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THE MILITARY

A Changing Role

The military men of Latin America have long been more interested in prestige and political power than in the real business of soldiering. Now, while they are still ready, willing and able to pull a coup—as they did in Bolivia last week—they are placing new emphasis on a practical military problem.

They are a surprisingly large force.

Since World War II, Latin American nations have kept an average 500,000 men under arms, and spent some \$1.6 billion annually on their care and feeding. Much of the money has gone for such status symbols as Caracas' \$10 million officers' club; millions more went into early pensions. Proudest symbols of all are some expensive toys of war. Venezuela's air force boasts a fleet of British Canberra jet bombers and U.S.-made F-86 Sabre jets. Because Peru bought four submarines, little Ecuador hurried out and got three Canberras. In 1956 Brazil spent \$36 million on Latin America's first aircraft carrier (without a single plane to put aboard), so Argentina naturally added a surplus British carrier to its fleet.

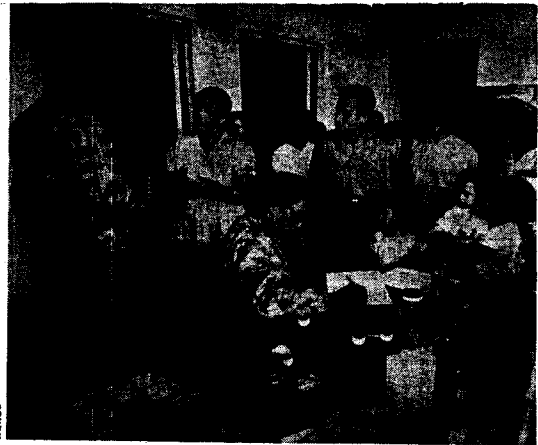
Latin America's military men stoutly insist that such heavy equipment is necessary in case of war. But the last Latin American war was fought from 1932 to 1935 between Paraguay and Bolivia over a scrap of wasteland known as the Chaco. There seems little likelihood of another such territorial struggle; nor is there much chance that any World War III could be fought in Latin America.

Learning about Guerrillas. The one future war that Latin Americans are likely to fight is quite a different sort. It is against the fitting Castroite guerrillas, who promise to "liberate" the people. This is the kind of war that Latin armies have only recently begun to learn about.

Some 1,500 guerrillas already operate in Venezuela, defying the best efforts of the army to root them out. There are will-o'-the-wisp Communist bands in the Andean hills of Colombia and Peru, in the jungles of Honduras and Guatemala. The guerrilla potential elsewhere is described by one top U.S. policymaker as "something that is going to keep us awake at night in the next ten years."

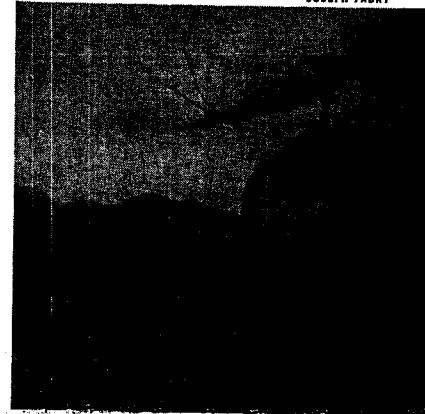
The guerrillas openly sneer at clumsy pursuit by tanks and jets. With a nudge from the U.S., Latin American military budgets are starting to call for Jeeps, mortars, radios, helicopters, coastal patrol boats and other mundane articles that would have been sniffed at a few years ago. Hundreds of enlisted men and officers attend the U.S. anti-guerrilla training schools in the Panama Canal Zone. They study guerrilla tactics and jungle survival, learn how to strangle a man with a bootlace, operate communications equipment, camouflage themselves and shinny up rope ladders like spiders.

From Bully to Friend. Latin America's soldiers are also learning about "civic action"—the needful art of winning *campesino* support before the guerrillas do. One of the reasons Fidel Castro survived in Cuba's hills was that the peasants despised Dictator Fulgencio Batista's bullying troops. By contrast,



COLOMBIAN TROOPS GIVING MEDICAL AID

JOSEPH FABRY



WAGING BANDIT WAR IN BACKLANDS

From jets to Jeeps.

the Bolivian army runs eight experimental and educational farms for *campesinos*. What popularity Bolivia's new junta chief René Barrientos commands stems partly from the fact that he is an ardent supporter of *Acción Cívica*. Peru's army labors mightily building roads into the undeveloped eastern lowlands. In Guatemala, troops have built football fields, made Christmas toys, turned ammo cases into school desks, and built public bathhouses.

The new emphasis is most noticeable in Colombia, where 90% of the nation's army is committed to anti-guerrilla warfare. Colombia's war began in 1948 as a political feud between the country's liberals and conservatives, soon degenerated into a senseless episode of banditry that has cost 200,000 lives in 16 years. Not until two years ago when Major General Alberto Ruiz Novoa became War Minister did the government make any headway.

Ruiz Novoa splintered his unwieldy divisions into tiny, mobile hunter-killer groups and sent them out to play hide and seek with guerrillas. *La violencia* has been cut 80%, and the number of bandits killed climbed to almost 800 last year. At the same time, civic action hands out medical aid, helps peasants build schools, push through roads and expand farm output. "The Colombian peasant is the soldier's friend now," says an army commander, "and we can't let him down."