

CHAPTER XIII

THE NICARAGUAN NATIONAL MILITARY ACADEMY

In the Guardia Agreement it was provided that the Government of the United States would detail qualified officers and men of the United States Marine Corps to establish a Nicaraguan Military Academy for the purpose of training Nicaraguan officers for service with the Guardia Nacional. These Nicaraguan graduate officers would gradually replace the officers and men of the United States Marine Corps serving with the Guardia, so that eventually the entire officer personnel of that organization would be Nicaraguan.

With this mission, the Nicaraguan Military Academy was formally inaugurated on 1 April, 1930, in the buildings and grounds known as Momotombo, and located on the northeastern outskirts of Managua overlooking Lake Managua. The staff was composed of the following officers and men:

1st Lieut. Edward J. Trumble, G.N. (2nd Lt.USMC) Director.

1st Lieut. Francis J. Cunningham, G.N. (2nd Lt.USMC) Sub-Director.

2nd Lieut. Nicholas M. Grieco, G.N. (Gy-Sgt.USMC)

The problems confronting the staff were many and varied. There were no text books in Spanish, there was no precedent on which to set a course, there was little or no money with which to operate, and there was no Aladdin's lamp to rub and summon the helpful genii. However, among the staff and corps of cadets there were enthusiastic and willing workers, and within a few days buildings were repaired, orders formulated, classes started, and the work of translating military textbooks into Spanish was begun. New ideals of discipline, orderliness and concerted action arose and became firmly embedded. All regulations and activities of the Military Academy were based on similar regulations and activities of the United States Naval Academy.

The first class of cadets was made up of nine worthy noncommissioned officers of the Guardia Nacional who had been specially recommended by their immediate commanding officers, and selected by a board of officers at Guardia Headquarters. From the very beginning particular stress was laid on the fact that in selecting candidates for admission to the Academy the political affiliations of the candidate bore no weight whatsoever.

The curriculum was designed to cover a period of eight months theory and practice at the Military Academy and one month of practical experience in the field in active operations against bandits. The eight months course of instruction was divided into five departments, which covered the following subjects:

1. Military Science and Tactics.
2. Administration.
3. Laws and Regulations.
4. Infantry weapons.
5. Military engineering.

In addition certain academic subjects were included in the curriculum, such as Elementary Mathematics, Geography of Nicaragua, History of Nicaragua, Composition, Customs and Traditions, Relations with Civilians and Diplomatic Ceremonies.

The staff of the Military Academy and the Corps of Cadets were subject to call for active field service against armed bandits at any time after the first three weeks of preliminary preparation and training. They were in fact a reserve for the fighting forces and were called out several times when the bandits were operating on a large scale.

On June 22, 1930, after two and one half months of instruction and study, the first class of nine cadets was graduated as the result of a national emergency then existing in the Northern and Central Areas. The following morning at 7:00 A.M., the newly commissioned officers were on their way to the scenes of combat.

The period from 22 June, 1930 to 19 November, 1930, was utilized in translating and printing Spanish Military textbooks, in constructing buildings to accommodate a larger class, and in the selection of the members of the new class. The second class when it entered on 19 November, 1930, presented new problems. It was a heterogeneous collection of thirty-seven; four were officer students who had been commissioned in November, 1929 prior to the establishment of the Military Academy, fifteen were noncommissioned officers from the Guardia, and eighteen were selected from civil life. There were ninety-seven applicants for admission. Selections were made by a board composed of the staff of the Military Academy in accordance with the recommendations of the Area and Department Commanders, who had first interviewed and looked into the qualifications of all candidates from their Departments or Areas. The list of selections was then submitted to the Jefe Director, and by him to the President of the Republic for final approval. This group progressed much more rapidly in its studies than the first class, due to the fact that more translations of textbooks were available, and the staff had improved through experience and preparation. An additional officer, Subteniente Humberto Castillo Q., Guardia Nacional de Nicaragua, was added to the staff at this time.

The members of the second class carried on their studies at the Academy until 2 January, 1931, on which date the entire staff and the Corps of Cadets were ordered as a special punitive patrol against the bandit groups participating in the disastrous Achuapa ambush for a period of one month.

The spirit demonstrated during the month of field service was admirable. The weaklings were discovered and weeded out, allowed to resign from the Academy. Those who survived the acid test were good soldiers, with the same spirit that keeps Marines on their feet when they want to drop. Exceptional marches were made, the hardships of campaign were endured and one contact was made with a bandit group during these days of active operations. On 5 February, 1931, the staff and the Corps of Cadets returned to the Military Academy to resume their studies.

Rapid progress was noted following the period of active service until the disastrous earthquake at Managua on 31 March, 1931. Following this catastrophe, the officers and cadets worked hard and tirelessly in caring for the sick and injured, maintaining order in the northeastern section of the city, providing food and shelter for the unfortunate, and in general striving to better the horrible conditions that followed the disaster. Subteniente Humberto Castillo Q., G.N. de N., a member of the Academy staff, died on 4 April, 1931, as a result of injuries received

while assisting the victims of the earthquake. Two members of the staff and four cadets, were awarded the highest decoration of the Nicaraguan Government, the Presidential Medal of Merit, for services rendered during and immediately following the earthquake.

The earthquake was a severe blow to all of Nicaragua, since it paralyzed the principal city, which was also the seat of government. At one time it seemed that it would be a fatal blow to the Nicaraguan Military Academy. There had been little money for its maintenance since its beginning, the pay of cadets had been reduced from fifty dollars a month for the first class to eighteen dollars a month for the second class, and there seemed for a time to be little prospect of its continuance. However, in its short period of existence it had gained a firm hold on the hearts of the people and had the support of the press and the Government of the country. As a consequence, the Jefe Director was able to secure an appropriation of \$3,200 monthly for its continuance. Out of these appropriations funds were obtained for the restoration of the buildings destroyed by the earthquake and the construction of new quarters to provide for a class of seventy-five cadets in July, 1931.

After the earthquake, the studies of the cadets were resumed, and on 1 June, 1931, twenty-eight cadets of the thirty-seven who entered were graduated and commissioned as Second Lieutenants.

Immediately following the graduation of the second class of cadets, work of selecting the members of the third class was begun. Meanwhile, the popularity of the Military Academy had spread throughout the land. There were two hundred and ninety-seven candidates for admission. Every area, department and district in the Republic was represented.

The requirements for entrance, besides a strict physical examination included the following:

- Age.....20 to 35 Years.
- Nationality.....Nicaraguan, (born or naturalized)
- Height.....5'4".
- Weight.....135 lb.
- Recommendations...Two from well known Nicaraguans or foreign citizens living in Nicaragua. Also a confidential report and recommendation on the part of the Area, Department or District Commander, following a personal interview with the candidate.
- Education.....Competitive examinations formulated in accordance with the requirements for the *Secundaria* (the equivalent to two years in high school) as outlined in the *Plan de Estudios* of the Minister of Public Instruction.

Examinations were held at all Area and Department Headquarters on the same dates, under the supervision of commissioned officers of the Guardia, and all papers sent to Managua for marking by a central board whose recommendations were submitted to the Jefe Director and by him to the President of Nicaragua for final approval.

During the time that candidates for the third class were being selected the work of rebuilding and construction of new quarters at the Academy was rushed in order that all would be prepared for the arrival

of the first contingent of cadets on 1 July. This class of seventy-five cadets reported for duty in groups by Departments as sufficient space was made available for their accommodation. The last group arrived on 15 July, 1931. Nineteen members were noncommissioned officers of the Guardia Nacional, and the remainder were selected from civil life. The majority of the civilians were college and university students. The pay of cadets was maintained at eighteen dollars per month, which excluded the probability of any young men entering the class for purely monetary reasons, especially since each cadet was required to deposit five dollars each month during the entire course in order to partially defray the expenses of equipment and uniforms upon graduation. The staff of the Military Academy during the third academic term was composed of the following officers:

Captain Edward J. Trumble, (1st Lieut. USMC), Director.

Captain Francis J. Cunningham (1st Lieut. USMC), Sub-Director.

1st Lieutenant John H. Coffman (2nd Lieut. USMC), Quartermaster.

1st Lieutenant James H. Satterfield (Gy-Sgt. USMC), Instructor.

1st Lieutenant Robert Colsky (Gy-Sgt., USMC), Instructor.

Teniente Manual Gomez F., Guardia Nacional de Nicaragua.

Subteniente Salvador Rizo, Guardia Nacional de Nicaragua.

The third class was under instruction at the Academy from 15 July, to 6 October, 1931. On 7 October, the entire Corps of Cadets was transferred to the Marine Corps rifle range for small arms and infantry weapons instruction. Upon the completion of this practical range work on 29 October, the cadets were returned to the Academy and outfitted and prepared for active field service. On 2 November, 1931, the entire organization moved into the field in the Southern Area for field training in preparation prior to campaign service against the bandits. On 19 and 20 November, all officers and cadets were transferred to the Department of Esteli by planes to assist in operations against strong bandit groups that were menacing the Departments of Esteli, Leon and Chinandega. During these operations the cadets took part in four combats; Mayocunda, Cenicerias, Las Pozas and Guadaloupe; and were given practical instruction in the duties of Post and District Commander in El Sauce and Villa Nueva. In addition, they trained a corps of eighty Auxiliares in these two posts. On 13 January, 1932, the Corps of Cadets was concentrated at El Sauce and returned to Managua by Marine Corps planes.

On 7 April, 1932, fifty-nine cadets of the original seventy-five who entered the third class were found qualified, graduated and commissioned as Acting Second Lieutenants.

On March 23, 24 and 25, 1932, physical and competitive mental examinations were held in all Areas, Department and District Headquarters of the Republic. There were three hundred and forty-eight applicants; of these, ninety-eight failed to qualify physically, failed to report for examination, or otherwise failed to comply with the entrance requirements. Two hundred and twenty-one applicants completed all of the physical and competitive mental examinations, which were so synchronized as to take place in all parts of the Republic at the same time.

From those completing the competitive examinations, eighty cadets were selected in accordance with the percentage obtained by them in the examinations. They assembled at the Academy on 27 April and began their course on 1 May, 1932. This class received the same course of

instruction given the previous class, including practical work on the rifle range with infantry weapons, and two weeks of field service in northern Leon and Estili.

Due to the necessity of replacing the American officers of the Guardia, the fourth class of cadets was graduated on 1 December, 1932, after seven months of instruction, when seventy-three cadets received their commissions as Acting Seconds Lieutenants.

As shown by the increasing number of applicants the Military Academy gained rapidly in popularity and was on its way to become an important institution in Nicaraguan national affairs. Before turning over the Guardia to Nicaraguan control, a complete set of texts was prepared in the Spanish language, and schedules were made for not only the next years course, but for the continuance of the Academy as a National Military School, offering a four years course of instruction. All of which were turned over to the Nicaraguan officers who succeeded to the command of the Guardia.

The success of the Military Academy was clearly demonstrated by the ability of the graduates to perform their duties both in the field and in garrison. The standard of service rendered by the officers who received their commissions through the Academy was surprisingly high, and was a source of the greatest satisfaction to the Jefe Director other American officers serving with the Guardia