

(NOTE: Additional information on the SENA training, made available to the Colombian soldier as he prepares to leave military service, ~~is~~ may be found in the enclosed folder describing the Bogota industrial training center.)

Latin Am. the
In a country where ~~day to day~~ ^{a sometimes} activities of insurgents, aided and abetted by geographical conditions and ~~an~~ ^{often} intimidated population, ~~of course, daily~~ ^{national political stability} threatens the security of ~~the government and the majority~~ in maintaining public order of the citizenry, the role of the military increases in importance. And if this ~~country~~ is also a developing nation where the military is the primary force behind civic action ~~such as road construction and~~ ^{other} national development projects, the importance of the ~~military~~ ^{army}, and especially the ~~drafted~~ ^{military} soldier who composes the majority of the working ~~military~~, increases more than proportionally.

^{,it is}
Colombia is such a country. Geographically/divided into three parts by separate ranges of the Andes Mountains, mountains that provided terrain for guerrilla operations. These mountains have also proven a natural barrier to the development of communications, ^{and intra-country transportation routes} particularly roads. The Colombian ~~Army~~ Soldier today is working ~~harder~~ on solutions to both problems.

The Colombian soldier, who is drafted for a period of two years, often comes from a small finca, or farm. By law, he registers for military service on reaching the age of 17. Most begin their service shortly thereafter.

Francisco Marquez Montes came to the Colombian Army from a farm near the small community of Santa Rosa de Cubal. Marco, with several military school opportunities open to him, ~~even~~ was to chose the ~~for~~ elite Lanceros where he was soon selected as a 'dragoneante', or outstanding soldier.

Following official entry into the Colombian Army, the new soldiers are given a short briefing on the various military schools available to them. These include the Cavalry (Caballeria), the ~~Grupo Mec~~ Mechanized units (Grupo Mecanizado), the Artillery (Artilleria), Engineers (Enginieros), Communications

In a Latin American country where the activities of insurgents, aided and abetted by geographical land features and an often intimidated population offers a constant threat to national political stability, the role of the military in maintaining public order is highly important. The fact that ^{bandit-}the ~~guerrilla~~-intimidated population is often of the lower class and mostly illiterate complicates the problem as ignorance is ~~largely~~ a major part of the basis upon which the insurgents base their anti-government propaganda.

And if such a country is also a developing nation where the military is the primary force behind civic action and other national development efforts, the importance of the armed forces ~~more~~ increases more than ^{this} proportionally. To ~~such~~ country then, the importance of the soldier cannot be overstated. He may be totally ignorant or partially educated. Either way, he is the foundation of the military, its muscle for both public order and national development.

(Transmisiones)), Transportation (Columna Transportes), and Medics (Sanidad) (MAP)

The schools, and qualifications for entry, are described to the new men. Marco chooses the Lanceros, the elite combat unit of the Colombian Army whose training center is located near the town of Melgar, approximately a two hour drive from Bogota downhill ~~km~~ into the flat, eastern part of the country.

Marco arrives at the training center accompanied by a recruiting officer who turns the new men over to the Commanding Officer of the training Cadre. A brief welcome statement is made to the men.....and conversion from civilian to soldier begins.

The first step is a personal history statement....name, birthday, parents names and address. Its all recorded for the personnel section. Next comes a complete medical exam which begins with height, weight. A medical record is begun for the soldiers, one that will stay with them. Notations are made on needed dental work, the possibility of other health problems that may need correction. With a lot of new men to process, the doctors are kept busy on reception days. Identification cards are to be issued, and photos are taken of the ~~Incorporating~~ new men for that purpose. In quick succession follow a visit to the barber who gives each man a 'new look' traditionally associated with most any Army; the issue of new clothes, uniforms and combat boots; and each man is assigned his new home: a bunk in a barn-like barracks. It is not long before the civilian clothes are gone, and the men are decked out in uniforms and on the parade field to begin basic training.

Each of the Colombian Army units conduct their own basic and advanced training. For the past ten years, the Lanceros conducted basic for other elite Colombian units such as the airborne battalion and the Palace Guards, plus advance training for themselves. This is in the process of change today, and the each major unit will conduct ~~its own~~ basic and advanced training ~~for its own personnel~~ for its own personnel from now on.

Amid the physical and combat type of training conducted for the soldier of the Colombian Army are special classes in the basics of reading, writing and mathematics. These classes were established by the Colombian Army to eliminate problems caused by illiterate personnel entering the service. ~~Such~~ The number of young men entering the Army who are not able to read or write number 17 to 18 percent of the total. ~~Since~~ This special training has, of course, the added benefit of returning literate men to civilian life on completion of their military service, thus benefiting the Colombian society as a whole.

Advanced training in the Lanceros takes a special direction...counter-guerrilla warfare. This training is intensive. Classes are conducted and ~~actual~~ attacks on guerilla camps are staged. Though these raids are mock-ups and the guerrillas are really other soldiers, the training is invaluable. Such operations are carried out in minute detail, from a civilian reporting the presence of guerrilla forces in a certain area to mapping the operation, and briefing the men in the patrol. Each detail is made as real as possible because the presence of insurgence in Colombia is very real.

All is not work for the Colombian soldier, however. Casinos del Soldado, or soldiers clubs, are to be found on most of the military posts, and here the soldier may spend free time with his friends in a variety of games or just visiting.

The Army's concern with its men and their future contribution to the future of Colombia does not end with ~~their~~ participation in military operations or civic action projects. During the latter ~~part~~ few weeks of ~~their~~ ^{the soldier's} military service, yet more training for ~~their~~ future as ~~contributing~~ citizens ~~who are~~ able to contribute to the development and advancement of the country is made available. This comes in the form of SENA.

SENA ~~is~~ means Servicio Nacional de Aprendizaje, a sort of national apprentice school system. SENA instruction and training centers are located

throughout Colombia. At these centers not only soldiers about to return to civilian life, but young men from age 14 through 21 have the opportunity to learn a trade, to improve an ability, to study new ways of/repairing engines to the care and feeding of livestock.

SENA is a wholly Colombian effort. Founded in 1957 by the government and a group of industrialists, it is financed today by a tax on industry payrolls. The founders of SEN A saw an increasingly critical need for semi-skilled and skilled tradesmen and technicians and decided to invest in the future of Colombia.

In the past 8 years, over 140,000 Colombians have taken courses at the 50-plus SEN A centers/ which include ~~approximately~~ nearly everything from indust to agric. Many of these have been soldiers who, because of SEN A and the Army's concern for the future of their men and their country, have had the opportunity to better themselves, upgrade their standard of living, and thus give give a helping hand towards the growth of their developing nation.

Following the completion of SEN A training, its back to an army post for the official discharge, a last few words from the Commanding Officer. The ceremony of discharge is brief, consisting of a pass in review of a company and the men who are to be discharged. Immediately upon completion of the ceremony, the men are dismissed to return to civilian life. Many will pursue new careers learned in the Army or at SEN A. But ~~first it is home~~ All will contribute to the ~~future~~ a better future for themselves, and in the process, for Colombia.