

CONSTABULARIES FOR CENTRAL AMERICA

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THE turbulent political condition of Central America needs hardly more than passing mention to most readers of the MARINE CORPS GAZETTE. Too many Marines have sweltered in its tropical heat watching the hungry "Outs" displace the well-fed "Ins" and waiting impatiently for orders home that never came except those *via* the unreliable route of the scuttle-butt. To the "Outs" and the "Ins" time meant nothing, but to the Yankee Marines weeks became months and life and the rations grew equally monotonous.

The history of these small nations for the past one hundred years is one page after another of external and internal strife. Such periods of peace as they did enjoy were usually the result of a military dictator getting into power with force enough behind him to preclude the possibility of his immediate overthrow.

It is true that the psychology of these people is such that they take war, as everything else in life, in an easy-going way. So war in Central America is quite different from war in France, for instance. While their wars have none of the annihilating and devastating effects of warfare as we know it, still its constant recurrence retards progress and keeps them in a very backward condition. Education, sanitation and economical development are way behind Western standards.

It is not within the scope of this article to discuss the many and sundry reasons for the unstable conditions to be found in these countries. There are two fundamental ones, however, that should be touched upon. One is the general poverty of the masses, which is due primarily to the lack of development of the natural resources. Life for the peon is sordid and drab. Little wonder that they welcome, with drawn machettes and loud Vivas, a revolution as a happy diversion and a license to steal. They have at least recreation and food to gain and nothing much of anything to lose. Another fundamental cause of instability is the isolation and inaccessibility of these nations. They are almost entirely lacking in modern means of internal communication. This makes the central government quite impotent to keep in touch and maintain law and order in a large portion of the state.

So far none of the measures of stabilization taken by our Department of State have reached either of these fundamental causes. Unification, arbitration, limitation of armaments, fiscal supervision, modernization of the electoral machinery and withholding recognition have all been tried at various times without particular success. No political cure for their real ills can be successful because they are in the grip of a vicious circle in which war produces impoverishment and impoverishment produces war. Many students of Latin-American affairs have come to appreciate this condition and have been looking for a means of breaking the circle. They believe they have found it in the

constabulary idea. Their arguments are along the lines that what these nations need to put them in the law-abiding, orderly column is money—capital with which to develop their national resources. To get this money, which must come from foreign sources, there must be an assurance of law and order and political stability—the bugaboo that is now scaring it away. They claim that a foreign controlled constabulary is the only means of giving capital the assurance that it must have to undertake any large and permanent investment. We will now consider this sword that is to cut the Gordian Knot.

The Department of State has taken up this idea in the last few years and is urging upon these countries the wisdom of organizing a constabulary force along modern lines and under foreign direction to replace their politically corrupt army and police. Whether this proves to be the panacea for all their troubles, that many predict, only time can supply the answer. However, it is interesting for us to look into the subject in some detail and examine the various steps that have been taken so far to accomplish the purpose.

In 1922, our government initiated a conference of representatives from all the Central American states which met at Washington early in 1923 and agreed to what is now known as the Washington Convention. Among several questions brought before this conference was the one of establishing constabulary forces in these republics. They finally came to an agreement on this proposition in terms as follows:

ARTICLE I

The Contracting Parties having taken into consideration their relative population area, extent of frontiers and various other factors of military importance, agree that for a period of five (5) years from the date of the coming into force of the present Convention, they shall not maintain a standing Army and National Guard in excess of the number of men hereinafter provided, except in case of civil war, or impending invasion by another state:

Guatemala	5200
El Salvador	4200
Honduras	2500
Nicaragua	2500
Costa Rica	2000

General officers and officers of a lower rank of the standing Army, who are necessary in accordance with the military regulations of each country, are not included in the provisions of this Article, nor are those of the National Guard. The Police Force is also not included.

ARTICLE II

“As the first duty of armed forces of the Central American Governments is to preserve public order each of the Contracting Parties obligates itself to establish a National Guard *to cooperate with the existing Armies* in the preservation of order in the various districts of the country and on the frontiers, and shall immediately consider the best means for establishing it. With this end in view the Governments of the Central American states shall give con-

sideration to the employment of suitable instructors, in order to take advantage, in this manner, of experience acquired in other countries in organizing such corps.

"In no case shall the total combined force of the Army and of the National Guard exceed the maximum limit fixed in the preceding Article, except in the cases therein mentioned."

After reading the terms of this agreement it is very evident that the Central American delegates rather reluctantly accepted the constabulary idea as presented by our government. The sole purpose of the proposition from our standpoint was to substitute a well-trained, disciplined and non-political force for the politically corrupt, undisciplined forces now existing. The Latin statesmen accepted that part of the project that could not gracefully be avoided, but made it possible to continue their time-honored and trusty police and army. While this agreement may not seem a very satisfactory one to a military man, trained to avoid subterfuges, to our diplomatic officials it was looked upon as an important step in the general work of cleaning up Central America.

Prior to and since the Washington Convention the Department of State has had several studies made of the project. The first of these to be made was by the War Plans Division of the War Department General Staff. This study was in considerable detail but largely theoretical, and based more on our experience with similar forces in Cuba, Philippine Islands and Haiti than on conditions in Central America. The War Plans Division recommended a constabulary strength for the various states as follows:

Guatemala	1800
El Salvador	1200
Honduras	600
Nicaragua	800
Costa Rica	400

Their study arrived at an estimated cost per year per man of \$300. This included all expenses except housing accommodations.

Because of the theoretical nature of the War Department's report, Lieutenant Colonel James K. Tracy, United States Marine Corps, with considerable first-hand knowledge of actual conditions in Central America and extensive experience as a senior officer in the Haitien Gendarmerie, was asked by the Department of State to study the subject and lend to it his practical experience.

Colonel Tracy's report did not differ materially in estimates of strength and costs from that of the War Department. In tabulated form they are as follows:

Country:	Population:	Proposed strength:	Yearly cost:
Guatemala	2,004,000	2,000	\$610,000
El Salvador	1,336,000	1,300	405,000
Honduras	637,000	650	200,000
Nicaragua	746,000	750	235,000
Costa Rica	459,000	450	140,000

Colonel Tracy's estimate of strength was based on one soldier per one hundred thousand inhabitants and his yearly cost figured on the basis of one soldier costing \$311 per year. In the light of the writer's experience in Nicaragua it is believed that both, the War Department's and Colonel Tracy's estimates of strength and costs are too low. The basis for a correct estimate of a force for Nicaragua is one and one-half soldier per one hundred thousand inhabitants at a cost per soldier of \$400. Besides working on the project of constabulary forces for all the Central American Republics, Colonel Tracy prepared a detailed organization to meet the peculiar needs of Honduras.

Later, Major John Marston, who was at the time commanding the Legation Guard at Managua and who previously had had extensive experience with the Haitien Gendarmerie during its formative period, compiled cost figures for a proposed force in Nicaragua. His results were as follows:

For a strength of:	Yearly cost:
100.....	\$33,810
200.....	77,036
400.....	158,060
600.....	251,596
1000.....	407,072

These costs include everything except arms and ammunition of which the Nicaraguan Government was amply supplied. These cost figures are considerably higher than the two previous estimates and are believed to be about correct for the local conditions of Nicaragua. The writer concurs in the views of Major Marston that pay is an important factor in the efficiency of such forces and should be treated very liberally. Money saved on pay is spent in the long run in many other ways by a loss of efficiency. As finances were the main obstacle in the way of establishing a constabulary in Nicaragua, Major Marston made no specific estimate of the strength of such a force, but as he prepared detailed estimates for a force of one thousand men, it is presumed that he had that figure in mind as a desirable strength.

In connection with the estimated strength and cost figures heretofore shown for constabulary forces, it is interesting to see what is now being spent on military establishments in these countries. The following table does not include cost of National police:

	1922-23	1921-22	1920-21	1919-20
Guatemala	\$1,674,584	\$1,624,000	\$834,000	\$390,000
Salvador	1,604,569	1,604,000	693,000	1,272,000
Nicaragua	132,292	145,000	327,000	327,000
Honduras	1,063,005	3,417,475	998,000	998,000
Costa Rica	596,000	648,000	1,040,300

(NOTE: A comparison of expenditures in Nicaragua with the other countries is interesting, particularly with Honduras, which is a country very similar in population and economic development. The stabilizing influence of the Marines at Managua is the sole reason for such low figures in Nicaragua. Previous to 1912 her expenditures on the army ran similar to those shown for Honduras.)

The writer first became acquainted with the constabulary project and involved in a way with furthering its progress in connection with the efforts

of our government to have Nicaragua establish such a force to replace the Marines when they were withdrawn from Managua. These negotiations had been in progress since 1923, but had made little if any headway. The Conservative Government of Nicaragua showed great reluctance to provide for such a force, claiming very rightly that their pro-American tendencies had already cost them many thousand votes and to install an American-controlled constabulary would be the death of the party. They also did not wish to take a step that might hurry the departure of the Marines from Managua.

The presidential elections of 1924 changed this situation very materially and in favor of the constabulary. The successful ticket in this election was made up mostly of those who had been in opposition to the previous Conservative Governments and of course their opposition was largely attacks on the American leanings of the Conservatives. The Marine Guard, being there at the request of the Conservatives, whom we put in power in 1912, was a particular target for their attacks. When this government came into power on January 1, 1925, they were obligated to get rid of the Marines. Of course, as soon as they got into power they soon forgot this obligation and were appealing most pathetically to our government for the Marines' retention. Our State Department saw the opportunity to force the constabulary and granted them a six months' delay in the withdrawal of the Guard provided they proceeded at once to organize a constabulary.

The attitude of President Solorzano and the incoming government can best be shown by an extract of his inaugural address made before the National Congress:

"With respect to the sixth point, which refers to the efficient organization of an urban and rural police, I desire to describe something which I judge to be of great importance to the improvement of various branches of our public administration.

"In November, 1923, the American Minister in our country addressed to our Government a note indicating, among other things, the desire entertained by the American Government to withdraw the Marine Guard which has remained in this Capital since 1912. It added that, to the end that peace should not be disturbed, it suggested the convenience of organizing the National Guard referred to in Article 2 of the Convention for the Limitation of Armaments, signed at Washington by Plenipotentiaries of the Central American States on February 7, 1923.

"I permit myself to transcribe the paragraph of that note relative to the creation of the National Guard referred to:

"As another evidence of its desire to assist Nicaragua in the orderly and undisturbed conduct of its normal existence, my Government would be glad to assist the Nicaraguan Government in the organization and training of an efficient constabulary which would assure the maintenance of order after the Marines are withdrawn. In establishing a force of this nature the Nicaraguan Government would be carrying out the terms of Article II of the Convention for the Limitation of Armaments, signed at the recent Conference on Central American Affairs. If the Nicaraguan Government desires, my Government will be glad to suggest the names of persons suitable to act as instructors in the new constabulary, in order that their experience may be made available to Nicaragua."

"With these antecedents, and taking into account that the sixth point of the Transactionist Program coincides with the international obligation established in Article II of the Convention cited as well as with the friendly initiative of the American Minister which was accepted in principle by our Government, I contemplate submitting

very soon to your elevated knowledge a project of a law creating the National Guard already discussed, and to that effect I am disposed to accept the good offices of the American Government in the sense of obtaining technicians and instructors so that, in conformity with Article II of the Conventions for the Limitation of Armaments, there may be organized in the most efficient way appropriate to the peculiar conditions of our country a National Guard which will cooperate in the maintenance of order in the various regions of Nicaragua and on its frontiers and which at the same time shall meet the necessity more and more noticeable of having a Rural Police not only for the protection of the interior, but for the suppression of contrabandists."

Following his inauguration President Solorzano made an official request on the Department of State for a detailed project that he could submit to the National Congress for their consideration. In response to this request the Department of State proposed the following plan:

PLAN FOR THE FORMATION OF A CONSTABULARY IN NICARAGUA

1. The Nicaraguan Government will establish a civil police force which shall be referred to hereinafter as the Constabulary.
2. The strength of the Constabulary, exclusive of American personnel, shall be 23 officers and 392 enlisted men, but this force will be increased should such increase appear advisable.
3. The Constabulary will be organized, armed, equipped and trained as a military-police with the object of replacing entirely the existing Army, Navy and National police of Nicaragua. And it will be treated as a National institution free from political influence and used for the sole purpose of maintaining peace and order.
4. To provide efficient organization and training, the Constabulary shall have a division known as the "Nicaraguan National Constabulary Training Branch." The numerical strength of this force shall vary in size as the state of the organization and training of the Constabulary dictates. This force shall be hereinafter referred to as the "Training Branch" and, in counter-distinction to this branch, the remainder of the Constabulary shall be termed the "Constabulary proper."
5. In view of the desire of the Nicaraguan Government that the Government of the United States lend its friendly cooperation in the formation of the Constabulary, it is agreed that the officers and enlisted men of the Legation Guard, now stationed in Managua will until their withdrawal, voluntarily lend their services in its formation and training.
6. To this end it is agreed that these American officers and enlisted men, whose voluntary services the Nicaraguan Government has accepted, shall within the Training Branch, but not within the Constabulary proper, have full and complete authority therein. In accordance with the request of the Government of Nicaragua, the Government of the United States will suggest the names of qualified persons who will be employed under contract by the Nicaraguan Government to take over the management of the Training Branch after the withdrawal of the Legation Guard. The Nicaraguan Government will make every effort to obtain the services of these instructors a sufficient time in advance of the withdrawal of the Legation Guard to assure the uninterrupted functioning of the Training Branch.

7. The Training Branch, and all the Nicaraguan Officers and enlisted men who may from time to time compose it, is not to come under the authority of the Ministry of War or the Commander of the Constabulary proper, but be subject directly and solely to the command and authority of the senior American Marine Officer who is subordinate only to the President of the Republic in all matters pertaining thereto.
8. The commander of the Training Branch will prepare such rules and regulations as may be necessary for the proper administration, discipline and control of the constabulary and these rules and regulations, when approved by the President of Nicaragua, will be binding on all persons who are, or who may become, members of the Constabulary. Such persons will not be subject to Civil Law process.
9. All officers and enlisted men of the Constabulary must first pass through the Training Branch and qualify by such physical, mental, moral and professional standards as the Training Branch commander may prescribe.
10. All replacements of either officers or enlisted men must come from the Training Branch.
11. Whenever the commander of the Training Branch deems it necessary, all officers and enlisted men of the Constabulary proper, either as individuals or as entire organizations, may be returned to the Training Branch and their places taken by individuals or organizations of the Training Branch.
12. The American officers who have volunteered their services with the Training Branch will have the authority to make such inspections of the Constabulary proper as the Commander of the Training Branch deems desirable and necessary.
13. The procurement of all supplies for the Constabulary will be made by the Supply Officer of the Training Branch who will honor all reasonable and necessary requisitions from the supply officers of the Constabulary proper.
14. Such existing army supplies, buildings, grounds and other army utilities as may be considered by the Commander of the Training Branch necessary for the establishment and maintenance of the Constabulary will be placed at his disposal by the Nicaraguan Government.
15. The Nicaraguan Government will appropriate in its annual budget the funds necessary for the execution of this plan as set forth in the appendix hereto. Checks drawn against this appropriation must in each case be approved by the Supply Officer of the Training Branch.
16. All disbursements for the Constabulary account will be made by the Supply Officers of the Training Branch. These Officers' accounts may be audited not to exceed twice in one year by a competent auditing commission. Upon the conclusion of any audit the correctness of the accounts thus audited will not thereafter be questioned unless such question is presented within thirty days after the completion of the audit. In case the correctness or legality of any payments cannot be satisfactorily determined by conference between the auditing commission and the Supply Officers, the matter in dispute shall be referred to the American Minister to Nicaragua and the Nicaraguan Minister of Finance whose decision is to be final. No disallow-

ance of any account paid by the Supply Officers shall be made if it appears that the same was paid in good faith and with honest intentions.

17. The American Officers and enlisted men whose services are being utilized in the Constabulary Training Branch will enjoy the privilege of free entry into Nicaragua of their personal and household effects and other supplies needed for their personal and family use.

18. Such changes in the present arrangement as may seem necessary on account of the withdrawal of the Legation Guard or at any time later will be made by the Nicaraguan Government in consultation with the Government of the United States.

This was a very material modification of the plan as it was originally drawn and approved by the Department of State. The original plan called for a force of fifty-eight officers and 973 soldiers with an American instructing force of thirteen officers and fourteen enlisted men of the Marine Corps and four officers and four enlisted men of the Naval Medical Corps. These to be recruited in two yearly increments. The failure of a bill authorizing the use of Marine Corps and Naval personnel for this duty to pass one of the branches of Congress made it necessary to reduce the size of the force and put in a provisional and temporary instructing force. The idea behind this was to take advantage of an opportune time to get Nicaragua committed to the Constabulary and then later, when we were in a better position, make it more effective. There was also the urgent need of leaving some force in Nicaragua to replace the Marines soon to be withdrawn.

This plan did, however, retain those features of the original plan that gave to the American instructors the control essential to its success, namely: the training branch, the right to inspect and recall members after they have gone to service and control over all expenditures.

This plan, when it was published in Nicaragua, created quite a furor. Writers in the anti-American press started a tirade against what they termed was a plan to turn over to the Americans the lives and liberties of the people. The politicians, of course, became frightened, but after innumerable conferences, exchanges of dispatches with Washington and redrafting of the plan, there finally, in May, 1925, emerged from the National Congress the following Constabulary law:

“ THE CONSTABULARY LAW AS PASSED BY NICARAGUAN CONGRESS

“ The Senate and Chamber of Deputies of the Republic of Nicaragua.

“ Considering,

that by Article Two of the Convention for the Limitation of Armaments signed at Washington on February 7, 1923, between the Republics of Nicaragua, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Honduras and Guatemala, Nicaragua obligated itself, as did the other high contracting parties, to establish a National Guard which should coöperate with the army in preserving public order,

“ DECREE :

“ 1. Create at the expense of the State the National Guard referred to in said Convention.

“ 2. The National Guard is an institution foreign to all political influence, designed to maintain social order in the triple capacity of an urban, rural and judicial police force.

The army is independent of the National Guard, although in an emergency, both should cooperate in the preservation of public order in the manner determined by the laws of Article 2 of the Convention.

"3. At its beginning the National Guard will consist of 23 officers and 302 individuals for subordinate positions, all Nicaraguans under contract. The executive power may vary this number when it considers it necessary.

"4. The Guard will be organized, equipped and disciplined in a military fashion, as an urban, rural and judicial police force, as has been said. It should be considered as a national institution entirely subordinate to the Government of the Republic for the maintenance of peace, law and order.

"5. The efficient education and organization of the National Guard will be effected by means of a School, which will be called the School of Instruction, into which all the individuals and officers destined to form the institution will previously enter. The students of the School will form the School Force, to distinguish it from the National Guard proper. The number of students in the School will vary according to the necessities of the National Guard, at the discretion of the Executive.

"6. In order that the experience acquired in other countries in the organization and operation of these forces may be availed of, the Chief of the School of Instruction and the Instructors may be Americans or of any other foreign nation, but must have a knowledge of Spanish; and the Executive is authorized by the present law to sign contracts with them for the prudential time he deems necessary, with the obligation that they be subject to the supreme control of the Government of the Republic and to the laws of the State.

"7. The Chief of the School of Instruction and the Instructors will exercise full and complete authority in its management and over the officers and individuals of the School Force, but not in the National Guard. In the latter they will have only the right to make inspections whenever the Chief of the School deems it expedient, in order to ascertain its progress, good service and efficiency. In order to fill vacancies or correct defects which they may observe, they may propose to the Executive the change of the men and officers of the National Guard, totally or in part, through the medium of the Ministry of Government and Police, for the purpose of maintaining discipline and correction therein.

"8. Apart from the President of the Republic and the appropriate Minister, no other authority of the State will have control in the School of Instruction or over the volunteers who compose it.

"9. The Regulations of the School of Instruction and the laws and regulations of the National Guard will be prepared by the superior officials of the School subject principally to the provisions of this law; but both must be approved and published by the Executive Power. Only in this manner will they be binding upon the personnel of the School and of the National Guard.

"10. The School of Instruction will be the preparatory centre for all the officers, individuals and employees of the National Guard. They must first pass through it for instruction, to establish their merits and aptitudes, their physical, mental and moral state; as must also all the substitutes for officers as well as individuals of the Guard who may be later called into service.

"11. The lands, buildings, equipment, articles and elements necessary to establish the School of Instruction and the National Guard will be provided by the State, the Executive Power being authorized by the present law to make the necessary expenditures.

"12. There will be a special department of provisions or supplies which will bear the name 'Supply Office' attached to and organized by the Ministry of Police. This office will take charge of the providing of food and other necessary supplies to the National Guard and to the School of Instruction. The Executive will regulate this office and fix the bonds to be given by those who handle funds, according to their amounts.

"13. The expenses necessary to the service of the School of Instruction and of the National Guard will be authorized by their respective chiefs and by the Chief of the Supply Office, subject to the corresponding laws of the Republic, and the employees of

this office will be strictly obliged to keep their accounts in conformity with the laws and to present them for auditing to the Supreme Tribunal of Accounts. All expenditures must first receive the approval of the Ministry of Police.

"14. The General Budget of the Republic will detail each year the amount or amounts necessary for the institution which the present law orders to be created according to the partial budget presented by the respective ministry.

"15. This law will become effective from the date of its publication in THE GAZETTE."

The only serious defect in this law is the removal from the control of the Constabulary of all procurements and disbursements. This defect may be rectified by Executive action or future amendment. If something is not done, it will prove a serious obstacle to the success of the force.

Due to the long delay in enacting this law the Marines at Managua had no active part in organizing this force. Some advice was sought and given on methods of recruiting and organizing but in no case, as far as we could observe, was our advice followed. When the Legation Guard left Managua in August, 1925, the Constabulary consisted of three American instructors and about one hundred and eighty men. It was armed but not uniformed and, although the instructors had only recently arrived, showed decided evidence of their training and leadership. It did not, however, prevent the coup d'état that followed shortly after our withdrawal. Whether it could have prevented it or not remains in doubt because from reports it seems the President would not sanction its use. It did not, however, have sufficient prestige and moral force to deter the leaders of that movement. The three American officers are all former officers of the Army who now hold reserve commissions. Two of them were formerly officers in the Philippine Constabulary and one a former officer in the Porto Rican regiment.

Constabulary forces are now in being in Salvador, Costa Rica and Nicaragua and one is in prospect for Honduras. The two former countries have their forces under Spanish instructors. Plans for the force in Honduras contemplates American instructors as in Nicaragua. So far, Costa Rica is the only one that is inclined to rely on the Constabulary as the sole means of defense and law and order. In the other countries the constabulary is more ornamental than real. They are holding on to their armies for defense and using their police as of old for the enforcement of law and order. Whether, as they get more confidence in the new institution, they will expand its activities until it replaces these other agencies is hard to foretell. Unless this is the future development, little if any lasting benefit will accrue from the constabulary idea, and Central America will once again become the stamping ground of United States Marines.

APPENDIX

TABLE I

Total Cost Items for Constabulary Fiscal Year, 1924-25

Pay, officers	\$6,585
Pay, enlisted men	23,916
Initial issue and reserve clothing	11,000
Transportation	2,000

Stationery and office supplies	1,000
Recreation and amusement	500
Furniture	400
Medical stores	500
Clerks, translators and school teachers	600
Contingent	1,500
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Total	\$48,001

TABLE II

Total Cost Items for Constabulary Fiscal Year, 1925-26

Pay, officers	\$26,340
Pay, enlisted men	95,664
Transportation	1,000
Stationery and office supplies	300
Recreation and amusement	500
Medical stores	1,000
Officers' travel expenses	1,000
Rifle range rental	500
Clerks, translators and school teachers	2,400
Contingent	500
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Total	\$129,204