sangre Negra" *(Black Blood)* in northern Tolima by elements of Batallón Colombia in May 1964.

Colombian PSYOP "Most Wanted" poster for Jacinto Cruz Usma, alias "Sangre Negra," contained a sketch, physical description, reward, list of crimes committed, and government efforts to curb his activities in northern Tolima.[28]

revolutionary struggle to win power." Composed originally of both communist and non-communist quasi-guerrilla and bandit groups, this southern guerrilla bloc, with some financial assistance, but more ideological support from the Colombian Communist Party, consolidated its armed elements into a unified group called the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia [*Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia* (*FARC*)].[24]

The first two National Front governments considered the existence of insurgent base areas simply unacceptable. Both Lleras Camargo and Valencia pushed the Colombian armed forces to relentlessly hunt down the quasi-guerrilla and bandit groups in the countryside that proved unresponsive to rehabilitation. Seven violence zones were targeted in *Plan Lazo*: No. 1: Antioquia–Choco; No. 2: South Santander–Boyaca; No. 3: Caldas, Norte del Valle, Norte del Tolima; No. 4: Cundinamarca–Tolima (Sumapaz); No. 5: Tolima–Huila; No. 6: South Valle–North Cauca; and No. 7: Llanos Orientales (Ariari).[25]

By 1966, the counterinsurgency strategy had eliminated the quasi-guerrilla and bandit sanctuaries, the "independent republics," and significantly reduced violence in the countryside to some semblance of stability. It was sufficient for the Colombian government to stop attributing internal problems to *La Violencia* after almost eighteen years.[26] Unfortunately, at a time when Colombian armed forces were capable of eliminating the remnants of most insurgent elements, government officials reclassified the threat as criminal activity.

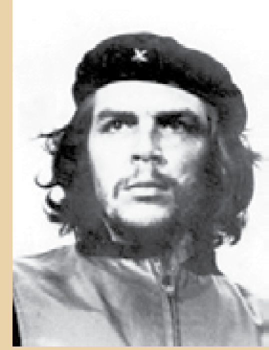
The government began considering the threat in the countryside as a law and order issue. Once again, it became a police problem. The Colombian Army, having "eliminated" the guerrilla sanctuaries, the so-called "independent republics," gladly relinquished primary responsibility to the police. They resumed their traditional apolitical role to focus on national defense. The failure of successive administrations (the National Front presidential power rotation agreement expired in 1974) to expand the police forces and build an effective state presence in rural areas enabled the FARC and other insurgent forces to regain momentum and expand their areas of domination of the countryside. Ultimately, the absence of law and order prompted the privatization of civil defense. Paramilitary forces sanctioned by the Bogotá government were regarded as extensions of the Colombian military in the rural areas.[27] Reciprocating exponentially to FARC methods of dominating the rural population, the paramilitaries ushered in *La Violencia II*.

In summary, the U.S. response to *La Violencia* in Colombia began with the Joint Survey Team Report provided by Hans Tofte in early 1960. The Joint Team recommended short-term security force solutions to quell the rural violence based on the counterinsurgency strategy successfully employed against the HUKs in the Philippines. These were integral to a long-term strategy that addressed social, economical, and political fixes that would reduce causes of popular unrest outside the cities of Colombia. The key element short-term was a mobile, well-equipped 1,000-man counter-guerrilla *Lancero* force, capable of rapidly exploiting actionable intelligence. As these *Lanceros* dealt with those causing the violence, the government would be rehabilitating formerly oppressed peoples through civic action and community welfare programs. Government psychological warfare capitalized on military civic action to improve their public image. The first $1.5 million of U.S. military aid in 1961 was tied to public order.

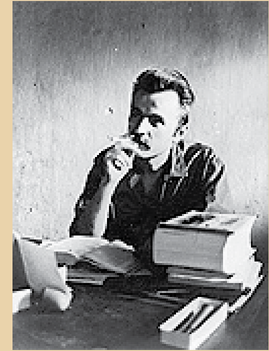
Operación MARQUETALIA

THE modern mythology of the FARC promotes the idea that *Operación MARQUETALIA* was a defeat for the Colombian state. Ernesto "Ché" Guevara, in reference to *MARQUETALIA*, declared that the existence of a "self-defense zone when it is neither the result of a total or partial military defeat of enemy forces, is no more than a colossus with feet of clay." Its recapture by security forces, " . . . will have a major effect: a great victory for the bourgeoisie, a great defeat for the Castro-Communist revolution.'" Responding to Guevara's assessment, Régis Debray wrote that the recapture of Marquetalia forced the FARC back to the first stage of guerrilla warfare.[1]

1 Dennis M. Rempe, *The Past as a Prologue? A History of Counterinsurgency Policy in Colombia, 1958–1966* (Carlisle Barracks, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, March 2002), 29.



Ché Guevara



Régis Debray

BG Yarborough; LTC Little, the U.S. Army Special Warfare Center G-3; and COL Russell, the 7th Special Forces Group commander, went to Colombia in February 1962, to study the violence problem and evaluate the effectiveness of their counterinsurgency effort. Yarborough recommended that relationships between military and police be delineated, that military and intelligence services at all levels collaborate more, and that intelligence and counterintelligence programs be coordinated and standardized. These were deemed critical to a national counterinsurgency plan. The HUK counterinsurgency basic concept of operations was used by the team. To conduct antiviolence planning, identify requirements, and coordinate operations, Yarborough recommended that MTTs—psychological warfare, civic action, air support, and intelligence—and five Special Forces ODAs be sent to work with the Colombian military. The Special Warfare Center recommendations became part of Ambassador Freeman's antiviolence plan and helped the Colombian generals preparing *Plan Lazo*.

National and community civic action in conjunction with aggressive counterinsurgency operations, fundamental tenets of *Plan Lazo,* enabled *La Violencia* to be brought to an end in 1966. Then, when Bogotá policymakers deemed that the problems in rural areas were caused by criminal activity, the Army reverted back to its traditional external defense role. Police in the countryside were not increased commensurately to fill the vacuum left by the Army. Over time, this enabled rural and urban insurgent movements to regroup and grow. The absence of law and order in the countryside fostered the privatization of self-defense forces to provide law and order vigilante style. This led to *La Violencia II*.

Endnotes

1 Dennis M. Rempe, *The Past as a Prologue? A History of Counterinsurgency Policy in Colombia, 1958–1966* (Carlisle Barracks, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, March 2002), 4.

2 Department of State, The Colombia Survey Team, A Preliminary Report Summarizing Observations, Conclusions and Principal Recommendations with an Operational Analysis (Annex I) Concerning Proposed U.S. Overt and Covert Action, Field Survey Nov/Dec 1959 by Joint State/CIA/Defense Team dated 1 February 1960, Classified Files ARSOF Archives, Fort Bragg, NC, hereafter DOS Colombia Survey Team Preliminary Report February 1960; Rempe, "The Past as a Prologue?", 6; Dennis M. Rempe, "Guerrillas, Bandits, and Independent Republics: U.S. Counter-insurgency Efforts in Colombia 1959–1965," *Small Wars and Insurgencies*, VI:3 (Winter 1995), 2, http://www.icdc.com/~paulwolf/Colombia/smallwars.htm. The key to improvement of the situation in Colombia was determined to be President Lleras Carmargo because he alone commanded the respect and support of populace throughout the country.

3 Department of State, The Colombia Survey Team, A Preliminary Report Summarizing Observations, Conclusions and Principal Recommendations with an Operational Analysis (Annex I) Concerning Proposed U.S. Overt and Covert Action, Nov–Dec 1959," Lieutenant General William P. Yarborough Papers, U.S. Army Special Warfare Center and School Archives, Fort Bragg, NC, hereafter cited as Preliminary Report of the Colombia Survey Team; "Colombia–*Plan Lazo*," http://www.icdc.com/~paulwolf/Colombia/survey team. Two team members later wrote a book on counter guerrilla operations based on their World War II experiences in the Philippines, Napoleon D. Valeriano and Charles T.R. Bohannon, *Counter-Guerrilla Operations: The Philippine Experience* (NY: Praeger, 1962); Colonel Napoleon D. Valeriano was a 1937 graduate of the Philippine Constabulary Academy. Valeriano participated in the Bay of Pigs invasion. Major Charles T.R. Bohannon and Colonel Valeriano were guest speakers at a U.S. Army Special Warfare Center seminar on the HUK Campaign at Fort Bragg, NC, on 15 June 1961, prior to Brigadier General William P. Yarborough taking his team to Colombia in early February 1962. U.S. Army John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School Archives, Fort Bragg, NC.

4 DOS Colombia Survey Team Preliminary Report February 1960.

5 DOS Colombia Survey Team Preliminary Report February 1960; Rempe, *The Past as a Prologue?,* 5.

6 DOS Colombia Survey Team Preliminary Report February 1960; Rempe, "Guerrillas, Bandits, and Independent Republics," 4.

7 DOS Colombia Survey Team Preliminary Report February 1960; Rempe, *The Past as a Prologue?,* 6; The counter-guerrilla force, organization, tactics, and command structure that was recommended emulated that used by the government to crush the HUK insurgency in the Philippines. Colonel Napoleon D. Valeriano and Lieutenant Colonel Charles T.R. Bohannon, *Counter-Guerrilla Operations: The Philippine Experience* (NY: Praeger, 1962), 255–69.

8 DOS Colombia Survey Team Preliminary Report February 1960; Rempe, *The Past as a Prologue?,* 6.

9 DOS Colombia Survey Team Preliminary Report February 1960; Rempe, *The Past as a Prologue?,* 10.

10 DOS Colombia Survey Team Preliminary Report February 1960.

11 Rempe, *The Past as a Prologue?,* 7.

12 *Violence in Colombia: A Case Study*, Department of State Airgram A-649, 6 April 1964, National Security File, Country File, "Colombia, Volume 1," Box 14, Austin, TX: Lyndon B. Johnson Library, 15, cited in Rempe, *The Past as a Prologue?,* 10; Rempe, "Guerrillas, Bandits, and Independent Republics," 4. The U.S. Air Force Kaman H-43B "Huskie" was used primarily for crash rescue and aircraft fire-fighting, http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/systems/aircraft/hh-43.htm. The principal mission of the U.S. Air Force L-20A was aerial evacuation of litter and ambulatory patients. Other missions included courier service, passenger transport, light cargo hauling, reconnaissance, rescue, and aerial photography. http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/systems/aircraft/u-6.htm

13 U.S. Army Special Warfare Center Report, "Visit to Colombia, South America, by a Team from Special Warfare Center, Fort Bragg, North Carolina," dated 26 February 1962, hereafter cited as BG Yarborough Report 26 February 1962.

14 BG Yarborough Report 26 February 1962; Rempe, *The Past as a Prologue?,* 12; Rempe, "Guerrillas, Bandits, and Independent Republics," 5–6.

15 BG Yarborough Report 26 February 1962; Rempe, *The Past as a Prologue?,* 14–15; Rempe, "Guerrillas, Bandits, and Independent Republics," 7.

16 Rempe, *The Past as a Prologue?,* 15–16.

17 Rempe, *The Past as a Prologue?,* 16; Rempe, "Guerrillas, Bandits, and Independent Republics," 7.

18 Rempe, *The Past as a Prologue?,* 16–19; Rempe, "Guerrillas, Bandits, and Independent Republics," 7–8, 19.

19 Rempe, *The Past as a Prologue?,* 27; Rempe, "Guerrillas, Bandits, and Independent Republics," 12.

20 Rempe, *The Past as a Prologue?,* 19–20.

21 Rempe, *The Past as a Prologue?,* 21; Captain Russell W. Ramsey, "Colombian Infantry," *Infantry* 54: 6 (November–December 1964), 7; U.S. Department of State, Airgram CA-11098 to U.S. Embassy, Bogotá, dated 20 April 1965, subject: Joint State/AID Message, http://www.icdc.com/~paulwolf/Colombia/rusk20apr1965.htm.

22 Rempe, *The Past as a Prologue?,* 21–23; Ramsey, "Colombian Infantry," 7–8.

23 Rempe, *The Past as a Prologue?,* 29.

24 Rempe, *The Past as a Prologue?,* 28–29; "The Backlands Violence is Almost Ended," *Time* (26 June 1964), http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/9,9171,898163,00.html.

25 Major Adiel Vasquez Franco, First Lieutenant Ruben A. Candia, and Second Lieutenant Bernardo J. Bosch, "Psychological Operations Versus Violence in Colombia," unpublished paper dated 1 November 1963, 12–13, U.S. Army John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School Archives, Fort Bragg, NC (hereafter Vasquez Franco unpublished paper).

26 Rempe, *The Past as a Prologue?,* 29–30.

27 Rempe, *The Past as a Prologue?,* 23.

28 Vasquez Franco, unpublished paper, 23; Ramsey, "Colombian Infantry," 4; U.S. Department of State, Telegram 23361 from Bogotá, dated 28 April 1964, http://www.icdc.com/~paulwolf/Colombia/sangrenegra28apr1964.jpg.

Forty Years of Insurgency:

Colombia's Main Opposition Groups

by Troy J. Sacquety

FOR more than forty years, the government of Colombia has had to contend with an insurgency waged by multiple groups that represent a mosaic of conflicting ideologies, methods, and capabilities. This article will examine the three main insurgent groups currently active in Colombia. These are the left-wing *Fuezas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia Ejército del Pueblo* (FARC-EP) and *Ejército de Liberación Nacional* (ELN), and the right-wing *Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia* (United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia or AUC). The now defunct "The 19th of April Movement," or M-19 as it is better known, will also be discussed on account of its historical importance.

Although each group is distinct and both the FARC and ELN oppose the AUC, they have some universal trends that are true to varying degrees. All three are considered terrorist organizations by the United States and the European Union, use the illegal drug trade as a funding mechanism, and have employed child soldiers.[1] They can be considered as relatively decentralized organizations that possess a unifying purpose and mission. Therefore, the local roles, missions, and alliances of a particular group may vary, but the central beliefs and purposes of each individual group remain the same. Recruits in these groups often are second and third generation and may serve for ideological reasons or they may be press-ganged. However, since the annual income of an average insurgent is many times greater than that of the average rural Colombian, the financial rewards are a powerful motivator.

The following article will provide a brief description of each group. It will highlight that group's particular history and political leanings, as well as their relative size and capabilities. By having a little knowledge of these groups, the reader will be better able to understand the present operational environment in Colombia.

FARC-EP: *Fuezas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia Ejército del Pueblo* (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia of the People)

FARC flag

The most important insurgent group in Colombia, which also represents the greatest threat to the government, is the FARC. According to *Jane's International*, it is the best-equipped, trained, and organized insurgent group in Latin America.[2] Its arsenal includes heavy machineguns and, reportedly, man-portable surface-to-air missiles (MANPADS). The FARC is potentially the world's richest and best-funded insurgent group with a yearly income of more than one billion U.S. dollars. Given this level of funding, the group has the capability to support a force several times its current size of 14,000–17,000 members who are organized into groups called "Fronts."[3] The founder and leader of the FARC is Pedro Marín. However, he is better known by his *nom de guerre*, Manuel Marulanda, or his nickname, *Tirofijo,* meaning "Sureshot," a reference to his marksmanship.

On 7 November 1998, Colombian President Andrés Pastrana Arango granted the FARC a 42,000 square kilometer demilitarized safe area, known derisively as "FARClandia." Here Pastrana and the FARC founder and leader, Pedro Antonio Marín, engage in unfruitful peace negotiations.

The FARC traces its roots to *La Violencia,* the 1948–1966 Colombian civil war between the Conservatives and the Liberals that claimed from 100,000 to 250,000 lives.[4] Marín was the leader of a radical Liberal insurgent group in *La Violencia* that later adopted a communist ideology. In 1964,

American Hostages in Colombia

THREE U.S. citizens have been held captive by the FARC since 13 February 2003. The contractors were taken when the engine of their Cessna Caravan 208B died during a counter-drug mission in south-eastern Colombia. Unfortunately, the crash site was near a FARC unit. The guerrillas took them captive before rescue teams arrived. Four of the five aboard the Cessna, Marc Gonsalves, Thomas Howes, Tom Janis, and Keith Stansell were Americans, and one, Luís Alcides Cruz, was a Sergeant in the Colombian Army.[1] Janis, the pilot, and Cruz were immediately executed. The other three Americans were captured and taken hostage. They remain in FARC custody today, four years later.

Although the threat of kidnapping is a clear danger to American personnel, it applies equally to other foreigners and Colombians. Primarily the FARC, and to a lesser degree the ELN, use kidnapping as a way to fund operations through ransom money, or to gain a valuable strategic advantage. This is particularly true for members of the Colombian government, military or police forces. They are held by the FARC and used as bargaining chips during peace negotiations, or to foster a prisoner exchange. For instance, on 25 March, 2006, the FARC released two policemen that had been held since November 2005, to demonstrate goodwill and "sweeten the pot" for an exchange of captured FARC guerrillas.[2] In total, the FARC holds some 60 "political" prisoners hostage, including former Presidential-candidate Íngrid Betancourt, according to various press reports.[3] The FARC also holds an untold number of civilians—possibly over a thousand—for ransom or extortion money. The extent of the problem is considerable. Colombia has the highest rate of kidnapping in the world, and the vast majority of these go unreported. In 2003 alone, *Jane's* reported that an estimated 673 victims provided the FARC with more than $91 million in ransom money.[4]

Leaflets such as this, publicize the plight of the three Americans in FARC custody. The leaflets offer a reward in return for information that might help authorities secure a release for the captives.

1 John McQuaid, "Special Report: Fatal Mission," *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, 9 November 2003.

2 International Committee of the Red Cross, "Colombia: two police officers released," 25 March 2006, http://www.icrc.org/web/eng/siteeng0.nsf/html/colombia-news-250306!OpenDocument.

3 The *Economist:* Economist Intelligence Unit, "Country Report: Colombia: "The political scene: Efforts commence to engage the FARC," 3 October, 2006, http://www.eiu.com; BBC News, "Colombia to vote on hostage swap," 27 January, 2006, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/4654440.stm.

4 Jane's Information Group, "Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC)," 16 December 2005, http://www.janes.com.

The FARC holds prisoners in compounds such as this one. To complicate rescue attempts, the FARC periodically rotates groups to new locations.

This mural, in the Colombian National Military Headquarters, brings attention to military and police captives remaining in FARC custody. Some hostages have been imprisoned for five years or more.

the Colombian Army attacked the "independent republic" at Marguetalia. Marín escaped and joined with local Communist-inspired groups to form the FARC as the armed wing of the Communist Party of Colombia.[5] At the time, its numbers could be measured in the dozens. Not until the early 1970s could the group deploy more than fifty fighters. It is now an extremely capable insurgent force with elements of combatants—including rapid reaction forces and "tax collectors."

The group relies on a three-tiered funding mechanism. The most important tier is involvement in the drug trade, which includes trafficking as well as "taxing" production. Tier two is nearly as lucrative as the drug trade, and involves extorting businesses or "taxing" landowners.[6] For example, in 2000, the FARC's decree of Law 002, announced that the group expected those worth over $1 million to pay "taxes."[7] If not, they risked the threat of kidnapping for ransom, the third tier in the FARC's way of obtaining revenue. To date, the group holds dozens of captives, including three Americans.[8]

The FARC uses intimidation to prevent the local population from betraying it to the Colombian government. This intimidation can range from veiled threats to outright assassinations or "disappearings," in which the victim is never seen nor heard from again. The FARC has also received outside training assistance—most notably from the Irish Republican Army (IRA)—and is well versed in the use of improvised explosive devices (IEDs).[9] The most notorious IED in Colombia, the "bunker buster," in IRA parlance, or the "barbecue bomb," is a propane cylinder turned into an exploding projectile. The FARC use it extensively. The weapon is extremely difficult to aim and its use often results in considerable collateral damage, such as on 2 May 2002, where a barbecue bomb aimed at an AUC target instead hit a church, killing 117 people.[10] Such use has led to appeals from groups like Human Rights Watch to end the use of indiscriminate weapons.[11]

In 1982, the FARC added EP to its name to symbolize that it was an organization of the people.[12] In 1985, it started on a political path and formed its own political party, the Patriotic Union (UP).[13] However, over the course of the next several years, hundreds of UP members were murdered, and the group fell back on continued guerrilla action. The group has entered into periodic peace talks with the government, although they appear to be used on the part of the FARC to rest and reorganize. In late 1998, the Pastrana administration ceded to the FARC a demilitarized area the size of Switzerland, known unofficially as "FARClandia," and officially as the *Zona de Despeje* (the "open land"). However the FARC's continued operations led President Andrés Pastrana to order Colombian forces to retake the demilitarized zone. President Alvaro Uribe Vélez has been even less willing than Pastrana to negotiate with the FARC. As with all the other insurgent groups, he has demanded that the FARC disarm before starting negotiations.

ELN: *Ejército de Liberación Nacional* (National Liberation Army)

ELN flag

Like the FARC, the ELN is a Marxist-inspired group that formed in the mid-1960s. It is second in size and importance to the FARC, but is an important political force. The group was formed in 1964, in the Santander region of northern Colombia. It drew its inspiration from Marxist and Maoist ideas, although some of the ELN's early recruits were trained in Cuba and brought with them much inspiration from the Cuban Revolution. The ELN also has a heavy influence from Roman Catholicism, and four of its early and influential members had previously been Catholic priests.[14] The ELN is considerably anti-imperialist and resents outside influences on Colombia. The group has been nothing but resilient. In the 1970s, it twice survived near total annihilation.

The ELN has historically dominated areas that Colombia's petroleum pipelines traverse. Given its aversion to outside influences on Colombia, it targets foreign oil companies and receives a substantial amount of its funding through extortion.[15] In part due to moral aversion on the part of its Catholic roots, the ELN's involvement in the drug trade is considered minor to that of the FARC. However, a third method of financing its operations comes through kidnapping and subsequent ransom. The ELN's most famous kidnapping occurred in 1999. Upset that the Pastrana Presidency was not giving the ELN the same attention as that shown to the FARC in negotiated talks, the group dramatically ramped up its actions to force the Colombian government to take notice. The group hijacked a Fokker 50 flight in mid-air and forced it to land in ELN-controlled territory. Following this, the ELN seized an entire church congregation in Cali, and

From 1986 until 2006, this one pipeline in northern Colombia suffered nearly 1,050 attacks. These attacks can produce environmental disasters and also result in the loss of millions of dollars in lost production and fuel.

later captured a fishing boat off Barranquilla.

Estimates place the current size of the ELN at about 3,000-4,000 members.[16] Given its relative size in comparison to the FARC and the AUC, the ELN has resorted to force multipliers. It is the group most noted for the use of landmines. Although the FARC and the ELN have been known to clash, in 2003, the groups announced an alliance.[17] They have worked in conjunction even to the point of participating in attacks together. This has been particularly true in areas where the AUC has put pressure on both groups. Since 2002, the ELN has had several rounds of discussions with the Colombian government. However, to date, they have not been successful.

AUC: *Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia* (United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia)

AUC symbol

Although officially disarmed, the AUC is the main right-wing insurgent group in Colombia.[18] The AUC's stated purpose is to provide regional protection from Marxist insurgents. However, the U.S. Department of State reports that Carlos Castaño, the founder and head of the AUC until rival factions murdered him in April 2004, said that 70 percent of the AUC's activities were funded through the illegal drug trade.[19] Like the FARC and ELN, it has been declared a terrorist group by both the United States and the European Union. Under the terms of *Plan Colombia* and its military adjunct, *Plan Patriota*, the AUC declared that the government was putting enough pressure on the FARC and ELN that its presence was no longer needed. The AUC agreed to disband by April 2006. However, several AUC groups are still active and, given the availability of weapons in Colombia, it is likely that independent factions in the group can undertake paramilitary actions at will.

The AUC was officially formed in April 1997, but it traces its roots to the self-defense militias that have long been present in Colombia. Many right-wing militias sprang up among rural landowners because they did not think that the Colombian government was doing enough to ensure their safety. There was an economic aspect as well, as the FARC and ELN were "taxing" landowners, forcing them to turn over a portion of their income or assets. The AUC was set up as an umbrella organization that could coordinate these numerous but far-flung right-wing militias, and serve as a regional counter-insurgency force. In essence, it served as an adjunct to the military.

Carlos Castaño, the founder and leader of the AUC, was killed in April 2004.

However, several of the AUC members brought into the fold had a checkered past. For instance, the Castaño brothers had been members of *Muerte a Secuestradores* (MAS) [Death to Kidnappers] and later *Perseguidos por Pablo Escobar* (Victims of Pablo Escobar), known as "*Los Pepes.*"[20] MAS was formed by narcotraffickers in the mid-1980s for the sole purpose of hunting down and killing M-19 members. *Los Pepes* was formed in the early 1990s by narcotraffickers to hunt down narcotrafficker Pablo Escobar and his associates.[21]

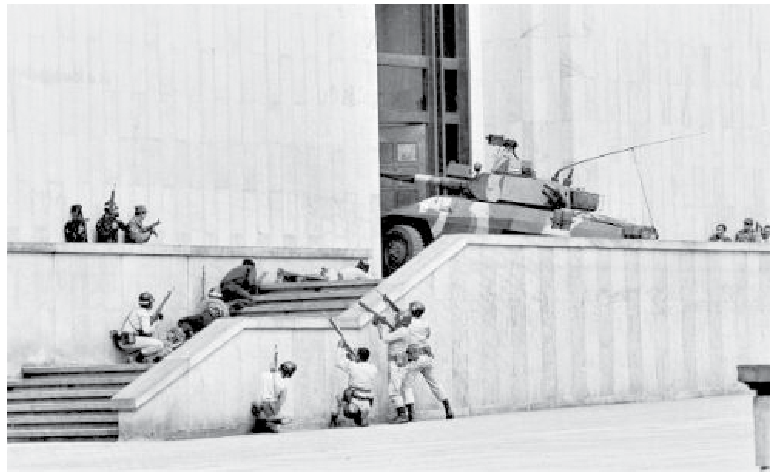
The Castaño brothers brought to the AUC this experience in narcotrafficking. Like the left-wing groups that it sought to oppose, the AUC also looked to the drug trade for funding. Additional funding was obtained through donations. The AUC served to pacify areas from FARC and ELN control, and used as its methodology intimidation, assassination, and outright combat. Often, the AUC's methods were brutal and the group has been accused of serious human rights abuses.[22] When the Colombian military became sensitive to human rights issues, its tacit association with the AUC ended.

Under *Plan Colombia*, Bogotá sought to put an end to the insurgency within six years. The government of Colombia increased pressure on the insurgents and raised the level of government security forces in affected regions. The AUC saw that the process was working, thereby negating the need for it to exist. The AUC officially finished the disbandment process in 18 April 2006.[23] By this time, a total of 30,150 AUC members had demobilized, and in the process, had turned in some 17,000 weapons.[24] However, several of the groups that are under the AUC's umbrella have yet to demobilize.

M-19: *Movimiento 19 de Abril* (Movement of 19 April)

M-19 flag

Although the M-19 is now a defunct group, its historical actions and importance merit inclusion in this narrative. The M-19 was also a leftist group, but contrasting with the FARC and ELN, was composed of urban intellectuals from the upper classes. The M-19 traces its beginnings to, and is named for, what the group alleged were the fraudulent presidential elections of 19 April 1970, where former dictator Gustavo Rojas Pinilla was



On 6 November 1985, the M-19 seized of the Palace of Justice in Bogotá. Here a Colombian Army Cavalry Regiment EE-9 Cascavel armored car breached and entered the building while firing its 90mm main gun.

denied victory. The group is most well known for its characteristic bold exploits. In 1974, the group stole one of the swords of Simón Bolívar as a symbol, pledging only to return it once Bolivar's ideals were accomplished.[25] In 1979, the group transformed itself into a serious threat by digging a 246-foot tunnel, whereby it gained access to an army warehouse and stole several thousand weapons.[26] On 27 February 1980, the M-19 engineered the takeover of the Embassy of the Dominican Republic. The group captured fourteen ambassadors—including the American ambassador—and others. In exchange for a sum of money and transportation to Cuba, the final hostages were released on 27 April 1980.

By the mid 1980s, the M-19 would be the Colombia's second largest insurgent group behind the FARC, but was short of funds. The group tapped into the drug trade by kidnapping the family members of prominent narcotraffickers, who, in retaliation, formed MAS. With police and army help, MAS tracked down M-19 members, then tortured and killed them, reducing the M-19 membership by half.[27]

The M-19's most audacious action took place on 6 November 1985, when thirty-five insurgents stormed the Palace of Justice in Bogotá. They took some 300 lawyers, judges and Supreme Court justices hostage. The Army attacked, and in addition to the kidnappers, eleven Supreme Court justices and ninety civilians lost their lives. This was M-19's last major action. By the end of the decade, the M-19 had turned in its weapons and renounced armed struggle. The group returned Bolívar's sword and transformed itself into a political party. The party existed through the 1990s—sometimes achieving a significant percentage of the vote—but merged with another party in 2003.

As can be seen, Colombia has had its share of insurgent groups. Those represented above are only the major groups. These groups have perpetuated the country's violence and are responsible for much of the illegal drug trade. Hopefully, the direction taken by the M-19 and the AUC—disarming—will be adopted by the left-wing groups. Only then will Colombia have the chance to end the insurgency that is now headed into its fifth decade.

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Colombian Military Forces

by Troy J. Sacquety

THE purpose of this article is to provide an introduction to the Colombian Army. It will describe the military chain of command, the Colombian Army's main operational units, give a brief look at Colombia's special operations forces and the system of Army schools and address the reforms being embraced by the Colombian military under the auspices of *Plan Colombia*. The Colombian military is composed of three branches: the Army, Navy and the Air Force. The Army is the dominant service. All services play a role in the counter-insurgency campaign but their participation is minor in comparison to the Army. Those services will not be discussed in any detail.

The Colombian President is the Commander-in-Chief of the armed forces, while the Minister of Defense has operational and administrative control. Next in the chain of command is the military commander of the armed forces, which, given the Army's size and influence, has always been an Army three-star General. This is also the highest rank in the Colombian military. The Army is officially charged with the defense of Colombia from outside aggressors. In actuality its mission has undergone extensive restructuring since 1999, and is now almost completely focused on fighting the counterinsurgency.

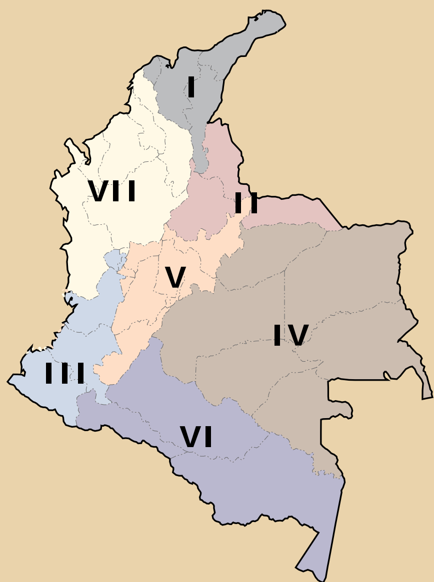
General Mario Montoya Uribe, Commanding General of the Colombian Armed Forces

The Army is composed of 180,000 personnel in seven infantry divisions and a number of special units, compared to 23,000 in the Navy and 10,000 in the Air Force.[1] The 160,000-man Colombian National Police (CNP) is part of the Ministry of Defense and works with the Army in its internal-security role against the paramilitaries. However, the CNP is not considered part of the armed forces.

Since the start of *Plan Colombia* in 2000 and the beginning of *Plan Patriota*, in 2005, the armed forces defense budget has increased from two to five percent of Gross National Product (GNP) under President Alvaro Uribe Vélez.[2] Concurrent with the increase in budget is a growth in the size of the military and the police. Conscription fills the ranks of the Army, Navy, Air Force and National Police, with draftees incurring a two-year term of service at age 18. The National Service obligation has been attacked for its inequalities. For instance, conscripts with the equivalent of a high school education do not have to go into combat and the wealthy can buy their sons way out of service.[3] There are volunteer enlistment options for both the Army and Navy, and those seeking a career in the Army may volunteer for the non-commissioned officer's school.

The army is organized into seven numbered divisions that are geographically-based around the country in regional Areas of Responsibility (AORs).[4] A soldier

Colombian Army Division patches



Colombia's seven divisions are headquartered over a wide region of the country.

Brigada de Aviación del Ejército *patch*

Brigada de Apoyo Logistico *patch*

Fuerza de Despliegue Rápido *(FUDRA) patch*

is usually drafted into the division in his home region and it is possible for him to serve his entire career in a single geographic area. There is also an Aviation Brigade, the *Brigada de Aviación del Ejército* and the *Brigada de Apoyo Logistico* (Logistics Brigade) with a supply battalion, maintenance battalion, a *Batallón de Intendencia* which supplies clothing and footwear to the Army, and a separate logistics battalion supporting Joint Task Force–South.[5] Colombian divisions are not uniform in structure and can have two to five infantry brigades. Each brigade is organized with three infantry battalions, a cavalry group for reconnaissance, one direct support artillery battalion, an engineer battalion and a service battalion. The Army is improving its mountain warfare capabilities as part of the counter-insurgency campaign and has fielded special battalions designed for combat in the *Alta Montaña* (High Mountains) in those divisions in the mountain regions. Presently only six of twenty-one brigades within the army are fully manned with the remainder under strength.[6] The Colombian Army has no Corps headquarters. Each division is an autonomous entity within its AOR.

In addition to the divisional brigades in the seven territories, the Colombian Army has a number of special units with functional responsibilities. The Rapid Deployment Force, known as the *Fuerza de Despliegue Rápido* (*FUDRA*), created on 7 December 1999, has countrywide responsibilities. The *FUDRA* is composed of three mobile brigades and one special forces brigade, and has organic UH-60 Black Hawk helicopters. These are separate from those in the Army Aviation Brigade, or *Brigada de Aviación del Ejército*, which provides rotary-wing airlift to the Army in addition to the *FUDRA,* and other counter-insurgency forces. The *FUDRA* is supported by a newly-created Military Intelligence Center that provides intelligence on insurgent units and their activities.

The counter-narcotics brigade or *Brigada Contra el Narcotráfico*, (CD Bde*)* was activated on 8 December 2000. The CD Bde, headquartered at Tres Esquinas, is composed of three large 900-man CD battalions, and works with the CNP to secure coca-producing areas for spraying as part of the aerial eradication program near the borders of Ecuador and Peru. The CD Bde works closely with the Narcotics Affairs Section (NAS) in the U.S. Embassy. There are similar mission-specific units in the Colombian Army.

Brigada Contra el Narcotráfico *patch*

Functionally-oriented forces include the *Agrupación de Fuerzas Especiales Antiterroristas* (AFEAU) or Special Forces Anti-Terrorist Group, designed to combat terrorist activities in urban environments, and the *Agrupación de Fuerzas Especiales Rurales* who perform a similar counter-terrorist mission in the rural areas. The *Brigada de Fuerzas Especiales,* or Special Forces Brigade, has four battalions capable of both airborne and counterinsurgency operations. A unit similar to the U.S. Army Rangers is the *Agrupación de Lanceros* or AGLAN, an elite strike force. U.S. Army Special Forces has a long history of assisting and training the Colombian Special Forces Brigade and the *Lanceros*.

Agrupación de Fuerzas Especiales Antiterroristas *(AFEAU) patch*

Created by Colombian Law 282 in 1996, the *Grupos Acción Unificada por la Libertad Personal* (Groups of Action Unified for the Liberation of Persons) or *GAULA* are elite units exclusively dedicated to respond to kidnapping and extortion. These highly trained military units work closely with the national judiciary to

The GAULA, or Grupos Acción Unificada por la Libertad Personal *(Groups of Action Unified for the Liberation of Persons), was set up in 1996 to be a force responsible for recovering kidnap victims and to battle the kidnappers.*

The M-113 is a U.S.-produced armored personal carrier and is in widespread use worldwide, seeing use in some forty-four militaries. It can carry eleven personnel and two crewmembers. Although it can be armed with a number of weapon systems, the most common are a heavy machinegun or a grenade launcher.

The RG-31 Nyala, made by the South African firm of Land Systems OMC, is a multi-purpose mine-protected vehicle. It features a "V"-shaped hull and has high ground clearance.

recover kidnapping victims and to capture the kidnappers. There are sixteen *GAULA* in the Army, two in the Navy, and ten in the National Police.[7]

The Colombian Army is equipped with a large stock of U.S. equipment such as the M-113 Armored Personnel Carriers, UH-60L Black Hawks and UH-1N Huey helicopters as well as a number of weapons systems from other nations.

These include Russian-made Mi-17 helicopters, and the Brazilian-made Cascavel EE-9 and Urutu EE-11 armored cars. The Army carries a variety of small arms, including the U.S. M16 and M2 .50 caliber machinegun. However, the main infantry rifle is the Israeli-designed Galil ARM 5.56 mm and the Galil AR 7.62 sniper rifle. Colombia is the only country licensed by Israel to manufacture the Galil. The Army is supplied by *Industria Militar*, the Colombian national military manufacturing firm.

The conventional infantry battalions are equipped with U.S. M1 81mm and M2 107mm mortars and the 120mm French-made Brandt heavy mortar. The infantry brigades have TOW (tube-launched optically-tracked wire-guided) anti-armor systems, 106mm recoilless rifles and 40mm air defense artillery systems. Colombian artillery battalions use the U.S. M-101 105mm towed howitzers. The mountain troops have the WWII vintage U.S. M-8 75mm pack howitzer. As in every Army, training is of paramount concern.

The Colombian Army has an extensive network of schools, mostly located in Bogotá, that train soldiers. Recruits undergo training at regional centers located at Bucaramanga, Pamplona, Ocana, Barranca bermeja, Sogamoso, Chiquinquira, Villavienco, and Guaviare.[8] The Military School of Cadets, known in Colombia as the *Escuela Militar de Cadetes "General José Mariá Cordova,"* is the Army's officer academy (the Colombian equivalent of West Point). Students undergo a five-year curriculum, after which they receive a commission as a Second Lieutenant. The next level of professional school for officers is the National War College, the *Escuela Superior de Guerra*, which is open to all the services. Persons with specialized qualifications in medicine and law are commissioned as volunteers through

A Colombian Marine mans his M-2 .50 caliber heavy machinegun. The Marines and the Navy perform operations along Colombia's rivers that assist in the Army in its counter-insurgency mission.

The EE-9 Cascavel armored car was developed by the Brazilian company, Engesa. It features a 90mm main gun, has a crew of three, and is extensively used by the Colombian cavalry elements.

The EE-11 Urutu is a 6x6 armored personnel carrier that was designed by Engesa, a Brazilian company, in the 1970s. It can carry up to twelve personnel, in addition to the driver.

The main battle rifle of Colombian forces is the Galil, as seen here.

A Colombian paratrooper in training takes his turn jumping from the 34-foot tower.

the Professional Officers Corps Reserve. They are generally selected and serve with the division near their homes.[9]

Non-commissioned officers have their own schools. The *Escuela de Suboficiales "Sargento Inocencio Chinca,"* the NCO school, was the established at Tolemaida in 1968. According to General Carlos Ospina, the former commander of the Colombian military, the formation of the school resulted from the successful example of U.S. Army's Vietnam-era "shake and bake" Non-commissioned Officer Candidate Course.[10] The next level of schooling available for NCOs is the eight-week course at the Command Sergeants Major Academy in Bogotá. General Ospina established the school in 2003 after seeking U.S. Army assistance. U.S. Southern Command (SOUTHCOM) detailed senior U.S. Army NCOs to assist in developing the program.[11] Both the Navy and the Air Force have officer's academies and NCO schools of their own.

The Colombian Army runs schools for the major branches to train the soldiers in their occupational specialties. There are schools of Infantry, Cavalry, Artillery, *Lanceros*, Engineers, Communications, Civil Military Relations and a Parachute School for airborne troops. There is also a School of Logistics that trains supply and maintenance personnel.[12]

Colombian engineers stationed in Tolemaida display their equipment, including mine detectors, protective equipment, and an explosive-sniffing dog.

As the article shows, the Colombian Army has a wide-range of capabilities to overcome the problems of an insurgent war. In the late 1990s many rural areas lacked a sustained military or police presence. This greatly aided the regrowth of insurgency and is something that Colombia must remedy as part of *Plan Patriota*. President Uribe has made government presence in the rural areas a centerpiece of his administration, and the Army, working in concert with the National Police has made great strides in this direction. There are now police in all Colombian municipalities and Army divisions are present and operating in every region. This has substantially eroded the power of the narco-terrorist insurgency.

The Colombian Army has formed units that have functional rather than regional responsibilities. For the special units, funding and material support remain a problem. The formation of the Command Sergeants Major Academy, the NCO School, the Professional Soldier's School and a growing professionalism in this largely conscript force are evidence that Colombia's Army is improving the leadership and quality of its units and are thereby making greater inroads against the narco-terrorist insurgency.

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Colombian Special Operations Forces

by Kenneth Finlayson

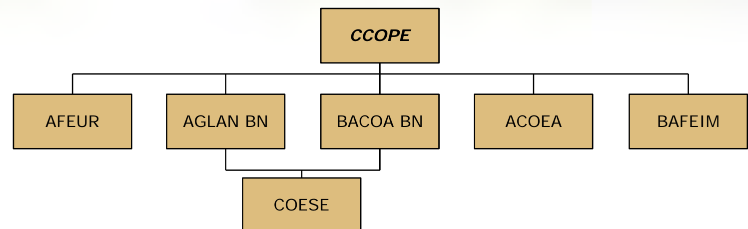
**Pseudonyms have been used for all military personnel with a rank lower than lieutenant colonel.*

THE Colombian military has a variety of special operations forces (SOF) committed to the on-going conflict with the narco-terrorist elements in the country. American advisors work closely with the different units and serve at several command and control headquarters. This article will introduce several Colombian SOF elements, comparing them as appropriate to like elements and commands in the U.S. military.

Located in Bogotá, the *Commando Conjunto de Operaciónes Especiales* (CCOPE pronounced See-Coh-Pay) was created in 2002 to serve as the command and control headquarters for all Colombian military special operations forces. The organization and mission of the CCOPE is roughly comparable to that of a miniaturized version of the Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC), at Fort Bragg, North Carolina.[1] The CCOPE is commanded by a colonel who reports directly to the commander of the Colombian Joint Staff. An American officer is routinely assigned to serve with the CCOPE.

The coat of arms of the Colombian Military.

Major Ricardo Ramírez* of Special Operations Command, South (SOCSOUTH) was the U.S. military liaison officer (LNO) to the CCOPE during the spring and summer of 2006. "The CCOPE, like other Colombian units, has a very small staff. The deputy commander, an O-6 [colonel], doubles as the Chief of Staff and there is one lieutenant colonel that is both the J-1 and J-4 handling personnel and logistics. About twelve noncommissioned officers fill out the rest of the positions."[2] Five battalion-size units, known by their initials as the AFEAU, the AGLAN, the BACOA, the ACOEA, and the BAFEIM, and another service command and control headquarters, the COESE, make up the CCOPE. The subordinate units span the land, sea, and air aspects of SOF, and are tailored for specific missions.



The task organization of the CCOPE.

Within the CCOPE organization, the unit tasked with the counter-terrorism mission is the *Agrupación de Fuerzas Especiales Anti-Terroristas Urbanas* or AFEAU (Af-Ā-You). This joint unit is the oldest counter-terrorism unit in the Colombian military, formed in the wake of the November 1985 seizure of the Palace of Justice by the terrorist M-19 group. Its mission is to target terrorist units and high-value targets in the urban areas as they are identified and confirmed, and react to terrorist attacks as they occur. Traditionally, C Company, 3rd Battalion, 7th Special Forces Group (7th SFG) has trained with the AFEAU, usually by two Joint–Combined Exercise and Training events each year at the AFEAU headquarters in Bogotá.[3] The nature of the AFEAU mission tends to keep the unit image low-key. More recognizable among the CCOPE units is the *Lanceros*.

AFEAU Insignia

The Colombian unit most closely resembling the U.S. Army Rangers is the *Agrupación de Lanceros* (AGLAN, pronounced Ag-Lan). Commonly referred to as the *Lanceros*, the group is made up of five fifty-man companies, lettered A through E. In each company is a squad of scout snipers and there is a separate reconnaissance element in the battalion headquarters.[4] The first compa-

Colombian SOF

In addition to the special operations forces (SOF) CCOPE *(Commando Conjunto de Operaciónales Especiales)*, there are other SOF units in the Colombian Army. One, the *Brigada de Fuerzas Especiales*, the Special Forces Brigade, is modeled after the Special Forces Groups of the U.S. Army. Another is a special unit whose principal responsibility is the conduct of anti-terrorist missions.

These strategic assets are controlled by the *Brigada de Fuerzas Especiales*, the Special Forces Brigade of the Colombian Army. Composed of four battalions, these highly trained units are experts in jungle warfare and are particularly adept at direct action missions. They have a long history of training with the U.S. Special Forces and most officers are graduates of the Special Forces Qualification Course conducted at the John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School at Fort Bragg, North Carolina.

SF Brigade patch

The Lancero *School is the most prestigious Ranger-type school in Latin America.*

Statue of the Lancero *at the unit training site at Tolemaida.*

nies were formed in 1959. The *Lanceros* are an elite infantry force that trains at the major Colombian Army base at Tolemaida.[5] In the summer of 2006, ODA 745 (operational detachment alpha) from A Company, 2nd Battalion, 7th SFG (A/2-7) sent three team members to be integrated as advisors to the *Lancero* group reconnaissance elements.[6] The 250-man *Lancero* group is about half the size of a 580-man U.S. Army Ranger battalion.[7]

To fill the *Lancero* units and train small-unit leaders for the Colombian Army, there is *La Escuela de Lanceros* (the *Lancero* School). The *Lancero* School, like the U.S. Army Ranger School, is a leadership school that trains junior officers and enlisted men in direct action and reconnaissance missions for *Lancero* units and the Army divisions. Formed in 1955 with the assistance of U.S. Army Captain Ralph Puckett Jr., the *Lancero* course is the most highly respected Ranger training in Latin America. The current course lasts seventy-three days and is a grueling test of stamina for the participants. Candidates come from all countries of Latin America as well as the United States, France, and Great Britain. The successful completion of the course, marked by the coveted *Lancero* badge, is an honor recognized throughout the continent.

As the *Lanceros* represent the Colombian Army equivalent of the U.S. Army Rangers within the CCOPE, the BACOA performs missions similar to the U.S. Army Rangers. The *Batallón de Comandos Ambroseo Almaeda* (BACOA, Back-Ō-Ah) is composed of three lettered companies. The A and B companies of the BACOA are 74-man units divided into three sections: a mountain section, an urban section, and an amphibious section. The C Company is a fifty-man unit composed of six reconnaissance and sniper sections.[8] Working closely with the BACOA, Major Ramírez described the mission of the companies as "Direct action in A and B companies. C company is for reconnaissance, both strategic and tactical."[9] While in many respects akin to U.S. Army Special Forces, Captain Roberto Gómez* of A Company, 2nd Battalion, 7th SFG described the mission of the BACOA as "more like the quick reaction force in the 82nd Airborne or some-type of ready-reaction unit."[10] During the A/2-7 rotation in the summer of 2006, three Special Forces personnel worked as advisors with the BACOA reconnaissance elements conducting long-range strategic reconnaissance. The BACOA battalion and *Lanceros* Group are additionally under a command and control headquarters within the CCOPE called the COESE.

The *Comando de Operaciónes Especiales Del Ejército* (COESE pronounced CŌ-Ess-Ā) functions in a manner similar to that of the U.S. Army Special

Numerous monuments on the unit history are located around the Lancero *training area at Tolemaida. This stone commemorates the 50th Anniversary of the founding of the* Lanceros.

Graduates of the Lancero *Course receive the coveted* Lancero *badge. This soldier with a large boa on his shoulders, typifies the image of the* Lanceros.

U.S. Army Special Forces soldiers training BACOA troops on the range at Tolemaida.

The BACOA use the fast-rope technique of insertion during missions. Here BACOA troops train at Tolemaida with their Special Forces advisors.

Operations Command.[11] It is the Army branch of the CCOPE much like USASOC is the Army Service Component within the U.S. Special Operations Command. The COESE primarily functions as a force provider for the two battalions.[12] Since the CCOPE is a joint command organization, it contains Colombian Air Force and Naval Special Operations units, the ACOEA and BAFEIM.

Headquartered in Bogotá, the *Agrupación de Comandos de Operaciónes Especiales Aéreas* (ACOEA or Ah-Coh-Ah) is the special operations aviation component of the CCOPE. A relatively new unit in the Colombian SOF community, the primary mission of the ACOEA is to provide sniper teams that can shoot from helicopters. The unit also possesses a combat search and rescue capability.[13] In the U.S. Army SOF community, the 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment is the unit that most closely resembles the ACOEA, although the ACOEA does not perform the troop-carrying, insertion, and attack missions that the 160th does.[14]

The *Batallón de Fuerzas Especiales de La Infanteria Marina* (BAFEIM pronounced Bah-Fi-Eem) is the Colombian special Marine force. Maintaining a headquarters in the old city of Cartagena on the northwest coast of the country, the three companies that make up the 253-man BAFEIM battalion are focused on operations in the coastal waters and riverine networks of Colombia.[15] Like their Army counter-parts in the BACOA Battalion and *Lancero* Group, U.S. special operations personnel have assisted the BAFEIM in training. U.S. Navy SEALs are routinely assigned to advise and assist the BAFEIM on counter-drug and counter-terrorism missions in the coastal waters of the country.[16] Another highly capable element of the CCOPE, the BAFEIM is the maritime element of the three-service organization that makes up the Colombian special operations command. While the CCOPE elements have numerous capabilities, their employment is often hindered due to lack of transportation, notably rotary wing aviation, and the difficulty of coordinating CCOPE operations in concert with the conventional Colombian Army divisions. This is a function of the Colombian command structure.

The Colombian Army has divided the nation into seven districts with an Army division serving in each. The division commander enjoys the same level of autonomy and control over military operations in his AOR (area of responsibility) that a U.S. Joint Task Force (JTF) commander (such as the commander of JTF-Afghanistan) has. All units operating in and national operations that take place in the division AOR become his responsibility. This autonomous arrangement often makes the deployment of the CCOPE units into a particular division AOR difficult, especially for time-sensitive missions.

"The CCOPE is a strategic tool," said Major Ramírez. "One action, one mission by the units of the CCOPE may well have national implications."[17] Just like it is with the U.S. Army, conventional force commanders often do not understand the capabilities and limitations of special operations forces assigned to work in their AOR. It is the responsibility of the SOF to explain to their conven-

The Naval element of the CCOPE is the BAFEIM. These highly skilled troops are experts in operations in the sea and rivers of Colombia, performing insertion missions in the manner of the U.S. Navy SEALs.

http://www.Ejército.mil.co

Map depicting the Areas of Responsibility of the Colombian Army divisions.

tional commander how SOF can be a force multiplier. Major Ramírez recalled a briefing for the 4th Division commander done by the staff of the BACOA Battalion. The commanding general of the division had resisted CCOPE units operating in his AOR. "The BACOA staff presented a first-class briefing on the unit capabilities and the plan for a proposed high-value target mission. When they finished, the division commander said, 'I am a great fool. That is the best briefing I have ever been given.' He immediately directed his staff to work closely with the BACOA. That briefing really opened the doors for the CCOPE units to gain access to the 4th Division area."[18] Not all of the CCOPE problems were as easily solved as that.

The CCOPE faces funding constraints. The units that make up Colombian SOF were largely created "out of hide" from existing elements. As such, the CCOPE does not have a separate budget and depends on the services to fund training and new equipment. The programs that place U.S. advisors with the CCOPE units do fund training ammunition and equipment. This helps to off-set some of the funding shortfalls the CCOPE faces. In his assessment of the CCOPE, Major Ramírez describes the CCOPE as "well trained and can do the mission. They are good in the jungle and have their TTPs [tactics, techniques and procedures] down pat."[19] The presence of the U.S. Army Special Forces advisors serves to strengthen already-capable units. Colonel Edward M. Reeder Jr., 7th SFG commander, noted of the Colombian SOF, "Colombia's military today is proven to be an exceptional fighting force, as was evident in the most recent *FUERZAS COMANDO 06* international counterterrorist Olympics in Paraguay, where they received top honors among fifteen nations from Latin America and the Caribbean as well as the United States."[20]

U.S. Army Special Forces practice rappelling at Tolemaida prior to training with their Colombian partners.

As the Colombian military executes its multi-year campaign *(Plan Colombia)* to eliminate the narco-terrorists, the special operations units of the CCOPE have a crucial role in the accomplishment of that mission. The CCOPE units are not large in size and are deficient in some assets such as helicopters that would make their employment more effective. As the Colombian Army addresses these shortfalls, the SOF units of the CCOPE will play an increasingly prominent role in the ongoing narco-terrorist war in their country.

Rigorous training such as building rappelling is common in the AFEAU.

Endnotes

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3 Ramírez* interview.

4 Ramírez* interview.

5 http://www.Ejército.mil.co/index.php%3Fidcategoria%3D92&sa=X&oi=translate&resnum=1&ct=result&prev=/search%3Fq%3DColombia%2BLanceros%26hl%3Den%26lr%3D.

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7 Ramírez* interview.

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Plan Colombia and *Plan Patriota*:

The Evolution of Colombia's National Strategy

by Robert W. Jones Jr.

In more than fifty years of battling with anti-government insurgent movements, Colombia has used a number of strategies in an attempt to achieve victory. *Plan Colombia* and *Plan Patriota* are the latest plans designed to defeat the insurgency. The difference between *Plan Colombia* and previous campaigns is threefold. First, the scope is larger. *Plan Colombia* covers the entire country and is not limited to isolated enclaves. Second, it is a combined political, military, and economic effort as opposed to seeking a strictly military solution. Finally, there is the unprecedented level of support from the United States. This article will explain *Plan Colombia* and the follow-on *Plan Patriota* in the context of U.S.-Colombian relations. The historical roots of *Plan Colombia* date to the 1960s.

From 1948 to 1966, Colombia endured a harrowing period of internal strife known as *La Violencia*. More than 250,000 people were killed as warring political factions in the country vied for supremacy. Ultimately, a power-sharing arrangement known as the National Front alternated power between the Liberal and Conservative parties. In 1962, U.S. Army Brigadier General William P. Yarborough visited Colombia and helped draft a plan to quell the insurgency. Known as *Plan Lazo*, the fundamental elements were national to community-level civic action done in conjunction with aggressive counterinsurgency operations by the military and police. *Plan Lazo* helped the first two National Front administrations (1958–1966) end *La Violencia*. With the drawdown of most political violence, Bogotá policy makers reclassified the rural guerrilla movement as a criminal problem. This made the insurgency a law-and-order issue and gave the primary responsibility to the national police. The government increased the scope of the police mission without increasing its budget or force size. The focus of Colombia's armed forces reverted to traditional national defense. Over the next decade, these conditions led to the re-emergence of insurgent groups. In the absence of an effective government presence to counter the guerrillas, self-defense forces were formed that provided vigilante-style law and order.

The first large scale attempt to defeat the insurgents was *Plan Lazo* in 1962. Rebel groups had established enclaves in the mountains. The enclaves became known as "independent republics," operating beyond government control. Initial attempts by the police, and then the army, proved fruitless. The bandits and quasi-guerrillas fought back and maintained control of their areas. The conflict lead to an integrated operations plan named "*Lazo*." (In Spanish a "*lazo*" is a rope, noose, or snare.) The plan called for operations to isolate the independent republics and then use military force to defeat the insurgent groups. While a military operation, *Plan Lazo* also had a civil component, one of national- and community-level rural development, civic action, and civil defense.

The final phase of *Plan Lazo* became *"Operación MARQUETALIA,"* the military operation to remove the so-called "Marquetalia Republic." The military force was to destroy the social and military infrastructure established by Jacobo Arenas. This Colombian Communist tried to create a socialist commune or society, based on the examples of the Paris Commune in 1871 and the 1949 Chinese Revolution. The Marquetalia Republic was an 800–square kilometer area in the Andes Mountains located at 6000 feet above sea level and was well suited for defense.[1] The Army focused a major offensive against the town of Marquetalia itself.

Following the military offensive, the surviving rebels and bandits managed to escape and scatter. The destruction of the independent republics led to the coalescing of several scattered groups and the formation of the FARC and ELN. In the

Map of Colombia indicating the Marquetalia Republic.

1970s, Colombia witnessed a rejuvenation of insurgency including the rise and fall of the M-19 as an urban group. Adding to the violence and discontent was the increase in narcotrafficking by the Cali and Medellín cartels. The chronically weak Colombian government was unable to control either the illegal drug trade or the growing insurgency.

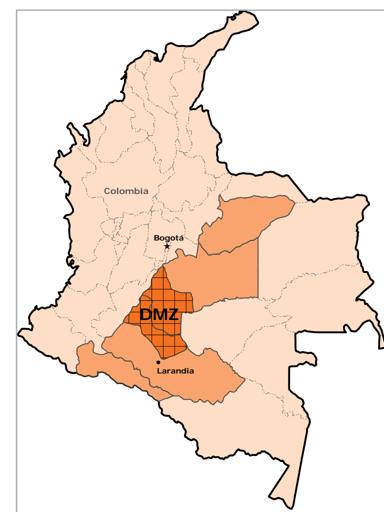
Unfortunately, the U.S. attitude toward Latin America drifted into "benign neglect" until the 1980s. The United States was fully engaged in Vietnam and the Cold War in Europe. In the United States, the political and social upheaval of the 1960s and early 1970s only quieted down at the end of the Vietnam War. Latin America received little attention until the overthrow of the Anastasio Somoza Debayle regime in Nicaragua by Communist Sandinistas in 1979. In the case of Colombia, it was only when the Medellín and Cali drug cartels became the world's leading cocaine suppliers in the mid-1980s that the United States focused on that country in a meaningful way. In the 1990s, a change of regime in Colombia brought a new strategy.

In 1998, after decades of violence and guerrilla warfare, President Andrés Pastrana Arango was elected—largely because he promised to seek peace with the insurgent groups. Pastrana's advisors developed a plan entitled "*Plan Colombia*: Plan for Peace, Prosperity, and Strengthening the State." President Pastrana presented "*Plan Colombia*" as "a set of alternative development projects which will channel the shared efforts of multilateral organizations and [foreign] governments toward Colombian society."[2] At $7.5 billion, the projected cost of the six-year *Plan Colombia* seemed enormous. The country sought outside assistance. Colombia pledged to provide $4 billion and asked the international community for the remaining $3.5 billion. The United States provided a $1.3 billion package of support, which included helicopters, equipment, and training, primarily from the U.S. Army Special Forces.[3]

Colombian President Andrés Pastrana Arango (left) meets with Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld (right) at the Pentagon on 26 February 2001, to discuss a range of regional issues. Pastrana was accompanied by the Colombian Minister of National Defense Luis Ramírez (center).

A unique feature was that Colombian diplomats and military leaders came to Washington DC to garner support for the plan even before it was fully explained to the Colombian government. The Colombian leadership briefed *Plan Colombia* to Congress to gain not only the financial, but also the political support of the U.S. government. President Pastrana's Chief of Staff, Jaime Ruíz, wrote the first draft in English, causing rumors that the plan originated in the United States. The Colombians received Congressional support. Responsibility for *Plan Colombia* was assigned to the Department of State (DOS). Implementation would take place through the U.S. Embassy in Bogotá.[4]

Part of President Pastrana's plan was to hold peace talks with the *Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia* (FARC). To demonstrate sincerity, Pastrana formed a demilitarized zone called the "*despeje*" (des-pah-hey), meaning "clear" or "open." Here the FARC and the government of Colombia could have "breathing space." Cessation of hostilities in the *despeje* would ostensibly allow all sides to come to the negotiating table to discuss peace and ultimately bring an end to conflict in Colombia.[5]



Map of *despeje* area.

Pastrana's concept, while well intentioned, did not work. The government of Colombia moved police and military units out of the designated *despeje*, but the FARC did not honor the agreement. Instead, the FARC used the cease-fire as a time to rest, refit, and build strength without the Colombian armed forces or police disrupting its activities. The "Switzerland-sized" *despeje* became a *de facto* country within Colombia. The FARC provided public services for the people, albeit at the price of absolute loyalty. For the next three years, the Pastrana administration pursued a series of negotiations with the FARC. The failure of these negotiations led to an increase in U.S.-supported counter-drug operations.[6]

In Bogotá, the Narcotics Affairs Section (NAS) of the DOS became the staff agency responsible for the counter-drug mission and its subsequent support. Staffed with a mix of DOS, military, and contracted personnel, NAS handled the counter-drug (CD) logistics and all coordination with the Colombian government, from the national government down to equipping and advising police and military units. The largest monetary part of the American contribution came as equipment support, primarily helicopters. UH-60 Black Hawks and refurbished UH-1 "Huey" helicopters gave the Colombian National Police and newly designated and trained Army

A Colombian Black Hawk lands in a jungle clearing. The helicopters provide a rapid deployment capability.

Secretary of Defense William Cohen (third from left) and Minister of Defense José Florencio Guzman (second from right) conduct a bilateral meeting on 2 December 1998. The defense ministers are in Cartagena, Colombia, attending the Third Defense Ministerial of the Americas. Cohen is accompanied by General Charles Wilhelm (on his right), U.S. Marine Corps, commander, U.S. Southern Command; and Peter Romero (on his left), Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs.

CD battalions the mobility to attack the narcotrafficking labs and the cocaine transit sites.[7]

The level of U.S. military involvement increased significantly. Because Colombia is a huge and largely roadless country, counter insurgency operations (COIN) in Colombia depended heavily on air movement. Helicopters were key and were the largest part of the U.S. commitment. The U.S. support provided fifty-nine helicopters: fourteen UH-60 Black Hawks, thirty single-engine UH-1H "Huey II" models, and fifteen twin-engine UH-1Ns.[8] Flight training of the Colombian Black Hawk pilots took place at Fort Rucker, Alabama. U.S. contractors trained the UH-1 pilots and crews in Colombia. A contract maintenance package was to keep the helicopters flying. Despite the enhanced mobility, a specially-trained counter-drug force was needed to fight on the ground.[9]

In 1999, the U.S. Southern Command (SOUTHCOM) commander, Marine General Charles Wilhelm, working in concert with the National Drug Policy Coordinator, retired Army General Barry McCaffrey, proposed that a Colombian Army unit be trained, equipped, and dedicated only to counter-drug operations. The 7th Special Forces Group (SFG) was to train the counter-drug battalion. The 900-man CD battalion had a headquarters company and three line infantry companies and was almost three times the size of a typical Colombian battalion. The new unit was designed to be highly mobile with organic helicopter support. The first CD battalion was deemed operationally ready on 15 December 1999.[10] At Fort Bragg, the 7th SFG assistant operations officer, Chief Warrant Officer 4 Solomon Delaney*, coordinated the movement of units and supplies from Fort Bragg to Colombia.[11]

Tied to U.S. funding were Congressional oversight and certain restrictions that added to the training burden for the 7th SFG. The six-month training program grew to nine months. Before training could begin, each Colombian soldier was vetted for possible human rights accusations, a problem in some parts of the Army (the

View through the jungle to a FARC base camp area. The camouflage and locations of most base camps require soldiers on the ground and extensive intelligence gathering to find them. PSYOP product–induced FARC surrenders provided guides to the hidden camp locations.

Members of A Company, 2/7th SFG in Tres Equinas take a break from training during a command visit by the Commanding General U.S. Army Special Forces Command, Major General Geoffrey Lambert.

vetting was similar to a criminal background check in the United States). Once the soldiers had been vetted by the State Department, three Special Forces companies (A/1/7th, A/3/7th, and A/2/7th respectively) rotated through the *Tres Equinas* base to train the new battalion.[12] A U.S. infantry battalion program of instruction stressed marksmanship and light infantry techniques. The unit, unlike other Colombian Army elements, was armed with U.S. equipment, including M16A2 rifles. The Gailil is the standard Colombian Army rifle.[13] A programmed expansion of the counter-drug capability led to the fielding of two more CD battalions and the formation of a CD brigade headquarters for command and control in 2003.[14]

Congressional oversight constrained operations. The CD battalion and the U.S.-supplied helicopters could be used only for counter-drug operations and for emergency humanitarian activities—if NAS and the U.S. Embassy cleared requests. The CD unit could not be used to fight guerrillas even if the insurgents were supporting drug traffickers. This meant the soldiers and their organic helicopters were not available to assist conventional Colombian divisions on COIN operations. This situation changed after 11 September 2001.

The 9/11 terrorists attacks on the United States expanded the scope of U.S. involvement in Colombia from a strictly counter-drug mission to a combined strategy of counter narco-terrorism (CNT). The shift, caused by an "expanded authority," increased U.S. military involvement in the war on narcotics traffickers and terrorists. Prior to the shift in policy, U.S. State Department–funded national police and counter-drug military units could not target nor assist in the engagement of guerrilla organizations, even though they were providing security for the drug producers and traffickers. Under the auspices of National Security Presidential Directive 18 (November 2002), the U.S. military was allowed greater coordination authority with the Colombian military, including the sharing of intelligence and training support.[15] Under "expanded authority," Special Forces could now assist Colombian Army Special Operations Forces with training to fight the narco-terrorists.[16]

There is a natural tendency of American military personnel to use familiar U.S. Rules of Engagement (ROE) for Afghanistan and Iraq as a measuring stick to gauge the willingness of Colombian military and police to take the fight to the narco-terrorists in their country. The ROE for the Colombian armed forces (military and police) is the National Legal Code. Similar restrictions apply to U.S. forces employed at home (to restore order during riots or in the event of an internal insurgency) without a Congressional declaration of martial law or being granted exemption to civil prosecution *(posse comitatus).*

The importance of the war in Colombia is revealed in the 2002 *National Security Strategy of the United States.* President George W. Bush said,

> *In Colombia, we recognize the link between terrorist and extremist groups that challenge the security of the state and drug trafficking activities that help finance the operations of such groups. We are working to help Colombia defend its democratic institutions and defeat illegal armed groups of both the left and the right by extending effective sovereignty over the entire national territory and provide basic security to the Colombian people.*[17]

President Alvaro Uribe Vélez (second from left) with U.S. military and Embassy staff during a tour of the Tres Equinas Air Force base.

U.S. support for *Plan Colombia* continued with a change of presidents in Colombia in 2002.

The new president, Alvaro Uribe Vélez, took office after the failed peace talks with the FARC. Determined to end the insurgency and seeing that negotiations were futile, President Uribe launched a new campaign against the FARC. The "expanded authority" provided for more U.S. aid and support. The Colombian Army had to break contact with the paramilitaries and abide by human rights accords. Uribe's offensive was divided into two parts. One was a general security strategy known as "democratic security," which dramatically increased the number of police in the municipalities across the country. The second part was a new joint military operation called *Plan Patriota,* which dedicated at least 18,000 soldiers to attack the *despeje* (sometimes called "FARClandia" by the Special Forces soldiers). It was meant to kill or capture its main leaders.

The operational aspects of *Plan Patriota* are similar to those of the old *Plan Lazo* and prior counter-drug operations. In Phase 1, the military attacks and temporarily secures a guerrilla-con-

Colombian soldiers inspect an open air FARC IED classroom. The propane cylinders are used to make IEDs (see Charles Briscoe's article on page 107).

Colombian police and military tearing down a FARC despeje *welcome sign.*

trolled area. As part of the operation, the Colombian units conduct extensive civic action and psychological operations to demonstrate the capacity of the government to look after the people. Highly trained Colombian National Police (CNP) *Jungla* units accompany the military in order to make arrests and secure evidence. In Phase 2, CNP *Carabinero* units are brought in the area to reestablish law and order. They build a fortified police station in case of a guerrilla counterattack and to actively establish their presence. In Phase 3, additional assets, primarily public services, are added in order to consolidate the government control of the area. Once an area is secured, the Army moves the operation to another FARC-controlled sector. Piece by piece the government retakes the FARC-controlled areas. Throughout all phases, the Colombian military uses psychological operations. At the tactical level, each division and brigade has a *Groupo Especial de Operaciónes Sicológicas* (GEOS—Psychological Operations Special Group) detachment assigned.[18]

Plan Colombia expired at the end of 2005. The successes achieved by the plan were such that the U.S. Congress has continued funding at essentially the same level. The flow of funds was simply moved through the Andean Counterdrug Initiative (ACI) that attacks narcotics operations in countries of the Andean ridge where coca growing is prevalent. Colombia receives the largest share of the ACI funding.[19] A unique exercise in international cooperation and coordination, *Plan Colombia* and *Plan Patriota* are fundamental parts of the complex relationship between the United States and Colombia.

The FARC built extensively throughout the despeje *(sometimes called "FARClandia" by the Special Forces). This is a house used by one of the higher FARC leaders.*

******Pseudonyms have been used for all military personnel with a rank lower than lieutenant colonel.*

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U.S. Forces:

The Major Command Structure

by Kenneth Finlayson

**Pseudonyms have been used for all military personnel with a rank lower than lieutenant colonel.*

No nation in Latin America receives more attention from the United States military as does Colombia. The U.S. Army has a history of involvement extending back to the 1950s including Brigadier General William P. Yarborough's visit in 1962. Yarborough's recommendation for training and advising the Colombian military, included in his *Plan Lazo*, continues to be reflected in the U.S. missions and forces that are present in the country. This is most notably the case for the special operations forces (SOF) who have a long-standing advising and training mission with Colombian forces. This article will introduce the major American military commands which are focused on the mission in Colombia from the U.S. Southern Command at the theater level to the 7th Special Forces Group.

The U.S. Southern Command (SOUTHCOM) is one of the nine unified combatant commands within the U.S. Department of Defense. A four-star command, SOUTHCOM's area of responsibility (AOR) encompasses Central and South America, the Caribbean (except U.S. possessions, territories and commonwealths), Cuba, and the Bahamas and the territorial waters of each.[1] SOUTHCOM also ensures the defense of the Panama Canal and canal area. As a combatant command, SOUTHCOM is responsible for contingency planning, operations, and security cooperation within the AOR. All SOUTHCOM forces are in theater.

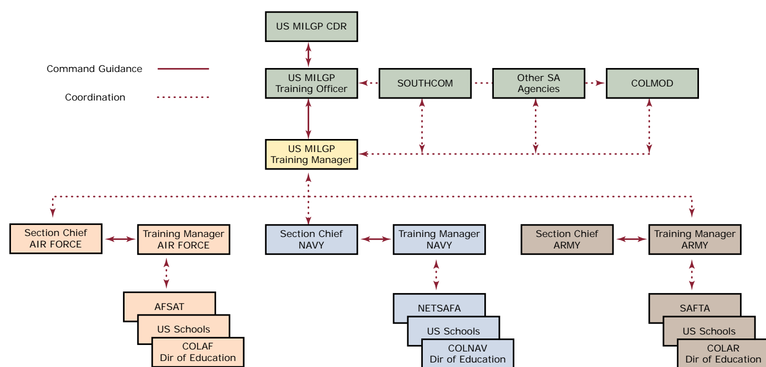
SOUTHCOM shoulder patch

Navy Admiral James G. Stavridis, the commander of SOUTHCOM, took command on 20 October 2006, at the headquarters in Miami, Florida. He commands 1,200 military and civilian personnel from the Army, Navy, Marine Corps, Air Force, Coast Guard, and several other federal agencies.[2] SOUTHCOM is organized into a headquarters, staff directorates, component commands, and military groups throughout the AOR. The headquarters relocated to Miami in 1997 from Panama, where SOUTHCOM and its predecessor, the Army's Caribbean Command, had been headquartered since 1904. SOUTHCOM's mission has remained constant over the years, with security assistance traditionally being a primary focus.

Admiral James R. Stavridis

The SOUTHCOM mission is to conduct military operations and promote security cooperation to achieve U.S. strategic objectives.[3] To accomplish this, the services provide component commands; a Joint Special Operations Component (Special Operations Command South); two Joint Task Forces, JTF-Bravo in Honduras and JTF-GTMO (Git-mo) in Guantanamo, Cuba; one Joint Interagency Task Force; and security assistance offices in virtually every nation in the AOR.[4] (Security assistance offices in the Military Groups handle Foreign Military Sales and coordinate the International Military Education and Training programs).[5] The SOUTHCOM mission statement delineates the strategic mission goals. Only Colombia is singled out among the other nations in the AOR as important enough to warrant a specific goal: "Support the Colombian government's efforts to defeat terrorists, reduce drug trade, and gain control of Colombian territory, while adhering to the international human rights norms and the rule of law."[6] In Colombia, SOUTHCOM is represented by the Military Group (MILGP), located at the U.S. Embassy in Bogotá.

SOUTHCOM Area of Responsibility



U.S. Military Group–Colombia Organizational Chart

A fixture at U.S. embassies around the world, the Military Group is the primary liaison between the Department of Defense and the host nation. In keeping with the importance of the Colombian mission to the U.S. national strategy, the MILGP at the embassy in Bogotá is a robust joint organization. Commanded by Army Colonel Kevin D. Saderup, the primary mission of the MILGP in Colombia is to synchronize missions and requirements, gather intelligence, and coordinate the military operations involving U.S. personnel in Colombia.[7] Reporting to the SOUTHCOM commander, the MILGP commander controls a number of assets to assist the Colombians as well as U.S. forces operating in the country. He serves as the primary military advisor to the U.S. ambassador and his staff and is the central coordinating agency for military operations. An especially important mission is the implementation of the force protection plan for U.S. forces in country. The prevalence of kidnapping by the Colombian illegally-armed groups and the negative ramifications that the kidnapping of an American soldier make this a constant intelligence and monitoring mission for the MILGP.

Key supporting elements in the MILGP for all these missions are the Tactical Analysis Team, the PYSOP Support Element, and the Joint Planning and Assistance Team (JPAT). These elements help the Colombians with planning, intelligence gathering, and operational analysis to enhance the ability of the Colombians to conduct their military operations. The MILGP has oversight responsibility for all U.S. military units and personnel in country and coordinates directly with the different unit headquarters to plan and conduct operations in Colombia. In the case of Army SOF, that headquarters is Special Operations Command South (SOCSOUTH).

SOCSOUTH is located at Homestead Air Reserve Base, south of Miami, Florida. Originally based at Quarry Heights, Panama, the headquarters moved to the U.S. Naval Station, Roosevelt Roads, Puerto Rico, in 2000, and then relocated to its current home in Florida in 2003. Commanded by Brigadier General Charles T. Cleveland, SOCSOUTH is a subordinate unified command of SOUTHCOM and is the theater special operations functional component.

SOCSOUTH shoulder patch

SOCSOUTH is responsible for all SOF operating in the SOUTHCOM AOR. This includes Naval Special Warfare units, the U.S. Army 75th Ranger Regiment, U.S. Army Special Forces, Civil Affairs and Psychological Operations, the 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment, and U.S. Air Force Special Operations forces.[8] These units provide the forces that SOCSOUTH uses to accomplish its mission.

The SOCSOUTH mission is to "plan, prepare for and when directed, conduct special operations in support of Commander, U.S. Southern Command strategies, plans, and operations."[9] In the case of Colombia, the size and complexity of the mission dictates special attention to forces deployed. Congressionally mandated force "caps" (ceilings) on military and civilian contract personnel were put in place in 2000 as part of the support to *Plan Colombia* as a method of controlling the number of U.S. forces in country. In 2002, Congress granted "expanded authority" to use funds earmarked for counternarcotics operations for a unified campaign fighting both drug trafficking and terrorist organizations in Colombia. Originally the force "cap" was 400 personnel; 200 military and 200 civilian contractors. In fiscal year 2005, the National Defense Authorization Act amended the law to double the size of the force "cap" to 800, equally divided between military personnel and civilian contractors.[10] This does not include foreign national contractors or personnel stationed at the U.S. Embassy and the MILGP.

As described by BG Cleveland, "Colombia is an economy of force mission. We have to make the most of the troops deployed. For the Special Forces guys, this means 'train the trainer.'"[11] U.S. Army Special Forces (SF) soldiers of the 7th Special Forces Group (SFG) from Fort Bragg, North Carolina, have long conducted regular deployments to Colombia to work with SOF units and the Colombian National Police. By training the instructor cadre of these organizations, the Special Forces "footprint" is expanded beyond what the numbers of troops deployed could effect by just training Colombian soldiers and police. SOCSOUTH's commitment to the mission in Colombia is unique in that the command has a small forward-deployed staff element in country to assist with the execution of the mission. SOCSOUTH averages seventy-five SOF deployments a year with an average of fifteen missions being conducted in seven countries each day.[12]

Brigadier General Charles T. Cleveland

Unique among the countries of Latin America, SOCSOUTH has a forward element colocated with the MILGP in Bogotá, a reflection of the importance and scope of the mission in Colombia. This element serves as an extension of the headquarters in order to expedite the coordination and support required to maintain the forces in country. Colombia is one of the most critical SOCSOUTH missions and all service SOF units play a part in the SOCSOUTH

SPECIAL OPERATIONS COMMAND SOUTH (SOCSOUTH)

SOCSOUTH is a subordinate unified command of U.S. Southern Command and serves as the functional component for special operations throughout the theater. SOCSOUTH is responsible for all Special Operations Forces (SOF) in the theater to include: Naval Special Warfare, Ranger Regiment, Army Special Forces, Special Operations Aviation Regiment, U.S. Air Force Special Operations, Civil Affairs and Psychological Operations forces. SOCSOUTH is a joint headquarters that manages more than 75 SOF deployments per year with an average of 15 missions in 7 countries on a daily basis from its HQ at Homestead Air Reserve Base. The command is composed of three permanently assigned operational units that are based in other locations in the southeastern U.S.

Mission: SOCSOUTH plans, prepares for, and when directed, conducts special operations in support of Commander, U.S. Southern Command (USSOUTHCOM), strategies, plans, and operations.

SOCSOUTH Core Tasks

Command and control Special Operations throughout the U.S. Southern Command area of responsibility.

Establish and operate a Joint Special Operations Task Force.

Provide the theater crisis response force.

SOCSOUTH pamphlet

operations there. The forces most commonly deployed into Colombia are the Army Special Forces soldiers of the 7th SFG.

One of the oldest of the Army Special Forces Groups, the 7th SFG was activated on 20 May 1960. Built from the ranks of the 77th SFG at Fort Bragg, members of the 7th SFG saw action in Vietnam in the early 1960s. With the deactivation of the 8th SFG, the 7th SFG became the group focused on Latin America, a role that it has continued to perform. Headquartered at Fort Bragg, the four battalions (three line battalions and the Group Support Battal-

77th SFG Distinctive Unit Insignia

8th SFG beret flash

7th SFG beret flash

Members of the 77th Special Forces Group in Training at Onslow Beach, North Carolina, 1953.

ion) of the 7th SFG deploy throughout the SOUTHCOM AOR in support of a wide variety of missions. And in the post-9/11 era of the Global War on Terrorism, the 7th SFG has joined other Army Special Forces groups in regular rotations to the U.S. Central Command theater. These rotations have significantly affected the size and scope of the unit deployments to the SOUTHCOM area.

Colonel Edward M. Reeder, 7th SFG commander, describes the "value-added" of the extensive engagement of the Group in Colombia. "The following represents the 7th SFG(A) benefits from the myriad operations in Colombia: increased foreign internal defense skill sets, better understanding of counter-narcoterrorist operations, executing complex and dynamic command and control, increased language skills with complete immersion with the partnered nation, and interacting with the U.S. Country Team and the most senior ranking officials from the Government of Colombia, are just some of the benefits of our ongoing efforts in Colombia."[13]

Colonel Edward M. Reeder

In terms of the magnitude of the mission, Colombia is the largest and most complex in which the 7th SFG is involved. The detailed planning and coordination for deployments, the proper allocation of various funding sources, and the shipment of ammunition and equipment via Air Force aircraft require a major on-going staff effort on the part of the group. In the 7th SFG S-3 (Operations), Chief Warrant Officer 4 Solomon Delaney* provides the "institutional knowledge" and expertise to handle the Colombia mission. Widely known and respected in the SOUTHCOM AOR, Delaney is the key planner who puts the teams on the ground and supports

The 7th Special Forces Group has a long history of training with the Colombian Army. Special Forces troops conducting marksmanship training on the range at Tolemaida.

them in Colombia.

In the normal deployment of Special Forces ODAs (operational detachment alpha) into the different countries in theater, the mission dictates the size of the command and control and support forces in country. In many cases, the ODAs are the only elements in the country and the teams perform all the coordination and support operations through the MILGP at the embassy. The magnitude and importance of the Colombian mission, particularly in the post-9/11 "expanded authority" period, dictated the deployment of a command and control headquarters for the multi-team mission. This resulted in the 7th SFG establishing a forward operating base (FOB) from one of the three Special Forces battalions in Bogotá or, as has lately occurred due to deployment requirements, a Special Forces company configured as an advanced operating base (AOB). The complexities of the support requirements and the emphasis on force protection in Colombia are beyond the capabilities of the ODAs to manage without the additional resources provided by the AOB or FOB.

Lancero Lane leads into the 7th Special Forces Group area on Fort Bragg, North Carolina. Lanceros, akin to the U.S. Army Rangers, are one of the units trained by the 7th Group.

Colonel Reeder delineated the Colombia mission as: "The 7th SFG(A) will continue to focus efforts with our Colombian counterparts in the struggle against narcoterrorists and the Global War on Terror. Our commitment will remain steadfast and our holistic approach to operations and intelligence fusion with the Colombian Armed Forces and National Police will become stronger in the upcoming year. Our joint efforts with Colombia to secure its borders from illicit drug trade and narcoterrorists will continue to directly support the strategic goals and vision of the Commander, SOUTHCOM and the Command, SOCSOUTH to improve Colombia's ability to find, fix and finish narcoterrorism."[14]

Colombia is proving to be a valuable training ground for SOF operations in the GWOT. "The 7th Group is helping pioneer ways in which the U.S. government is going to have to fight the long war in places beyond Iraq and Afghanistan," said Reeder.[15]

For more than fifty years, the U.S. military has played an active role in advising, assisting, and training the Colombian defense forces. Within the SOUTHCOM AOR, Colombia has dominated the U.S. strategy and received a significant share of the resources. The impact of the mission in Colombia is felt at every level of command, from the theater to the ODA.

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"Conducting the Orchestra:"

AOB 740 in Colombia

by Kenneth Finlayson

**Pseudonyms have been used for all military personnel with a rank lower than lieutenant colonel.*

It is not uncommon for a single twelve-man Special Forces operational detachment alpha (ODA) to be the sole unit deployed for an advisory and training mission overseas. The team coordinates its activities through the U.S. Military Group (MILGP) who oversees all U.S. military forces in country. The size and complexity of the mission in Colombia is beyond the capability of a single team. A Special Forces (SF) company is deployed to Colombia to control the multi-team missions and provide the interface with the MILGP, Special Operations Command South (SOCSOUTH), the State Department's Narcotics Affairs Section (NAS), and the Colombian Army's Special Operations units. This article will examine the command and control role of A Company, 2nd Battalion, 7th Special Forces Group (SFG) during its deployment to Colombia in 2006. Since 2004, the mission of U.S. Special Forces units in Colombia has been adjusted to accommodate the change from a solely counter-narcotics mission to one that is focused on counter-narcoterrorism training for the national police and the Colombian army.

The result of this "expanded authority" for U.S. forces in Colombia has been greater attention to enhancing the Colombian security forces' ability to "find, fix, and finish" narco-terrorists in support of the Colombian counter narco-terrorist strategy.[1] In the case of A Company, 2/7 SFG, this translated into a mission to train, advise, and assist both the Colombian Special Operations Forces (SOF) and the Colombian National Police (CNP) during its rotation from July to October 2006. A Company's mission involved working with the BACOA (*Batallón Comando*) and the *Lanceros* (*Agrupación Lanceros*) at the Army training base at Tolemaida, the Colombian Army Special Forces Brigade at Larandia (and six outsites), and with the CNP's *Carabineros* and *Junglas* at the Gabriel Gonzalez Police Training School at Espinal.[2] The Special Forces company (-) organized for the deployment as an advanced operating base (AOB). The multiple training locations dictated by the mission stretched the unit's capabilities to the maximum.

Normally, the mission in Colombia would be directed by a Special Forces battalion headquarters. The battalion staff would function in its doctrinal role as a forward operating base (FOB) providing command and control of AOB(s) operating at the various locations. However, the 7th SFG's Global War on Terrorism requirements precluded deployment of the 2nd Battalion headquarters

Map of Colombia highlighting training sites.

Expanded Authority

After 11 September 2001, Congress passed House Resolution 4775, legislation specifically designed to fund operations in Colombia that targeted the narco-terrorist factions. This "expanded authority," was codified by National Security Presidential Directive 18 in November 2002.[1] Under expanded authority, the U.S. military was allowed greater latitude for coordination with the Colombian military, including the sharing of intelligence and coordination of Psychological Operations specifically targeting terrorist organizations. The expanded authority allowed Special Forces soldiers working with the Colombians to actively assist the Colombian government in fighting the counter-narcoterrorists, whereas prior to the directive, the Special Forces were limited to counter-drug operations.[2]

HR 4775: 2002 Supplemental Appropriations Act for Further Recovery From and Response To Terrorist Attacks on the United States (Enrolled as Agreed to or Passed by Both House and Senate)

> *Chapter 3, Department of Defense; SEC. 305. (a)(1) In fiscal year 2002, funds available to the Department of Defense for assistance to the Government of Colombia shall be available to support a unified campaign against narcotics trafficking, against activities by organizations designated as terrorist organizations such as the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), the National Liberation Army (ELN), and the United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia (AUC), and to take actions to protect human health and welfare in emergency circumstances, including undertaking rescue operations.*[3]

1 National Security Presidential Directive 18 in November 2002 is classified Secret, copy, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.

2 Captain Hector Baca-Ibarra*, 1st Psychological Operations Battalion, interview by Lieutenant Colonel Robert W. Jones Jr., 20 November 2004, Raleigh, NC, digital recording, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.

3 HR 4775, 2002 Supplemental Appropriations Act for Further Recovery From and Response To Terrorist Attacks on the United States (Enrolled as Agreed to or Passed by Both House and Senate), http://thomas.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/F?c107:1:./temp/~c107XPJtKf:e42615:.

Lanceros *preparing for demolitions training at Tolemaida.*

in this role. The mission required the AOB to perform duties normally handled by the battalion staff. To accomplish this mission, the AOB commander, Major John H. Norman*, augmented the AOB operations center with ODA 744 to run around-the-clock operations and task organized his other teams, ODAs 741, 745, and 746, as well as one attached team, ODA 753, to cover the training requirements at three major training locations and several outsites.[3] A second attached team, ODA 723, was supported by the AOB while working on a sensitive SOCSOUTH mission. The AOB was also supporting an ODA in Paraguay performing a Joint/Combined Exchange Training mission (JCET), an ODA in Chile on a Humanitarian Demining Assistance mission, and a portion of one ODA (a "split team") in Ecuador on a JCET. In addition, ODA 725 from AOB 730 was conducting a JCET in Panama and reported to AOB 740.[4] The AOB provided command and control for these ODAs during their missions and direct support to the ODAs in Colombia.

Captain Roberto Gómez*, the ODA 744 team leader serving as the operations center director, described the AOB mission: "It is to provide support to the ODAs in the outstations. We handle all their support requests and prepare the standard SITREP [situation report], the 'commander's eyes' report each day."[5] Supporting the requirements from the teams occupies the night-shift personnel in the AOB. The AOB operations center had to maintain 100 percent accountability and communications with the dispersed elements of the company.

The communications network established by the AOB was wide ranging. It included continuous communications with all ODA elements at the outstations, with the teams in Paraguay, Chile, and Panama, the 7th Group Headquarters at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, and SOCSOUTH in Florida. This included both voice communications and digital connectivity. Operations in Colombia were run using a web-based system that provided digital links to all the sites and the AOB much as they do in Afghanistan and Iraq. The high threat environment in Colombia required 100 percent accountability of U.S. personnel at all times and constant communications with all teams. The AOB also kept track of all U.S. military personnel temporarily in country, such as a team of Marines on a site survey for an upcoming deployment and the crew of an Air Force MC-130 stranded in Bogotá awaiting a spare part.[6]

Banner erected by the cadre in the training area of the Special Forces Brigade at Larandia—a common practice in Colombia.

Carabineros in training at the National Police training area near Espinal.

Ammunition for the ODAs in the outlying sites was stored and maintained by ODA 746 at the Ammunition Supply Point at Tolemaida.

While in country, these personnel maintained regular contact with the AOB.

The transportation of supplies to support the outlying teams was done primarily by air. This mission received a major portion of the AOB's attention. Ammunition and supplies brought into Colombia were required to clear customs. Sergeant First Class Soren A. Sjogren*, the S-3 Air (aviation operations), met all the aircraft, dealt with the Colombian customs personnel, and prepared the extensive paperwork required. Properly clearing the ammunition and supplies into country was the first step in supporting the teams. Getting it into the hands of the users was the second.

Colombia is a nation the size of Texas and California combined and vast tracts of the country are roadless. In many areas, the threat posed by the narco-terrorists reduces the use of available roads and that usage is restricted to daylight hours. This places a premium on air transportation for personnel and supply. A precisely synchronized "air bridge" of U.S. Air Force transport aircraft and contract air carried the bulk of the supplies required—most notably ammunition. Coordinated well before the deployment by Chief Warrant Officer 4 Solomon Delaney* of the 7th SFG S-3, the maintenance of this resupply pipeline required a constant dialogue between the AOB and the 7th SFG headquarters at Fort Bragg, as well as with the teams at the outsites and in Paraguay, Chile, and Panama. Ammunition had to be stored, handled, issued, and accounted for daily. Because of the many different types of ammunition involved, two soldiers from the AOB were dedicated to the mission of running the ammunition supply point (ASP) in Tolemaida.

Staff Sergeant Allan Stillman* was attached to AOB 740 from ODA 746 to serve as an ammunition specialist at the U.S. ASP at the Tolemaida training base. Here, he worked with ODA 745. He arrived in Tolemaida with the team on 12 July 2006, aboard a U.S. Air Force C-17 that delivered twelve pallets of ammunition to be used by the U.S. and Colombian forces.[7] Assisted by Sergeant Donald Revere*, a wheeled-vehicle mechanic and the forklift driver who moved the ammunition, Stillman inventoried the ammo, separated it by type, and stored it in the CONEXes that constituted the ASP. All three of the major U.S. training sites in Colombia were supplied from the ASP. On occasion, Stillman and Revere delivered ammunition to the ODA at Larandia using contract fixed wing airlift coordinated by the AOB.[8]

For Revere, when he was not driving "Atlas," the rough-terrain forklift that was used at the ASP, he was the primary "fleet" mechanic at Tolemaida servicing a High Mobility Multi-Purpose Wheeled Vehicle (HUMMWV), a John Deere six-wheeled "Gator," and several contract pickup trucks.[9] Revere arranged for gasoline with Colombian base operations personnel at Tolemaida, negotiated local purchase of necessary spare parts, and assisted the ODA members during the training.[10] Periodically, Revere and Stillman returned to the AOB in Bogotá in conjunction with the delivery of ammunition and coordinated new requirements. The ammunition requirement shows how the scope of the AOB mission extended beyond routine administrative and logistics tasks.

A major function of the AOB S-4 (logistics) personnel was establishing and monitoring contracts. Virtually every aspect of the operations in Colombia depended to some degree on contract support. Housing the personnel in Bogotá, transportation in the city and out to the unit sites, cell phones for all personnel, and office equipment for use in the AOB were only some of the support requirements covered by contracts. Contracts were initiated through the Embassy and had to be cleared through the Embassy security personnel, but the burden fell to the AOB to make sure the contracts were renewed on time and the proper services provided. A continuous focus for the AOB was the need to practice force protection procedures. U.S. personnel in Colombia essentially live and work in an "armed camp."

U.S. Air Force C-17 aircraft provided a substantial portion of the airlift to supply the operations in Colombia.

For the U.S. troops in Colombia, force protection is a

"Atlas," the rough-terrain forklift, provided the ammunition handling capability at the ASP in Tolemaida.

vital and on-going operation. Colombia is the number one nation in the world for kidnapping. The illegally-armed groups practice this on a huge scale to fund their operations. Three American contractors working in Colombia were kidnapped following the crash of their light plane in February 2003, and are still in captivity. The Special Forces elements take extensive precautions to preclude the possibility of their soldiers being kidnapped. Policies such as no alcohol consumption in country, use of the "two-man rule" for any movement, the employment of armored vans for transportation, and the careful inspection and frequent changing of contract living quarters are just some of the precautions necessary in Colombia. Every individual traveling within Bogotá and to the outstations is required to follow a detailed travel plan and check in with the AOB according to a fixed schedule. Travelers carry a "skat bag" with communications and personal protection equipment should the need arise to escape a kidnapping attempt. Every member rehearses the escape and evasion plan as part of this preparation. All the company personnel in country practice marksmanship training twice a week and every member rehearses the procedures for a medical evacuation or to execute a quick reaction force (QRF) mission to rescue an American.[11] ODA 746 was the first choice for a QRF by virtue of its location near the airfield in Tolemaida. The force protection threat is determined by the MILGP and the Embassy security personnel and the AOB conforms to the established threat level.

First Lieutenant Brandon Gorham* commanded the Military Intelligence Detachment supporting the AOB. His primary mission was running the force protection program of the AOB in Bogotá and disseminating the necessary intelligence to the teams at the outlying sites so that they could exercise proper precautions. To accomplish this, he had a desk in the Embassy Intelligence Fusion Center to coordinate the intelligence collection process. "I deal with the MILGP, the NAS [Narcotics Affairs Section], the DAO [Defense Attaché Office] and everyone else I can talk to."[12] Using both U.S. and Colombian intelligence gathering assets Gorham provided the commander a very complete intelligence picture. Like the rest of the soldiers manning the AOB, to be effective he had to get away from the "hands-on" aspects of intelligence collection and function as a staff officer supporting the teams in the field.

Master Sergeant Raymond E. Ruíz*, who was responsible for running the operations center night shift, commented that the AOB "functioned in the role of coordinator. We do what we can to take the burden off the teams. The ODAs feel the real vibrations when they are stretched."[13] In addition to handling the requirements for aviation support, ammunition, and equipment for the teams in the field, the AOB performed numerous "housekeeping" details. A steady stream of visitors from the 7th SFG, SOCSOUTH, and SOUTHCOM meant picking up VIPs at the Bogotá International Airport, bringing visitors through customs, arranging lodging and providing transportation, as well as the constant requirements associated with force protection. It was the versatility of the troops manning the AOB that made this possible.

"You have to learn to conduct the orchestra, not play the instruments." That was the Battle Captain's Creed, in the words of Master Sergeant Keith Jordan* who aptly described the role of the U.S. Army Special Operations personnel at AOB 740 in Colombia.[14] When the AOB handed off the mission to AOB 730 of C Company, 1st Battalion, 7th SFG, it had gained valuable experience running a complex and sensitive mission. It was excellent preparation for upcoming deployments in the Global War on Terrorism.

AOB 730 inherited the operations and support requirements, contracting mission, and extensive communications network from AOB 740. AOB 730's mission placed an emphasis on training and advising the *Centro de Reentrenamiento Tactico Del Ejército* (CERTE, "Sir-Tay"), the instructor cadre of the Colombian Army's Non-Commissioned Officers Academy.[15] In addition to the main operation at Tolemaida, AOB 730 supported six outstations with instructor/trainers, as well as teams in Paraguay, Ecuador, and Peru.[16] Colonel Edward M. Reeder Jr., the commander of the 7th SFG, described the mission of the Group in Colombia in this manner: "The 7th Special Forces Group's commitment to the Colombian counter-narco-terrorist mission represents an unparalleled investment with the SOUTHCOM theater of operation, which has been a critical part of the Global War on Terror. Over the past two decades, the 7th SFG(A) has been exceptionally successful in Colombia, assisting in the security and safety of our Partner Nation through our charter of training, assisting, and advising the Colombian Army and National Police. This progress can be measured directly by the dramatically improved stability of Colombia. The Colombian security picture today stands in stark contrast of the difficult and violent days of years past."[17] For the Special Forces soldiers on the ODAs, advising, assisting, and training the Colombian forces is the essence of their mission. For those serving in the AOBs, the vital mission in Colombia entails diplomatic liaison and constant coordination to enhance Colombia's

capacity to succeed in the fight against narco-terrorism while providing the command and control of the units for SOCSOUTH.

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“Who taught these guys to shoot like Chuck Norris?”

ODA 746 in Tolemaida

by Robert W. Jones Jr.

**Pseudonyms have been used for all military personnel with a rank lower than lieutenant colonel.*

NUMEROUS U.S. Special Forces (SF) teams have deployed to Colombia over the years to train Colombian Army elements at the sprawling base of Tolemaida. It was now time for Operational Detachment A 746. The element was stood up as the sixth operational detachment alpha (ODA) of A Company, 2nd Battalion, 7th Special Forces Group (2/7th SFG) in mid-October 2005. Besides being the newest ODA, 746 was also a “young” team. It was made up of four experienced Special Forces non-commissioned officers (NCOs), a new ODA commander, and six recent graduates of the Special Forces qualification course who had entered the Army through the “18X program.” These newcomers to Special Forces joined the 7th SFG in late October and early November 2005. During the first nine months, Red Cycle (support) interrupted team training. This article discusses the first overseas deployment for ODA 746. It was also the first SF deployment for most of the team members.[1]

The training mission was typical for Special Forces, but it was to be Phase II training. The ODA was to “train the trainer” to enable Colombians to instruct and evaluate their own soldiers in advanced infantry tactics and techniques. ODA 746 was assigned two mission sets: train selected soldiers of the Special Forces Brigade (*Brigada de Fuerzas Especiales*—BRFER) and the Commando Battalion (*Batallón de Comando Ambroseo Almaeda*—BACOA) in advanced infantry tactics, advanced marksmanship skills, and airmobile operations. While both units are part of the Colombian special forces, they are assigned to different commands; the Special Forces Brigade is part of the *Fuerza de Despequé Rápido* (FUDRA, the rapid deployment force) and is a national-level force controlled by Colombian Army Headquarters. The second unit, the BACOA, is the Colombian special forces unit assigned to the COESE (*Comando de Operaciónes Especiales Ejército*). The COESE is the Colombian equivalent of a miniatur-

18X

THE Special Forces Initial Accessions Program, better known as the 18X program, began in 2001 as an attempt to increase Special Forces recruitment. The 18X program allows a civilian “off the street” to join the Army with the intention of becoming a Special Forces soldier after two years of training. Prior to the establishment of the 18X program, soldiers, usually with two to four years of experience, would attend Phase 1, the Special Forces Assessment and Selection (SFAS) portion, the first hurdle to Special Forces qualification. The 18X recruit attends Infantry One Station Unit Training and airborne school at Fort Benning, Georgia. Once his training at Fort Benning is complete, the soldier travels to Fort Bragg to attend SFAS and if successful begins the Special Forces Qualification Course. Many 18X are not “off the street” civilians without a military background, but instead are prior service soldiers. They left the military after completing an enlistment and rejoined the Army specifically to be Special Forces and to serve their country.[1]

1 Command Sergeant Major Michael S. Breasseale, “The 18X Program: Ensuring the Future Health of Special Forces,” *Special Warfare*, May 2004, 28–31.

7th Special Forces Group beret flash

ODA 746 logo

Colombian SF Brigade insignia

BACOA symbol

ized U.S. Army Special Operations Command.[3]

Training foreign soldiers is always challenging. It is no different in Colombia. During the "train the trainer" classes, the Special Forces soldiers had to accept that their instructor students could be pulled out unexpectedly because their unit was going into combat. During the first week of training, five medics left training to rejoin their deploying units.[4] The Colombian "battle rhythm" is typically ninety days in the field conducting security operations, followed by thirty days in garrison. During the garrison phase, the soldiers take leave and receive training. The ODA 746 mission in Colombia eventually evolved into assisting the Colombian instructors with sustainment training because of the operational tempo.[5]

The optimal training schedule prepared at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, was quickly adjusted when faced with reality at Tolemaida. Prior to beginning advanced marksmanship training, one of the first tasks was to assess the shooting skills of the students. The medics conducted both eye and ear screening for the Colombians; if they could not see the target, getting on the range was pointless. The Special Forces cadre then began with a simple "stress test" of shooting skills. It started with a short run that ended at the firing range. Then, the soldiers had to first engage several targets through a doorway before moving through the door into an open area to engage multiple targets. The stress test bypassed the usual antiseptic firing range that the soldiers had grown accustomed to and made the shooting realistic. During the stress test, it became evident that many of the Colombian soldiers had picked up bad habits, prompting one Special Forces NCO to ask, "Who taught these guys to shoot like Chuck Norris?" He meant "Hollywood" style—spraying the rounds from the hip, instead of aimed shots. These bad habits had to be corrected immediately.[6]

Shooting dominated the ODA 746 effort in Tolemaida. Together the team designed and conducted a basic shooting course for the Colombian special forces units. Within a few days, the Colombians, practicing good shooting techniques, were consistently hitting designated targets with well-aimed shots. The experience gained from the American instructors would be multiplied when the Colombian sergeants returned to their units to teach their soldiers these marksmanship skills.

One of the critical things that the Special Forces bring to training is more ammunition, and in large quantities.

Tolemaida

TOLEMAIDA is located about seventy kilometers southwest of Bogotá near the resort town of Melgar. Tolemaida is a large sprawling training base, sometimes called the "Fort Benning" of the Colombian Army. The base is home to infantry training, home of the Colombian Army *Lancero* (1955) and Airborne (1964) schools, and the Army's major engineer unit. The Army base is colocated with the Colombian Air Force *"Capitán Teniente Coronel Luis Francisco Pinto Parra"* airbase and home of the Combat Air Command No 4 *(Comando Aereo De Combate No 4)*. U.S. Special Forces have had a continuous training presence in Tolemaida for the past ten years.

The Lancero *sign at Tolemaida.*

The Lancero *memorial statue in Tolemaida.*

An ODA 746 sergeant takes a BACOA Comando *through the shooting course. To their rear another Colombian with an American shoot through a window facade.*

View of the firing line. Colombians from the BACOA are armed with M-4 rifles.

The Colombian instructor/students shot more in a week than they typically did in a year. Ammunition management was critical to the advanced marksmanship training. An additional NCO, Staff Sergeant Allan Stillman*, a weapons sergeant (18B) from ODA 744, was attached to ODA 746 at Tolemaida specifically to manage the ammunition and insure accountability safeguards were in place. This responsibility had to be learned during the deployment. Managing large amounts of ammunition for units training in different parts of the country is not something a brand new 18B normally does. At Tolemaida, Stillman had a double management challenge—the ammunition used by the Colombians and the training ammunition for the U.S. Special Forces teams while deployed.[7]

Another attachment to the ODA was a mechanic, Sergeant Donald Revere*, from the battalion support company, 2nd Battalion, 7th SFG. Although the light-wheel vehicle mechanic (military occupation specialty 63B) was a veteran of two Afghanistan and one Colombia deployments, his duties were not limited to repairing the vehicles at Tolemaida. Being bilingual, Revere assisted several of the new Special Forces sergeants with classes. He also operated the forklift supporting Stillman with the ammunition. Revere's multiple talents proved invaluable at Tolemaida.[8]

For the 18Xs on their first deployment overseas, Tolemaida was a good environment in which to practice newly acquired skills and learn from the Colombians. Sergeant Douglas Franks* had enlisted right after high school graduation. The Idahoan graduated from the "Q" Course on 28 October 2005, as a Special Forces engineer (18C). Once assigned to the 7th SFG, he was cross-trained at the Special Warfare Center and School as a communications sergeant (18E) because there was a shortage of that specialty in the 7th Group. At Tolemaida, Franks worked communications and helped teach demolitions to the Colombians. "The Colombians were eager to learn, and we [the Americans] would show up early for scheduled training, not just to prepare, but to practice our Spanish," said Franks. He discovered that his Spanish basic language training had provided just that, the basics. He went to work identifying words and phrases needed to instruct the Colombians. His tactics, weapons, and demolitions dictionary quickly grew to over fifteen pages as training progressed.[9]

The demolitions training followed the crawl-walk-run system. Training began with a series of practice "dirt shots," literally blowing holes in the ground. Then, the Special Forces engineers taught wood, followed by steel cutting techniques. The training culminated in an exercise to clear a helicopter landing zone. This entailed cutting down several trees with explosives. Members of ODA 746 also prepared other specialty courses for the Colombians.[10]

One of the sub-tasks assigned to ODA 746 was to conduct sniper training. This was given to the weapons sergeants, Staff Sergeant Israel Estévez* and Staff Sergeant Daniel Cazadores*, both on their first Special

ODA 746 members and Colombians prepare demolition charges during training.

A Colombian special forces soldier sets charges on a tree. One challenge is to use just enough to clear the tree and not waste explosives.

After preparing and setting the charges, an SF sergeant oversees a Colombian soldier as they prepare to detonate the explosives.

BACOA snipers and Americans firing at the sniper range. The M40 sniper system is clearly visible.

ODA 746 soldiers fire the .50 caliber M82 Barrett sniper rifle.

BACOA snipers and Americans firing the M40 sniper system at the Tolemaida range.

Forces deployment. As the primary instructor, Estévez had two weeks to train the Colombian snipers. The range area provided by the Colombians enabled shots up to 800 meters, a good test for most snipers. Estévez prepared his first class before leaving Fort Bragg, based on the BACOA sniper teams having the American M40 sniper system (a 7.62 caliber Remington 700 rifle with scope). At the end of the two weeks, the Americans introduced the Colombians to the .50 caliber Barrett sniper system.[11] It was also an opportunity for the other ODA members to train with the weapons system. But, shooting was not the only training ODA 746 planned.[12]

The helicopter is key to quickly deploy forces in Colombia. The Colombians' major method of infiltration is by rappelling from a helicopter into small landing zones cut out of the jungle. ODA 746 introduced them to "Fast Roping" infiltration. The "Fast Rope" is a single thick rope that allows multiple soldiers to descend from a helicopter rapidly. This technique allows a Black Hawk helicopter load of soldiers to get on the ground in seconds rather than the several minutes via rappelling. While inexperienced in terms of their number of deployments, the ODA members were well trained in their various tasks.

Integrated into the training for the Colombians were team prepara-

Standard rappelling technique. This takes longer and exposes both the helicopter and the soldiers to enemy fire.

Practicing Fast Rope insertion using the Lancero *school tower.*

Soldiers descending on Fast Ropes. Multiple soldiers can descend on the same rope, unlike rappelling where only one per line can infiltrate.

Two members of ODA 746 ham it up for the camera during medical cross-training. One SF soldier needs to practice more often.

tions for a future deployment to Afghanistan. The ODA members planned and executed training to strengthen individual and team skills. The detachment commander, team sergeant, and operations sergeant designed the training program, emphasizing physical fitness and shooting as the baseline, knowing both were essential in Afghanistan. Thus, the classes the Special Forces soldiers presented to the Colombians reinforced specialties and provided cross-training to the others.

ODA 746 had only one soldier who had previously deployed to Colombia—an experienced operations sergeant, Sergeant First Class Edward Bennett*. It was his fifth deployment to Colombia dating back to 1996. After many years in the 7th SFG and a three year tour at the Special Warfare Center and School, Bennett shared two observations on the mission. First, the quality of the Colombian soldiers had improved over time. The majority of them were now "professional soldiers" who had already served their two-year conscription. They had reenlisted for a specialty, one of which was special operations. Second, the training and living facilities in Tolemaida had improved dramatically since 1996. The Colombian Army had dedicated considerable resources to improve the quality of life for the soldiers and their families, including housing and medical care. All told, ODA 746 did " . . . exactly what we came here to do," said Bennett, which was "to improve the Colombians ability to conduct advanced marksmanship, tactics, and airmobile training."[13]

Illustration by Dan Telles

Team training with the 60mm mortar.

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Endnotes

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10 Franks* interview.

11 This is the M82 .50 caliber sniper system produced for the military by Barrett Firearms Company.

12 Staff Sergeant Israel Estévez, ODA 746, 7th Special Forces Group, interview by Dr. Kenneth Finlayson, 21 July 2006, Tolemaida, Colombia, digital recording, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.

13 Bennett* interview.

"There is a Word I Need to Learn:"

ODA 741 and Colombian National Police Training at Espinal

by Kenneth Finlayson

**Pseudonyms have been used for all military personnel with a rank lower than lieutenant colonel.*

Colombian National Police Emblem

CNP instructor badge

Granadero Badge

Carabinero Emblem

THE Colombian *Policía Nacional* (National Police or CNP) have historically played a major role in the nation's on-going effort to combat narcotics trafficking and terrorism. A long-standing program of training assistance by the United States, featuring Special Forces soldiers from the 7th Special Forces Group (SFG) is an integral part of the CNP training program. Training for the majority of the CNP personnel takes place at the Gabriel Gonzalez Police Cadet School located in the town of Espinal, approximately sixty miles southwest of Bogotá. This article will outline the structure and mission of the CNP and examine the experience of operational detachment alpha (ODA) 741 from A Company, 2nd Battalion, 7th SFG, as it trained the CNP at the police training base in Espinal, Colombia, from 1 July to 30 September 2006.

Formed as part of the Colombian Ministry of Defense, the CNP was established in 1891, but was confined to the capital city of Bogotá.[1] The original force was about 450 men, organized with the assistance of a commissar of the French National Police.[2] Traditionally the police acted as a Liberal Party counter-balance to the predominately Conservative influence within the military in the "give-and-take" of Colombian politics.[3] In 1962, the independent departmental police forces in the rest of the country were joined to the CNP in Bogotá to form a single national police force. Previously, the separate police forces had been maintained by each of the country's thirty-two departments (states). In 2000, President Alvaro Uribe Vélez directed a reduction that divided the forces among eleven police administrative districts covering the country. When he took office, President Uribe began a program to increase the strength and presence of the police in all parts of the country. At the time of his inauguration, 160 municipalities in Colombia had no police presence. In these towns, the CNP were driven out by the FARC (*Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia*).

Then Secretary of State Colin Powell reviews the Colombian National Police during his visit in December 2002.

Colombian President Alvaro Uribe Vélez visits with President George W. Bush during Uribe's visit to the United States in March 2004.

In his testimony before the Senate Caucus on International Narcotics Control on 3 June 2003, General James T. Hill, the commander of U.S. Southern Command, described the advances: "President Uribe faces enormous challenges, but he is using his mandate to put deeds behind his words. He has only been in office for eight months, and turning the government from a conciliatory posture to an aggressively focused one is not an easy task. He is increasing military and police end-strength. . . . The government has developed a plan to protect travelers along the major roadways. He is pushing the military and the police to regain control of areas and neighborhoods dominated by the narco-terrorists."[4] President Uribe's promise to double the size of the Army and the CNP drove the rapid

expansion of the forces.

By 2006, police outposts in all municipalities had all been manned and the strength of the CNP had grown to more than 160,000.[5] The police are now present in all 1,098 of Colombia's municipalities.[6] The increased police presence, the country-wide employment of the police special units, and a determined drug reduction program has reduced the influence of the narco-terrorists and begun the process of decreasing the production of narcotics in the country. The growing of coca in the traditional locations has been curtailed, forcing the drug traffickers to move to more remote locations which are more difficult to detect. It has also led to a switch to the growing of opium poppies used to produce heroin. Cultivation of the coca plant fell 30 percent from its high in 2004 and cocaine production was reduced from 490 metric tons to 430 tons. The U.S.-supported crop-spraying program of the CNP eradicated 135,000 hectares (333,585 acres or 521 square miles) of coca and 3,000 hectares (7,413 acres) of heroin poppy in 2005.[7] Under the Andean Counterdrug Initiative, $310 million was appropriated by the United States to support counterdrug and security assistance in 2005.[8]

The CNP is three main entities working in rural areas, the first two being the *Granaderos*, the basic entry-level police volunteers, and the *Carabineros*, mobile squadrons who possess specialized training in maintaining order in the rural areas, security to the main highways, and counter-insurgency training to protect municipal police outposts. The third element is the *Junglas* (hoon-glas), described as "the jungle commandos" by Captain Steve McAdam*, the team leader of ODA 741.[9] In Bogotá, other specialized police units cover traffic control and the personal protection of judiciary members.

This UH-1 Huey helicopter is used for training at the CNP training center at Espinal.

The *Granaderos* are the first tier of the CNP. They are trained in the basic police-work skills and are the first-line "beat-cop" patrolmen. They constitute about ten percent of the CNP and, since 2003, their numbers have increased by more than 16,500.[10] As with all members of the police force, they are volunteers. A dedicated recruitment effort begun in 2000 was expanded to include every part of the country. Currently about 10,000 new recruits are brought into the police force annually.[11] The *Granaderos* are stationed in the rural municipalities in units that vary in size from 46 to 169 policemen.[12] The United States has funded the CNP with over $100 million over a five-year period beginning in 2003. During this same period, the Colombian government funded the CNP at $600 million.[13] The situation in Colombia, however, calls for a more sophisticated and highly trained police element to confront the problem of the narco-terrorist. For this mission, the CNP uses the *Carabineros*.

The *Carabineros* are rural police elements organized into sixty-two 150-man mobile squadrons.[14] They are "double" volunteers being drawn from the ranks of the *Granaderos*. They are advised and assisted in the field by members of the Narcotics Affairs Section of the U.S.

The Junglas *role in the drug eradication program includes the location and destruction of the jungle laboratories that produce cocaine from the coca plants.*

The entry doors to the Junglas *cadre classroom were painted with "before"* (antes) *and "after"* (después) *images of the* Junglas *recruits. On the right is the artist is in the "after"* (después) *photo.*

Granadero rappelling tower with the emblem of the *Granaderos* at Espinal.

Statue of the elite *Junglas* at the CNP training site at Espinal.

Embassy. Between 1999 and 2001, over eighty police stations were closed down because of the FARC threat. This prompted an expansion of the *Carabinero* program. More highly trained in the tactical application of counter-insurgency, and often working in concert with the Army, the *Carabineros* are the unit of choice for the CNP to provide law and order in the outlying areas after the illegally-armed groups are forced out. The unit tasked with the mission to initially regain government control in the contested areas is the *Junglas.* The *Junglas* evolved in 1989 as a company of highly-trained volunteers. The CNP recruits *Junglas* from throughout the entire force. However, many of the police volunteers start out as a *Granadero*, volunteers to move up to the *Carabinero* ranks, and ultimately becomes one of the elite *Junglas.* The CNP fields three 166-man airmobile *Jungla* companies of these "triple volunteers," whose mission is to interdict drug operations and restore to government control any municipalities that fall to the insurgents.[15] In terms of deployment, the *Junglas* provided the first-strike capability for destroying the drug labs that produce cocaine and for attacking the high-value targets (HVTs). The *Carabineros* secure and control the contested area and prevent the return of the FARC until such time as it is sufficiently under government control to reintroduce the *Granaderos* as the permanent police presence. The missions of the *Junglas* and the *Carabineros* require extensive training. It was at the Gabriel Gonzalez School that ODA 741 established its base of operations in June 2006 (SF has been working at Espinal in various capacities since 1989).

"Our mission is to integrate with the CNP and advise on training techniques and suggest improvements in the different POIs [programs of instruction]," said McAdam. "This is a great opportunity to expand our footprint. We are working with the cadre of the *Carabineros*, and teaching advanced skills to the *Junglas*."[16] In the view of Staff Sergeant Roy Kennedy*, the *Junglas* were "more high-speed, comparable to a SWAT team back in the states."[17] On this rotation, the ODA was not working with the *Granaderos*, whose training program was being handled exclusively by the Colombian police cadre previously trained by Special Forces personnel under the "train the trainer" concept. ODA 741's missions entailed advising and assisting the *Carabinero* cadre and actively teaching the *Junglas* in small-unit tactics and individual soldier skills. Working with both courses simultaneously presented unique problems for the team.

ODA 741 was reinforced for the mission at Espinal with three members of ODA 745. Master Sergeant Karl Merriman*, the team sergeant for ODA 741, worked diligently to assimilate the attached members. Half the team members were products of the Special Forces 18X pro-

A typical classroom building used at the CNP training center in Espinal.

Sign at the entrance to the *Jungla* area at the CNP training school in Espinal.

Carabineros *doing push-ups prior to commencing training at Pijaos.*

The homemade "barbeque bomb" uses burlap as wadding.

gram that brought them into Special Forces from basic training and were on their first deployment. Even with the three additional soldiers, Merriman commented that, "Twelve men are insufficient. Supporting these two courses simultaneously could easily take two or three ODAs."[18] Stretching the ODA to the limit resulted from the CNP decision to compress the seven-week *Carabinero* course into two weeks. The months following the May 2006 Presidential elections in Colombia placed a heavy burden on the CNP. They had to have a presence in all parts of the country to protect the candidates and prevent disruption of the election process. Hence the decision was made to compress the course to make more *Carabineros* available.

Seven hundred-fifty *Carabineros* were getting refresher training on land navigation, map reading, patrolling, demolitions, and marksmanship in a POI that had the Colombian cadre and their American counter-parts constantly scrambling to accomplish all tasks to standard. Normally eighteen *Carabinero* squadrons were trained at Espinal annually.[19] At the same time, other members of the team were teaching advanced infantry skills to the fifty-man *Jungla* class.[20] While the training tempo was unrelenting, the quality and motivation of the Colombian policemen made the experience very rewarding.

"These are very capable, intelligent young guys," noted Staff Sergeant Jack Coleman*, who worked with the Colombian cadre on land navigation. "They were using the Garmin Etrex GPS [global positioning system] and the cadre translated the English instructions into Spanish as we went along. Interestingly, their training aids were U.S. Army maps."[21] Staff Sergeant Mark Foreman* remarked, "Even with the compression of the training schedule, the cadre did a good job. The three guys I worked with were excellent. And the troops like to see the American presence."[22]

For the young American soldiers, a positive "can-do" attitude was often their strongest trait. Sergeant Barry Bishop* felt that "being personable with the troops was important. These guys look to us as the experts, so you can't be distant."[23] CPT McAdam reminded his team, "not to take over the training, and to be professional."[24] Training with the *Junglas*, Staff Sergeant Michael Alstott* reiterated the importance of interacting with the Colombians. "There can't be any 'Ugly Americans' out here. This is what I'm here for and the Special Forces guys have touched almost everyone in the police force."[25] When the police went to training, they counted on the Americans

The rolling terrain of the Pijaos training area. The buildings in the background are the original estancia, *now the home of the CNP officer in charge of the training area.*

The small out building at serves as the ammunition supply point at Pijaos.

Colombian demolitions experts prepare a demonstration of the "barbeque bomb" made from propane tanks.

Captain Steve McAdam, team leader of ODA 741, with "barbecue bombs" made from propane cylinders.*

being there with them.

The primary training site for the CNP at Espinal was at a training area known as Los Pijaos (P-House), a large *finca,* or estate, in the hills. A superb training area of rolling hills and fields, Pijaos had once been an extensive ranch owned by an innovative and prosperous Colombian. Large herds of cattle and sheep were grazed on the land, and the owner built a dam and a system of canals and installed a small hydro-electric plant to provide electricity to the *finca*. As he became wealthy, the rancher was targeted by the FARC, who demanded "taxes." Rather than submit to the extortion, the owner left the area, but not before leasing his *finca* to the Colombian government, which turned the facility into the primary CNP training area.[26] The former estate house became the home of the officer in charge of the facility, and the various outbuildings became part of the infrastructure to support training. The area is ideally suited for all types of training, having locations for a variety of marksmanship ranges, demolitions sites, live-fire exercises, patrolling, and land navigation training. It was at Pijaos that the *Carabineros* and *Junglas* honed their skills.

There has been little permanent construction at the facility since the former ranch became the CNP training site. The troops bivouac on a bare, rocky plateau. A rudimentary hut and covered pavilion is the mess hall. The universal fixture at U.S. training areas, the "roach-coach," consists of a family selling homemade food and soft drinks from the back of a small pickup truck. The troops are trucked out to the site and move about the area on foot. Near the demolitions area is a small building that serves as an ammunition supply point. On display outside are several of the FARC "barbecue bombs" made from propane tanks. A demonstration of this weapon is part of the *Carabineros* training. During demo training with the *Carabineros*, SSG Coleman found the Colombian cadre to be very knowledgeable and capable, but "Americans tend to respect the power of the demo more. They [the Colombians] are not casual around the demo, but we try to make them safer."[27] As busy as the team members were with the police, they still found time to train on their own.

With an eye toward the team's next major deployment, MSG Merriman and CPT McAdam arranged for horses and mules for pack training and riding. "I went to my counterpart in the *Carabineros*, Captain Pereda. At one time, he was one of the top equestrians in Colombia. He called back to his old boss in Bogotá and arranged to

Carabineros *conducting demolitions training at the Pijaos training facility.*

Carabineros *moving up to the bare, rocky plateau that serves as their bivouac site.*

have horses and mules brought out," said McAdam.[28] The *Carabineros* still have horse-mounted elements and the animals were trucked down from Bogotá and kept in the stables at Espinal. In addition to the basic riding and pack animal training, the team worked on marksmanship and individual and collective skills necessary for its next deployment. As is typical for Special Forces soldiers "downrange," the team members honed their language skills.

Near the entrance to the rough dirt road into the Pijaos training area was a small truck stop on the highway. Lunching in the *parador*, the small open-air restaurant, SSG Coleman confidently placed his order with the waitress without consulting the menu. When his meal arrived, the unidentifiable food [tripe soup] bore no resemblance to what he thought he had ordered. "There is a word I need to learn," he remarked after the waitress explained what he had ordered.[29] He manfully ate the meal. Once again, experience proved to be the best teacher.

Because the CNP is part of the Colombian Ministry of Defense, Special Forces soldiers can train law enforcement personnel. For this young ODA, working with the CNP will stand the team in good stead for the future. The regular rotation of 7th SFG through the CNP School ensures that every policeman in Colombia continues to be touched by the American Special Forces trainers.

Endnotes

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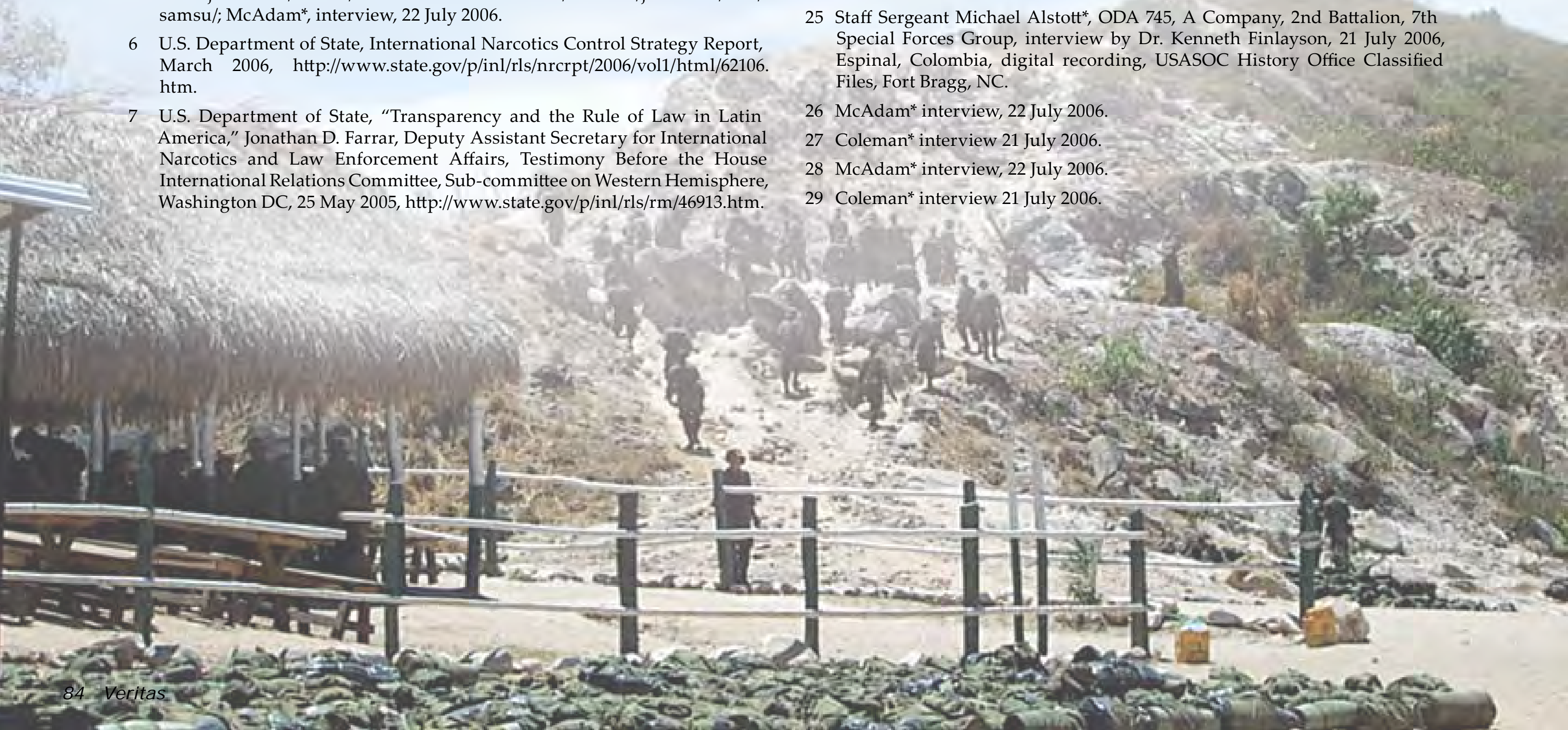


Special Forces in Larandia:

ODA 753 and the CERTE

by Robert W. Jones Jr.

**Pseudonyms have been used for all military personnel with a rank lower than lieutenant colonel.*

ONE of the tasks given to A Company, 7th Special Forces Group (ODB 740) for its deployment to Colombia was to support the Colombian *Centro de Re-entrenamiento Táctico Del Ejército* (CERTE—Army Tactical Retraining Center). The CERTE is the organization responsible for sustainment training of the Colombian Army. The Colombian typical battle rhythm has units in the field for ninety days conducting security operations, followed by about thirty days of sustainment training before returning to the field and combat operations. The CERTE instructors travel to bases throughout the Colombian Army to retrain soldiers after field time and leave. The A Company Commander, Major John H. Norman* assigned the mission to operational detachment alpha (ODA) 753.[1]

7th Special Forces Group beret flash

ODA 753's deployment into Colombia would center on assisting in the CERTE sustainment training. Special Forces ODAs frequently train for "split team" operations; dividing the ODA in half. However, ODA 753 would take that normal division to another level.[2] In a two month period ODA 753 would assist and advise the CERTE at six different sites, three concurrently. Each team task organized according to the mission requirements. This article describes the overall mission and experience of one Special Forces training team in Larandia.[3]

ODA 753 unofficial emblem

The Larandia base is located near Florencia, the capital of the Caquetá department, about 250 miles south of Bogotá. The base is located less than two hours drive south from the *Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia* (FARC) demilitarized zone in the center of the country, sometimes referred to "FARClandia" by the Special Forces soldiers. The primary means of transportation into the base is fixed wing aircraft into the small airstrip. It is about a three-hour flight (CASA-212) from Bogotá. Because of the FARC activity in the area, Larandia is a closed base for the Special Forces soldiers. As one of the soldiers observed, "It's a good way to save money, you work all day with the Colombians, do some PT, plan the next day's activities, and then get some sleep."[4]

At Fort Bragg, ODA 753 prepared for the deployment. A detailed mission analysis identified the need for training and assistance teams at three different sites working concurrently. At the end of a month-long training cycle the teams would move to another site with the Colombian cadre and begin a new training cycle with the next unit. To prepare for the mission each of the soldiers reviewed their primary specialty skills and cross-trained in other specialties to better assist the Colombian instructors. They were validating the "train the trainer" concept. The three- and four-man teams spread out throughout Colombia, some going to army bases that had never had a U.S. Special Forces presence before.[5]

The Colombian Centro de Re-entrenamiento Táctico Del Ejército *(CERTE—Army Tactical Retraining Center) is responsible for sustainment training of the Colombian Army.*

With the U.S. Special Forces serving as assistant instructors to the Colombians, language skills were very important. The soldiers had completed the basic four-month Spanish language course at the U.S. Army John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School, which provided the fundamentals of the language. The Americans practiced their language skills during training and while maintaining contact with the Colombian instructors and soldiers. At the end of the deployment the soldiers' knowledge of Spanish had improved dramatically.[6]

The team sergeant for Team 3 (and the ODA 753 operations sergeant) Master Sergeant Mitchell Little* was

Training in

Entrance to one of the CERTE training sites. This training would compare to Common Task Training in the U.S. Army. The sign describes the task, condition, and standard for the training at that site.

Communications station prepared for training with the PRC-710 radio. This training site would compare to many in the U.S. Army.

After running from a previous station, these soldiers conduct calisthenics. Then they must accurately **transmit a radio message in a specified time.**

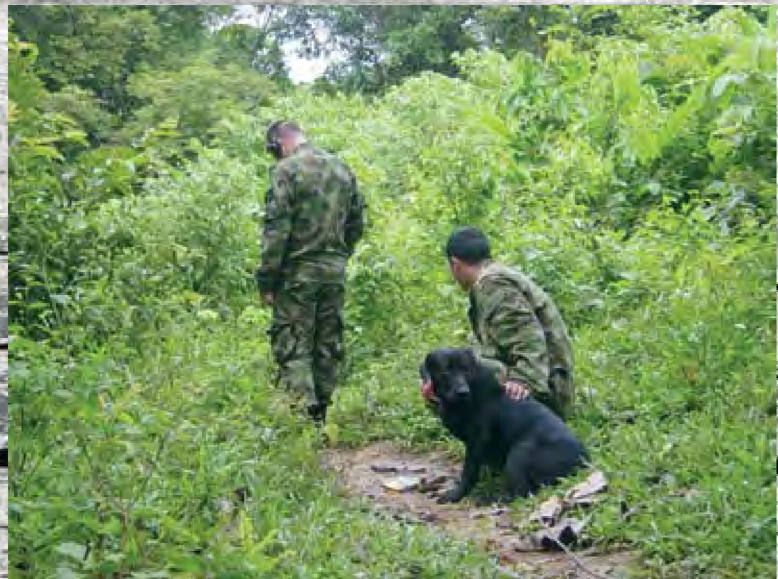
CERTE Instructors oversee a zero range at Larandia.

Colombian soldiers listen to a CERTE instructor prior to conducting IED detection training. This CERTE instructor has over ten years of combat engineer experience against the FARC.

Larandia

IED detection training at Larandia Here the soldiers **use the mine detector to find IEDs.**

Once something suspicious has been found a soldier **may use a probe to find the explosives.**



An alternate method is to use an explosive dog to **find IEDs.**

This "toe popper" IED uses a syringe to conduct the electric circuit.

Here a trigger device is hidden inside a discarded potato chip bag, waiting for someone to step on it.

ODA 753 Task Organization for the CERTE mission

HQ (Tolemaida)
CPT 18A Det Cdr
SFC 18D Medic

Team 1 *(Aguachica & El Cenizo)*
SFC 18D Medic
SFC 18B Weapons
SSG 18E Commo
SFC 18F Intelligence

Team 2 *(La Australia & Cupiagua)*
SFC 18E Commo
SSG 18B Weapons
SSG 18C Engineer
SSG 18B Weapons

Team 3 *(Larandia & Zarsal)*
MSG 18Z Team SGT
SSG 18D Medic
SSG 18E Commo

The reinforced ODA 753 would accomplish its mission at the six different sites shown above.

familiar with this training scenario. An experienced 7th SFG veteran, he had already been deployed to Colombia, as well as other Latin American countries, and Afghanistan. But, this was his first deployment after three years as an instructor in the Robin Sage training exercise of the Special Forces Qualification Course. In addition to assisting the CERTE instructors, Little and his team spent a large part of the time coordinating logistics support for the Colombians.[7]

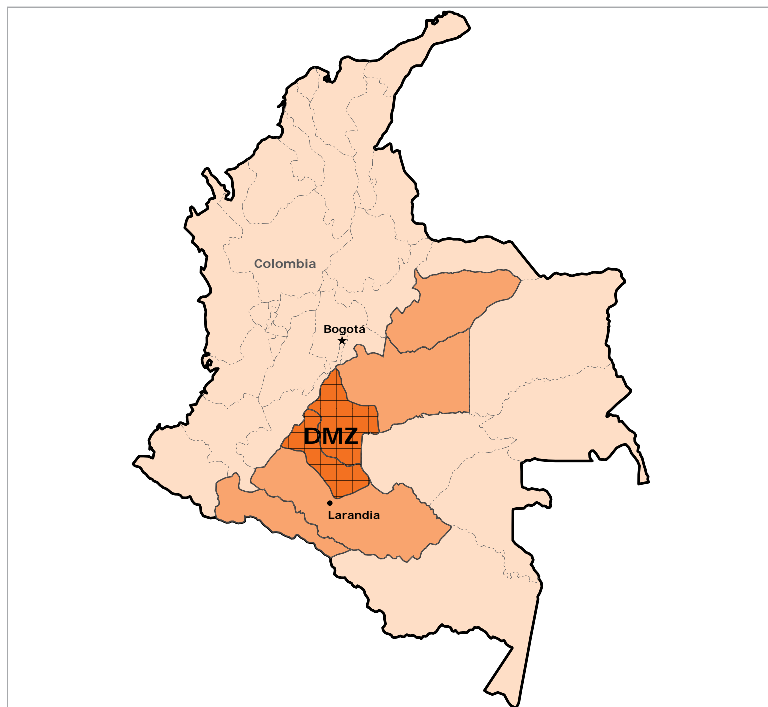
In order to complete the split mission, ODA 753 needed more personnel. While not ideal, one ODA from A Company provided the manpower to fulfill company missions. Most of the "fills" came from ODA 744. That team had been assigned a support role: augmenting the Company headquarters in Bogotá and teams in Tolemaida and Larandia. Both of the soldiers on MSG Little's team were temporarily assigned for the CERTE mission.[8]

The second team member was the communicator, Staff Sergeant Thomas Lawless*. From Washington state, Lawless had enlisted in the Army in 2004 under the Special Forces Initial Accessions Program, better known as the 18X program. On his first deployment with Special Forces, Lawless balanced daily communications requirements while acting as an assistant instructor to the Colombian cadre, primarily during marksmanship and communications training.[9]

The third team member was the medic, Staff Sergeant Clint Wilson*. Medical care is always critical on a deployment, especially in remote areas, like Larandia. After enlisting in the Army in 2001 under a Ranger contract then Private Wilson discovered the 18X program as he finished infantry training at Fort Benning. He was able to switch his assignment choice to Special Forces and joined the second 18X class in 2002. Wilson had already deployed to Colombia in 2005 for six months to support the Infrastructure Security Strategy (ISS) mission in the Arauca department. As a medic, he maintained medical readiness of the U.S. soldiers and the Colombians. Wilson also assisted in medic and first aid training. Most of his time was spent at the Colombian training sites and ranges. "Medics everywhere have a special bond. Their job is to share knowledge and training to complete the same task, taking care of people."[10]

The CERTE followed a four-week training program. The first week, Phase 1, (unilateral training) consisting of human rights (three days with training scenarios), Psychological Operations, and then specialty training, communications, medical, and demolitions. Phase 2 (week 2) consisted of individual soldier skills, from weapons marksmanship to basic soldiering. Training transitioned into squad, platoon and company collective training during Phase 3. The program of instruction ended with a field training exercise emphasizing mission planning and actions on the objective. The final Field Training Exercise incorporated the skills and tactics reviewed and practiced during the previous three weeks.[11]

The CERTE instructors led by Major Santa Mariá and Captain Álvarez in Larandia were all combat experienced veterans of the ongoing guerrilla war. These instructors improved a well-developed four-week program of instruction (POI) based on their experience. One instructor took the standard POI for mines and booby



Map of Colombia showing the "DMZ/FARClandia" and Larandia.

traps (IEDs) and improved it, by including his and other instructor's collective experiences fighting the insurgents. Another instructor, Sergeant Ortega, had been a prisoner of war (a *sequestrado* or "kidnapped") of the FARC for eleven months. He escaped, made his way alone through the jungle, and returned to the army after seven days of escape and evasion. His experiences were incorporated into survival training.[12]

In Larandia, the team of eighteen CERTE instructors and the Special Forces advisors prepared to retrain of one of the counter-guerrilla battalions. Each Colombian Division contains a mix of infantry and counter-guerrilla battalions. A Colombian line infantry battalion is comparable in size to a U.S. Army battalion with between 500 to 700 soldiers. These battalions are usually tied to a geographic location to provide area security. Therefore, the unit would conduct local combat operations. These units are filled with conscripts doing their two years of mandatory national service. The counter-guerrilla battalions are different.[13]

A member of FMTU-5 indicates that the Colombian Special Forces sniper is doing well.

Usually commanded by a Major, a Colombian Army *Batallón Contra Guerilla* (BCG—counter-guerrilla battalion) is organized and trained to deploy rapidly to contested areas, specifically to fight guerrillas. Therefore, it is lightly armed and equipped to provide mobility. A BCG contains 200 to 250 soldiers, organized into four companies, each with two platoons. The unit is not committed to a specific department or territory and the division commander sends them anywhere in his area of responsibility. The majority of soldiers in the BCGs are professional soldiers, not conscripts.[14]

During the last part of its mission the ODA 753 teams assisted in the training of an airmobile company-sized quick reaction force (QRF) for each of the seven divisions in the Colombian Army. A company-sized QRF in standby enabled each division commander to react to rapidly changing tactical situations.

Because Special Forces are spread thin by other operational missions in Latin America and commitments in Afghanistan and Iraq other service units in U.S. Special Operations Command were preparing for SOF missions in Colombia. A training team from the newly formed Foreign Military Training Unit (FMTU), a newly assigned element of the Marine Special Operations Command (MARSOC), arrived in September to assist the Colombians. The team, designated FMTU-5 provided a variety of training, but specifically advanced marksmanship. As the FMTU gains experience, it will take over some of the training missions in Colombia.

The deployment to Colombia will be one of many for the ODA 753 soldiers. At the end of the training cycle the Colombians would be better trained and prepared to return to combat. In return, the Special Forces soldiers gained valuable training experience working with the CERTE instructors. The deployment was best summed by SSG Lawless, "You can give someone all of the info and lectures, but you've got to experience it to really know what it's like."[15]

Two Counter-Guerrilla Battalion logos from Larandia, both are part of the rapid reaction units in the Colombian Army.

The Foreign Military Training Unit is a new special operations unit and the first subordinate unit of Marine Special Operations Command.

MARSOC emblem

Members of ODA 753 Team 3 with FMTU-5 Marines in Larandia.

View of one of the new barracks built at Larandia using Plan Colombia *funds.*

Endnotes

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OPATT to PATT:

El Salvador to Colombia and the Formation of the Planning and Assistance Training Teams

by Kenneth Finlayson

**Pseudonyms have been used for all military personnel with a rank lower than lieutenant colonel.*

THE United States maintains one permanent military advisory program in Colombia. This is the Planning and Assistance Advisory Team (PATT). The historical roots of the PATT program come from the successful Operational Planning and Assistance Training Team (OPATT) program in El Salvador. From 1984 until 1993, the officer and non-commissioned officer (NCO) OPATTs worked with the Salvadoran Army brigades in their fight against the *Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional* (FMLN). This article will explain the OPATT program in El Salvador, the connection between the OPATT and PATT programs, and the current mission of the PATTs in Colombia. While in some ways similar, significant differences exist. The counter-narcotics war in Colombia has presented unique problems for the PATTs.

Unofficial El Salvador MILGRP shoulder patch

In the 1970s, a growing insurgency in El Salvador became a serious threat when the diverse leftist movements in the country united under the FMLN. Open-armed rebellion erupted in 1980 and quickly escalated in 1981, with an offensive that attempted to split the country. The El Salvadoran Armed Forces (ESAF) was incapable of suppressing the growing rebellion. It lacked counterinsurgency training and resources. Morale in the ESAF was low. The ESAF was further hampered by human rights violations accusations stemming from operations against the FMLN. In 1981, regular assistance to the Salvadoran military began to come from the U.S. Army.

The United States began sending military personnel as trainers to assist the Salvadoran Army improve its war-fighting capability. Initially, mobile training teams (MTTs) made up of Special Forces (SF) personnel were sent to work with the Salvadoran Army elements. MTTs are "Department of Defense personnel on temporary duty in a foreign country for the purpose of training foreign personnel in the operation, maintenance, or other support of weapons systems and support equipment as well as training for general military operations."[1] Between 1981 and 1984, the MTTs were key to the expansion of the Salvadoran military from a poorly-trained force of 9,000 to an effective counterinsurgency force of 54,000.[2] The formation of the 1,000-man quick reaction infantry battalions, called the *Batallónes de Infanteria de Reacción Inmediata* or BIRI, gave the ESAF a force capable of wresting the initiative on the battlefield from the FMLN. The Special Forces MTTs were typically deployed for no longer than six months and were specifically focused on particular training objectives. This did not provide the continuity necessary to effectively advise the Salvadoran brigades.[3] In 1984, the Army began the OPATT program to provide personnel to each ESAF brigade.[4]

Since 1981, the U.S. forces operated under the constraints of a 55-man "force cap" imposed by Congress and followed rules of engagement that prohibited the train-

Salvadoran Army troops engaged in an air mobile operation. The training of the ESAF by the American OPATTs enhanced the capability of the Salvadoran Army and resulted in the eventual defeat of the FMLN.

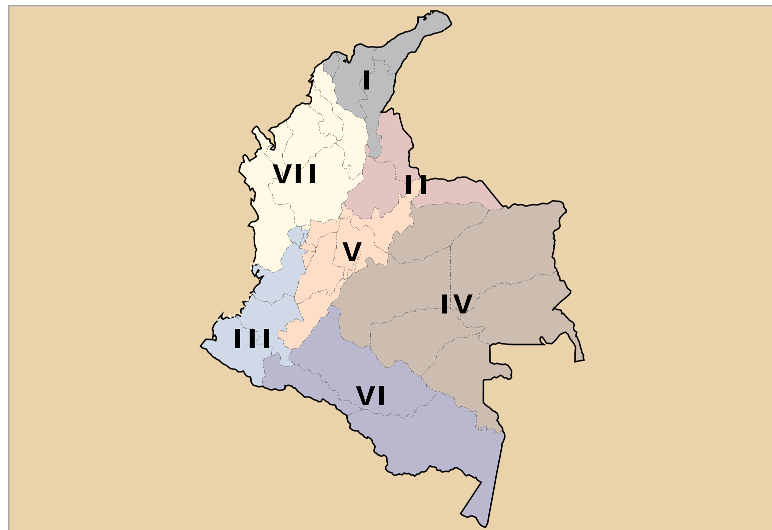
ers from engaging in active combat operations with the Salvadoran Army.[5] While the prohibition against going "down range" in support of operations grated on the OPATT advisors, ample training still needed to be done. Master Sergeant Johnny R. Gómez deployed to La Union Province with his team to establish the first Salvadoran National Basic Training Center at a former cotton warehousing site. "We built the facility up from scratch and trained 1,500 recruits each cycle so we were really busy."[6] Master Sergeant Leamon Rattere was part of a team in Santa Ana that trained a light infantry battalion. "We had new recruits and each Special Forces NCO trained a company. The captain, who was the team leader, trained the battalion staff. We took each 120-man company from a bunch of raw recruits and produced a combat-effective light infantry company."[7] The initial six-month MTTs of the Special Forces teams to each ESAF brigade were followed by the one-year permanent duty assignments of Army OPATTs. This program lasted for more than eight years, at which time Special Forces troops on deployed-for-training missions again began to regularly work with the ESAF. By 1991, the war was winding down, and in 1993, no U.S. advisors were left with the EASF brigades.[8] The OPATT mission resulted in a quantitative upgrade of the capability of the Salvadoran Army and a significant improvement in their human rights record.[9]

The OPATT program provided the genesis for the PATT program in Colombia. Brigadier General Simeon G. Trombitas, the current commander of Special Operations Command–Korea, was an OPATT with the Salvadoran 4th Infantry Brigade from June 1989 to March 1990. In July 2003, as the commander of U.S. Military Group–Colombia (MILGP), Colonel Trombitas realized that the situation in Colombia was enough like El Salvador to warrant establishing a program similar to the OPATT model used successfully there from 1984 to 1992. A major military campaign by the Colombian military was the incentive.

Colombian President Alvaro Uribe Vélez had initiated *Plan Patriota,* the military component of *Plan Colombia*, in 2003. *Plan Patriota* is a nation-wide counter-insurgency campaign designed to reestablish government control in the countryside and to curtail the narcotics trafficking industry. Trombitas recognized the need to provide support to the Colombian Army as the campaign commenced. The Colombian National Police (CNP) is supported in its role in *Plan Patriota* by the U.S. State Department's Narcotics Affairs Section, and the Colombian Army needed a similar level of support.

Colonel Purl K. Keen, the MILGP commander prior to Trombitas, initiated a program of "mobile MTTs" to work with the Colombian military. After 11 September 2001, the manpower demands of the Global War on Terrorism (GWOT) forced him to depend heavily on Reserve and National Guard soldiers from all services to man the teams. The expansion of the program from mobile MTTs to teams permanently stationed with the Colombian divisions led to the formation of the PATTs.

The PATTs are administratively part of the U.S. Army Security Assistance Training Management Organization (SATMO) headquartered at Fort Bragg, North Carolina. The mission of the PATT program is to provide planning assistance and guidance to Colombian military units in support of *Plan Patriota*.[10] Only those units having an acceptable human rights record as vetted by the U.S. State Department have PATTs attached to them. Teams are with the 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 6th, and 7th Infantry Divisions, the 18th Separate Brigade, the 2nd Riverine Brigade, and the Colombian Army operations staff in Bogotá.[11] Their advice and support centers on operational planning and the integration of the Colombian assets at the division- and brigade-level. They also assist the division staffs in coordinating Colombian Air Force and Navy assets into Army operations.[12] The PATT is under the operational control of the MILGP, who controls the teams while they are in Colombia. Administrative control of the teams resides with the SATMO, who takes care of the individuals as far as pay, leave, and promotions. The current annual funding from SATMO for the PATT program in Colombia is $1.5 million. This essentially covers the foreign military sales costs of the personnel that make up the teams.[13]



PATTs currently work with all the Colombian divisions except the 1st and 5th.

Chief Warrant Officer 4 James C. Hawthorn* was preparing to return to the United States after an extended tour in Colombia as an advisor to the Colombian Joint Task Force–A, when Trombitas requested that he stay and put together the PATT program.[14] "Colonel Trombitas initially wanted Special Forces guys, PCSed [permanent change of station] for more continuity. We had these mobile MTTs going. We initially had lots of field grade [majors and above] on TDY [temporary duty]; about sixty guys of which 75 percent were Army. In 2004, we were able to slowly shift over to guys on PCS for more stability. The GWOT was the reason we did not get a lot of Special Forces guys."[15] Other U.S. services, notably the Air Force and the Marine Corps, contributed manpower to the teams. Trombitas' vision to place a PATT with each Colombian division was eventually implemented. It continues as the best available solution to providing a long-term advisory/trainer presence with the Colombian Army divisions.

PATT facility in Villavícencio, Colombia, sixty kilometers south of Bogotá. The quality of PATT housing varies widely.

Operations by the Colombian Riverine Brigade

The joint teams are generally three to four individuals. Fluency in Spanish is a key element for service on a PATT in Colombia. The major selection criteria for PATT personnel is technical competence in order to fill the identified requirement.[16] Army personnel are on one-year rotations to Colombia. The other services have different rules for filling their allocated slots. Marine Corps personnel are on a one-year tour like their Army counterparts. Air Force personnel are on shorter assignments. Captain Thomas G. Spencer*, a U.S. Air Force intelligence officer stationed with the PATT at Larandia, was on a 179-day tour.[17] "We have four personnel, a little larger team than normal. Our mission here is to provide assistance with training and facilitate the logistics operations. Our big project right now is upgrading the firing ranges."[18] In the case of the base at Larandia, improving the ranges meant grading the range areas and installing modern target systems. The verification of the use of MILGP funds as part of military assistance is also a significant part of the PATT program.

Army Major Marlon P. Diamond* is the Senior PATT with the Colombian 4th Infantry Division in Apiay. "I see my job as helping in any way I can. We give assistance with operational planning and cover all the staff areas like intelligence, logistics, training, human rights issues, and civil affairs."[19] The small size of the Colombian divisional staffs generally prevents them from implementing U.S.-style planning. "They are small and lack the skills to do the military decision-making process like we do, "said Diamond.[20] As CW4 Hawthorn noted: "In the Colombian Army, the division commanders are the key decision makers and they traditionally have small [ten to fifteen person] staffs, so the presence of the teams at the division headquarters in an advisory capacity gives the most 'bang for the buck'."[21] Present at numerous division planning sessions, Hawthorn observed, "They don't plan like we do. The division commander will brainstorm with his brigade commander and the staffs, then give a verbal order. The brigade commander will write an order which is more like our FRAGO [fragmentary order] so the general knows the brigade commander understands his concept. Then they go with it."[22]

Since 2001, the PATT program in Colombia has progressed from the mobile MTTs rotating between the Colombian brigades to a more permanent team at the division level. The officers on the PATT work with the division staffs. U.S. NCOs on the PATTs are more likely to be involved with the hands-on training in the units.

Sergeant First Class Larry Stanley*, on the PATT with the 22nd Mobile Brigade of the 6th Infantry Division at Larandia, was working one-on-one with snipers. "My job is train, support, and assist. I've been working with the snipers from each company [of the brigade]. I work with each guy individually on sniper techniques. They are usually short of ammunition, so we don't shoot as much as we would like."[23] With the NCOs working with the Colombian soldiers and the officers working with the commanders and staffs, the PATTs are able to accurately gauge what their unit's capabilities are.

CW4 Hawthorn was the PATT operations officer in

The headquarters of Joint Task Force–Omega in Larandia. PATT personnel are working with the Task Force, which is the Colombian headquarters responsible for the conduct of Plan Patriota.

Bogotá in 2004, and in his view, "The PATTs are well connected in terms of the Colombian units. Our guys have great visibility over operations. We ran a bi-monthly PATT conference and there was a lot of cross-fertilization that came out of that. The MILGP and Embassy folks generally attended and the PATTs painted a true picture of their units."[24] These conferences were helpful in coordinating the PATT mission in the country.[25]

While in many respects these duties were similar to those of the OPATTs in El Salvador, several aspects of the PATT mission in Colombia are unique. The sheer size of the country, geography, and wide distribution of the units are major differences. El Salvador can fit into Colombia fifty-one times, with huge portions that are virtually roadless.[26] Colombia's population is eight times as large as El Salvador's. In a country slightly larger than the state of Massachusetts, the OPATTs in El Salvador faced lesser difficulties with travel and logistics than are faced by the Colombian PATTs. Despite the differences in scale and the mission to provide division support in Colombia versus advising at the brigade level in El Salvador, the mission is similar. The PATTs provide continuity in terms of an American presence at the Colombian divisions that are stationed in each region. While not as well resourced as the OPATTs in El Salvador, the PATTs have achieved success by synchronizing operations in *Plan Patriota*, validating Colombian military support requirements, and coordinating delivery of U.S. government support.[27] The eight-year-long OPATT program in El Salvador is considered a classic example of a successful Foreign Internal Defense mission. In five years of existence, the PATT program in Colombia has evolved from a "band-aid" of mobile training teams to an orchestrated permanent presence that is enhancing the ability of the Colombian military to conduct the type of counter-insurgency operations necessary to win the narco-terrorism war.

U.S. Army Security Assistance Training Management Organization logo

Endnotes

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PSYOP in Colombia

by Robert W. Jones Jr.

**Pseudonyms have been used for all military personnel with a rank lower than lieutenant colonel.*

PSYCHOLOGICAL Operations is an essential part of any counter insurgency campaign. Over the past two decades, United States Army Psychological Operations (PSYOP) has covered the full spectrum of support, from leaflets and posters to radio and television broadcasts to sophisticated websites, all designed at influencing the population of a target country. In Colombia PSYOP changed over the past ten years from focusing exclusively on counter drug programs to counter narco-terrorism (CNT) after the 9/11 terrorist attacks (and "expanded authority" granted by the United States). This article discusses U.S. Army PSYOP in support of the war in Colombia as it evolved from the Overt Peacetime Psychological Operations Program (OP3) to counter drug operations in *Plan Colombia* to the counter-narco-terrorism mission under the Global War on Terrorism (GWOT).

PSYOP support in Colombia, and the U.S. Southern Command area comes from the 1st Psychological Operations Battalion, 4th Psychological Operations Group. The mission of the 1st POB is to provide PSYOP support throughout the SOUTHCOM area of responsibility in support of U.S. objectives.[1]

1st PSYOP Battalion Distinctive Unit Insignia

For many years U.S. Army PSYOP has provided support to the U.S. Embassy in Bogotá, Colombia through the auspices of the Overt Peacetime Psychological Operations Program (OP3). Begun in 1984 by the Department of Defense, OP3 is developed and controlled by geographic combatant commands, in coordination with the U.S. Ambassadors in various countries.[2] In U.S. Southern Command (SOUTHCOM), the OP3 assists U.S. allies throughout South America.[3] With the rise of illegal drug trafficking from South America to the United States, the majority of OP3 in SOUTHCOM has concerned counter drug (CD) programs, with Colombia becoming the focus of support. In the case of Colombia, SOUTHCOM and the U.S. Embassy plan and support psychological operations through OP3. Under OP3, PSYOP may be conducted in support of U.S. regional objectives, policies, interests, theater military missions, or during military operations other than war, including counter drug operations.[4] Colombians also received training at the School of the Americas (at Fort Gulick, the Panama Canal Zone, and then at Fort Benning, Georgia), but also at the U.S. Army John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School at Fort Bragg, North Carolina. U.S. Army PSYOP support was also offered to Colombia. Mobile Training Teams from the 1st POB went on temporary duty tours to Colombia, but their support was not continuous until 1990.

In May 1990 a three-person team traveled to Bogotá to discuss a possible PSYOP mission with Colombian and U.S. officials. The meeting proved to be productive and set the stage for a series of long-term deployments. By July, a second U.S. PSYOP team visited two Colombian Army divisions to assess their PSYOP capabilities and programs. Based on their assessment, a PSYOP team spent two weeks that November conducting target analysis and product development workshops at the Colombian 2nd Division (in Bucaramanga) for battalion and brigade PSYOP officers. The workshops included a practical assignment that allowed the Colombians to develop products targeted to their individual regions of assignment. In order to have continuity and to provide support, a move was then made to temporarily place PSYOP soldiers in Colombia on a continuous basis.[5]

Since U.S. PSYOP support was limited to counter-drug operations, it limited the amount and type of PSYOP support that could be provided to the Colombian military and its operations. Because of the limitations, by 1991 the

majority of U.S. PSYOP support went to the Colombian National Police (CNP) whose primary role was counter drug. The CNP had established the *Centro de Operaciónes Sicológicas* (COPSI—Psychological Operations Center) that dealt with counter drug operations. Just as the U.S. PSYOP effort in Colombia gained momentum, however it was stymied when the majority of the assigned personnel were temporarily pulled for duty with Operation SAFE HAVEN (the Haitian refugee crisis at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba), but support would begin again in earnest in the next year.[6]

By 1992, the main component for U.S. PSYOP in Colombia was the Military Information Support Team (MIST). Based out of the U.S. embassy, the MIST worked with the Colombian police, military, and government agencies to advise and assist in counter drug (CD) products and programs.[7] These counter drug programs centered on four basic tenets: Interdiction; Eradication; Human Rights; and Alternate Economic Development. The composition of the MIST was austere and generally consisted of only four personnel (the commander, a 37A PSYOP Officer, either a captain or major; a NCOIC, a 37F E-7 or E-6; PSYOP sergeant, 37F E-5, and a 25M Illustrator). The MIST-Colombia soldiers would rotate every 179 days. However, due to administrative and training requirements the soldiers usually spent between 90 to 120 days in country.[8]

An example of a counter drug poster developed by the Colombian National Police.

U.S. PSYOP was limited to counter drug support, with the single exception of the Infrastructure Security Strategy (ISS) in a very narrow area in the Arauca department. As the *Ejército de Liberación Nacional* (ELN) increased attacks on the oil pipeline, in 1997, Occidental Petroleum lobbied Congress for help. Under the ISS mission, a 7th SFG reinforced Company trained the Colombian 18th Brigade to protect the pipeline. Integrated into the training was a PSYOP campaign. The 1st POB sent a team with the 7th SFG to train and advise newly formed Colombian tactical PSYOP teams at the Colombian PSYOP school. After an area assessment, the PSYOP team leader found that each unit in the Arauca department operated a small FM radio station. Counter insurgency radio programs were then developed and broadcast. For the duration of the ISS mission U.S. PSYOP could actively be involved in supporting the Colombian counter insurgency campaign.[9]

PSYOP poster used for the ISS Mission.

The 9/11 terrorists attacks on the United States expanded the scope of U.S. involvement in Colombia from a strictly counter drug mission to a combined strategy of counter narco-terrorism (CNT). The shift caused by the "expanded authority" increased U.S. military involvement in the war on narcotics traffickers and terrorists. Prior to the policy shift, U.S. PSYOP support for Colombia could not target, or assist in the targeting, of guerrilla organizations, even though they were providing security for the drug producers and traffickers. Under the auspices of National Security Presidential Directive 18 (November 2002), the U.S. military was allowed greater coordination authority with the Colombian military, including sharing intelligence and PSYOP support.[10] Under this "expanded authority," PSYOP could now assist not only the Colombian National Police, but also the Army, in the fight against the narco-terrorists.[11]

With the "expanded authority" policy shift, the MIST changed its name to "PSYOP Support Element (PSE)." In January 2003, with the increased mission, the newly renamed PSE—Colombia grew to 12 soldiers. To avoid confusion within the Embassy, and the Colombian military, most continued to refer to the PSE as a MIST. In November 2006, U.S. Special Operations Command changed its policy, and now all PSEs are officially referred to as MISTs.[12]

Unique to Colombia was an abbreviated product approval process. In the early stages of Operations ENDURING FREEDOM and IRAQI FREEDOM the approval process went up the chain of command to the combatant commander and in some cases to the Office of the Secretary of Defense. The PSYOP product approval process was streamlined in Colombia. PSYOP products developed by the PSE-Colombia soldiers were reviewed by the Military Group (MILGP) Commander, then staffed through the embassy public affairs officer, and approved for dissemination by the Deputy Chief of Mission (DCM).[13] Since the major cities of Colombia, especially Bogotá, have a highly developed printing industry, products are produced in Colombia rather than the U.S.[14]

The assignment to Colombia is an example of flexibility for the PSYOP soldiers. The majority of time is spent dressed in a civilian suit working on strategic and operational issues at the embassy or the Colombian military headquarters (the equivalent of the Pentagon). In the

PSE-Colombia soldiers training with Colombian GEOS soldiers on the LSS-40B tactical loudspeaker system.

very same week, the soldiers may be in the field teaching techniques to the Colombian PSYOP soldiers.[15]

Since the 1990s the Colombian Army has developed its own tactical PSYOP capabilities. The U.S. PSYOP soldiers assisted in training the Colombian *Groupo Especial de Operaciónes Sicológicas* (GEOS—Psychological Operations Special Group). The GEOS units are assigned to each of the Colombian Army Divisions, to provide organic PSYOP support. Through the auspices of the U.S. Embassy's Narcotics Affairs Section (NAS), the Colombians received specialized PSYOP equipment and training. Each division headquarters is equipped with a tactical development center with a computer workstation and a print risograph machine. For tactical operations, the GEOS detachments are equipped with still and video digital cameras and LSS-40B Tactical loudspeakers; the same type used by U.S. soldiers.[16]

One of the major programs run by the PSYOP section at NAS is the Humanitarian Demobilization, a major effort under the Uribe administration to encourage insurgents to reintegrate back into the society. Planning for NAS PSYOP is the responsibility of a small staff section with an Army PSYOP officer assigned to NAS on a three-year tour. In the summer of 2006 the PSYOP Officer, Major Tomas Suarez*, had over ten years of experience in Latin America, most in Colombia. The Humanitarian Demobilization program encourages insurgents, both right and left, to put down their arms and reintegrate into society. The program is a highly sophisticated multi-media campaign using radio, television, newspapers, posters, and leaflets. If the former guerrilla has no record of human-rights abuses amnesty is given. In addition to the amnesty, the former guerrillas are eligible to receive retraining for a trade, a small business loan, and a cash "bonus" for laying down their arms. By the end of 2006, on the average every three hours, a guerrilla turned himself in to either the police or army; 56 percent come from the FARC.[17]

The humanitarian demobilization program conducted by the Colombian government and supported by NAS emphasizes life after the FARC.

The key to good PSYOP in Colombia, as anywhere else, is a detailed target audience analysis (TAA), the accuracy of which can "make or break" a product or even an entire campaign. In the 4th PSYOP Group, the TAA process is assisted by the Strategic Studies Detachment (SSD) assigned to each regional PSYOP battalion. One of the early tasks for U.S. PSYOP personnel was to assist the Colombians in human rights training. The question was posed "how do you produce a human rights product that soldiers will look at and keep?" The solution was to produce a wallet-sized card with the picture of one of Colombia's top bikini models on one side. The target audience of primarily young male soldiers not only kept the card, but it also became a coveted collector's item. Innovative concepts such as this resulted in one of the most successful human rights campaigns ever seen in Colombia and a drastic increase in the Colombian military's commitment to the protection of its citizen's basic human rights.[18]

> Each regional PSYOP battalion at the 4th PSYOP Group has a Strategic Studies Detachment (SSD). The SSD consists of Department of the Army civilian PSYOP analysts who provide an organic research capability for the battalion. Most analysts have an advanced degree (usually a PhD). All of the analysts read and speak at least one of the languages in their area of expertise (many speak two). These civilians are the continuity for regional PSYOP planning within the 4th POG. The linguistic skills and cultural knowledge make each SSD a unique asset to the unit. [19]

Historical examples can sometimes work in other environments, but there first must be a detailed target audience analysis. One example is the deck of cards that was used as a PSYOP product from Iraq, with Saddam Hussein as the ace of spades. The SSD and PSYOP team members advised against using this example in Colombia to identify the "most wanted" members of the FARC and ELN. Several factors lead to the assessment. First, Colombians generally do not use the same playing cards as we do in the U.S. and secondly, the American involvement in Iraq is especially unpopular in the Colombian media. A clearly U.S.-sponsored product would have undoubtedly brought unneeded negative media attention. Instead, after a detailed analysis the PSYOPers used chess, a popular game in the country, as the alternative. Both television and print media ads were developed showing a game of chess and then showing the pictures of captured FARC members. The television ad was shown as a public service message, during the most

Children wait for their parents during a medical readiness training exercise (MEDRETE) in San José del Guaviare. The gifts given during the civic action have several purposes—the plastic bag in the smiling boy's hands contain toothpaste, toothbrush, and mouthwash. Both the boy and the girl on the right have a package that has a school notebook, an eraser, ruler, and pencils. The message on the cover of the notebook, "Todos somos Colombia" *(We are all Colombia), is part of the government's information campaign to gain legitimacy.*

viewed "*novelas*," the extremely popular nighttime soap operas. As new FARC leadership surrendered, were captured, or killed, the Colombians updated the ad showing the individuals.[20]

Something that is relatively small can have a tremendous impact on the population. In conducting a TAA in Colombia the importance of school notebooks for children (and families) was noted. School children are required to have a notebook per subject, with generally six subjects per term. The small 3"x9" notebooks cost about 2,000 pesos each (about $0.80–$0.90 U.S.), or about five to six dollars, per child per school term. In rural or urban poor areas, this could amount to about 10 percent of a family's monthly income, just for notebooks, for one child. But, without the notebooks the child could not attend school. The solution was to provide them for free as a PSYOP product. The PSYOP-produced notebooks have a message, usually counter drug, on the front and back covers.[21]

Over the past two decades, as American policy changed, U.S. Army PSYOP was there to support the objectives. Beginning with a small initial assessment team, evolving to the MIST, progressing to the beginning of *Plan Colombia* (and its support to training and the establishment of the counter drug brigade and its three battalions), PSYOP has been an integral part of the U.S. foreign internal defense effort. Through the efforts of the soldiers and civilians of the 1st POB, U.S. Army PSYOP will continue to assist Colombia.

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Civil Affairs in Colombia

by Robert W. Jones Jr.

THE Civil Affairs mission in Colombia spans much of the country. Although sometimes reinforced, it is normally performed by a single Civil Affairs Team–Alpha (CAT-A), usually four soldiers. For many years, most active Army Civil Affairs support came from Company A, 96th Civil Affairs Battalion (Airborne) [CAB(A)] that had responsibility for Latin America. This changed in 2006 with the formation, in a provisional status, of the 97th CAB(A) (the second active duty Civil Affairs battalion since 1974 when the 96th was activated). The mission remains the same, conducting Civil Affairs to support Counter Narco Terrorism (CNT) operations.[1]

96th Civil Affairs Battalion Distinctive Unit Insignia

97th Civil Affairs Battalion Distinctive Unit Insignia

An integral part of Army special operations support of CNT operations is Civil Affairs (which transformed into A Company and C Company, 97th CAB).[2] Since the 1990s, Civil Affairs teams from Company A, 96th CAB(A) conducted Civil Affairs throughout Colombia in support of national objectives. The Civil Affairs operations encompassed a mixture of Civil Information Management, Nation Assistance, and Foreign Humanitarian Assistance activities, but were usually built around medical, dental, veterinary, and surgical readiness training exercises. The intent of these readiness training exercises ("RETE") is to provide training for U.S. soldiers.[3] These "RETE" activities produce a threefold result: first, they help the Colombia people in remote and underserved areas; second, the activities promote the legitimacy of the Colombian government; and third, they provide training opportunities for U.S. Army personnel.[4]

The role of all Civil Affairs Operations executed is to be transparent to the Colombian public. This is done through the integration of Colombian forces, police, civilian government agencies, NGOs, doctors, and engineers, to plan, coordinate and execute operations facilitated by the civil affairs team. The primary operational impact for this Foreign Internal Defense/Counterinsurgency mission is to legitimize Colombian institutions and create and sustain favorable opinion. CA forces focus on the center of gravity (the populace) by engaging the civil component and there by shaping the operating environment.

The three Civil Affairs missions highlighted in the photographic essay are representative of U.S. Army Civil Affairs in Colombia over the past two decades. Each mission takes hundreds of hours of coordination and liaison with Colombian national, departmental, and local governments, the Colombian military and National Police, as well as civilian volunteer and private health organizations and foundations. While the missions have a basic template, each one is unique because it is tailored to the particular needs of a specific community, balanced with a threat assessment. All missions are accomplished in contested areas, sometimes in full view of members of the *Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia* or other narco-terrorist organizations that are attempting to overthrow the government.

Map of Colombia highlighting cities in this article.

Colombian volunteers and U.S. Civil Affairs arrive at the National Police base in San José del Guaviare. The safest and most economical way to travel in much of Colombia is by air. In the center of the photograph is a reminder of the danger in the area; the control tower also serves as a guard post for the base.

Locals wait for medical care outside the clinic. For many the free medical care offered during this MEDRETE may be the only medical care they can access. On the wall is the cartoon character used for CNP anti drug messages.

An eye exam being conducted during the MEDRETE in San José. The optometrists and technicians can provide quick basic care.

San José del Guaviare MEDRETE

San José del Guaviare is the capital of the Guaviare department and the economic center of the area. Located on the southern bank of the Guaviare River, San José borders the former demilitarized zone (*Zona de Despeje*) for the FARC (sometimes called "FARClandia"). The MEDRETE personnel flew from Bogotá to the Colombian National Police (CNP) anti-narcotic base airfield in San José. To get to many areas of Colombia, flying is the quickest and safest means of transportation. The MEDRETE took place on 19-20 August 2006 using the CNP facilities as the support base for the operation. In the two days, a mix of Colombian volunteers and U.S. soldiers saw 497 patients and provided more than 800 consultations (most patients had multiple medical problems). The medical support provided covered general medical, optometry, orthopedics, audiology, vaccinations, general dentistry and orthodontics.[5]

Children wait for their parents during the MEDRETE. The gifts given during the civic action have several purposes; the plastic bags at the lower left contain toothpaste, mouthwash and a toothbrush. The packages on the children's laps have school notebooks, an eraser, ruler, and pencils. The message on the cover of the notebook, "Todos somos Colombia," *(We are all Colombia) is part of the government's information campaign to gain legitimacy. The soccer ball* (fútbol) *has the message* "Más deportes en lugar de drogas," *(More sports instead of drugs).*

The MEDRETE/DENTRETE activities planned by Civil Affairs are "come as you are," in this case dental care for a local man.

View of the front gate at the Colombian National Police base in San José. This is a critical base for the counter-drug campaign in central Colombia. By sponsoring and supporting various civic action projects locally, including the MEDRETE, the National Police could shore up support for the government and counter narco-terrorism operations.

Civil Affairs soldiers find themselves using a variety of transportation to accomplish their mission. In this case the best way to Solano is via the Caquetá River. The Colombian soldier on the right is wearing the new digital camouflage pattern uniform.

View from the bow of the boat as the Colombian medical volunteers and the Civil Affairs soldiers near Solano on the Caquetá River. The barge is a barracks ship and operations center for Colombian riverine forces operating against narco-terrorist organizations.

The MEDRETE makes the maximum use of space with the available facilities. This is a combination waiting room, equipment storage, break area, and behind the curtain, medical screening.

Colombian soldiers pass out "school kits." The school kit is a notebook that children can use for school, some include pencils and other items. The notebook cover is designed by Colombian and U.S. Psychological Operations, usually with a anti-drug message or theme.

Solano MEDRETE/ SURGRETE

Located near the Colombian Air Force's *Tres Equines* base, Solano is located in the Caqueta department. In just three days (8-10 September 2006) Colombian medical volunteers and U.S. Army personnel saw over 826 patients; performed 826 minor surgeries, conducted 560 optometric evaluation consults, and dealt with 670 other specialty consults. The medical activities covered general medical, optometry, pediatrics, and minor surgery (primarily hernias).[6] The MEDRETE/SURGRETE improved working relationships between the Colombian Military and local government (departmental officials). The MEDRETE also provided medical practice for the Civil Affairs medics.

Detailed planning is critical for a MEDRETE. This photo shows some of the wide variety of medical supplies that were brought into Solano. If the Civil Affairs team does not plan for the supplies there is no corner drug store to buy extras.

The Medical clinic in Solano, the site for the MEDRETE.

Colombian doctors and nurses conduct a hernia operation at the Solano clinic. Minor surgeries are often conducted. The Colombian volunteers are critical to most Civil Affairs activities in the country.

Locals wait in the school courtyard for a variety of medical activities during the Fusagasugá MEDRETE. The waiting provides a good time for various counter-drug and pro-government messages.

Volunteers provide optometry exams in a classroom. The mobile optometry kits allow the volunteers to provide eye exams and prepare classes in a relatively short period of time.

Barbers provide haircuts to the locals in Fusagasugá.

Children listen to a presentation given by the Colombian National Police while their parents wait in line for other activities. The police officers dressed as clowns are used to make the counter-drug message entertaining.

Not all of the children appear to enjoy the clowns.

Fusagasugá MEDRETE

Fusagasugá is located about thirty miles southwest Bogotá in the Cundinamarca department. During a three day (22–24 September 2006) MEDRETE, Colombian volunteers and U.S. Army personnel conducted general medical assessments, as well as optometry, orthopedics, vaccinations, and general dentistry care. The MEDRETE provided healthcare for over 1,030 patients at the cost of $22,000 for medicines and eyeglasses.[7]

A U.S. Civil Affairs soldier came up with an innovative idea—to bring along barbers. In many remote areas there are no "professional barbers." As other Civil Affairs programs got started and people gathered, the contracted barbers set up "shop." Soon men, boys, and their families congregated about the portable "barber shop." The simple act of getting a haircut, provided another opportunity to judge popular reactions to the MEDRETE and collect information about other Civil Affairs activities needed, especially specific medical and dental problems. The "barbershop" demonstrated to the locals that the Colombian Government had a presence in the area and was regaining control from guerrilla elements. It also showed that the government cared for the people.

Colombian volunteer dentists provide basic dental care to locals in Fusagasugá. In this case they are operating in a local schoolhouse. Schools are often used to support Civil Affairs missions. The portable dental sets are relatively easy to transport to remote locations. For many, this may be their only opportunity for dental care.

**Pseudonyms have been used for all military personnel with a rank lower than lieutenant colonel.*

Endnotes

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Blue Helmets to Maroon Berets:

Batallón Colombia in the Suez and Sinai, 1956–1958, 1982–2006

by Charles H. Briscoe

SINCE World War II, Colombia has supported international collective security through the United Nations and regionally with the Organization of American States (OAS). Colombia provided a naval frigate and an infantry battalion to serve in Korea with the UN Command for four years. In 1956, President Gustavo Rojas Pinilla sent *Batallón Colombia* to serve as part of the UN Emergency Force (UNEF) to defuse the Suez Crisis. Colombia, as an original signatory of the Inter-American Treaty of Reciprocal Assistance [commonly known as the Río Treaty (1948)], mobilized its armed forces in support of the OAS naval quarantine of Cuba during the Missile Crisis in 1962. Hemispheric defense was the basis of the Río Treaty; aggression against one is considered to be an attack against all member states.[1] Since 1982, Colombia has supported the Multinational Force and Observers (MFO) in the Sinai with an infantry battalion *(Batallón Colombia)* and selected officers, the UN Observer Mission in El Salvador (UNOSAL), and the UN Protection Force in the former Yugoslavia (UNPROFOR).[2]

United Nations symbol

Multinational Force and Observers logo

The purpose of this article is to briefly explain the Colombian military missions with the UNEF during the Suez Crisis of 1956 and with the MFO in the Sinai since 1982. Colombia has supported the principle of collective security since the end of World War II. Its Army and Navy forces fought with the UN Command in Korea to halt Communist aggression. Since the Korean War, the Colombian Army has been providing international peacekeeping forces and observers. These highly sought after overseas assignments have been career enhancing and an opportunity to escape the domestic violence endemic to Colombia since *La Violencia* began in 1948.

In the first months after overthrowing the regime of President Laureano Gómez, General Rojas Pinilla dramatically reduced the domestic violence. However, by early 1954, the country was again deep in guerrilla war, more localized in rural areas, but equally bloody. The National Police were taken out of the fight and the Army thrown in shortly before the return of *Batallón Colombia* from Korea. As Colonel Alberto Ruíz Novoa (second commander of the Colombian battalion and then Minister of War) and the other veterans of Korea rose rapidly to positions of responsibility, these leaders soon lost confidence in their

President Laureano Gómez, 1950–1953

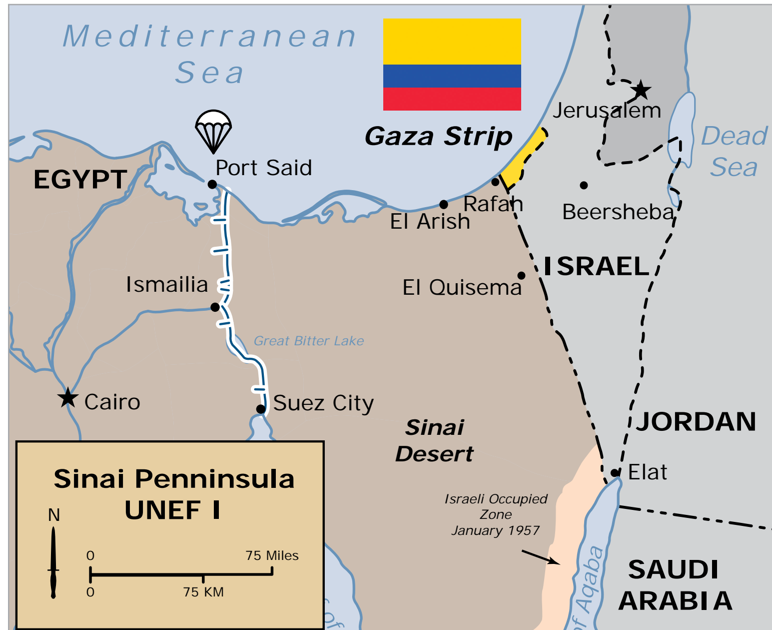
La Violencia

WHEN an assassin killed populist Liberal Party leader and presidential candidate Jorgé Eliécer Gaitán in central Bogotá on 9 April 1948, the citizens spontaneously flooded into the streets to demonstrate their outrage. Uncontrolled violence for two days in the capital city left more than 1,400 people dead before order was restored. The *Bogotazo* (as those forty-eight hours are called) was the catalyst for the social turmoil that subsequently spread into the countryside. The traditional political antagonisms between Liberals and Conservatives, coupled with social and economic inequities, prompted waves of rampant violence in rural areas. The uncontrolled killing that resembled familial blood feuds grew to epic proportions as law and order broke down in the countryside. *La Violencia* went through three distinct phases in its first life span: 1948–1953; 1953–1957; and 1958–1966.[3]

Populist Liberal Party leader Jorgé Eliécer Gaitán

President Gustavo Rojas Pinilla, El Jéfe Supremo de Colombia, *1953–1957*

Batallón Colombia *insignia (which is identical to that worn in Korea)*



United Nations Emergency Force I in the Sinai

former chief, who had evolved into a self-aggrandizing, despotic dictator ruling on whim. His days as president were numbered when, in a last ditch effort to regain military support, he committed the *Batallón Colombia* by executive decree to the UN for the Suez Crisis in 1956.[4] The Army leadership, unwillingly involved in the domestic conflict, welcomed the UN mission. The crisis over the Suez Canal was an opportunity to divert the soldiers' attention from the violent war in the countryside.

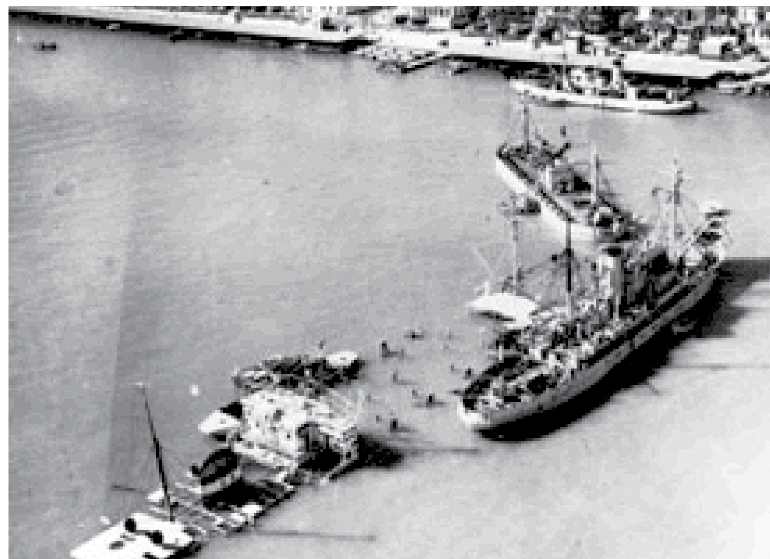
UNEF symbol

The Suez Crisis of 1956 erupted after Anglo-French air forces bombarded Egyptian military targets before parachute assaults were made into Port Said and Port Faud. British and French paratroopers seized control of the Suez Canal on 31 October 1956. Two days before Israel had invaded the Sinai Peninsula. The rationale given for these acts of aggression were President Gamal Abdul Nasser's nationalization of the Suez Canal Company, Egyptian and United Arab Republic (UAR) encouragement of Algerian nationalism, Egypt allowing Arab guerrilla training bases in the Gaza Strip, and Nasser's threat to deny universal passage through the Suez Canal.[5]

During a 3–4 November 1956 all-night meeting of the UN General Assembly, the delegations from Canada, Colombia, and Norway drafted a joint resolution calling for a UN military task force to supervise a "cessation of hostilities" in the Suez. Colombian delegate Francisco Urrutía recommended that a "safety cordon" be established around the Gaza Strip by stationing UN troops along the frontier. The decision to provide a military unit to the UN raised little public interest in Colombia. The military regime did not need popular support to send its forces abroad. And, the Suez Crisis was not related to the country's domestic disorder.[6]

President Abdul Gamal Nasser

Military support to a UN mission, as it was during



Sunken vessels blocking the Suez Canal.

United Nations stamps commemorate UNEF mission to the Suez.

UN Emergency Force Medal

WHEN the *Batallón Colombia* returned from the Suez, it again became the elite force in the Colombian Army. But, this time the battalion would serve under a military-civilian junta government until a presidential election could be conducted.[1] It would be twenty-four years before Colombia accepted another peacekeeping mission. Again, it was in the Middle East, but this time the international peacekeepers would wear maroon berets instead of blue UN helmets.

UNEF medal

1 Russell W. Ramsey, "The Colombian Battalion in Korea and Suez," *Journal of Inter-American Studies IX* (October 1967), 555.

the Korean War, was one of the few issues on which most Colombian politicians were in agreement in 1956. Offers of troops were made by twenty-four countries. Only ten were accepted. By 11 November 1956, forces from Canada, Colombia, Norway, and Denmark were assembled at Capodichino, near Naples, Italy. Within days, the contingents were flown by Swissair into Ismailia, Egypt, to form the UN Emergency Force (UNEF), commanded by Canadian Major General E.L.M. "Tommy" Burns, the former Chief of Staff of the UN Truce Supervision Organization.[7] It was UN Secretary General Dag Hammarskjold who called the "Blue Helmets" the "first truly international force" because it eventually contained Communist, non-Communist, and neutral forces.

UN Secretary General, Dag Hammarskjold

After the Anglo-French invasion force was pressured to withdraw in late December 1956, the greatest potential spot for trouble was the Israeli-Egyptian border. The Brazilian, Indian, and Colombian battalions and a Swedish company were spread along the armistice demarcation line, called the Gaza Strip. The Colombian patrol sector until late October 1958 was the Khan Yunia zone.[8]

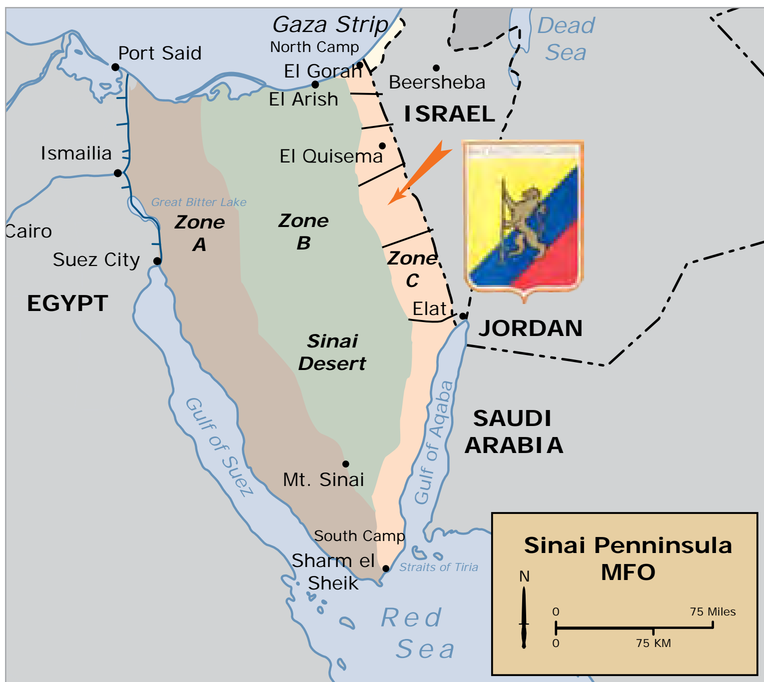
The UNEF mission was basic peacekeeping. The combined UN force monitored the French and British withdrawals and phased Israeli pull-back across the Sinai. UNEF assumed relief operations and administrative responsibility for the Gaza Strip. The forces of UNEF established observation posts and conducted patrols along the Gaza demarcation line and the international frontier in the Sinai between Israeli and Egyptian military forces. The *Batallón Colombia* of 490 officers and men sailed for Colombia on 28 October 1958, after nearly two years of peacekeeping duty.[9] It would be twenty-four years before Colombia accepted another peacekeeping mission.

Colombia has provided an infantry battalion and officers to the Multinational Force and Observers (MFO) mission since 1982. The MFO is an independent, international peacekeeping organization funded equally by Egypt, Israel, and the United States. It does not act as a buffer between Egyptian and Israeli forces nor as an instrument of interim or truce arrangements, but rather works closely with the two nations to support a permanent peace.[10] Colombian Army soldiers and civilians (31 officers, 58 noncommissioned officers, 265 soldiers, and 3 civilians) are assigned to the Sinai mission for eight-month tours; half of the element rotates every four months.

The mission of the *Batallón Colombia* is to observe and report any activities in the Central Sector of Zone C, according to the Sinai Treaty and Protocols, and to guard

President Jimmy Carter, architect of the Israel-Eqypt Peace Accords of March 1979 and the MFO in August 1981.

Batallón Colombia *with the MFO in the Sinai.*



MFO Sinai map with Central Sector of Zone C highlighted

A Colombian soldier being awarded the MFO medal.

the North Camp, El Gorah, located on the northeast side of the Sinai border. The battalion also provides medical and dental officers, a force liaison officer, a force security officer, and fourteen soldiers to augment the Multinational Force staff. The *Batallón Colombia* accomplishes its peacekeeping observation mission by stationing elements of two infantry companies at seven remote sites throughout the Central Sector of Zone C, on the eastern border of the Sinai. Since the remote sites always have to be permanently manned, temporary observation posts and motorized patrols ensure wide coverage and continuous observation. Colombia is justifiably proud of its MFO mission in the Sinai that promotes peace and stability in the Middle East.[11]

Multinational Force and Observers Medal

These two international peacekeeping missions reflect the continuous commitment of Colombia to world peace through international collective security. *Batallón Colombia* first became an instrument of Colombian foreign policy during the Korea War. Today, *Batallón Colombia* is still charged with that responsibility in the Sinai with the MFO.

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3. Dennis M. Rempe, *The Past as Prologue? A History of U.S. Counterinsurgency Policy in Colombia, 1958–1966* (Carlisle Barracks, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, March 2002), 2–3. Interestingly, Fidel Castro, representing the University of Havana law students, and Rafael del Piño, members of *Unión Insurrecional Revolucionaría (URI),* arrived in Bogotá on 29 March 1948, to inaugurate a new inter-American student congress. They asked Jorgé Eliecier Gaitan to be the keynote speaker at a session of the congress. He was to address the students later in the afternoon on the day he was killed. Castro did become slightly involved as an armed observer in the *Bogotazo* riots, but sought sanctuary in the Cuban Embassy on 13 April 1948, and left the country shortly afterward. "Fidel Castro Reveals Role in 9 April 1948 Colombian Uprising," El *Siglo* (Bogotá) 11 April 1982, 6–7, were excerpts of an undated interview with Cuban President Fidel Castro by journalist and writer Arturo Alape, broadcast over Colombia *Radio Cadena Caracól* on 9 April 1982, http://lanic.utexas.edu/la/cb/cuba/castro/1982/19820411; Carlos Reyes Posada, *El Espectador* (Bogotá) 10 December 1961, from Hugh Thomas, *The Cuban Revolution* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1961), 28, in Geoff Simóns, *Colombia: A Brutal History* (London: SAQI Books, 2004), 45–46; David Bushnell, *The Making of Modern Colombia: A Nation in Spite of Itself* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1993), 203.
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5. Gabriella Rosner, *The United Nations Emergency Force* (NY: Columbia University Press, 1963), 6, 12, 17.
6. Ramsey, "The Colombia Battalion in Korea and Suez," 549.
7. Rosner, *The United Nations Emergency Force*, 117, 119, 124.
8. Ramsey, "The Colombia Battalion in Korea and Suez," 549, 550; UNEF required a distinguishing uniform mark. American-style helmets were sprayed light blue in color with "UN" stenciled in white paint on the sides and issued to all troops. Rosner, *The United Nations Emergency Force,* 123, 125, 127.
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ELN Mines and FARC Mortars:

IEDs in Colombia

by *Charles H. Briscoe*

In the early morning of 1 November 2006, a hundred FARC-EP (*Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia-Éjercito del Pueblo*) guerrillas began their attack against the newly rebuilt police station in Tierradentro, a remote village near the National Archeological Park, Department of Córdoba, 230 miles northwest of Bogotá. A ground assault followed a bombardment of explosive-filled propane gas cylinders—a favored FARC weapon. They are inaccurate and cause considerable collateral damage. In the bloodiest attack since President Alvaro Uribe Vélez was re-elected, sixteen police, one civilian, and three rebels were killed.[1]

President Alvaro Uribe Vélez

The Colombian chief executive was personally familiar with FARC mortars because fourteen were fired at the presidential palace during his inauguration in August 2002. One ricocheted off an outer wall. None exploded inside the compound where 600 dignitaries were assembled, but twenty-one people were killed when the projectiles landed in an adjacent neighborhood.[2]

The *Veritas* 2:1 article, *"Los Artefactos Explosivos Improvisados:* Spanish for IEDs (Improvised Explosive Devices)," discussed field expedient explosives and mines that were employed by the FMLN (*Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional*) during the 1982–1993 war in El Salvador. Loss of limb casualties (amputees), military and civilian, from anti-personnel land mines called *quita patas* (foot removers) and IEDs numbered nearly 10,000 in 1990.[3] However, after almost sixty years of internal conflict, Colombia is now the country most affected by land mines and IEDs in the Americas.[4] By 2003, Colombia had become the nation with the third largest number of mine victims in the world. Afghanistan and Cambodia rank first and second, respectively. El Salvador is fourth.[5]

On 24 October 2004, the Colombian armed forces completed their destruction of stockpiled anti-personnel mines in compliance with the international Mine Ban Treaty (MBT). But, in Colombia today, non-state armed groups, most notably the FARC-EP (FARC) and the UC-ELN [*Unión Camilista–Ejército de Liberación Nacional* (ELN)], continue to employ anti-personnel mines and IEDs on a regular basis. These homemade weapons are second and third generation improved IEDs compared to what was employed in El Salvador. Explosive weights are much greater and the shrapnel infinitely "dirtier."[6]

ELN flag

FARC flag

Graphic gross mutilation has a much greater psychological impact than the simple maiming sought by the FMLN. IEDs and land mines accounted for 30 percent of the Colombian Army soldiers killed and 40 percent of the wounded in 2004.[7] In the first three months of 2005, one of three Colombian soldiers killed was a mine or IED victim. The year ended with 1,110 IED casualties. The number has grown steadily; from 627 in 2002, to 734

in 2003, to 882 in 2004.[8] The problem in Colombia is an overwhelmingly rural one. As of June 2006, 96 percent of the incidents had taken place in the countryside.[9]

The purpose of this article is to show how the "New Generation" of two specific IEDs favored by the FARC and the ELN are significantly more lethal than those used by the FMLN in El Salvador. While the FARC also employs land mines, the ELN groups are most noted for them. The favorite FARC terror weapon, having contracted explosives training from the Provisional Irish Republican Army (IRA), is the propane gas cylinder mortar (*la bomba barbacoa*—barbecue bomb).

Allegations of a FARC-IRA connection arose after Interpol confirmed that the three Irishmen arrested in Bogotá on 11 August 2001—James Monaghan, Martin McCauley, and Neil Connolly—were IRA members. Monaghan is credited with designing the IRA homemade mortar. It was originally developed with Libyan help in the early 1970s. The primitive Mark 1 evolved over time into the much more sophisticated Mark 18 "Barracks Buster," named for its destructive effect on British bases in Northern Ireland. The weapon earned the designer the moniker "Mortar Monaghan." McCauley and Connolly are reported to be among the best explosive/bomb men in the IRA. Long-range (2,000 meters) propane mortars are mounted in vehicles, called "technicals" by U.S. troops, in the manner of the Somali pickup trucks with crew-served weapon systems.[10] Colonel Nelson Francisco Rocha, Director of the Colombian Military Engineer School, confirmed that the "FARC mortars" were amazingly similar to IRA "barracks-busters" and that the FARC was producing electric detonators and using black-powder impulse charges."[11]

La bomba barbacoa and its launcher are crude, but ingeniously simple. The projectiles are made from common twenty-pound propane gas cylinders. Millions of Colombians use propane gas for cooking and heating, making the supply of tanks plentiful and easily available. The larger hundred-pound tanks serve as the mortar/launcher after their tops have been cut off and a supporting bipod welded on. Crude sheet iron fins are welded to the smaller twenty-pound tank tops to provide some stability in flight (see photos). Through a hole cut in the top or bottom, up to twelve pounds of homemade explosive are poured in and cushioned with sawdust. Sometimes gasoline and glue are added to make them more inflammatory. Tear gas powder is another option. They are time-fuzed with non-electric detonators to land before exploding. A wadded-up burlap sack in the mortar tube (hundred-pound propane tank) separates the propellant black powder from the base of the *bomba barbacoa*. Elec-

Illustration by Dan Telles

Artist facsimile drawing of a "technical" mounted with bombas barbacoa.

Bombas barbacoa *and simple tube launcher on bipod at Espinal.*

Schematic of bomba barbacoa.

Non-slip pattern sheet iron (commonly used to make custom step-ups on U.S. trucks) fins for a bomba barbacoa.

Small bomba barbacoa.

Mortar tube and bomba barbacoa*.*

Detonator

Schematic of FMLN artilleria sin cañon*.*

A close-up of artilleria sin cañon rampas *showing wooden launchers with adjustable legs to set elevation. Earth was tamped against the backplate.*

trical detonators fire the propulsion charge and activate the time fuse in the projectile.[12]

Colombian explosive experts have demonstrated that when fired at an elevation of sixty degrees, *la bomba barbacoa* can reach 2,000 meters. Normal combat employment ranges are 300 to 1,000 meters. They are normally fired *en masse*, as were the FMLN *rampas*, to accomplish what a conventional artillery or mortar pre-attack concentration of fire would. But, *en masse* by the FARC equates to several hundred *bombas barbacoa*, fired from mobile and fixed launchers, rather than forty or fifty *rampas*. *Las bombas* are inaccurate. Most buildings within fifty meters of the intended target are usually heavily damaged. The inaccuracy, shrieking noise when launched, destructive effect on buildings and bunkers, and shrapnel make them true terror weapons. They have become a trademark feature of FARC attacks on rural police stations and army garrisons.[13]

While they differ radically from FMLN *rampas*, tactical employment and launching are similar. The lack of artillery to support FMLN attacks prompted the development of a primitive inclined fixed-direction system. These direct-lay artillery systems, called *artilleria sin cañon* (artillery without cannons) were popularly called *rampas* or ramps, based on the simple incline launch platforms. *Rampas* were grouped *en masse* to launch barrages of explosive "cannonballs" into Salvadoran Army *cuartels* (garrisons).[14]

Following a thunderous explosion, ten to twenty cloth-wrapped balls, barely illuminated in the night sky by their burning detonation cord, would come flying over the walls. The explosive "cannon balls," bouncing and rolling along the ground with fuses burning, were reminiscent of the bearded and mustachioed *Yosemite Sam* using an old cannon to get rid of that "pesky wabbit" in a *Bugs Bunny* cartoon.[15] Curiosity and laughter about the comic absurdity of this innovation ended quickly, as those close to a fizzling cannon ball realized the

FMLN mortar tube.

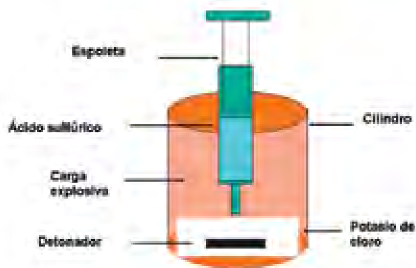
FMLN battery of rampas *outside the 4th Brigade at El Paraiso, El Salvador, in 1988.*

Various styles of IED mortars.

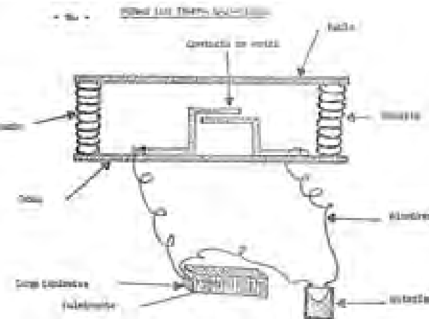
TECNICA PARA CAVAR LA FOSA

Se escoge un punto de referencia del enemigo y medimos la distancia al objetivo.
Se coloca en los extremos de la fosa una estaca de madera y se hacen coincidir con el punto de referencia.

Diagram of how to emplace a Rampa *Battery.*



ELN Pressure IED schematic.



FMLN pressure anti-personnel mine (FMLN pressure mine).

ELN Pressure Anti-Personnel IEDs (Pressure IEDs Detonators) above and below.

danger and dived for cover.[16]

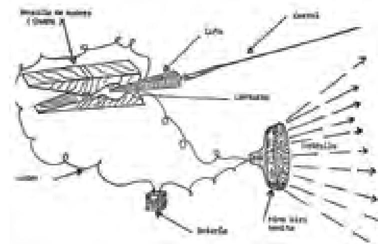
Fortunately, the dud rate was high. The "cannon balls" were made of a hardened paste mixture of powdered chlorate, aluminum, and black gunpowder with rocks and scrap metal for shrapnel, wrapped in strips of cloth (a Nicaraguan Sandinista trademark).[17] While duds were a problem with the *rampas*, that has not been the case with FARC mortars, with the exception of those mounted on "technicals," that often self-destruct. The IED land mines, called *minas cumbos* and *minas vuela-patas* (pressure-activated mines and "flying feet" mines), are consistently more reliable.

As ELN terror weapons, these mines are most commonly placed along routes used by Colombian military and police forces, around their camps, and helicopter landing zones. They have also been used around schools, along village streets and paths, near water sources, bridges, housing areas, and illicit drug fields.[18] Home-crafted mines *(minas artesanales)* are made from beer/soda/juice cans, PVC pipe, glass jars, milk containers, and wooden boxes. Syringes serve as pressure activators. They have non-electric and electric fuses, and sometimes there are anti-handling devices.[19]

Minas cumbos and *minas vuela-patas* are detonated by a syringe whose rubber seal has been removed and replaced with a metal contact point. When a soldier/civilian steps on the mine, the syringe is depressed, contact is made, and the device activates. They are very simple to make and inexpensive—less than $7 each. Most are mass-produced in company-level factories. Since they take only seconds to emplace, FARC/ELN-paid trail-watching children can run ahead of the patrols and quickly place a mine in their path.[20] Both the FARC and ELN justify their continued use of land mines.

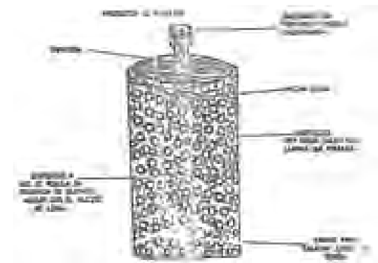
In April 2006, ELN representative Antonio García stated that the ELN "complied with international norms against . . . indiscriminate use" of land mines with a qualification: "When we do mine, we do not do it on roads, nor in populated areas."[21] A year earlier, in January 2005, the Central Command of the FARC issued a statement defending its use of anti-personnel mines on the grounds that it was fighting an adversary with more resources.[22] The FMLN broadcast a similar policy during the war in El Salvador.

FMLN *Radio Venceremos* admitted responsibility for indiscriminate land mine warfare with the declaration that it was "an integral part of their revolutionary strategy. Mines worked. The only problem was that a mine could not tell the difference between a six-year-old child and an armed combatant."[23]



FMLN Chinese Hat tripwire activated anti-personnel IED.

ELN fruit juice anti-personnel IED.

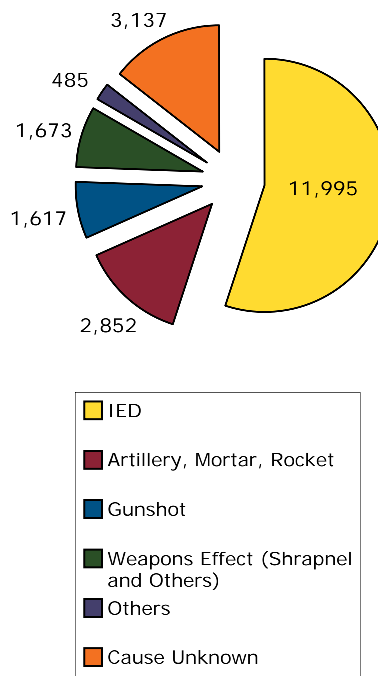


Schematic of Salvadoran FMLN Soda or Fruit Juice Can anti-personnel mine.

FMLN Radio Venceremos.

El Salvadoran FMLN Comandantes Lionel Gonzalez (left), Dimas Rodríguez (center), and Facundo Guardado.

Salvadoran amputee child poster that greeted every visitor at the International Airport in San Salvador during the latter stages of the war.



The government of El Salvador focused a very effective national PSYOP campaign on this admission.

The rapidly increasing number of Colombian IED casualties is linked in part to the government's policy of eradicating coca fields and reclaiming FARC and ELN-controlled land under *Plan Patriota.* Greater use of mines was justified by the FARC and ELN to protect their camps and coca fields. Most of the casualties are military, but also include civilians hired by the Army to clear the coca fields. This practice began after a booby-trapped land mine incident killed twenty-nine soldiers. Guerrilla snipers capitalized on the situation and shot at the collected medics.[24] The FARC used *Plan Patriota* operational areas as a training ground by rotating in elements from all parts of the country into the region. There, they practiced tactics of attrition, harassment, and IED use and kept pressure on the security forces.[25] The Colombian military uses explosive detection dogs to find IEDs, but often both the handler and dog become casualties.[26]

Improvised explosive devices, whether used in an urban or field environment, are standard guerrilla weapons. The majority of our combat casualties in Iraq (3,000 deaths versus more than 10,000 wounded) and Afghanistan have been caused by IEDs. The same is true for the Colombian armed forces engaged in the counter-narco-terrorist war, as it also was for the Salvadoran military fight against the FMLN. Simple field expedient IEDs made from fertilizer chemicals, rebar rods, scrap metal, and rocks—"2nd and 3rd generation homemade munitions" employed by the FARC and ELN—should not be discounted. When the supply of conventional munitions are reduced in Afghanistan and Iraq, more primitive, but equally deadly IEDs will take their place. Supplemental funding from the Defense Department has significantly expanded the countermining program administered by the Army Section of the U.S. Military Group (USMILGP) Colombia.

The Army Section has an Engineer major dedicated to support the Colombian military with countermine equipment and tools, assist with its countermine and IED program of instruction, and train soldiers to identify, detect, and destroy land mines and booby traps used by narco-terrorists and guerrilla groups. USMILGP Colombia is computer-linked to the U.S. Army IED Task Force in the Pentagon. U.S. Defense supplemental funding for Colombia grew from $500,000 in fiscal year 2004, to $1 million in fiscal year 2005, to $1.5 Million in fiscal year 2006. The United Kingdom, Canada, Japan, Spain,

and Switzerland similarly fund other Mine Ban Treaty programs.[28]

The IED training manual used by the FMLN in El Salvador was a photocopied or mimeographed edition of hand-drawn sketches. FARC and ELN IED training manuals today are professionally written, commercially published textbooks. Terror training has become a very sophisticated business in the 21st Century.

The choice weapon of terror for an insurgent is an IED because the risk to the user is minimal. When IEDs are employed against civilians in Spain, Northern Ireland, Israel, Iraq, the Philippines, England, and the United States, they are simply called bombs. However, to an American or Colombian serviceman, FARC *bombas barbacoas* and ELN *minas cumbos* and *minas-vuela patas* are IEDs in another insurgent war.

******Pseudonyms have been used for all military personnel with a rank lower than lieutenant colonel.*

Endnotes

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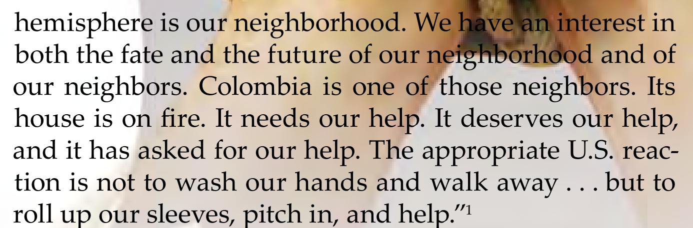
Post Script



by Charles H. Briscoe

THIS presentation did contain many elements common to Mission Area Analyses. However, the intent was to provide enough background to understand and appreciate Colombia's *Violencia* and the forms it has taken over the past fifty-eight years. The narco-terrorist threat (including IEDs), a history of insurgency in Colombia, and Colombian support of international collective security were provided to explain subsequent organization and structure of the Colombian armed forces, specifically the military and paramilitary police. The structures of these armed services and their heritage and overseas experiences, culturally driven, have influenced Colombia's internal defense plans over the years. The influence of the Philippine HUK counterinsurgency model, first introduced by the U.S. State Department team in 1959, and reiterated by the Yarborough assessment of 1962, has pervaded internal defense strategy in Colombia for more than forty years. With this background, the Army SOF role become more apparent.

U.S. Army special operations missions and roles in support of U.S. Southern Command; Special Operations Command, South; and the USMILGP Colombia Professional Exchange Program, Planning Assistance Training Teams, and countermining programs are integral parts of U.S. defense strategy in the region. How ARSOF soldiers contribute at all levels to the foreign internal defense mission is the personal part. This is majors and below taking the commander's intent and accomplishing the mission based on the circumstances and environment.

The biggest difference between the success achieved in 1966 and 2006 is that today's national internal defense campaign includes a greatly expanded police force to reestablish law and order in the rural areas. Rehabilitation programs and civil affairs initiatives that follow the military counterinsurgency successes in guerrilla-controlled zones are restoring confidence in national government.

Because IEDs constitute the greatest terror threat, the countermine program of the USMILGP is receiving heavy emphasis. More importantly, the U.S. government is committed to fighting the CNT war in Colombia. Ambassador David Passage summed it up well: "This hemisphere is our neighborhood. We have an interest in both the fate and the future of our neighborhood and of our neighbors. Colombia is one of those neighbors. Its house is on fire. It needs our help. It deserves our help, and it has asked for our help. The appropriate U.S. reaction is not to wash our hands and walk away . . . but to roll up our sleeves, pitch in, and help."[1]

There is a natural tendency of American military personnel to use familiar U.S. Rules of Engagement (ROE) for Afghanistan and Iraq as a measuring stick to gauge the willingness of Colombian military and police to take the fight to the narco-terrorists in their country. The ROE for the Colombian armed forces (military and police) is the National Legal Code. Similar restrictions apply to U.S. forces employed at home (to combat internal insurgency or restore order during riots) without a Congressional declaration of martial law or being granted exemption to civil prosecution *(posse comitatus)*.

The FARC and ELN kidnap/capture "political" (government, military, police) prisoners to gain advantages during government negotiations and to fund operations with ransom money. On this New Year's Eve, 31 December 2006, a former Colombian Minister of Development for President Andrés Pastrana, Fernando Araujo L., escaped his captors after being held for six years.[2] Today, the FARC is holding some sixty "political" prisoners, including former presidential candidate Ingrid Betancourt and several hundred *sequestrados* (kidnapped) for ransom . . . some for as many as ten years.[3] And finally, lest we forget, three Americans, Marc D. Gonsalves, Thomas R. Howes, and Keith D. Stansell, involved in a contract anti-narcotics mission have been FARC hostages since 13 February 2003.

Endnotes

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In the Next Issue of Veritas

Major Herbert R. Brucker:
SOE Training & Team "Hermit" in France

This third article on Major Herbert R. Brucker, DSC, chronicles Special Operations Executive (SOE) training for Office of Strategic Services (OSS) personnel in the United Kingdom and the Team "HERMIT" mission in France from May to September 1944. The trilingual OSS SO (Special Operations) operative Brucker was among the first Americans to receive SOE training before being detailed to Britain's SOE as the radio operator for a three-man team.

Key West: The Home of Special Forces Underwater Operations

Key West, Florida, is the home of C Company, 2nd Battalion, 1st Special Warfare Training Group and the Special Forces Underwater Operations training program. Founded in 1964 at Fleming Key, the school trains combat divers, dive medics and dive supervisors for Special Forces and other Army elements.

OSS Logistics: Supplying Special Operations
and the Resistance in France

Area H at Holmewood, England, was the OSS base for packing parachute containers that were then dropped into France. Logistics teams at this base supplied the OSS Operational Groups (OGs), Jedburgh teams, and Special Operations (SO) teams, who in turn, helped to support the French Resistance. The photo album of LTC Fitzhugh Chandler, the former Commanding Officer of Area H, provides a unique view of how complex this mission was.

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