



## Administering the Protectorates: The U.S. Occupation of Haiti and the Dominican Republic

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The Spanish-American War marked the emergence of the United States as a significant colonial power. Some areas, notably the Philippines and Puerto Rico, were openly annexed. Others, especially in the Caribbean, though they continued to maintain some aspects of sovereignty, in reality became virtual protectorates. In all these cases, the United States found itself poorly prepared for the task of administering the territories under its control. This lack of preparation was compounded by a peculiar unwillingness of the American government and people to acknowledge that they had embarked upon colonial ventures. This attitude of reluctant imperialism meant that the United States could never establish a formal colonial office or prepare a professional corps of colonial administrators. Successive governments were even reluctant to request congressional appropriations to administer newly controlled territories. Instead, they called upon the military to assume the role of colonial administrator. At first the Army carried the major responsibility in this area, but from 1910 on, the Navy and the Marine Corps took over most of these duties. This paper examines two cases of Navy-Marine administration within foreign nations, Haiti and the Dominican Republic.

There has been considerable debate over the motivation for the American interventions in Haiti, the Dominican Republic, and several other Latin American nations in the first third of the 20th century. The desire to protect American

investments and to expand economic controls, security interests involving the Panama control or fear over possible German influence, and even a rather confused paternalism have been among the more prominent motives which may have prompted the interventions.<sup>1</sup> While we find a rather confused notion of national security the most important of these factors, we have little new to contribute to this discussion and will concentrate our efforts on other areas.

The goals of the interventions are somewhat easier to discover. The prime goal, in most cases, was the restoration of internal order and the creation of relative political and economic stability.<sup>2</sup> This meant ending revolutionary outbreaks, reforming the military and police forces in an effort to make them effective supporters of established administrations, and controlling national finances in order to achieve stable and, for American investors, profitable economic conditions. At times the holding of relatively free elections was seen as an important means of promoting stability.

Secondary goals included maintenance and expansion of American political and economic dominance in the Caribbean and paternalistic concerns for uplifting and improving conditions within the occupied nations. The relative importance attached to any of these goals varied from intervention to intervention and, during American administration of its Caribbean "protectorates," from administration to administration back in Washington.

Our examination of the occupation of Haiti and the Dominican Republic focuses upon three basic questions. The first of these is how and why the prevalent system of American administration developed. This includes examination of the expansion and the limits of American areas of control in each nation, and some study of relations between the civil and the military personnel involved in the interventions. We compare United States administrative policies in Haiti and the Dominican Republic and try to explain the differences which we encounter. Finally, we try to determine to what extent these systems of military administration related to the original goals of the interventions. This involves analyzing the results of the interventions in an

effort to determine if American administration advanced or hindered the achievement of the original goals.

While both interventions occurred during the first term of President Woodrow Wilson, the essential background was created by the policies of the preceding administrations. Secretaries of State Elihu Root and Philander Knox both devoted considerable attention to relations with the nations of the Caribbean. Root established something of a model for future U.S. policy in the area with the Dominican Customs Treaty of 1907. This treaty authorized an American customs receivership with first priority on customs receipts going to payments to foreign bondholders. In addition, the Dominican Republic pledged not to increase its foreign debt without American consent. In return the United States helped arrange a new \$20 million loan to the Dominican government.<sup>3</sup>

Root's successor, Philander Knox, emphasized a policy of using loans and financial controls to promote stability and protect American investments.<sup>4</sup> Efforts to extend customs controls to Haiti were unsuccessful, but Knox did succeed in blocking German and French efforts to gain a measure of financial control over that nation.<sup>5</sup>

The inauguration of Wilson as president and the appointment of William Jennings Bryan as secretary of state seemed to signal a change in America's Caribbean policy. Bryan had earlier opposed American imperialism in that area and the new president, speaking at Mobile in October 1913, condemned the use of power to gain economic advantages over smaller nations and pledged that the United States would never again acquire territory by conquest.<sup>6</sup>

However, the subsequent crisis in relations with Mexico, culminating in the 1914 occupation of Vera Cruz, made it clear that the new administration was no more willing to treat the nations of Latin America as sovereign equals than its predecessors had been. Wilson's heavy-handed paternalism, with its concept of "shooting men into self government," represented little improvement over the open commercial imperialism of Knox.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, this policy resulted in even greater American interference with

the internal affairs and international relations of the Latin American governments.

## **Haiti**

From the beginning of the 20th century until the United States intervened in 1915, conditions in the black republic of Haiti became increasingly unstable. In this 15-year period, which normally would have been a little over two presidential terms, Haiti had nine presidents.<sup>8</sup> There was a continual struggle between upper-class mulattos of French language and culture and lower-class blacks, most of whom were illiterate and spoke Creole. Graft was rampant and elections were a farce. A group of peasants called *cacos* lived in the north near the Dominican border and made their living by participating in revolutions which often were financed by German merchants living in Haiti.<sup>9</sup>

This instability was of great concern to U.S. President Woodrow Wilson. Unfortunately, no one in Wilson's State Department knew much about Haiti. Secretary of State William Jennings Bryan relied for information upon Roger L. Farnham, head of the National City Bank's interests in Haiti. This was bad because Farnham was unsympathetic toward the Haitians and was determined to bring about U.S. intervention in the republic. He was even able to convince Bryan that Germany and France, who were then at war, were working together to gain control of Mole St. Nicholas.<sup>10</sup>

Wilson decided that reforms in Haiti were essential to the security of the United States even though American financial interests in the republic were small. He also believed that the United States had an obligation to help its neighbors for their own sake. Wilson and his advisors decided that the only way to ensure Haiti's security was to have some control over expenditures and reorganization of the armed forces, as well as of customs. Free elections would also be necessary. A new minister to Haiti, Arthur Bailly-Blanchard—a mild-mannered, elderly career diplomat whose chief qualification was fluent French—was to try to persuade Haiti to agree to these proposals. Wilson's plan for free elections was virtually unworkable

because (1) there were no organized political parties, (2) contending leaders were little more than chiefs of mercenary bands, (3) the mass of the people were illiterate and indifferent to politics, and (4) the president of Haiti was chosen by congress and not by the people.<sup>11</sup> As each new president came to power, the United States attempted to get him to agree to Wilson's plan.

On 27 July 1915, Haitian President Guillaume Sam was overthrown. When it was apparent that he was going to fall, Guillaume ordered the shooting of political prisoners who were of the elite class and fled to the French legation. The commander of the prison carried out these orders and fled to the Dominican legation. Fearing trouble, the American chargé cabled Admiral William B. Caperton, who was at Cape Haitian with the cruiser *Washington* and a contingent of Marines. Caperton left immediately for Port-au-Prince, arriving on the morning of the 28th. Before his arrival, a mob invaded the French and Dominican legations and killed both Guillaume Sam and his prison commander. Caperton decided to land troops and take control of the city to protect foreign lives. After he had already made this decision, he received orders from the Navy Department to land Marines.<sup>12</sup>

About 250 Marines and an equal number of bluejackets were landed. They met no resistance, and the admiral assumed military control of the city. However, in anticipation of possible trouble, he asked that the Navy Department be prepared to send additional reinforcements of one or more regiments of Marines. At this point, United States policy in Haiti was unclear. On 4 August 1915, the chief of naval operations reported to the Assistant Secretary of the Navy Franklin Roosevelt, "The State Department has not yet informed us of their exact policy in Haiti, but Mr. Lansing has expressed the intention of outlining a definite policy in the near future."<sup>13</sup>

The U.S. Government was now in a position to obtain the control in Haiti which it had been seeking, but both Secretary of State Lansing and President Wilson had difficulty deciding what should be done. On July 30, Lansing asked the Navy to order Caperton not to turn over the government of Port-au-Prince to any Haitian

authority for the time being, but he wrote Wilson that he did not know what the United States should do or legally could do. He pointed out that the United States had no real excuse to take over Port-au-Prince as it had at Vera Cruz. Wilson was also concerned about legality, but felt there was nothing to do but "take the bull by the horns and restore order."<sup>14</sup>

One of the first things to be done was to elect a new Haitian president. On August 10, Caperton was authorized to allow the election of a president, but the Haitian congress was to be informed that the United States would find unacceptable any president who would not end factional strife or who would not give "the United States practical control of the customs and such financial control over the affairs of the Republic of Haiti as the United States may deem necessary for efficient administration."<sup>15</sup> There were two candidates, Rosalvo Bobo, who had led the revolt against Guillaume, and Philippe Sudre Dartiguenave, president of the senate. Caperton interviewed both men and was satisfied with Dartiguenave's answers, but when he asked Bobo if he would support the president if he were not chosen, Bobo replied, "No, I will not! . . . I alone am fit to be President; I alone understand Haitian aspiration, no one is fit to be President but me . . ." <sup>16</sup> On August 12, the election was held. Dartiguenave received 94 votes, Bobo 16 votes, and 30 votes were scattered among other candidates.<sup>17</sup> Dartiguenave was inaugurated as president, and in the early years he cooperated with the United States occupation.

In the meantime, the U.S. military was extending its control by disarming the Haitians and dissolving their army. On August 19, Caperton was ordered to take charge of customs collection and use the funds to develop a constabulary, and to conduct temporary public works to provide work for the unemployed. The United States was trying to get the Haitian president to request such action, but Caperton was ordered to take over the customs whether or not Dartiguenave requested it. Caperton feared a Haitian reaction to this and asked for additional troops. As troops became available, the admiral took over the customs houses one at a time.

Finally, on September 2, he took over the customs house at Port-au-Prince, and on September 3 declared a state of martial law.<sup>18</sup>

On August 14, President Dartiguenave had been sent a copy of the treaty proposed by the U.S. The provisions were to be accepted by Haiti without modification. It provided for American control of customs, finances, the constabulary, public works, and public health. It omitted control of Haitian courts and education, which the United States later regretted. President Dartiguenave readily accepted the treaty, but the Haitian congress was reluctant. After much delay, Caperton issued a statement that there were rumors that senators were accepting bribes to hold up the treaty. He threatened to prosecute anyone taking bribes in the provost court set up under martial law. Later that day, the treaty was ratified by the Haitian senate.<sup>19</sup> Since the United States Senate was not in session, a *modus vivendi* was signed which put the treaty into force pending American action. The plan was to use officers of Caperton's staff until the treaty was approved, but—as this would have violated U.S. law—officers were appointed to perform duties *similar* to those provided by the treaty. It should be pointed out that civilians could have been appointed to these positions with no conflict, but Caperton maintained that the Haitians preferred military officers.<sup>20</sup> The United States Senate ratified the treaty on 28 February 1916, and on 12 June 1916, an act of Congress made it possible for American military personnel to accept paid positions under the Haitian government.<sup>21</sup>

President Dartiguenave evidently supported the treaty in the belief that it would hasten American withdrawal. This did not prove to be the case. A large segment of the Haitian population seems to have accepted the treaty with less hostility than might have been expected. In fact, many of the elite felt United States intervention was the lesser of two evils.<sup>22</sup> This attitude made it possible always to have a Haitian government to work with and eliminated the need to establish a military government.

With the transfer of Admiral Caperton in July 1916, no one person was responsible for United

States policy in Haiti. In Washington, authority was divided between the State Department and the Navy Department. Bailly-Blanchard, U.S. minister to Haiti, was ineffective and did not even keep the State Department informed about developments in the Republic. The dominant figure in Haiti became the Marine brigade commander, but he had no authority to direct the other treaty services.<sup>23</sup> Policy tended to drift. Colonel Eli K. Cole, brigade commander in 1916, wrote to Admiral Knapp, "I have absolutely no knowledge as to the policy that our government desires to follow in regard to Haiti. If I knew its desires it would be much easier to so conduct affairs here that they would work towards the end desired."<sup>24</sup>

In some ways, the all-white Marine Corps was not a good organization to have working in a black republic. Many of the officers were prejudiced and hated the uppity black elite. Major Smedley Butler, first commander of the Haitian Gendarmerie, referred to the elite as cockroaches.<sup>25</sup> It was also reported<sup>26</sup> that when Butler—who was supposedly subordinate to the president of Haiti—traveled with Dartiguenave, it was Butler who slept in a bed while the president slept on the floor.<sup>27</sup> In addition, social relations between Marine officers and Haitians were greatly curtailed after the arrival of American wives.<sup>28</sup>

The main arm of Marine authority was the Gendarmerie d'Haiti, which acted as both a police force and an army. Initially, all its officers were Marines. The treaty called for a gradual Haitianization of the officer corps, but by 1921, there were only nine Haitian officers out of a total of 117.<sup>29</sup> Through the Gendarmerie, the Marines tried to control almost everything in Haiti. In fact, Caperton said that the Marines were making an "effort to swipe all Haiti."<sup>30</sup> For military reasons, they wanted to control telephone and telegraph services, which were under the minister of the interior.<sup>31</sup> In order to guarantee the health of their officers, the Gendarmerie wanted control of the sanitation department.<sup>32</sup> Again, out of military necessity, they claimed control of the building and repair of roads. The road building was done by reviving the old French practice of *corvée*. The pub-

lic works engineer, who should have had charge of road building, contested the action of the Gendarmerie.<sup>33</sup> He went unheard until the abuses of the *corvée* led to a new *caco* revolt in 1919.

The abuse of the *corvée* was the work of Major Clarke H. Wells. The brigade commander had noted the increased opposition of the Haitian peasants to the *corvée*; therefore, in October 1918, an order was issued by Colonel John Russell abolishing it. Despite this order, it was illegally continued in the northern and central regions of Haiti by Major Wells. In his reports to headquarters, he denied this but in March 1919, a new brigade commander visited central Haiti to investigate rumors and found the *corvée* still in operation. This area was the center of the 1919 *caco* uprising. After further investigation, Marine Corps Commandant John Lejeune recommended that Wells be court-martialed, but too much time had passed to build a good case, and the charges were dropped because of insufficient evidence.<sup>34</sup>

The *caco* revolt was the first real test of the Gendarmerie, and they failed it. The Marines had to be called in to put down the revolt. One reason for this was that the Marines had discouraged target practice because they figured it was dangerous to teach the natives to shoot because they might turn on the United States. Colonel Waller remarked, "You can never trust a nigger with a gun."<sup>35</sup>

During this period, it was realized that some provisions of the United States–Haitian Treaty violated the Haitian Constitution. It was therefore decided to change the constitution. The Haitian Congress opposed the revisions, so Dartiguenave had to dissolve the senate in April 1916, and then the whole congress in June 1917. It was decided that the new constitution would be submitted to the people in a plebiscite. The constabulary was charged with running the election and drumming up support for the new constitution. The vote was held and the constitution was approved 98,225 to 768. This may well have been a true count of the votes since this was a small turnout and people who opposed the constitution simply did not bother to vote. The new constitution approved all United States actions



taken during the occupation and for the first time allowed foreigners to own land in Haiti. The president was allowed to decide when a new congressional election would be held; none were until 1930. Until then a council of state appointed by the president enacted legislation.<sup>36</sup> After 1918, constitution relations between Dartiguenave and the U.S. deteriorated; he resented the control exercised by treaty officials, which deprived him of authority. Dartiguenave was replaced as Haitian president by Louis Borno on 10 April 1922.<sup>37</sup>

With the change from the Wilson to the Harding administration, a Senate committee was created to investigate the intervention. One of the main recommendations of the committee was that a high commissioner be appointed to oversee policy in Haiti. General John H. Russell, who had served two terms in Haiti as brigade commander, was selected for the position. He was responsible to the State Department but he also commanded the Marine Brigade.<sup>38</sup> Borno and Russell worked well together, and Haiti enjoyed one of its longest periods of peace.

There were problems over censorship of the press, but since 95 percent country was illiterate, this proved to be a minor difficulty. Russell enforced censorship with an even hand at the direction of the State Department.<sup>39</sup> At this time, the United States also wanted a constitutional amendment to give it control of education, but Borno was able to thwart this without bringing on a crisis.<sup>40</sup> Both Borno and Russell agreed that Haiti was not ready for elections, and both postponed holding them. This, of course, kept Borno in power.

During this period, 1921–29, the Constabulary was able to maintain law and order without Marine help. The 500 to 800 Marines were all stationed in Port-au-Prince or Cape Haitian.<sup>41</sup> Haitianization of the guard was accelerated, and by 1929, 39.6 percent of the officers were Haitian.<sup>42</sup> Training in the use of arms had been emphasized after the *caco* revolt, and in 1924 a rifle team composed entirely of Haitians tied for second place with France in the Olympic games.<sup>43</sup> Work with the fire departments also continued and the Gendarmerie, whose name had been changed in 1925 to Garde d'Haiti, was

effectively carrying on the job for which it had been developed.

The Borno-Russell government was brought to an end by student strikes which began in November 1929 and soon involved politicians and a call for elections. There was fear that the Garde would join the strike, and Russell called for Marine reinforcements. To quiet the discontent, Borno announced that he would not run for president in 1930. With this assurance, the trouble passed. The Garde did its job, and Marine reinforcements did not have to be landed.<sup>44</sup>

As a result of the strike, a presidential commission headed by Cameron Forbes was sent to Haiti to investigate how and when the United States could withdraw. They recommended an increasingly rapid Haitianization of the treaty services and that Russell be replaced at the end of his term by a civilian minister who was to be charged with working out the details of United States withdrawal.<sup>45</sup> These recommendations were put into effect with the appointment of Dana Munro as minister to Haiti.

Stenio Vincent was elected president of Haiti in November 1930. Negotiations to end the occupation proved long and difficult. The occupation itself did not end until 15 August 1934, when the last Marines withdrew, and United States involvement with Haitian finances continued for some time afterwards.

## ***The Dominican Republic***

The 1916 intervention in the Dominican Republic and the subsequent creation of a military government was the culmination of a long history of American involvement in Dominican affairs. Under the terms of the 1907 treaty, which established the customs receivership, the United States believed it had acquired the right of intervention. A bitter, long-standing, political feud between the *horacistas*, followers of General Horacio Vasquez, and the *jimenistas*, partisans of ex-president Isidro Jimenez, combined with the growing strength of such regional *caudillos* as Desiderio Arias of Santiago, insured that excuses for such action would not be lacking. In May 1914, the direct threat of

American intervention ended one civil conflict, with both major factions agreeing to Wilson's demand that they select a provisional president, hold elections and abide by the results. The election, held in October, resulted in a narrow victory for former president Jimenez.

Regional uprisings against the new government began in 1915, and the possibility of intervention loomed large, especially after the July landings in neighboring Haiti. In November, William Russell, the American minister to the Dominican Republic and a longtime advocate of intervention, dispatched a lengthy note to the Dominican government demanding that they cease increasing the public debt, accept the appointment of an American financial adviser, and allow the United States to create a constabulary to replace existing military and police forces.<sup>46</sup> All Dominican political factions joined in denouncing these demands, which would have reduced their nation to the status of a protectorate. The United States, however, continued to press its demands while awaiting events which might force Dominican acceptance.

In April 1916, open conflict broke out between President Jimenez and General Arias. Arias occupied the capital and forced the Dominican congress to impeach the president.<sup>47</sup> President Jimenez denounced this action and gathered forces of his own to retake Santo Domingo. At the State Department's request, the Navy dispatched several ships to the area and landed a small force of Marines to protect the American legation.<sup>48</sup> When it became evident that the president's forces alone could not dislodge Arias, the American minister insisted that Jimenez ask for U.S. military assistance. After some vacillation, Jimenez instead resigned on May 6th.<sup>49</sup> Under the Dominican constitution, the selection of his successor fell to the congress, currently in session and under the control of Arias. Russell was determined to prevent the selection of Arias and, instead, to obtain the election of someone who would meet American demands for broad economic and military controls. Additional American forces were hurriedly landed and Admiral Caperton, at Russell's direction, gave Arias an ultimatum to surrender or be attacked by the Marines.<sup>50</sup> Unwilling to accept

either alternative, the Dominican *caudillo* slipped quietly out of town on the night of the 13th and headed north. A few hours later, Marines occupied the city without resistance.

In the intervention's initial stages, policy was clearly controlled by the State Department. When Admiral Caperton asked the Navy Department what American policy was, he was told to "consult with the American Minister, examine the archives of the legation and obtain there from the policy of the United States"<sup>51</sup> Russell continued to direct operations for several weeks after the initial landings. At his urging, additional Marines were landed and sent north, where they easily defeated Arias' forces, disarming them and placing their leader under house arrest.<sup>52</sup> The customs receivership took control of all internal as well as external taxes, and Russell attempted to use this financial leverage, combined with the threat of further actions by Caperton's forces, to prevent the Dominican congress from electing anyone unwilling to support American demands. This effort failed when, on July 25, congress selected Dr. Francisco Henriquez y Carbajal as provisional president.<sup>53</sup>

Angered by Dominican defiance of American demands, the State Department refused to recognize the new administration and the Customs Receiver, on Russell's instructions, cut off all government funds.<sup>54</sup> When even this failed to force compliance, Secretary of State Lansing, at the urging of Russell, decided on an even more drastic course of action: on 26 November 1916, he obtained Wilson's approval of a proclamation establishing an American military government.<sup>55</sup>

The Navy had long urged the establishment of martial law in the Dominican Republic "in order to legalize our military action," and the proclamation approved by Wilson had been drafted by Captain Harry Knapp, commander of American forces in the area.<sup>56</sup> Justifying this action on supposed Dominican violations of the 1907 treaty, Captain Knapp, on November 29, proclaimed the establishment of military government, declaring that government would continue under "such duly authorized Dominican officials as may be necessary, all under the oversight and control of the United States Forces exercising Military Government."<sup>57</sup> At the same

time, Knapp suspended all permits allowing Dominicans to carry firearms and established press censorship.<sup>58</sup>

With the installation of Captain Knapp as military governor, control over American policy was vested in the Navy Department. In short order, without consulting the State Department, Knapp declared all cabinet offices vacant and appointed Navy and Marine officers, "none of whom had any knowledge of Dominican affairs or problems and the great majority of whom could not even speak the language of the country," to fill these posts.<sup>59</sup>

In recommending a military government, Russell had urged that it be set up only for one year, but once in power, the officers showed no interest in returning control to the Dominicans.<sup>60</sup> Instead, they repeatedly expanded their authority into new areas. Occasional protests from Washington had little effect. Knapp's replacement of the cabinet caused considerable consternation in Washington, and Secretary of the Navy Josephus Daniels ordered him to suspend the appointments.<sup>61</sup> Knapp replied by declaring that any such action would result in "loss of prestige and embarrassment to the Military Government" and appealed to Daniels to reverse his order.<sup>62</sup> The secretary capitulated and cabled his approval, expressing the hope that the officers would eventually be replaced by "representative Dominicans."<sup>63</sup>

In the following weeks, the military government's powers expanded rapidly. Congress was suspended and the governor issued decrees, known as executive orders, regulating many areas of Dominican life.<sup>64</sup> While Dominican courts were not interfered with at first, violations of executive orders were tried before Marine provost courts. A total of 821 such orders were issued during the occupation, covering everything from regulating the sale of lottery tickets to prohibiting insults against "the Government of the United States of America or any officer thereof, or the Military Government of Santo Domingo or any officer thereof."<sup>65</sup>

By mid-December, Knapp was informing Washington that it was "much too early to think of permitting elections," asking instead for aid in road building and other programs of public

works.<sup>66</sup> Efforts also began to create a constabulary, trained and commanded by Marines. Before the year 1917 was far advanced, it became obvious that the military government was planning to continue for an indefinite period and had no intention of turning over any power to Dominicans after a year of operation. Captain Knapp was blunt about this, declaring that it would be "many years" before the Dominicans were "fit for democracy," and adding that until then it would be dangerous to place a Dominican in command of the constabulary, or indeed in any major position in that force.<sup>67</sup> With both the State and Navy Departments increasingly preoccupied with the coming war with Germany, no serious objections were raised to such views.

With no clear guidelines from Washington, the military government continued to expand. By mid-July, Knapp was seeking authority to remove Dominican judges from office, a power President Wilson had ordered removed from the original proclamation of military government.<sup>68</sup> The military also took over control of the educational system and issued new sets of regulations for all schools. The new Code of Education provided for a five-member National Council of Education to be composed of leading Dominican citizens, but this provision was ignored until at least 1920, when the Marine officer in charge of education finally decided that "the council should be appointed."<sup>69</sup>

In September 1917, William Russell, who had remained in the odd position of American minister to the military government, tried, with the support of Secretary of State Lansing, to get the officers in the cabinet replaced by American civilians, even suggesting that perhaps the individuals appointed could be given reserve Navy commissions, but the Navy refused to even consider such a possibility.<sup>70</sup> The entry of the United States into World War I had strained the occupations personnel as many of the best officers were recalled to other duties, but even under such circumstances, the Navy remained unwilling to share any power.

The war created a host of new problems for the military regime, while at the same time it left it even freer of any direction from Washington.



Unlike Haiti, the Dominican Republic did not declare war on Germany, but German citizens were closely watched and arrested on virtually any pretext. The needs of shipping for the war effort disrupted the Dominican economy and created several serious shortages. The military government made numerous pleas for special consideration in shipping matters, arguing that the republic had become a ward of the United States.<sup>71</sup>

A more serious effect of the war was its influence upon the Guardia Nacional Dominicana, the newly organized constabulary. The withdrawal of some Marines for action in Europe combined with continued insurgent activity in the interior made a rapid expansion of this force necessary.<sup>72</sup> While the higher posts in the Guardia were filled by Marine officers, company-grade officers were usually Marine sergeants or corporals or Dominicans willing to work for the occupation. Under the system of provost courts operating in the republic, these poorly prepared officers often found themselves operating as police chief, prosecuting attorney, judge, and jury in isolated communities. Abuses were inevitable. One observer reported that one such officer, after a brief hearing which "usually took place within ten minutes of the arrest," would pronounce judgment by saying, "Take the son of a bitch out and bump him off."<sup>73</sup> Accusations of atrocities against the Marines and the Guardia reached a peak during this period, further discrediting the occupation.

Conditions continued to deteriorate following Knapp's departure from office in mid-1918. Under the acting governor, Marine Brigadier General Fuller, some government actions seemed to border on absurdity, notably proposals to change the nation's name to Hispaniola and efforts to stamp out cockfighting.<sup>74</sup> The appointment of Rear Admiral Thomas Snowden as military governor, effective February 1919, did nothing to improve the situation. Snowden lacked Knapp's relative tact or sympathy for the Dominicans. The new governor considered the occupation analogous to a state of war, with the Dominican population having the status of enemies.<sup>75</sup> His main preoccupations as governor seem to have been continuing the crusade

against cockfighting and adding to it a campaign against prostitution. When the customs receiver, C. H. Baxter, criticized his actions and suggested that the Navy had "outstayed its usefulness," Snowden reacted by taking away his power to collect internal revenues.<sup>76</sup>

Snowden made little effort to conceal his low opinion of Dominicans, declaring that without American control, they would quickly return to their former "insurrectionary habits," and adding that the occupation must last at least 10 more years until a new generation of Dominicans could be educated by Americans in the benefits of democratic government.<sup>77</sup> The admiral's secretary of finance, Lieutenant Commander Mayo, even drafted a declaration of policy which he tried to have the State Department issue, announcing that the occupation would continue at least 20 more years "until the people of the Dominican Republic have developed the character and ability to govern themselves."<sup>78</sup>

The actions of the military government which aroused the greatest Dominican resentment were the strict press censorship and the trial of Dominican citizens by military courts.<sup>79</sup> Focusing on abuses in these areas, organized opposition to the occupation grew rapidly in late 1919. American policy was also coming under increasing attack from other Latin American nations.<sup>80</sup> Alarmed by these developments, the State Department's interest in Dominican affairs revived, and officials began to seek some way of ending the military government. As a preliminary step, Admiral Snowden was ordered to form an advisory council of leading Dominicans, including Archbishop Nouel, a former president. This commission's first recommendations called for lifting press censorship and restricting provost courts. The military governor responded by issuing an even more restrictive decree on censorship and the entire commission immediately resigned.<sup>81</sup> While there is no direct evidence that Snowden deliberately provoked this response, it is clear that he was relieved to see the commission dissolved and made no effort to persuade its members to reconsider their resignations.<sup>82</sup>

The resignations left the governor free to run the republic for most of the remainder of 1920,

but in November, Secretary of State Bainbridge Colby made yet another effort to regain control of the occupation. Snowden was again instructed to form a commission of representative Dominicans and to issue a proclamation announcing the American intention to withdraw as soon as possible.<sup>83</sup> This action infuriated the admiral, who denounced it as “premature” and “most unfortunate.”<sup>84</sup> He had no alternative but to obey the order, but when the Dominicans appointed to the commission attached minor conditions to their acceptance, the admiral brusquely denied their request, precipitating another mass resignation. This time his tactics did not work, as the State Department rebuked him, declared the Dominicans’ conditions acceptable, and the members withdrew their resignations.<sup>85</sup> Snowden’s aide in Washington denounced these actions, characterizing the State Department officials responsible as “conceited asses trying to throw a bluff to cover the grossest, but perhaps unknowing ignorance,” but the decision remained firm.<sup>86</sup>

In mid-1921, the Harding administration finally removed Snowden, replacing him with Rear Admiral Samuel Robison. It took three more years of conflict with both Dominican politicians and officers of the military government before the intervention was finally ended, but State Department control of Dominican policy was never again seriously jeopardized. The main remaining obstacle to termination of the occupation was working out an arrangement for returning power to the Dominicans. Despite numerous setbacks, such a plan was reached in the fall of 1922, due in large part to the diplomatic skill of Sumner Welles.

Admiral Robison and Welles disagreed sharply over both the timing and the conditions of American withdrawal, but in virtually every case, the views of Welles and the State Department prevailed. At one point the military governor restored censorship and sentenced Dominicans to five-year jail terms for opposing land tax collections, but Welles’ sharp protests led to Washington ordering Robison to end censorship and suspend the sentences.<sup>87</sup> After this rebuke, the admiral confined his opposition to verbal protests, and by September 1922, Assistant

Secretary of State Francis White could write Welles that he “was very grateful to see . . . that the Admiral has recently been giving you less trouble.”<sup>88</sup>

In October 1922, a provisional Dominican government was installed, and Admiral Robison was replaced as military governor by Brigadier General Harry Lee. Lee’s powers were sharply reduced, with his major functions being completing the training of officers for the Guardia and assuring that elections for a regular Dominican government went smoothly. These took place in March 1924, and six months later, the last Marines left the country, bringing the military government to an end.

## ***Conclusion***

These brief studies of the Haitian and Dominican occupations suggest several striking parallels, as well as some significant differences. An initial conclusion to this study might be that the State Department tended to turn affairs over to the military when its own policies were frustrated, and the degree of power given to the military was directly proportional to the extent of frustration. In both interventions, the decision to employ military force was apparently made without serious consideration of the long-range implications of such a decision. There was also little effort made to acquaint the officers or men involved in the intervention with the purpose or goals of the action. General Cole’s complaint that he had “absolutely no knowledge as to the policy that our Government desires to follow in Haiti” was by no means an unusual remark.<sup>89</sup> Interviews with numerous retired officers who had participated in the interventions elicited totally negative responses on the question of the extent of their briefings on American policy, or on the nature, culture, and politics of the society they were expected to govern.<sup>90</sup> It was the military’s availability, rather than its competence for the tasks assigned it, which led to its employment. In addition, as the State Department’s Solicitor’s Office noted in 1919, the president could order military officials to administer foreign areas, but lacked the authority to direct any other government department

to undertake such duty. When such action was taken, those involved drew no new or additional federal salaries, but if individuals not on active military duty were utilized, the problem of pay arose, and there was "no appropriation under which the government of the United States could pay such salaries."<sup>91</sup>

Once having occupied a nation, the officers, like any bureaucratic group, attempted to expand their control into virtually all possible areas on any available pretext. While nothing in the original goals of either intervention contemplated anything like a mammoth re-education of the entire society, within a few months of assuming power, officers in both nations were openly proclaiming the necessity of continuing the occupation until an entire new generation had grown up under American tutelage. They continued arguing in this vein until shortly before the interventions ended. Just what this tutelage would involve, or exactly how it would reform the national political and social structures, was never made clear, but its necessity, along with the alleged incompetence of the current generation of leaders, was constantly used as an excuse for prolonging and expanding the military's power.

The very nature of the military also influenced its constant efforts to expand its authority. Officers usually placed a high value on such qualities as order, obedience, and security. Attempts to impose such values on a foreign culture produced inevitable conflict. When such efforts were resisted, the military's solution was further expansion of controls. Each step could be logically defended at the time it was undertaken. For example, restoring internal order meant controlling the police. Control of the police made control over courts desirable. Direct involvement with the courts developed interest in the lawmaking process. All of this provoked criticism, which led to efforts at censorship. Such a process ultimately led the military into projects, such as the effort to control education in Haiti or to abolish cockfighting in the Dominican Republic, which bore no observable relationship to the original purposes of the interventions. In the long run, it was American political and diplomatic realities along with the

perceived needs and inherent rivalries of both the military and the State Department which created, expanded, and finally ended each occupation.

While the original goals, personnel employed, and basic patterns of conflict in both nations were often quite similar, there were some significant differences. The military in Haiti was never as free from State Department control as was the military government in the Dominican Republic and, therefore, the bitter conflicts between civil and military officials which characterized the State Department's effort to regain control of policy in the republic were largely avoided in Haiti. The continuing existence of at least the semblance of a Haitian government was one important reason for this. The limitations this placed upon the military's authority was keenly felt and many officers expressed a clear desire to create a military government in Haiti similar to the one operating in the Dominican Republic.<sup>92</sup> Civilian officials in Haiti were well aware of this and, perhaps alarmed by developments next door, carefully avoided any move towards creating such a system.<sup>93</sup> This left unsolved the problem of coordination among the various agencies of the United States Government operating in Haiti, a failure which the 1921 Senate Investigation made clear. It was then that the expedient of appointing a high commissioner was adopted. The State Department felt that a Marine would have to fill this post in order to control the other officers, but was determined to appoint only an officer who would, in turn, be amenable to State Department direction. This led to a clear rejection of Smedley Butler and the ultimate selection of General Russell.<sup>94</sup>

Racial prejudice played a stronger role in shaping American actions in Haiti, where it was often openly expressed by the Marines, than it did in the Dominican Republic, but it should by no means be assumed that it was lacking in the latter case. Lieutenant Colonel Harry Davis expressed the feelings of many Marines in the Dominican Republic when he wrote that "the application of White to these people is as true as saying that Haiti is white. The difference between the two peoples insofar as color is con-

cerned is that the Haitians are 100 percent black and proud of it and the Dominican is 99 percent black and ridiculously ashamed of it.”<sup>95</sup>

In the long run, it appears that the military administration of the protectorates in some ways hindered and in some ways served American policy goals. The heritage of bitter anti-American feeling produced in the Dominican Republic by the provost courts and other actions of the military government, and the identification of Americans with extreme racial prejudice which was made in Haiti, both hurt United States influence and convinced many of the educated minority that close ties with the United States were to be avoided rather than sought. At the same time, through the creation of the constabularies, internal order and stability was certainly promoted. Unfortunately, this was an imposed, authoritarian stability. With the destruction of the *cacos* by the Marines, the Garde d’Haiti became for years the master of Haitian politics, making and unmaking presidents with a minimum of internal violence, but also with a minimum of popular participation. In the Dominican Republic, Rafael Leonidas Trujillo used his control of the Guardia Nacional, which the Marines had created, to take over the government, creating one of the longest lasting and most oppressive dictatorships in Latin American history.

Most of the acts of the military in these two nations, however, seemed simply irrelevant to long-range goals and had little lasting effect. With the Americans’ departure, life returned to normal; cockfighting and prostitution continued as always in the Dominican Republic, and in Haiti, the roads rapidly crumbled and the Army won no more Olympic sharpshooting medals. For the vast majority in both nations, life went on as before, seemingly unaffected by the years of occupation.

For both the military and the State Department, some basic lessons regarding the problems and limitations of using the military to impose American policy upon another nation had evidently been learned before the troops withdrew. In December 1919, A.F. Lindberg of the Customs Receivership wrote the head of the State Department’s Latin American Division that

“in practice it has been proven that military or naval men do not have either the sympathy or the ability of a civilian in handling affairs of this sort” and added “when the military once get into a place they like to stay put.”<sup>96</sup> Lindberg’s observation that the military—once involved in an intervention—was reluctant to leave was undoubtedly true and was never sufficiently taken into account by those in Washington who decided to use the military to administer the Caribbean protectorates. His claim that civilians would somehow have had more “sympathy” or “ability” in carrying out such administration is, however, highly questionable and reflects more the continuing conflicts and communications failures between American civilian and military personnel engaged in the interventions rather than any inherent weaknesses of American officers. It was the policy itself that was unworkable, and no officials on the scene, no matter how sympathetic or able, could have overcome this fundamental weakness. By 1921, many of the officers involved in administering the protectorates, in contrast to their civilian counterparts in the State Department, had come to realize this. A memorandum from the Chief of Naval Operations noted that.

It is fully realized that this Department is not called upon to determine what policy shall be followed in regard to the Dominican Republic. It is a fact, however, that this Department, through its personnel, will be called upon to carry out such policy as may be laid down in respect to Dominican affairs, and will undoubtedly receive the greater measure of any blame that may result or any discredit that may follow the application and enforcement of a policy which is defective and unworkable.<sup>97</sup>

With the end of the interventions, lessons such as these were apparently soon forgotten and, in the years since, many of the problems created in the Caribbean interventions have reappeared in other areas. Hopefully, future studies—focusing on the administration rather than simply the formulation of policies which use the military to directly intervene in the inter-

nal affairs of other nations—will reveal more of the dangers and limitations of such actions.

## Notes

1. For varying views on the motivations behind the interventions, see Dana G. Munro, *Intervention and Dollar Diplomacy in the Caribbean, 1900–1921* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1964); William Appleman Williams, *The Tragedy of American Diplomacy* (New York: Dell Publishing Co., 1962); and H. G. Mellman, “The American Policy of Intervention in the Caribbean,” unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Illinois (1940).
2. The 1914 Veracruz intervention is probably the most notable exception to this rule.
3. Munro, 116–25. For a fuller description of Root’s policy, see Lajeune Cummins, “The Origin and Development of Elihu Root’s Latin American Diplomacy,” unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of California at Berkeley (1964).
4. Wilfrid Hardy Callcott, *The Caribbean Policy of the United States, 1890–1920* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1942), 258–61.
5. Munro, 245–55.
6. Sumner Welles, *Naboth’s Vineyard: The Dominican Republic, 1844–1924* (New York: Payson and Clarke Ltd., 1928), II, 714–16.
7. This phrase was used in defending Wilson’s Mexican policy by the American Ambassador to Great Britain, Walter Hines Page. Burton J. Hendrick, *The Life and Letters of Walter H. Page*, I, 188. For a fuller discussion of Wilson’s Caribbean policy, see George W. Baker, “The Caribbean Policy of Woodrow Wilson, 1913–1917,” unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Colorado (1961).
8. *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relation of the United States, 1916* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1928), 311. (Hereafter cited as *Foreign Relations*.)
9. Dana G. Munro, *Intervention and Dollar Diplomacy in the Caribbean, 1900–1921* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press), 326–9. (Hereafter cited as Munro, *Intervention*.)
10. *Ibid.*, 337, 349.
11. *Ibid.*, 271, 326, 331, 337, 339, 342.
12. U.S. Congress, Senate, Select Committee on Haiti and Santo Domingo, *Inquiry into Occupation and Administration of Haiti and Santo Domingo, Hearings*, pursuant to Senate Resolution 112, 67th Cong, 1st session (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1922), 304–8. (Hereafter cited as *Hearings*.)
13. Benson (Navy Dept.) to FDR, Eastport, Me.

- 8/14/15, FDR Group 10 (Naval Affairs) Box 12.
14. Munro, *Intervention*, 353.
15. *Hearings*, 315.
16. *Ibid.*, 316.
17. *Ibid.*, 321.
18. *Ibid.*, 333–36, 347–8.
19. *Ibid.*, 327–8, 394–5.
20. *Ibid.*, 399–404.
21. Munro, *Intervention*, 361.
22. *Ibid.*, 358.
23. *Ibid.*, 365–6.
24. Cole to Knapp, 12/17/16, RG 45, Box 632.
25. Butler to Waller, Port-au-Prince, July 13, 1916, SDB IAN, and Butler to Thomas S. Butler, Port-au-Prince, Haiti, July 15, 1916. SDB papers.
26. Waller to Lejeune, June 11, 1916, Lejeune Papers, Box 4.
27. Hans Schmidt, *The United States Occupation of Haiti, 1915–1934* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1971), 110 fn. (Hereafter cited as Schmidt, *Occupation*.)
28. Munro, *Intervention*, 358–9.
29. James H. McCroclin, compiler, *Garde d’Haiti, 1915–1934* (Annapolis: U.S. Naval Institute, 1956), 212. (Hereafter cited as McCroclin, *Garde*.)
30. Waller to Lejeune, July 1, 1916, Lejeune Papers, Box 4.
31. Dept. of St., Div. of L.A. Affairs, Aug. 21, 1916. Paraphrase of telegram from Scholle, American Charge in Port-au-Prince, Aug. 19, RC 45, Subject File, Box 632.
32. General Waller to Major General Commandant USMC, July 13, 1917, RG 45, Subject File, Box 632.
33. Butler did not like the engineers and said that there were only five of them, so they could not take over any work outside the capitol. He said that it was not too hard to snow them under, but he was afraid that they would soon be able to take over because the Navy was behind them. Butler to McIlhenny, Dec. 31, 1917, Butler Papers.
34. Schmidt, *Occupation*, 101–5.
35. *Ibid.*, 103.
36. Munro, *Intervention*, 368–71.
37. McCroclin, *Garde*, 155.
38. Harding to Attorney General Harry Daugherty, Feb. 6, 1922, Harding Papers, Box 102.
39. Dana G. Mimro, *The United States and the Caribbean Republic 1921–1933* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1974), 110–1.
40. *Ibid.*, 93–4.
41. *Ibid.*, 85.
42. McCroclin, *Garde*, 212.
43. *Ibid.*, 166–7.

44. *Foreign Relations*, 1929, Vol. III, 175–204.
45. *Foreign Relations*, 1930, Vol. III, 237.
46. Russell to Dominican Foreign Office, 11/19/15, *Foreign Relations*, 1916, 333–37.
47. Russell to Secretary of State, 5/1/16, *Foreign Relations*, 1916, 222–23. *New York Times*, 5/2/16, 10.
48. Lansing to Russell, 5/2/16, Decimal Records of the Department of State, National Archives, Washington, D.C. (Hereafter cited as DS). 839.00/1810. Colonel Frederic May Wise and Meigs O. Frost, *A Marine Tells It To You* (New York: J.H. Sears and Co., n.d.), 141. C. H. Baxter, Customs Receiver, to General McIntyre, 5/11/16, Baxter Correspondence, Records of the Dominican Customs Receivership, Record Group 139, National Archives (hereafter cited as Baxter Papers).
49. Russell to Lansing, 5/6/16 and 5/7/16, *Foreign Relations*, 1916, 224–25. Baxter to McIntyre, 5/11/16, Baxter Papers. Wise, 142–43. Munro, *Intervention*, 306.
50. Caperton to Secretary of the Navy, 5/13/16, *Foreign Relations*, 1916, 226. Russell and Caperton to Generals Arias, Mauricio Jimenez, and Cesareo Jimenez, *Foreign Relations*, 1916, 226–27.
51. Admiral William B. Caperton, “Activities of Rear Admiral William B. Caperton, U.S.N., while in command of Cruiser Squadron, U.S. Atlantic Fleet, and Commander in Chief, U.S. Pacific Fleet,” 256, unpublished ms., in William B. Caperton Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress. (Hereafter cited as Caperton Papers.)
52. For an account of this operation, see Condit Turnbladh, *Hold High the Torch* (Washington: United States Marine Corps, 1960), 37–63.
53. Munro, *Intervention*, 309.
54. Melvin Knight, *The Americans in Santo Domingo* (New York: Vanguard Press, 1928), 76.
55. President Wilson to Secretary of State, 11/26/16, *Foreign Relations*, 1916, 242.
56. Memorandum of conference between Admiral Benson, Captain Knapp, Minister Russell, and Mr. Polk, 10/31/16, Subject File WA 7, Naval Records Collections, Record Group 45 (hereafter cited as RG. 45).
57. Proclamation of Occupation and Military Government, 11/29/16, *Foreign Relations*, 1916, 246–47.
58. Knapp to Secretary of the Navy. 12/1/16, DS, 839.00/1958.
59. Welles, II, 797.
60. David C. MacMichael, “The United States and the Dominican Republic, 1871–1940: A Cycle in Caribbean Diplomacy,” unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Oregon (1965).
61. Secretary of the Navy Josephus Daniels to Knapp, 12/8/16, DS, 839.00/1972.
62. Knapp to Daniels, 12/8/16, DS, 839.00/1972.
63. Daneils to Knapp, 12/8/16, DS, 839.00/1972.
64. Executive Order No. 18, 1/2/17, Executive Orders Folder 1-25, Records of the Military Government of Santo Domingo, Record Group 38, National Archives (hereafter cited as RG. 38.)
65. Marvin A. Soloman, “Law, Order and Justice in the Dominican Republic,” unpublished M.A. thesis, Southern Illinois University at Edwardsville (1970), 32–33.
66. Knapp to Secretary of the Navy, 12/17/16, RG. 45, Subject File WA 7.
67. Knapp to Secretary of the Navy, 1/14/17, DS 839.00/1985.
68. Knapp to Secretary of the Navy, 7/17/17, RG 45, Subject File WA 7.
69. Colonel Rufus H. Lane, “Report on Public Instruction, 1917–1920,” Papers relating to the Dominican Intervention, Marine Corps Historical Archives, Washington, D.C. (hereafter cited as MCHA).
70. Russell to Secretary of State, 9/11/17, and Lansing to Secretary of the Navy, 9/19/17, DS 839.00/2051. Daniels to Secretary of State, 9/26/17, DS 839.00/2053.
71. Knapp to General McIntyre, 12/30/17, and Brigade Quartermaster to Chief Quartermaster, USMC, 5/21/17, RG 38.
72. Marvin Goldwert, *The Constabulary in the Dominican Republic and Nicaragua*, (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1961), 11–12.
73. Herbert Gould to Acting Secretary of State Phillips, 8/18/18, DS, 839.1051/16.
74. Nasario Suadri, Governor of La Vega, to Officer in Charge, Dept. of Interior and Police, 6/13/18, MCHA.
75. Snowden to Admiral Coontz, 9/4/20, DS 839.00/2241.
76. MacMichael, 473.
77. Snowden to Secretary of the Navy, 6/23/19, DS 839.1051/21.
78. Memorandum by J. C. Dunn, Division of Latin American Affairs, 9/11/19, DS, 839.00/2150.
79. Munro, *Intervention*, 321.
80. Welles, II, 829–30.
81. *Ibid.*, 824–27.
82. Brewer, Chargé in Santo Domingo, to Secretary of State, 1/9/20, DS, 839.00/2182.
83. Munro, *Intervention*, 322. Welles, II, 830. Daniels to Secretary of State, 11/30/20, DS 839.00/2182.
84. Quarterly Report of the Military Governor of Santo Domingo, 10/1/20 to 12/31/20, DS, 839.00/2352.



85. Welles, II, 833–34.
86. Lieutenant Commander Mayo to Snowden, 1/27/21, RG 38, Box 1.
87. MacMichael, 569.
88. Francis White to Welles, 9/16/22, DS, 839.00/2592.
89. General Eli Cole to Knapp, 12/17/16, RG 35, Subject File, Box 632.
90. In these interviews, conducted largely from 1965 to 1970, each officer was asked what briefing he received before arriving in Haiti or the Dominican Republic. Not a single respondent recalled receiving any briefing.
91. Memorandum by L.H.W. (Office of the Soliciter), 12/13/19, DS 839.00/2246.
92. Examples abound. See Smedley Butler to General Lejeune, 6/22/27, Butler Papers, MCHA; General Cole to Knapp, 4/18/17, RG 45, Subject File, Box 632. Colonel Waller to Lejeune, 2/14/16, John A. Lejeune Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.
93. John McIlhenny to Franklin D. Roosevelt, 5/2/19, Franklin D. Roosevelt Papers, Roosevelt Library, Hyde Park, N.Y., Personal Correspondence, Box 127.
94. Letter from Dana G. Munro to Richard Millett, 12/30/65.
95. Lieutenant Colonel Harry Davis to George Christian, Executive Secretary to the President, 6/10/21, Warren G. Harding Papers, Ohio Historical Society, Columbus, Ohio.
96. A. F. Lindberg to Dr. Rowe, Chief of Latin American Division, 12/18/19, DS, 839.00/2251.
97. Captain C. S. Freeman, Memorandum for Chief of Naval Operations, 4/30/21, General Records of the Department of the Navy, Record Group 80, National Archives, File 16870–625.

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*Part V*

**Dominican Republic, 1916–1924**







## Caudillos and *Gavilleros* versus the United States Marines: Guerrilla Insurgency during the Dominican Intervention, 1916–1924

by *Bruce J. Calder*

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From 1917 to 1922, the peasants of the eastern region of the Dominican Republic successfully waged a guerrilla war against the forces of the U.S. military government. This conflict stands, along with the campaign against Augusto César Sandino in Nicaragua in the later 1920s, as the major military involvement of the United States in Latin America in the 20th century. And it deserves a significant place in the series of guerrilla wars which the United States has fought, from the Philippines at the turn of the century to Vietnam. Yet the record of the Dominican conflict has largely been buried or lost. No one has yet made a comprehensive study of the 1916–1924 seizure of the Dominican Republic by the United States despite its importance as a lengthy episode in Dominican history and as a major example of the implementation of Wilsonian diplomacy in Latin America. The program of the military government, the impact of the occupation on Dominican life, and the nature of the Dominican reaction, including the guerrilla war, remain largely undocumented.<sup>1</sup>

This essay, based primarily on the records of

the U.S. military government,<sup>2</sup> explores several basic questions: Who were the guerrillas? And what motivated them to fight? The answers are revealed by the examination of two factors: first, the nature of eastern Dominican society, particularly the traditional political system and the new economic influences at work in the region which undermined long-established patterns of life; and, second, the U.S. Marines' conduct of the antiguerrilla war and their treatment of Dominicans.

### ***Response to Intervention: The Case of the East***

Early in 1916, U.S. armed forces entered the Dominican Republic in response to the latest in a series of revolutionary episodes which had begun in 1911. Although neither U.S. nor Dominican officials envisioned a lengthy occupation at that time, it was mid-1924 before the last of the occupying forces embarked from the island nation. During the eight intervening years, a military government of occupation attempted to bring about a number of fundamental changes in the hope that these reforms by fiat would create a stable and friendly neighbor, and a reliable customer, to the south of the United States.

The Dominican response to the intervention and occupation ranged from enthusiastic cooperation to determined resistance. The latter included a political-intellectual protest, supported mainly by the educated elite in the larger towns and cities, and a guerrilla resistance, sustained by peasants in a rural zone in the eastern part of the republic.

The guerrilla struggle was significant. For six years, the Marines failed to control most of the eastern half of the republic. Ranged against them at various times were eight to twelve guerrilla leaders who could enlist up to 600 regular fighters and who could count on the support of numerous part-time guerrillas, as well as on the aid and sympathy of the general population. The guerrillas, using their environment and experience to advantage, fought against a Marine force which possessed superior arms,

equipment, and training. The outcome of the six-year-long irregular war was a stalemate and finally a negotiated conditional surrender by the guerrillas in 1922, a capitulation at least partially predicated on the then impending withdrawal of all U.S. forces from the republic.

The guerrilla war was born early in 1917 when the military government sent Marines into the east and encountered a still-thriving vestige of 19th-century politics, the caudillo system. This irregular type of rule, which bestowed power and authority upon men who could combine military skills, economic resources, personal strength, charisma, friendship, family ties, and the ability to manipulate followers, had deep roots in Dominican history. Particularly during the 19th century, while the republic's political institutions were developing, Dominicans were often at war, fighting the Spanish, French, Haitians, or among themselves. The result was a society heavily influenced by caudillos, who soon came to dominate the nation's political life. Despite later reform efforts, the caudillo system persisted into the 20th century, with a few regional caudillos such as the northwesterner Desiderio Arias assuming great national political importance at the time of the intervention.<sup>3</sup>

The east had not boasted a regional leader of Arias' stature since the days of President Pedro Santana in the 19th century, but caudillo politics nevertheless continued to play a prominent part in eastern life in 1916. In fact, the east offered a particularly secure environment for this tradition because meager improvements in transportation and communication had hardly challenged the historic isolation and near-independence of most of the region. A kind of dual government existed. Alongside of the highly centralized de jure structure of provinces, communes, and sections, with a civil governor and other officials appointed by the national government, there was a de facto power structure dominated by popular local leaders, the caudillos. A relationship between the two structures existed because national political factions bid for the support of local and regional leaders and because, once a faction gained control of the central government in Santo Domingo, it could exercise its power in the east only when these local popular leaders,

under specified conditions, agreed to cooperate with its officials.<sup>4</sup> As a consequence, national administrations actively sought the allegiance of local and regional caudillos, often with simple cash payoffs, government concessions or franchises, or appointments to public positions, such as the military command of a province or the garrison of a town, or simply a minor position with the rural police.<sup>5</sup> If a government could not obtain the support of an important regional figure, it then had to concede him virtual autonomy in his own territory, or back a rival caudillo with arms and money in an attempt to defeat him.

The central government could not rely on its own military forces to back its authority against the caudillos. The Dominican army was small and so poorly trained, commanded, equipped, and paid that it provided no threat to anyone except the law-abiding and defenseless members of the lower class who fell afoul of its petty extortions and graft. In any case, the caudillos often controlled the army. As Sumner Welles noted, "the military branch of the Dominican Government was inevitably the means through which, by corruption or promise of corruption, revolutions were engineered."<sup>6</sup> Not being able to count on this "meager Dominican soldiery," Military Governor Harry Lee later wrote, the central government had shown a "chronic attitude of passivity and tolerance" toward the caudillos.<sup>7</sup>

Local military chieftains, employed with the government or not, might rebel at any time. In mid-1915, a fairly serious uprising occurred in the east as part of the general restiveness against the administration of President Juan I. Jiménez. Though some casualties had resulted, the national government allegedly pacified the rebels and their followers by promising road construction contracts and appointments to the rural police, as well as by providing safe conducts to Puerto Rico for the leaders.<sup>8</sup> Authorities continued their policy of accommodation when, a few months later, they brought another eastern caudillo to the capital and "in order to quiet him . . . assigned to him a salary of 150 dollars a month for doing nothing."<sup>9</sup>

The east's population accommodated itself to

the caudillo system. Although the influence of these traditional leaders was ultimately felt in every sector of society because of their military strength, it fell most heavily on rural areas and very small towns. In that milieu, no cohesive class or caste barriers frustrated the acceptance of the caudillo, who was most often a poor countryman by birth and upbringing. The tradition-oriented inhabitants admired, feared, and respected him as an authority, and from among these country dwellers he recruited his followers. The only potential countervailing force in the countryside was that based on wealth. But the few leading landowning families and the sugar corporations were no more able to control the caudillos than the central government. Instead, they manipulated the caudillo system to protect their own interests, paying one of the stronger local leaders to guard their crops and property.<sup>10</sup>

In the east's larger towns, all closely related to the extensive rural areas which surrounded them, the personal influence of the caudillo was quite strong, at least among the poorer citizens. Even the elite of such towns as Seibo, Hato Mayor, and Higüey, composed of landowners, a few professionals, and the more prosperous merchants was likely forced by political realities to deal with the caudillos, although it set itself apart socially and in other ways. The elite's financial interests were somewhat adversely affected by the caudillo system, for the warfare with which it was often associated caused economic declines which cut business and professional incomes. Elite political interests were in even sharper conflict with the system.<sup>11</sup> Inasmuch as the members of the upper stratum furnished personnel for the higher offices of the *de jure* governmental structure, they were tied to the national political system rather than to the regionalism of the caudillo. But their political survival was ultimately related to the goodwill of the traditional rural leader.<sup>12</sup>

Only in the city of San Pedro de Macorís, the third largest in the republic by 1916, did these traditional rural leaders have minimal influence. The city's obvious sources of independent strength lay in its size and wealth and in the international ties which resulted from its being



headquarters for the republic's sugar production and export. Perhaps even more important was the process of urbanization, which weakened ties with the rural area surrounding the city (except for the neighboring sugar estates) and resulted in a separate social structure in which the rural chieftains had no place and thus no power. San Pedro de Macorís' leading citizens, though they might ally themselves with the caudillos for their own political ends, could bargain from a somewhat more equal position than other citizens of the east.

Thus, local and regional caudillos effectively held power and maintained or broke the peace in most of the eastern region. The U.S. military government confronted this situation in late 1916 and either failed to understand it or completely misjudged the strength of the caudillo system. Military officials had learned during 1916 that some people in Macorís, as well as the sugar companies, strongly opposed the dispatch of Marines to the east. But the military authorities decided to ignore this opposition after they discovered that "the sugar estates were practically paying blackmail to bad characters to keep them from looting and burning, a part of the understanding being apparently that they themselves would keep other bad characters off."<sup>13</sup>

Though military officials might well have viewed the sugar companies' payments as a kind of tax collected by what was the effective police power of the region, they instead saw the situation as anarchic and criminal. When they sent in troops to enforce the authority of the central government, the local and regional caudillo leaders, whose prestige and power derived from the threatened system, went to war. As they had done many times before, the regional power holders determined to force the central government to deal with them.<sup>14</sup>

In the caudillo system, then, are found the roots of the guerrilla war which desolated the east for six years. But an important question remains. If the caudillo system existed in other parts of the republic, as it did, why should guerrilla war develop only in the east? The answer seems to be that there was such a possibility in other areas of the country, but various factors thwarted or redirected the energies which might

have sustained revolt.<sup>15</sup> The east, more than other isolated areas of the country, had wealth and population in conjunction with a favorable topography. Thus food, money, and supplies were readily available to the insurgents. And the sizeable, though by no means dense, population of the east provided the guerrillas with recruits, shelter, refuge, and most important, an extensive system of intelligence.

The rapidly changing social and economic structure, however, more than any other factor, distinguished the east from other regions. The expansion of the predominantly foreign-owned sugar latifundia beginning in the late 19th century, which in a few years converted large portions of the east's fertile lands from subsistence minifundias into large capital intensive agricultural estates, had a severe impact on a significant portion of the eastern population. Independent peasants who for generations had lived in the area, holding and farming small *conucos* (garden plots) without interference, suddenly found themselves pushed from the land. By a combination of outright purchase, cajolery, tricks, threats, violence, and legal maneuvers, the sugar companies easily wrested homesites, farms, and grazing lands from their former holders or owners, leaving them landless and destitute.<sup>16</sup>

Large numbers of peasants either left the area or became part of a growing rural proletariat, laborers completely dependent on the sugar industry for money wages. Unfortunately for the laborers, the sugar estates needed a large work force only during the harvest, which lasted for less than six months of the year. The jobs, mostly for cane-cutters, were laborious and low paid. Work was not even assured during the harvest season because of the sugar companies' practice of importing laborers from Haiti and neighboring West Indian islands; for the remainder of the year, unemployment was inevitable for all but a few fortunate employees.

Thus, the east counted a substantial number of displaced and bitter peasants and many others who, similarly threatened, sympathized with them. And they had cause to direct their bitterness toward North Americans, whose corporations were among the chief beneficiaries of the



land acquisitions. Many of the men who fought with the caudillo-led bands were from the sugar *bateys*, the company-owned villages in which the workers lived. As James McLean, a Marine officer who commanded the Guardia Nacional in the east, noted unsympathetically in 1919, the guerrilla ranks included "a number of voluntary recruits from the riff-raff among the unemployed who were hanging around the sugar estates."<sup>17</sup> Fighting alongside the guerrillas at least provided a livelihood for the landless and unemployed worker, if not for his family, and it was a convenient way to even a score with oppressors who were protected by the law. After the mass surrender of guerrillas in 1922, military officials found a significant percentage to be men who had recently lost their land.<sup>18</sup> Realizing the relationship of landlessness and unemployment to the guerrilla war, the military government implored the sugar companies to increase "steady employment" during 1922, and to open up as much land for new *conucos* as possible, so that the sugar work force could maintain itself during the months after the *zafra* or harvest. "Any lack of employment," stated the military governor, "will have the most disastrous results in the increase in banditry"<sup>19</sup> (as military officials preferred to call the guerrilla insurgency).

Marine documents indicate that the insurgents generally fought close to home. The greatest number came from the sugar growing heartland of the east, an expanse centering on Hato Mayor and Seibo and running south to the coast. Others came from adjacent areas; from the north coast near Sabana de la Mar, from the east in the vicinity of Higüey, and from the west around Monte Plata and Bayaguana. Most of the peasant partisans, both leaders and followers, were Dominicans, despite the presence in the eastern cane fields and the company-owned *bateys* of many imported laborers from Haiti and the British Caribbean.<sup>20</sup>

### ***Political Motivations of the Guerrillas***

Two of the most important questions about

the guerrilla war concern the political nature of the movement.<sup>21</sup> Were the insurgents politically conscious? If so, at what level? Many bits of evidence indicate that all the guerrillas had at least inchoate political motives: they resented the changes in their lives which resulted from the loss of their land to the large corporations; they resented being unemployed and poor; and they resented the fear and insecurity brought into their daily existence by the aggressive and arbitrary acts of the occupying Marines. Some guerrillas, moreover, were conscious that these issues were important to their struggle. They would, for instance, recruit followers by informing peasant smallholders that the American corporations were planning to take over their land.<sup>22</sup> Going one step beyond this, various guerrilla leaders and groups openly identified themselves as political revolutionaries and claimed regional or national goals. They also conducted themselves, on some occasions, as an irregular government, exacted taxes, enforced popular law, and dispensed justice. For example, at the beginning of the struggle in 1917, the guerrilla leader Vicente Evangelista let it be known that he was fighting a "revolution" against the military government and, according to a Marine report, his stand received considerable support from the country people.<sup>23</sup>

However, the statement that the guerrillas had political motivations must be qualified. As in most movements of this kind, both leaders and followers were sometimes motivated by personal rather than political considerations. Intergroup rivalries at times led guerrilla bands to fight one another.<sup>24</sup> Such rivalries were the product of the caudillos' preintervention competition for personal power and influence, and they persisted after 1916. Vicente Evangelista, for example, once tried to negotiate an agreement with the Marines which would have delivered a rival leader into his hands.<sup>25</sup> In addition, small groups of actual bandits took advantage of the social turmoil brought on by the guerrilla war, and even the organized guerrillas sometimes committed criminal acts against fellow Dominicans.

Considerable positive evidence demonstrates the political consciousness of the insurgents. In

1918, for instance, a group of Marines was scouting near Las Pajas, guided by a local official, the second alcalde of the section. An unidentified group of insurgents surrounded the Marines, and a battle began. At one point, the alcalde called out, taunting the guerrillas for being *gavilleros*, the Dominican word for rural bandits. Back came numerous cries to the effect that: "We are not *gavilleros*; we are revolutionists!"<sup>26</sup>

During and after 1919, one of the most prominent groups operating in San Pedro de Macorís and eastern Santo Domingo provinces was that led by Eustacio "Bullito" Reyes. These guerrillas called their troop La Revolución, and when seizing money, arms, or supplies from their victims, they identified themselves as such.<sup>27</sup> And in 1920, on the eastern edge of the zone of hostilities, between La Romana and Higüey, an unidentified guerrilla unit accosted a mail carrier and sent him and his mail unmolested back to Higüey with a letter carefully explaining that the guerrillas were revolutionaries, not killers. A Marine report noted that this and similar incidents indicated that the "bandits" were "trying to pose as revolutionists" in order to "gain assistance and recruit[s]. . . ." <sup>28</sup>

By far the most important partisan leader was "General" Ramón Nateras, who campaigned with large groups between 1918 and 1922. In 1921, Nateras devised an obviously nationalistic operation which forced the military government to recognize the political motivations of the guerrillas. In the fall of that year, Nateras and his men abducted the British manager of the Angelina sugar estate. They released him unharmed after two days when he agreed to Nateras' demand that he and the other estate managers make known to the U.S. government the political and patriotic goal of the guerrillas, which was that the United States should terminate its occupation of the Dominican Republic.<sup>29</sup>

Corroborating the guerrillas' direct statements is evidence which shows that they saw themselves as a kind of government. In January 1922, for example, Marines discovered the burial site of four men. The epitaph on a board above the grave read: "Emilio Gil, Miguel de León,

Reimundo Ramos, Juan Moraldo: fusilados por haber descalado la bodega Margarita [shot for having robbed the store 'Margarita'], diciembre 22 de 1921, Ramón Nateras;" and in three places the board had the inscription "General Ramón Nateras," imprinted with the rubber stamp which Nateras used in his correspondence. The Marine report on this finding noted "that Ramón Nateras purports to be a ruler in the section of the woods north of La Campina and that he undertakes to punish raids made upon the cane field bodegas when the raids are not made under his direction and control."<sup>30</sup> This system of justice applied equally within insurgent ranks. During a raid on a sugar estate bodega in early 1921, the guerrillas executed one of their troop on the spot for a violation of discipline.<sup>31</sup> Departure from the guerrillas' code of ethics compromised their all-important relationship with other Dominicans.

Evidence indicates that the guerrillas regarded their seizures of money and property as a kind of taxation or as material requisitioned for a political movement. They "look upon themselves as heroes, and the food and clothing which they steal as prerogatives of their position," wrote an incredulous Marine lieutenant.<sup>32</sup> In a similar vein, a Marine officer reported in late 1920 that a wealthy farmer living near Higüey had been "fined" \$100 by the guerrillas.<sup>33</sup>

Occasionally, Marine reports suggest that the guerrillas had some connection with the national political structure and with the bourgeois party system. But no national politician was ever directly implicated in the guerrilla activity despite numerous investigations by the military government.<sup>34</sup>

### ***Personal Response to Marine Conduct***

There can be little doubt that personal motivations had more significance for the ordinary guerrilla than political or patriotic considerations. Unemployment certainly played an important part in swelling guerrilla ranks. Yet men had other reasons for fighting; included

among the partisans and their supporters were many who still had small farms and other means of employment. Some of these men may have fought for adventure's sake, others to vent economic fears or frustrations. But overshadowing all other factors was that of personal hatred and fear of the Marines and the Marine-created and -controlled Guardia Nacional Dominicana (National Guard). The Marines, as they fought to exert U.S. control over the eastern Dominican Republic, frightened, insulted, abused, oppressed, injured, and even killed hundreds of Dominicans, combatants and noncombatants alike, who lived and worked in the area of hostilities. No more effective agent existed for the guerrilla cause.

These abuses ranged from major atrocities to minor, if infuriating, Marine rudeness. If cases such as that of a Marine captain who allegedly machine-gunned to death as "bandits" some 30 peasants working a sugar *cañaveral* (cane field) were exceptional,<sup>35</sup> other incidents such as that involving a group of armed and uninvited Marines who invaded a party at a social club in Seibo and drank up much of the champagne<sup>36</sup> are so common that many probably went unrecorded. Also very common and often recorded, but only occasionally punished, were serious crimes such as the well documented case of Altigracia de la Rosa. As this teenage peasant woman prepared dinner one evening in December 1920, four armed Marines entered her house in Ramón Santana, raped her, and then took her and her mother prisoner and held them for 10 days. No charges were brought against the Marines involved.<sup>37</sup>

What factors underlay the friction between the Marines and the inhabitants in the east? In the first place, the Dominican peasants feared the Marines because they were outsiders. In peasant eyes, the invaders had an unfamiliar physical appearance; they dressed queerly, they spoke an unintelligible language, and they practiced unfamiliar customs. Besides, the Marines were armed and many of them were brusque, discourteous by Dominican standards, and not a few abusive.<sup>38</sup>

The Marines and other American officials arrived in the Dominican Republic completely

unprepared for the experience. Most enlisted men had little education; neither officers nor enlisted men knew anything about Dominican culture; and few could speak Spanish.<sup>39</sup> The jingoistic nationalism prevalent in the early 20th-century United States affected the Marines as much or more than others. Many North Americans possessed a patronizing sense of superiority, the belief that they had taken up what Military Governor Thomas Snowden referred to as "the white man's burden; the duty of the big brother."<sup>40</sup> Such attitudes flourished in the impoverished, exploited, and underdeveloped Dominican Republic. More important than ignorance or chauvinistic nationalism was the deeply ingrained, anti-black racism of many Marine officers and men. North American racism found a fertile field in the Dominican Republic, "a country whose people," Military Governor Harry Knapp noted, "are almost all touched with the tarbrush."<sup>41</sup> The Marines' prejudice caused them to look down upon Dominicans generally, but the problem became even worse among the peasants of the east, poor and darker-skinned than many other citizens of the republic. Furthermore, the Marines' racist culture had accustomed them to patterns of white superiority and black subservience in both the northern and southern United States, a fact which in the Dominican Republic led to Marine abuse and Dominican bitterness.<sup>42</sup>

Race was a potential irritant in any encounter between Dominicans and Marines. A North American woman resident in Santo Domingo reported that Marines commonly referred to Dominicans as "spigs" and "niggers," a habit also noted by several visitors.<sup>43</sup> When a writer accused Marine officers and men of using the terms "spig" and "spik," Military Governor Knapp came to their defense, questioned whether officers would do so, and denied that the enlisted men's use of this "slang" caused bad feelings among Dominicans.<sup>44</sup>

A typical incident occurred on the streets of San Pedro de Macorís. An offended black artisan reported, probably in cleaned-up language, that when he and a Marine corporal accidentally brushed each other in passing on the sidewalk, the corporal whirled around and yelled,

"Look here, you damned negro! Don't you know that no damned negroes are supposed to let their body touch the body of any Marine? And that they are always to give them way in the street!" The Marine then assaulted the man. The victim, an English-speaking immigrant, fully understood and reported the encounter.<sup>45</sup> The provost marshal of San Pedro de Macorís essentially refused to investigate the matter, and it was dropped.<sup>46</sup>

In another instance of abuse, one which involved the killing of several men, all testimony against the Marine defendant was discounted by the Marine officer in charge of the investigation because of "the unreliability of the Dominican as a witness under oath . . . and . . . the hopelessness of finding any Dominican who can differentiate between what he has seen and he has heard." The charges in the case, the investigator argued, coming from "an individual of different race . . . who has no conception of honor as we understand it," would best be dropped. Because "of the wide gulf separating the white from the negro race," because of the basic "difference in psychology," the officer added, the Dominican "race has a totally different conception of right and wrong from that held by the white race." Finally, the Marine officer in charge of handling the case suggested prosecuting the complainant, "for the maintenance of the prestige of the white race."<sup>47</sup>

The conduct of the guerrilla war itself greatly frustrated the Marines. Their frustration at times led to abuse of Dominicans, irrespective of whether they were guerrillas or *pacíficos*, as the noncombatants were called. The Marines were not prepared to fight a guerrilla war. They found themselves in often futile pursuit of an elusive enemy, repeatedly fell into ambushes and other tactical situations of the guerrillas' choosing, and were unable to establish permanent control over any area. Even if they had understood the guerrillas' style of warfare, the Marines would still have suffered difficulties. They were strangers in an environment in which the guerrillas had lived all their lives. Unlike the Marines, the guerrillas blended into that environment perfectly; as a result, it was usually impossible for the North Americans to

distinguish guerrillas from *pacíficos*.<sup>48</sup>

As the war progressed, the Marines began to discover that frequently there *was* no difference between the two groups. A peasant tilling a field might be behind a rifle 30 minutes later, ambushing a Marine patrol. A woman innocently washing clothes, or a child at play, might, as soon as the Marines moved out of sight, convey news of their direction and numbers to a guerrilla agent. As the Marines began to grasp the situation, they came to treat everyone as the enemy. In the process, they created more guerrillas and guerrilla supporters from among the previously uninvolved.

As Marine harshness touched the lives of an increasing number of people, both individuals and families began to flee their homes, seeking greater security by establishing new homes and *conucos* in more isolated areas of the forests and in the mountains to the north. It was simply not safe to be in areas where the Marines were actively pursuing guerrillas. Numerous incidents occurred in which people who could not or would not reveal information concerning the guerrillas were beaten, tortured, and killed, or, if they were more fortunate, imprisoned. A peasant might also be the object of gratuitous violence by the Marines, such as rape or the destruction of a home or other property. Ever present was the danger of being attacked as a suspected guerrilla.<sup>49</sup> On the other hand, the danger existed of being robbed by individuals or groups who used the guerrilla war as a cover for their ordinary criminal behavior. As a result of all these circumstances, the whole central area of the east became, in the words of a Marine commander, "a scene of desolation and long abandoned homes . . . a sad and pitiful spectacle."<sup>50</sup>

Flight did not necessarily help. Marine patrols began to run across hidden homesteads or even small villages with permanent houses and surrounding *conucos*, and populations of men, women, and children. The Marines assumed, generally without evidence, that the inhabitants were guerrillas. It became common to burn their homes and possessions, although the Marine command attempted to stop this practice, hoping that such homes would serve

as gathering places where patrols might easily locate insurgents in the future.<sup>51</sup> If the inhabitants fled, as fear often impelled them to do, the Marines fired at them, even though they were usually unarmed. "People who are not bandits do not flee at the approach of Marines," noted one Marine officer.<sup>52</sup>

In a typical incident in 1918, a Marine detachment located two peasant homes north of Hato Mayor, at the foot of the Mancho hills. "There were two bandit houses," wrote Sergeant Morris Stout Jr., "and I would say, four men, four women and some children occupied same. They did not have any property of importance." When the inhabitants fled the approaching intruders by climbing a steep hill next to the houses, the Marines "formed a skirmish line and opened fire, but all got away except one woman and child and one horse and saddle."<sup>53</sup> This particular incident brought an admonition from Marine headquarters in Santo Domingo to "exercise extreme caution in firing on fleeing parties which contain women and children."<sup>54</sup> But a 1919 communication, not five months later, revealed that a Marine raid had severely wounded three of the four children of one "bandit."<sup>55</sup>

Olivorio Carela, a follower of the guerrilla leader "Bullito" Reyes, provides evidence of the results of Marine policies. Carela had joined the guerrillas, he testified, when "American forces had fired at his house and he had run away to take refuge."<sup>56</sup> Another guerrilla, Ramón Batía, said in an interview that after a Marine captain had threatened his life, he believed "that his only remaining option was to flee into the hills." There he joined the guerrilla leader Vicente Evangelista and later formed his own group.<sup>57</sup>

As the guerrilla war progressed, the insurgents became more and more indistinguishable from the rest of the populace. A number of Marine reports in 1918 show that women had begun accompanying guerrilla bands, a fact which is corroborated by the few guerrilla documents which exist.<sup>58</sup> The incorporation of women and sometimes whole families into guerrilla life, and the establishment of permanent villages, made it all the more difficult to distinguish guerrillas from refugees and other

ordinary inhabitants of the rural areas.

In time, nearly the entire population of some areas of the east became involved in the guerrilla war. The Marines faced not only full-time guerrillas and former *pacíficos* who had fled their homes, but also those who had stayed behind in villages and small towns. These rural centers became hotbeds of guerrilla activity, serving as centers for intelligence, for the gathering of money and supplies, and for recruitment. Several incidents occurred which revealed that a town's male population had turned out almost en masse to ambush a Marine patrol shortly after its departure from the town.<sup>59</sup> Marine reports frequently noted that many of the "so called bandits or gavilleros have relatives in all the outlying towns and it is understood that they are frequently visited by the gavilleros."<sup>60</sup> Similarly large numbers came from the *bateys* located on the sugar estates to the south. In periods of guerrilla inactivity, a Marine lieutenant surmised, many of them "can be found in the southern district near the *colonias* [sugar workers' villages] and living in the houses of the sugar cane workers. Some of them may even be working the sugar mills." In any case, he continued, "it is a certainty that they are being supplied with rum, clothes and all sorts of supplies by their friends around the mills."<sup>61</sup>

Of course, *pacíficos* were not the only victims of Marine abuse. The guerrillas themselves sometimes suffered brutal treatment, torture, and even death while captives of the Marines. In one 1918 incident, a Marine lieutenant murdered eleven jailed followers of Ramón Nateras. His explanation was that he became angry after having heard that a friend of his, a Marine captain, had been killed in an encounter with guerrillas.<sup>62</sup> One of the more common methods of eliminating guerrilla prisoners was to shoot and kill them while they "attempted to escape." In 1919, after two and a half years of such incidents, Marine authorities in Santo Domingo cautioned Marines in the field to secure prisoners more carefully, since "there is always suspicion produced by reports of this character that the prisoner was given an opportunity to escape so that he might be killed."<sup>63</sup>

A Dominican who watched the events in the east unfold described the effects of the Marine presence quite clearly: "The gavillerismo [rural unrest] increased with the occupation, or was created by it, . . . because of the increasing danger and difficulty of living in those districts. . . . When someone . . . was killed, his brothers joined the gavilleros, to get revenge on the Marines. . . . Some joined the ranks inspired by patriotism, but most of them joined the ranks inspired by hate, fear or revenge."<sup>64</sup>

### ***Efforts to Eliminate Marine Abuses***

Higher officials of the military government soon became aware of the developing pattern of Marine abuse in the east and took some corrective action. But the remedies were often weak and ineffective, either for lack of enforcement or because of the difficulty of controlling the hour-to-hour conduct of units in the field. Furthermore, many officials devised rationalizations which enabled them to ignore much of the evidence which steadily accumulated during the occupation.

Military officials did make efforts to get Dominicans to come forward with their charges,<sup>65</sup> but few chose to complain to the authorities. Many who had experienced or witnessed the Marines' system of justice, based on provost courts, believed that to bring charges was useless and possibly dangerous, since those who did so were sometimes jailed, fined, harassed, or physically harmed. Otto Schoenrich, a North American writer of moderate opinions who was well acquainted with the Dominican Republic and the occupation, wrote that: "the provost courts have gained the reputation of being unjust, oppressive and cruel, and seem to delight in excessive sentences. These provost courts, with their arbitrary and overbearing methods, their refusal to permit accused persons to be defended by counsel, and their foreign judges, foreign language and foreign procedure, are galling to the Dominicans, who regard them with aversion and terror."<sup>66</sup>

Military records indicate that the Marines'

investigative officers and courts of justice deserved their poor reputation. Investigating officials in general showed themselves unsympathetic to the views of Dominican complainants, often accepting the word of their cohorts over that of a Dominican as a matter of course. And the Marines viewed the court system as a weapon to be used against the guerrillas and their supporters. Like the officers in charge of preliminary investigations, the military tribunals were notoriously biased in favor of Marine defendants. Prosecutions of offending Marines were often halfhearted, and sentences, if any, were light, especially when the defendant was an officer. On the other hand, the court system was often prejudiced and sometimes even vindictive against Dominican plaintiffs. And Dominican defendants could only expect the worst. One Dominican observer of the Marines' judicial efforts commented: "When an American officer has committed a crime, the effort of his superiors is to hide it, to prove the innocence of the criminal, believing that to admit the truth would tarnish the honor of the American forces."<sup>67</sup>

One example of the misuse of the system of military justice is the case of Licenciado Pelegrín Castillo. This man, a lawyer, accused Marine Captain Charles R. Buckalew with killing four guerrilla prisoners in cold blood, and of other atrocities, such as crushing the testicles of a prisoner with a stone. Although evidence pointed unequivocally to the captain's guilt, a preliminary court of inquiry, headed by Marine Lieutenant Colonel C. B. Taylor, found the evidence unreliable and suggested that Buckalew "deserves praise and not censure." Furthermore, the court recommended that Pelegrín Castillo be stripped of his right to practice law.<sup>68</sup> Pelegrín Castillo was then tried by a military court for making false accusations.<sup>69</sup> Much later, such massive evidence accumulated against Buckalew that he was made to stand trial before a military court. Despite the defendant's confession, which essentially corroborated Pelegrín Castillo's earlier charges, the court acquitted Buckalew on technical grounds.<sup>70</sup>

Not only was testimony given by Dominicans discounted by the courts, but clear evidence



exists of the intimidation of witnesses. Such intimidation prevented some cases from ever reaching the courts and prevented others from being tried fairly. One instance of the former involved a man who volunteered to turn in some firearms. A Marine, assisted by members of the Guardia whom he commanded, apparently believed that the man had knowledge of the whereabouts of additional arms and so began to torture him, beating him on his testicles with sticks and burning his feet. His daughters were taken naked from their house and forced to watch and then all of them were imprisoned. Complaints concerning the incident subsequently produced an investigation, but it reached no conclusion because witnesses were afraid to talk.<sup>71</sup>

During one of the investigations into the misconduct of Captain Buckalew, all of the prosecution's witnesses suddenly "voluntarily recanted and acknowledged that they falsely testified," thus making it "impossible to establish the truth of the accusations made against Charles R. Buckalew."<sup>72</sup> It is reasonable to conclude, in light of Buckalew's later confession, that the witnesses were under pressure to recant their previous, accurate testimony.

Some of the sentences of the military courts were so blatantly unfair that higher military officials were compelled to protest. Occasionally this caused a retrial or the reopening of an investigation. In one case involving the killing of prisoners, Military Governor Harry Knapp called the acquittal of the obviously guilty Marine defendants a "shocking occurrence, utterly reprehensible."<sup>73</sup> On another occasion, Secretary of the Navy Josephus Daniels wrote that he viewed with "distinct regret and disapprobation" the "inadequate sentence" given to a Marine private for a serious offense.<sup>74</sup> In 1922, Marine Lieutenant Colonel Henry C. Davis was dismayed to discover that of a number of Dominicans sentenced to five years' imprisonment at hard labor for alleged guerrilla connections, "none of these men were legally tried but were 'railroaded' into jail." Tried by a provost court in San Pedro de Macorís, the prisoners had not been allowed to present witnesses on their behalf, nor did any prosecution witnesses

appear against them, a procedure approved by Rear Admiral Thomas Snowden, the military governor at the time. Lieutenant Colonel Davis believed that "other cases of this kind" existed and asked for a special investigation.<sup>75</sup>

Dominicans ordinarily received harsher treatment in the military courts than did Marines. Though there are not many precisely comparable cases recorded, a revealing exception occurred in early 1922. A group of four Marines, thought by other Marines in the half-light of dusk to be guerrillas because they carried rifles and wore the blue denim typical of the peasant fighters, had been flushed out of the brush by a Marine patrol. An investigation proved that the Marines had set out "on a robbing expedition in the Consuelo [sugar estate] settlements," one of several in which they had participated. For this crime they each received a sentence of 30 days' imprisonment on bread and water.<sup>76</sup> Dominicans tried for similar but less devious acts received sentences from five years to life.

The failure of the system of military justice to deal fairly with Dominicans caused them to distrust and fear it, and thus eliminated legal recourse for those who suffered mistreatment by the Marines or the Guardia. Another obstacle to an effective crackdown on Marine misconduct lay in the fact that military officials often sought to ignore, suppress, or make excuses for incidents which did come to their attention.

Among the explanations which the authorities of the military government gave for the misconduct of troops in the field was that the problem originated with Dominicans of the Guardia Nacional fighting under Marine command rather than with the Marines themselves. Since Guardia members lacked adequate training, argued Military Governor Knapp, their breaches of discipline were a natural "reversion to the intolerable conditions which existed in the late pre-intervention Dominican Army and Guardia Republicana."<sup>77</sup> His view found support in reports from the field, such as one from the brutal Captain Buckalew, who complained that, after his men had been through an area, he had "to listen to complaints of stolen horses, poultry and produce . . . as well as iron-handed

methods used, which were in vogue in the old Guardia. . . .”<sup>78</sup>

The Guardia *was*, no doubt, a source of problems. But in reality, the responsibility for abuse and atrocities lay as much with the Marines. This fact became obvious in the case of Captain Charles Merkle, whose infamous deeds are still remembered in the Dominican Republic in the 1970s. In October 1918, only after the Archbishop of Santo Domingo interceded on behalf of terrified citizens in the east, Marine authorities arrested Merkle, charging him with numerous incidents of torture and murder.<sup>79</sup> When Merkle conveniently committed suicide,<sup>80</sup> the military government dropped its investigation and brushed off his numerous atrocities as unique and isolated incidents, attributable to his Germanic ancestry rather than to Marine attitudes, the problems of fighting a guerrilla war, or the occupation itself. Captain Merkle, wrote Military Governor Snowden, “was a German who used the well-known German methods on the native population.”<sup>81</sup>

In the years following Merkle’s death, as it became clear that other Marines had been involved in similar atrocities, officials created a new rationalization. Many Marine officers in the east, they explained, were actually corporals and sergeants who, without further training, had been hurriedly promoted to captain because of the World War I officer shortage.<sup>82</sup> “It is hardly equitable,” argued Military Governor Knapp, “to expect young and inexperienced officers, some of whom have just been appointed from the ranks, to be thoroughly familiar with all the regulations and rules of warfare governing their conduct, especially as many of these have been rushed into field service as soon as their commissions were received.”<sup>83</sup>

Charges made by C. M. Ledger, the British chargé d’affaires in San Pedro de Macorís in late 1921, within six months of the end of the guerrilla insurgency, indicate clearly that both the abuses and the failure to deal adequately with them continued throughout the war. Ledger sought an investigation into events surrounding the killing in cold blood of a British citizen, a black worker from St. Kitts, by Marines. The chargé saw this incident as part of a “reign of

terror” and mentioned several *bateys* from which the inhabitants had fled their homes in fear of Marine violence after incidents during which Marines had beaten men and raped women. Though the Marines were theoretically protecting the *bateys* from guerrilla raids, the chargé noted, the guerrillas were “not in the habit of killing their victims nor of interfering with their women folk.” He asked a thorough investigation.<sup>84</sup> Military officials at first ignored the charges, but repeated insistent requests finally brought some action. Indications pointed strongly to a particular Marine officer and his unit, but the investigator seemed unable to produce sufficient concrete evidence for anything more than a minor charge against one enlisted Marine. Eventually the entire matter was quietly shelved and the criminals remained free.<sup>85</sup>

The occupation forces compiled a lengthy record of wrongdoing, even if, as appears likely, not all cases were recorded. The most blatant offenses occasionally resulted in investigations, trials, and convictions. But, in a sense, these judicial processes were irrelevant: the abuses had already occurred, the peasants had learned to hate the Marines, and the guerrilla cause had gained adherents.

Only in 1921 and 1922, during a U.S. Senate investigation of the military occupations of the Dominican Republic and Haiti, did some of the details concerning Marine misbehavior come to light.<sup>86</sup> By then the damage had long since been done. The only beneficiaries were those who somehow could obtain a sense of vindication from the far-off, after-the-fact hearings, which in themselves did not declare anyone innocent or guilty or pass any sentences.

## ***Concluding Summary***

In early 1917, representatives of the U.S. military government in the Dominican Republic had disembarked in the east to carry out what appeared to be a relatively simple task: the pacification of a few local troublemakers and the establishment of the authority of the central government. But when the newly arrived and poorly prepared Marine leaders attempted to implement their orders by riding roughshod

over the traditional autonomy of the east, they sparked an armed uprising. Thereafter, several factors combined to feed the flames of war. One was the tension and resentment associated with the region's rapidly expanding sugar industry and the resulting social and economic dislocations. Another was the anger which the Marines' own mishandling of the conflict generated.

There can be no doubt that the Marines' opponents were something other than the "bandits" born of military government propaganda and accepted by subsequent writers. They were peasant guerrillas fighting for principles and a way of life. Although the precise nature and the degree of their motivation remains open to exact definition, it is certain in some cases that both the guerrillas and their leaders were conscious of political issues.

The end of the guerrilla conflict came in the spring of 1922, shortly after U.S. and Dominican representatives had signed an agreement for the termination of the occupation. The peasant rebels, faced by combined forces of Marines and Dominican paramilitary auxiliaries, were encountering their first effective opposition in six years. After long negotiations, they laid down their arms in return for a nearly total amnesty.<sup>87</sup>

In their surrender, the guerrilla leaders paid obeisance to a new way of political life. They may have hoped that the new order would last only until the Marines departed, but, if so, they were mistaken. No longer would the central government be forced to negotiate with the eastern caudillos to gain the region's allegiance. Never again would these traditional leaders successfully defy the central government or raise their followers in rebellion.

Despite the Marines' ineffectiveness in combatting the guerrillas, changes had occurred in the east which ensured the demise of the old system. Over the course of the war, the military government had greatly improved transportation and communication networks and continued to do so until 1924. By then, for the first time, the east was effectively linked to the rest of the nation. More important, military authorities had created in the Dominican constabulary, the Guardia Nacional Dominicana, a force

which would soon hold an effective monopoly of military control, power that would be directed from the national capital, Santo Domingo. The reality of the new situation became clear in 1930 when the head of the Guardia, General Rafael Trujillo, overthrew the constitutional government and began his 31-year dictatorship.

## Notes

1. The most balanced account of the 1916–1924 period is the work of Luis F. Mejía, *De Lilís a Trujillo: Historia contemporánea de la República Dominicana* (Caracas, 1944), chs. 6–8. Also valuable are Sumner Welles, *Naboth's Vineyard: The Dominican Republic, 1844–1924*, 2 vols. (New York, 1928), chs. 8–15, reflecting the views of an enlightened State Department official; and Melvin M. Knight, *The Americans in Santo Domingo* (New York, 1928), a somewhat disorganized radical critique of the occupation and the events leading up to it. Stephen M. Fuller and Graham A. Cosmas have written a brief Marine history, *Marines in the Dominican Republic, 1916–1924* (Washington, D.C., 1974). Other books treat individual aspects of the intervention or present documents from the period. Only recently have several authors begun to portray the guerrilla war, namely Gregorio Urbano Gilbert, in his autobiographical *Mi lucha contra el invasor yanqui de 1916* (Santo Domingo, 1975) and Felix Servio Ducoudray, *Los "gavilleros" del este: Una epopeya calumniada* (Santo Domingo, 1976).

2. The bulk of the papers of the military government of Santo Domingo are in the U.S. National Archives, particularly in Record Groups 38, 45, and 80. Subsequent references to these papers will denote the record group, the series, and the box number of the document, e.g. NA, RG38, E6, B3. Other papers of the military government are located in the Archivo General de la Nación in Santo Domingo, D.R. These documents are the correspondence of the several executive departments, such as Police and Interior, Agriculture, etc., and cover a wide range of subjects. Lack of organization, however, renders them very difficult to use. Subsequent references to these records will appear as: AGN, *Mil. Govt. Papers*. Since the U.S. Department of State maintained a diplomatic mission in Santo Domingo during the entire occupation period, numerous relevant documents are also located in File 839, *Records of the Department of State Relating to the Internal Affairs of the Dominican Republic, 1910–1929*, which is also available on microfilm as United States National Archives Publication, Microcopy

No. 626 (hereafter cited as *Records*, D.R., 1910–1929).

3. For an analysis of the Dominican caudillo system by a man who despised its effects, see Francisco Henríquez y Carvajal, “Memorandum” to Stabler, Chief of the Div. of Latin American Affairs, State Dept., in *U.S. Dept. of State, Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, 1919* (Washington, D.C., 1934), 111–113 (hereafter cited as *FR*, with appropriate year). See the U.S. Commission of Inquiry to Santo Domingo, *Report of the Commission of Santo Domingo* (Washington, D.C., 1871), 8–9, for a description of the caudillo system by North American investigators in 1870. Miguel A. Monclus, *El caudillismo en la Republica Dominicana*, 2d ed. (Ciudad Trujillo, 1948), is heavy on biographical facts but light on analysis.

4. Henríquez y Carvajal, “Memorandum,” in *FR*, 1919, 112.

5. Payoffs to caudillos are cited in Welles, *Naboth's Vineyard*, 589; and in Dana Gardner Munro, *Intervention and Dollar Diplomacy in the Caribbean, 1900–1921* (Princeton, N.J., 1964), 82, 274–277, and 311–312.

6. Welles, *Naboth's Vineyard*, 908.

7. Lee to Sec. of the Navy, May 19, 1924, NA, RG38, E6, B74.

8. Chargé Johnson, Santo Domingo, to Sec. of State, Sept. 15, 1915; and Minister William Russell to Sec. of State, Nov. 30, 1915, in *FR*, 1915, 294, 297.

9. Russell to Sec. of State, Mar. 14, 1916, in *FR*, 1916, 221.

10. Military Gov. Harry S. Knapp to Major General Cmdt., U.S. Marine Corps (hereafter cited as USMC), Oct. 27, 1918, NA, RG45, WA7, B647. The analysis in this and the two following paragraphs is in part speculative, based on the author's study of contemporary commentaries by Dominican civilians and many military government documents which infer the existence of the social situation described.

11. Officials of the military government argued, with statistics, that a close relationship existed between political strife and economic decline. See, for instance, U.S. Military Government of Santo Domingo, *Santo Domingo: Its Past and its Present Condition* (Santo Domingo, 1920), 13.

12. A typical incident in Seibo in 1916, when the *comandante de armas* rebelled against his civilian superior, the governor, is a graphic example. See Bernardo Pichardo, *Resumen de historia patria*, 3d ed. (Buenos Aires, 1947), 297.

13. Knapp to Major General Cmdt, USMC, Oct. 27, 1918, NA, RG45, WA7, B647.

14. One regional leader, Vicente Evangelista, made

this point explicitly in the surrender terms he proposed to the military government. Knapp to Sec. of the Navy, July 14, 1917, NA, RG45, WA7, B647. It is important to note that the notorious pre-1917 caudillos were killed or captured during the first year of fighting. Thereafter, with the war underway, new leaders appeared.

15. Several tense situations developed in the west. In Barahona province there was some unrest over land and water rights and in neighboring Azua province there existed a messianic movement led by Dios Olivorio Mateo, whom the Marines hunted over a period of years and killed in 1922.

16. Beginning from almost nothing in 1870, the sugar estates had grown very rapidly. By the early 20th century, sugar had become the nation's most important crop, with the bulk of the production on the plains of the east, centered around San Pedro de Macorís. Knight, *The Americans*, 139–140, notes that by 1925, between 350,000 and 400,000 acres of the east's best land was in sugar. Knight, who devotes a chapter to the growth of the sugar industry, is one of the best sources of information on this aspect of Dominican life. Juan J. Sánchez, *La caña en Santo Domingo* (Santo Domingo, 1972), is a short, excellent book on the industry in the late 19th century.

17. James T. McLean, Director, Southern District, to Cmdt., Guardia Nacional Dominicana (hereafter cited as GND), NA, RG38, EG, BU (BU indicates box number unknown).

18. Military Gov. Samuel S. Robison to sugar companies, mailing list attached, June 13, 1922, NA, RG38, E6, B36.

19. *Ibid.*

20. Of more than 100 men who were imprisoned on charges of banditry in the spring of 1922 in San Pedro de Macorís jail, only 14 had French names and were scheduled for deportation, probably to Haiti. Provost Marshal, to Commanding General, Aug. 14, 1922, NA, RG38, E6, B50. Of the more than 140 guerrillas who surrendered in April and May 1922, only four had names which could possibly be Haitian-French. Commanding General Lee to Military Gov., May 22, 1923, NA, RG38, E6, B64.

21. The military government consistently referred to the insurgents as “bandits,” although military documents frequently belied this thesis. Most Dominican writers, until the recent works of Felix Servio Ducoudray and Gregorio Urbano Gilbert, have for various reasons left the “bandit” thesis unchallenged. The cover-up of the guerrilla war is discussed at length in my dissertation. See Calder, “Some Aspects of the United States Occupation of the Dominican

- Republic" (Ph.D. Diss., University of Texas, 1974).
22. Colonel C. Gamborg-Andresen, CO, 3d Provisional Regiment, to Brigade Commander, Feb. 27, 1919, NA, RG45, WA7, B645.
  23. D. B. Roben, CO, 44th Co., to Regimental Commander, July 30, 1917, NA, RG45, WA7, B646.
  24. Julio Peynado, a Dominican observer, makes this observation in a letter to Horace G. Knowles, Apr. 22, 1922, Peynado Family Papers (hereafter cited as PFP). Knowles was a former diplomat, an active lawyer and writer, and one of the organizers in the U.S. of the campaign against the Dominican and Haitian occupations.
  25. Knapp to Sec. of the Navy, July 14, 1917, NA, RG45, WA7, B646.
  26. Captain T. P. Cheatham, 114th Co., to Battalion Commander, Nov. 22, 1918, NA, RG45, WA7, B646.
  27. Record of the Proceedings of a Superior Provost Court, Santo Domingo, convened Feb. 16, 1920, Trial of Olivorio Carela, NA, RG38, E6, B36.
  28. Captain Robert Yowell, Seibo Barracks, to Battalion Commander, Sept. 14, 1920, NA, RG38, E6, B22.
  29. Sugar estate managers to Military Gov. Robison, Oct. 4, 1921, NA, RG38, E6, B24.
  30. William C. Harlee, Commander, 15th Regiment, to Commanding General, Jan. 25, 1922, NA, RG38, E6, B48.
  31. R. Sánchez González, Gov., San Pedro de Macoris province, to Colonel P. M. Rixey Jr., Sec. of State for Interior and Police, Mar. 8, 1921, NA, RG38, E6, BU.
  32. William O. Rogers, 15th Regiment, to District Commander, Apr. 25, 1919, NA, RG45, WA7, B645.
  33. Major Watson, 9th Co., GND, to Cndt., Nov. 23, 1920, NA, RG38, E6, BU.
  34. In 1918 a regional leader of the Horacista party, Basilio Camilo, was accused of connivance with guerrillas. One of his lawyers, Luis F. Mejía, wrote later that Camilo was sentenced to prison "despite the lack of proof against him," but was pardoned soon afterwards. Mejía, *De Lilís a Trujillo*, 164.
  35. Horacio Blanco Fombona, *Crímenes del imperialismo norte-americano* (México, 1927), 122.
  36. President and members, Club Faro de Hicayagua, to Military Gov. Thomas Snowden, May 25, 1920, NA, RG38, E6, B24.
  37. Dispatch, Marine Corps to Flag Santo Domingo, Mar. 17, 1922, NA, RG80, CNO Planning File 159-9; and Knowles to U.S. Senator Medill McCormick, Mar. 17, 1922, PFP.
  38. Colonel George C. Thorpe, a Marine commander in the east, notes that Dominican peasants feared the Marines' very appearance. Thorpe, "American Achievements in Santo Domingo, Haiti and the Virgin Islands," *Journal of International Relations*, 11 (July 1920), 63-64.
  39. Military Gov. to Bureau of Navigation, Sept. 9, 1920, NA, RG38, E6, B32, contains the estimate that "the majority" of naval enlisted personnel in Santo Domingo had not completed grade school and only "a few" had begun high school; the figure is probably no higher for the Marines. Harry Alverson Franck, *Roaming through the West Indies* (New York, 1920), 245-246, and Otto Schoenrich, "The Present American Intervention in Santo Domingo and Haiti," in George H. Blakeslee, ed., *Mexico and the Caribbean* (New York, 1920), 211, both note the Marines' lack of ability to use Spanish. Military Gov. Knapp admitted that in late 1916 he could not read a simple pamphlet in Spanish. Knapp to Sec. of the Navy, Dec. 17, 1916, NA, RG45, WA7, B643. Kenneth W. Condit and Edwin T. Turnbladh, *Hold High the Torch: A History of the 4th Marines* (Washington, D.C., 1960), 76, notes the Marines' general unpreparedness for their occupation duties.
  40. Snowden to Josephus Daniels, Sec. of the Navy, June 2, 1920, NA, RG38, E6, B31.
  41. Knapp to Arthur T. Hadley, President of Yale University, Sept. 20, 1917, NA, RG38, E6, BU.
  42. A Dominican, Mejía, *De Lilís a Trujillo*, 157, noted U.S. racial prejudices. For a fuller description, see Franck, *West Indies*, 239-240. Rubin Francis Weston, *Racism in U.S. Imperialism: The Influence of Racial Assumptions on American Foreign Policy, 1893-1946* (Columbia, S.C., 1972), thoroughly documents the racist views of U.S. citizens regarding the Dominican Republic and other nations. See especially 209-256.
  43. Mrs. Helen Leschorn to U.S. Senator Atlee Pomerence, Jan. 24, 1922, enclosed in letter of W. C. MacCrone, Regimental Intelligence Officer to Brigade Intelligence Officer, Mar. 25, 1922, NA, RG38, E6, B48; and Franck, *West Indies*, 239.
  44. Knapp to Russell, Nov. 2, 1918, NA, RG45, WA7, B644.
  45. J. I. Bowman to Military Gov., Dec. 21, 1921, NA, RG38, E6, B37.
  46. Provost Marshal G. M. Kincade to Military Gov, Jan. 11, 1922, NA, RG38, E6, B37.
  47. Finding of Facts, Opinion, and Recommendations of Court of Inquiry convened at Marine Barracks, San Francisco de Macoris, Feb. 24, 1920, NA, RG38, E6, B38.
  48. News Release, Oct. 29, 1921, issued by Eastern District Headquarters, San Pedro de Macoris, cites the problem of guerrillas "appearing like any other citi-

- zen." Located in NA, RG38, E6, B37. Franck, *West Indies*, 236, also notes this problem.
49. U.S. Senate, Inquiry in Occupation and Administration of Haiti and Santo Domingo, *Hearings before a Select Committee of Haiti and Santo Domingo*, 2 vols., 67th Cong., 1st and 2d sess., 1922 (hereafter cited as U.S. Senate, *Hearings*), I, 1106–1155, documents a large number of incidents of Marine violence against captured guerrillas, suspected guerrillas, and *pacíficos*. Franck, a journalist who spent some time with the Marines in the Dominican Republic circa 1920, gives a sketch of Marine abuses and suggests some possible motivations for them in *West Indies*, 234–235. Military courts tried 85 persons during the first three years of the occupation for allegedly having concealed information regarding guerrillas or arms. See Summary of Exceptional Military Courts in the Dominican Republic from November 29, 1916, to December 29, 1919, Covering Cases of Dominicans and Sojourners in the Dominican Republic, Tried by Provost Courts, Superior Provost Courts and Military Commissions, NA, RG38, E6, B13.
  50. Harllee, Eastern District Commander, to Commanding General, Jan. 25, 1922, NA, RG38, E6, B48.
  51. Thorpe, Chief of Staff, to Brigade Commander, May 29, 1917, NA, RG45, WA7, B645. Thorpe's order was not necessarily obeyed. In October 1918, he angrily denounced two recent home burnings. Thorpe to 2d Lieutenant William A. Buckley, Oct. 7, 1918, NA, RG45, WA7, B646.
  52. Harllee, Eastern District Commander, to Commanding General., Jan. 25, 1922, NA, RG38, E6, B48.
  53. Sgt. Stout, Detachment of 113th Co., to Senior Officer, Oct. 16, 1918, NA, RG45, WA7, B646.
  54. Brigade Commander B. H. Fuller to Colonel Thorpe, Oct. 31, 1918, NA, RG45, WA7, B646.
  55. Company report[?], unsigned, 1919, contained in Marine Operations, 1919–1924 file, NA, RG45, WA7, B646.
  56. Record of the Proceedings of a Superior Provost Court, Santo Domingo, convened Feb. 16, 1920, Trial of Olivorio Carela, NA, RG38, E6, B36.
  57. "Ramón Batía dice . . .," *Listin Diario*, May 18, 1922.
  58. Ibid.
  59. Colonel Thorpe to Regimental Commander, Sept. 8, 1918, NA, RG38, E6, B6.
  60. CO, 2d Battalion, 15th Provincial Regiment, to District Commander, Sept. 28, 1921, NA, RG38, E6, B36.
  61. 1st Lieutenant Allan S. Heaton, 2d Battalion, 15th Provisional Regiment to Brigadier Commander, June 11, 1919, NA, RG45, WA7, B645.
  62. Findings of a Court of Inquiry held at Seibo, Mar. 27, 1918, NA, RG38, EG6 139.
  63. Brigadier General Fuller to CO, 15th Regiment, Mar. 1919, NA, RG38, E6, B19.
  64. Peynado to Knowles, Apr. 22, 1922, PFP.
  65. Lieutenant Colonel Henry C. Davis, District Commander, "Public Notice," May 10, 1921, NA, RG38, E6, B36.
  66. Schoenrich, "American Intervention," 212.
  67. Blanco Fombona, *Crímenes*, 123–124.
  68. Finding of Facts, Opinion and Recommendation of Court of Inquiry convened at Marine Barracks, San Francisco de Macorís, Feb. 24, 1920, NA, RG38, E6, B38.
  69. Colonel C. M. Perkins, Brigade Law Officer, to Brigade Commander Logan Feland, May 1, 1920, NA, RG38, E6, B38. Luis F. Mejía, one of Pelegrín Castillo's lawyers, describes the case in *De Lilís a Trujillo*, 172.
  70. Colonel Constantine Perkins to Lieutenant Colonel C. B. Taylor, Mar. 4, 1921, NA, RG38, E6, B38.
  71. Sworn and notarized statement concerning the case of José Cepeda, signed and witnessed, May 31, 1920, Casa de Don Federico y Biblioteca del Maestro, Santo Domingo, D.R. (hereafter cited as BDM).
  72. Commanding General Charles G. Long to Military Gov., Jan. 11, 1921, NA, RG38, E6, B38.
  73. Knapp to CO, 2d Provisional Brigade, June 14, 1918, NA, RG38, E6, B6.
  74. Daniels to Brigade Commander Pendleton, July 9, 1917, NA, RG38, E6, B4.
  75. Davis, Southern District Commander, to Military Gov., May 13, 1922, NA, RG38, E6, B49.
  76. Harllee, Eastern District Commander, Jan. 25, 1922, NA, RG38, E6, B48.
  77. Knapp to Brigade Commander, Confidential, Oct. 17, 1918, NA, RG38, E6, B6.
  78. Buckalew, CO, 6th Co., GND, to Cmdt., June 8, 1918, NA, RG38, E6, B6[?].
  79. Merkle's crimes are documented in U.S. Senate, *Hearings*, I, 1117–1147.
  80. Thorpe, Battalion Commander, to Regimental Commander, Oct. 9, 1918, NA, RG45, WA7, B646.
  81. Snowden to Sec. of the Navy Daniels, June 2, 1920, NA, RG38, E6, B31.
  82. They are listed in Ernesto Vega y Pagán, *Historia de las fuerzas armadas*, vols. XVI and XVII of *La era de Trujillo: 25 años de historia dominicana* (Ciudad Trujillo, 1955), XVII, chs. 1–5.
  83. Knapp to Brigade Commander, Oct. 21, 1921, NA, RG45, WA7, B64G.



84. Ledger to Military Gov., Note no. 79, Nov. 4, 1921, NA, RG38, E6, B37.

85. See file of letters and Report of Investigation, all attached to letter of Chargé Ledger, cited above.

86. U.S. Senate, *Hearings*, vols. I and II.

87. The events leading to the surrender are detailed

in Calder, "Some Aspects," ch. 6.

#### **About the Author**

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## *Cacos and Caudillos: Marines and Counterinsurgency in Hispaniola, 1915-1924*

by *Graham A. Cosmas*

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During and after World War I, the U.S. Marine Corps engaged in prolonged counterinsurgency campaigns in Haiti and the Dominican Republic. Dr. Cosmas examines the methods used to quell the guerrillas in these two countries, assesses the accomplishments as well as the failures of these early pacification efforts, and summarizes the counterinsurgency lessons that the Marine Corps learned from its experiences in Hispaniola.

The Marines who occupied Haiti and the Dominican Republic during and after World War I possessed little specific preparation for counterinsurgency or other types of low-intensity conflict. During the decades preceding these interventions, the Corps had concentrated its attention on developing an advance base force for use with the fleet in conventional naval warfare. Marine leaders viewed expeditionary duty as a secondary mission of the advance base infantry regiments. Nevertheless, when the Marines sent an expeditionary brigade to Haiti in 1915 and another to the Dominican Republic in 1916, they confronted challenges across the entire spectrum of low-intensity conflict, from semi-conventional and guerrilla warfare by organized military forces through terror-

ism, banditry, and rural crime and social disorder. The Marines in response employed a wide variety of counterinsurgency tactics and techniques. They also experienced the dilemmas and frustrations often encountered by troops sent overseas to battle an elusive, resourceful enemy on the enemy's own ground.<sup>1</sup>

In Haiti, the First Provisional Marine Brigade encountered the *cacos*, peasant warriors from the wild, mountainous northern and central regions of the country. These men, recruited by local chieftains on the basis of personal loyalty and the promise of loot, fought in the mercenary armies of a succession of presidential aspirants from Haiti's urban, elite political class. During the years preceding the American intervention, *caco* revolts had made and broken governments at a rate of about one per year. The American landings in July 1915 aborted still another *caco*-enforced change of presidents. The Marines quickly suppressed initial resistance to the occupation, and the *cacos* remained quiet for nearly three years. During that interval, the Marines organized and trained a Haitian Gendarmerie, which took over most of the day-to-day work of garrisoning and policing the interior of the country.

Misconduct by the gendarmes and some of their Marine commanders brought the *cacos* to arms again in late 1918. To secure labor for building roads, the Gendarmerie reinstated the unpopular *corvée*, an old Haitian practice of drafting peasants for short terms of construction work near their homes. In the northern district, heart of *caco* country, gendarmes under Marine Major Clark W. Wells administered the *corvée* in a brutal and corrupt fashion. Correction of these abuses by the First Brigade commander came too late to prevent thousands of *cacos* from taking to the hills and to arms. The insurgency found a charismatic leader in Charlemagne Massena Peralte, a politician from the fringes of the black elite. Charlemagne, recognized by lesser *caco* chiefs as the head of a revolutionary government, proclaimed the objective of expelling the Americans from Haiti; but he seemed equally interested in ousting the Americans'

client, President Sudre Dartiguenave, and replacing Dartiguenave with a candidate from Charlemagne's own faction. Whatever his political goals, Charlemagne was a formidable threat to the occupation. His *cacos*, who began attacking Gendarmerie outposts in October 1918, numbered, by American estimate, almost 5,000 full-time fighters. Perhaps 15,000 additional peasant supporters turned out for operations near their homes or kept the insurgents supplied with food and intelligence. In the capital, Port-au-Prince, anti-American and anti-Dartiguenave politicians organized a rudimentary underground on Charlemagne's behalf. Fortunately for the Marines and gendarmes, the *cacos* were poorly armed. A minority of them carried old-model black-powder rifles; the majority went into battle with swords, machetes, and pikes.

When Marines landed in the Dominican Republic in May 1916, they had little difficulty in securing the capital and the central and western regions of the republic. In the eastern provinces of Seibo and Macorís, however, they encountered armed opposition which, while less militarily formidable than the *cacos*, proved more difficult to suppress. Rural Haiti, while extremely poor, was a stable and comparatively harmonious society of peasant freeholders. The eastern Dominican Republic, by contrast, was a region in transition from subsistence agriculture to an export economy dominated by foreign-owned sugar estates. The region was geographically isolated from the rest of the republic. It possessed only weak local governments and police forces and long had been ruled by *caudillos*, military strongmen whose power rested on their ability to maintain armed bands recruited, like the *cacos*, on the basis of personality and plunder. The *caudillos* participated in the country's periodic revolutions, often receiving local political offices for their services. Between revolutions, both the *caudillos* and professional bandits, called *gavilleros*, sustained themselves and their followers by robbery and extortion at the expense of whomsoever in the region possessed any surplus wealth, mostly rural storekeepers, sugar

estate owners, and the citizens of smaller municipalities. The stronger chieftains maintained informal alliances with the political elites of the few existing towns and cities as protection against the central government's rare, feeble attempts to assert its authority. Some chiefs also accepted regular cash payments from the sugar companies in return for keeping company properties safe from attack by lesser *caudillos* and *gavilleros*.

The American military government in Santo Domingo City,<sup>2</sup> unlike its Dominican predecessors, was determined to assert its authority and to restore law and order in the eastern provinces. Hence, from 1917 to 1922, Marines of the Second Provisional Brigade waged armed conflict against the *caudillos*. The Dominican leaders were inspired in some instances by nationalist political motives, but more often fought to maintain their regional authority and military reputations. Their followers were fewer in number than the *cacos*, amounting to a maximum of perhaps 600 full-time fighters and an indeterminate number of occasional or seasonal adherents, many of whom were economically motivated. Indeed, rural disorder waxed and waned with the annual sugar industry employment cycle. The Dominican insurgents acknowledged no supreme leader comparable to Charlemagne Peralte and usually operated in groups of less than 150 men. After late 1919, these bands rarely engaged even the smallest Marine patrols. Like the *cacos*, the Dominicans possessed mainly antiquated rifles and, more commonly, were armed only with pistols and shotguns. *Caudillos* and *gavilleros*, however, could count on at least the passive support of much of the rural population, support based in part on fear of reprisal, in part on local and personal loyalties, and in part on resentment of the Marines as occasionally brutal and heavy-handed foreign intruders.

The Marines, in operating against both *cacos* and *caudillos*, assumed as the foundation of their strategy the necessity of minimizing the use of force and devoting maximum attention to winning the friendship, or at least

the tolerance, of local civilians. Marine leaders continually informed their troops that they were not at war with the Dominicans or the Haitians, but in each instance were instead protecting a law-abiding majority against a minority of troublemakers. To reinforce this image, the Marines deliberately labeled their opponents "bandits." In July 1919 the First Brigade, for example, instructed its troops to use that term, rather than "*caco*," when referring to "natives, who, in certain sections are menacing the peace of the country." The Marines in both countries tried to avoid seizing or destroying civilian property and attempted to minimize disruption of the normal routine of the rural population. Brigadier General Harry Lee, the last commander of the Marines in the Dominican Republic, summed up the basic principles of Marine counterinsurgency in Hispaniola:

There are records where civilized powers, whose armed forces were engaged in the suppression of banditry, countenanced the most drastic methods. These . . . included the destruction of stocks and crops . . . , the burning of homes and villages, the laying to waste of entire sections, where the inhabitants harbored brigands. However, such drastic measures were never employed in Santo Domingo, because there exists one great disadvantage of their use: the moral effect upon the peaceful inhabitants, who become so exasperated as to forfeit their friendship for generations. That the friendship of the people of an occupied state should be sacrificed by any unnecessary measure was avowedly contrary to the policy of the United States.<sup>3</sup>

Efforts to implement these enlightened principles were hampered by deficiencies in the number and quality of available Marines. Counterinsurgency theorists of the 1960s contended that a troop ratio of ten to one or better was necessary for victory over guerrillas; the Marine brigades in Haiti and the Dominican Republic never approached that advantage. The 1st Brigade numbered about 900

officers and men when the *caco* revolt began and nearly 1,200 when it ended. In the Dominican Republic, the 2d Brigade could spare only 500 or so officers and men to pacify the eastern provinces until early 1919, when the arrival of an additional regiment increased Marine strength in the area to about 1,200. Both brigades were supplemented by native constabularies organized and officered by Marines. The 2,700-man Haitian Gendarmerie, although inferior to the Marines in training and armament, bore much of the burden of combat and freed the Marines of garrison duty in secure areas. By contrast, the *Guardia* (later *Policia*) *Nacional Dominicana*, counterpart of the Haitian Gendarmerie, provided the Marines little reinforcement. Delays in organizing the *Guardia*, rapid turnover in its Marine commanders, and a lack of money and equipment kept the Haitian force weak, ineffective, and well under its authorized strength of about 1,200 men throughout the period of hostilities. During final operations in the east, only two small *Guardia* companies performed auxiliary duties, leaving the field campaigning largely to the Marines.<sup>4</sup>

In 1917 and 1918, both occupation brigades gave up many of their most experienced and most capable officers and men to the brigade in France and to other elements of the expanding Marine Corps. Mobilization, followed rapidly by demobilization, brought wholesale personnel turnover to the two brigades in Hispaniola as they received large infusions of newly promoted officers and NCOs and first-term enlisted men. The resulting deterioration in small-unit leadership and troop quality, combined with racial and cultural antagonisms and the strains of operating against guerrillas, contributed to repeated incidents of misconduct by Marines in command of constabulary units as well as their own organizations. These incidents included the torture and execution of prisoners, indiscriminate firing on civilians by patrols, arbitrary seizure of peasants' food and livestock, and off-duty crimes and acts of violence and discourtesy toward ordinary Haitians and

Dominicans. Such abuses occurred in both countries; however, they appear to have been more numerous and damaging to the occupation in the Dominican Republic, where small Marine units were dispersed more widely and where the counterinsurgency campaign was more prolonged and indecisive.<sup>5</sup>

Marine misconduct, often exaggerated and sensationalized by critics of the interventions, became an issue in the 1920 American presidential campaign and was the subject of U.S. Navy, Marine Corps, and Senate investigations. In response to such exposure, both brigades during the early 1920s attempted to improve troop conduct and attitudes. Marine offenses against local citizens were investigated more thoroughly and punished more rapidly and sternly than before. Brigade leaders also intensively indoctrinated their men in the peaceable nature of their mission and the necessity of winning the friendship of the population. These efforts, combined with the end of active operations and the concentration of most Marines in fewer, larger garrisons, eliminated the worst abuses. By that time, however, much damage had been done. *Corvée* abuses in Haiti had helped set off the *caco* uprising, and widespread hatred of the Marines among rural Dominicans swelled guerrilla ranks and hindered Marine efforts to end the insurgency and banditry.<sup>6</sup>

The Marines directed the preponderance of their military effort to the pursuit and destruction, or at least the dispersal, of organized rebel bands. They attempted to do this by saturating the countryside with small patrols, rarely larger than 20 men, which operated from permanent posts or temporary bases. Patrols followed up attacks or engagements, intensively searched fixed zones, and set ambushes on known enemy movement routes. Marine patrols also went after particular enemy bands or leaders when reliable information as to their location could be obtained. The brigades directed these operations through regimental and battalion headquarters, each of which was responsible for a section of territory and a varying number of garrisons. Patrols normally went out under



lieutenants and senior NCOs; but company, battalion, and even regimental commanders at times took the field to familiarize themselves with the terrain, to respond to major enemy raids, or to follow up especially promising intelligence leads. Command and control were difficult, especially before portable field radios became available in the early 1920s. Headquarters often lost track of patrol routes and positions. Clashes inevitably occurred between friendly forces; in the most costly of these, Marines in Haiti killed a *gendarme*, a civilian scout, and a *caco* prisoner in an ambush of one patrol by another.

Marine commanders distilled their patrolling experience into standard operating procedures. These covered such basics as employment of point men, the conduct of stream crossings and house searches, security at halts and bivouacs, hand signals for silent control of movement, telltale signs of enemy ambushes, and mundane but vital details such as foot care. In the Dominican Republic, where much territory had to be covered and horses were available locally, the Marines often patrolled mounted; the 2d Brigade stationed a full company of such "horse Marines" in the eastern provinces. Supply was simple. Patrols in the field carried iron rations with them on their persons or on pack animals; when these ran out, they lived off the country—a practice unavoidable in many cases, but one also productive of some of the abuses noted previously.<sup>7</sup>

Even the smallest Marine patrols had little to fear in combat from enemies poorly armed and untrained in small-unit tactics. When *cacos* and guerrillas sprang successful ambushes, as they frequently did, the insurgents' poor weapons and worse marksmanship usually rendered their fire ineffective. Insurgent attempts to close for hand-to-hand combat, more frequent in Haiti than in the Dominican Republic, occasionally cost Marine and constabulary forces heavily, but more often simply gave them easier targets to shoot.

The Marines' problem was finding the enemy. In the roadless, heavily wooded hills and mountains of Hispaniola, the insurgents

were difficult to bring to battle unless they chose to fight or the Marines and constabulary surprised them in their camps. The *cacos*, accustomed to waging more or less conventional warfare in their various revolutions, made the Marines' work easier by launching frequent attacks on Gendarmerie posts, not to mention two mass assaults on Port-au-Prince and an abortive storming of Grande Riviere du Nord during which Charlemagne Peralte was killed in a Gendarmerie raid on his command post. Even in the hills, the *cacos* tended to move in large groups and to remain too long at customary concentration points, often old forts dating back to the French occupation. The Dominicans, by contrast, though ineffective in combat, were masters of evasion and never attacked posts or defended towns. Bringing them to battle, a Marine commander admitted,

to a large extent, depends on the bandit leader. If he wants to fight, and sometimes he does, he will open fire on the detachment, mostly on the point, and then disappears in the brush, where his retreat . . . is facilitated by the dense vegetation, intimate knowledge of the numerous trails . . . , and . . . fleetness of foot. If the bandit does not want a fight he simply lets the detachment pass by undisturbed.<sup>8</sup>

To help find the enemy and also to assist in governing the occupied republics, the Marine brigades built up elaborate intelligence services. Patrols in the field, interrogation of *caco* and guerrilla prisoners and defectors, as well as networks of voluntary and paid local informants were the Marines' principal sources of information about the enemy. After air squadrons were attached to the brigades in early 1919, the Marines used aerial reconnaissance to improve their knowledge of the countryside and occasionally to find enemy bands and camps. At brigade and lower headquarters, intelligence officers collated, evaluated, and distributed information from all sources. They paid attention to more

than purely military matters, assembling as well material on social and political conditions and the indigenous culture. Timely, accurate intelligence contributed substantially to the deaths of Charlemagne Peralte and Benoit Batreville in Haiti; but Marine intelligence also had its failures. During 1917—1918, for example, commanders and intelligence officers wasted much effort in futile attempts to establish that local German businessmen and landowners were stirring up and arming *cacos* and guerrillas. The Marines also were more efficient at accumulating a large volume of information than they were at evaluating and distributing that information. A regimental commander in the Dominican Republic declared: “Though a vast amount of information is secured, the greater part of it is of no value, either by reason of absolute inaccuracy . . . or by reason of delay in delivery”<sup>9</sup>

New technologies—principally aircraft and radios—assisted Marine operations after the end of World War I. In both Haiti and the Dominican Republic, Marine aircraft occasionally bombed and strafed enemy camps or fleeing troops, inflicting casualties and causing temporary panic. Such incidents, however, were rare, due to the inability of Marines on the ground to communicate rapidly with the aviators. Of more substantial value was the air squadrons’ work in reconnaissance; in transporting mail, supplies, and personnel; and in evacuating the sick and wounded from remote posts. In the Dominican Republic, aircraft also helped to coordinate patrol activity by dropping messages to the infantry. Meanwhile, stationary radio sets at unit headquarters and a limited number of portable field radios speeded response to incidents, simplified the task of coordinating widespread patrols, and reduced the need to tie up scarce mounted personnel in escorting couriers.<sup>10</sup>

In both Haiti and the Dominican Republic, the insurgents drew recruits, supplies, and information from the rural population and, especially in the latter stages of the Dominican disorders, lived with the peasants between occasional forays. The Marines,

therefore, experimented with measures for separating their armed enemies from the people and for enlisting local help against the insurgents.

Such efforts in Haiti were comparatively modest. The Marine brigade and the Gendarmerie revived an earlier Haitian system of internal passports to restrict civilian movement in *caco* areas. In 1919, the Marines and gendarmes began recruiting and paying citizens called *vigilantes* to guide patrols within their home areas and to help identify *cacos* and their sympathizers. The Marines also set *cacos* against *cacos*. They enlisted a well-to-do Haitian, Jean Conze, to organize a Gendarmerie-sponsored band and allowed him to win several noisy mock battles to enhance his military reputation. Conze succeeded in establishing himself as a principal lieutenant of Charlemagne Peralte and used this position to lure Peralte into the fatal expedition against Grande Rivière, an action for which Conze received a large cash reward.

Population control efforts by the Marines in the Dominican Republic were much more extensive and elaborate. Guerrilla warfare and banditry in the eastern provinces centered about areas of thick woods, interspersed with small farming settlements called *canucos*, which abutted the large sugar estates. There guerrilla leaders maintained their hideouts. Between raids, many of their followers lived in the *canucos* or in the company-owned villages on the sugar plantations, where they were seasonally employed.

After several limited population control and screening efforts during 1918 and 1919 produced few results, the 15th Regiment under its new commander, Lieutenant Colonel William C. Harllee, launched a systematic effort in the autumn of 1921 to drive the guerrillas from their hideouts. Between 24 October 1921 and 11 March 1922, Harllee conducted nine large-scale cordon and search operations against guerrilla base areas. In these drives, which involved most of the 15th Regiment and elements of the *Policia Nacional*, Marine patrols, directed by radio



and air-dropped messages, encircled an objective area and then moved inward, rounding up most of the adult population at a central collecting point. There a specially assembled corps of Dominican informers, supervised by Marine intelligence personnel and screened from sight of the detainees, picked alleged bandits out of the multitude. The suspects were held for further investigation and trial by Marine provost courts. Colonel Harllee provided food and medical assistance for the remaining detainees and, after personally explaining that the operation had been for the purpose of removing the criminals who had preyed upon the people, allowed them to return home. The Marines thoroughly mapped the areas in which they operated and used prisoners convicted by the provost courts as work gangs to cut networks of trails through the woods in order to make them more readily penetrable by military patrols. The operations met no armed resistance and resulted in few Dominican casualties. After one of the first of these drives, however, the 2d Brigade, in response to civilian complaints, ordered that citizens "will not be collected, tied, and marched to distant points" for screening, an indication that the 15th Regiment's roundup methods were other than gentle.

The effectiveness of Harllee's operations became a matter of controversy. No major guerrilla leaders were caught in these dragnets, but several hundred part-time fighters and supporters were captured and the groups still at large were forced out of their accustomed areas of operation. Harllee himself contended that his operations disrupted the guerrilla infrastructure and taught the people "that the bandit chiefs are no longer masters in their areas." Pro-occupation Dominican municipal officials and sugar estate managers alike complained, however, that the cordons terrorized the people and upset normal economic activity without halting the guerrillas. The cordons probably did bring effective pressure to bear on the insurgents' civilian support network and greatly increased the Marines' ability to operate in what formerly

had been almost impenetrable forest redoubts. Nevertheless, the 2d Brigade commander, Brigadier General Harry Lee, who had orders from Washington to conciliate the Dominicans, sided with Harllee's critics. On 5 March 1922, the general ordered an end to the concentrations.<sup>11</sup>

Lee abandoned cordon operations in part because he believed he had a more effective weapon in hand: combined patrols of Marines and Dominican counterinsurgents. The Marine brigade had experimented with the use of indigenous irregulars early in the occupation, at one point employing one *caudillo* and his band to attack another. The military government, however, devoted most of its effort to the maintenance of law and order. It sought to disarm Dominican civilians, to suppress the private security forces of the sugar companies, and to confine military activity on the part of the Dominicans to the *Policia* and small municipal police forces. Throughout most of the occupation, relations remained contentious between the Marines and the sugar estate managers, who had access to much valuable intelligence and whose employees offered a potential source of both antiguerrilla and guerrilla manpower (to include the guerrilla chiefs themselves). Marine commanders justifiably complained that the company managers withheld information, especially about guerrilla leaders whom they paid off. The Marines also contended that the estate managers and large landowners often fabricated reports of guerrilla activity in order to encourage the establishment of Marine garrisons near their property, less to fight the insurgents than to intimidate their own workers. The estate managers for their part freely criticized Marine tactics and accused the American military government of failing to protect their properties.<sup>12</sup>

Brigadier General Lee set out to co-opt the estate managers. After listening sympathetically to their protests against Harllee's cordons, he adopted a suggestion made by the managers and local Dominican officials that civilian irregulars who knew both the terrain and the enemy be enlisted to hunt down the

insurgents. Planning for the irregular force began in November 1921, and by early the following April, five groups of so-called Civil Guards were ready to take the field. Each consisted of 15 Dominicans who were selected by their municipal governments or estate managers, armed and trained by the Marines, and commanded by a Marine officer assisted by two or three Marine NCOs. Operating in their own neighborhoods and backed by Marine firepower, the irregulars proved able to find insurgent groups, engage them, and inflict casualties. Their operations during April, according to Lee, "fairly broke and led to the disintegration of the bandit groups." The principal chiefs as a result all surrendered in the following month.<sup>13</sup>

To secure these surrenders, Lee employed still another counterinsurgency weapon: amnesty. The Marines treated their foes legally as criminal offenders either against the American forces in the Dominican Republic or against the client government in Haiti. Once they established military superiority over their adversaries, however, the Marines offered exemption from prosecution and punishment to the guerrilla leaders and any of their men who surrendered voluntarily with their weapons. In Haiti, the 1st Brigade provided not only amnesty but also cash rewards and civilian jobs to *cacos* who gave up. In return for leniency, *caco* chiefs were required to tour the countryside with Marine and Gendarmerie patrols, to urge other *cacos* to surrender, and to speak in favor of the government and the occupation. Chiefs who thus identified themselves with the Americans, the brigade commander reasoned, "would not again be accepted by the bandits." Accepting these terms, 165 *caco* commanders and more than 11,000 of their soldiers reportedly turned themselves in during late 1919 and early 1920.<sup>14</sup>

In the Dominican Republic in 1917, the 2d Brigade employed negotiation and offers of amnesty to secure the surrender of several major *caudillos* and their bands. The military government, however, subsequently prosecuted one of these leaders and several of his

lieutenants for the murder of two American civilians. The long sentences these men received, followed by the killing of their leader while reportedly attempting to escape from prison, diminished the value of offering amnesty for some time.

In early 1922, General Lee took advantage of the intensified military pressure of the cordon operations and the Civil Guards to revive the offer of amnesty. Using the sugar estate managers and local Dominican politicians as go-betweens, Lee declared a temporary cessation of hostilities and in May secured the surrender of seven major insurgent chiefs and some 140 of their followers—a majority of the guerrillas still fighting at the time. Lee's terms were strict. Insurgents who surrendered were required to give up their weapons and stay near their homes or a Marine or *Policia* post where they could be kept under surveillance. The leaders had to stand trial before military commissions that imposed 15-year prison sentences, suspended during good behavior. Supplementing the amnesty program, Lee and his superior, Rear Admiral Samuel S. Robison, the military governor, sought with only limited success to persuade the sugar estates to employ more workers during the normally slack season in an effort to reduce the common economic incentive for banditry.<sup>15</sup>

Even before the last Dominican rebels had surrendered, Marine officers began digesting their campaign experience in Hispaniola and using what they had learned there to devise a doctrine for the conduct of what they called "small wars." The results of their work appeared in their professional journal, the *Marine Corps Gazette*, as well as in classes taught at the Marine Corps schools at Quantico, Virginia. Much of this early doctrine simply stated what had been practiced in Hispaniola and included such obvious lessons as the indispensability of accurate, timely intelligence; the importance of top-caliber small-unit leadership and individual training; the desirability of restraint in the employment of firepower; and the necessity of not offending the inhabitants of small countries being "cleaned up." The scandals and investigations

accompanying the occupation of Hispaniola had left at least some Marines aware of the difficulties of waging war under the eye of public opinion. Major Earl H. Ellis, a former 2d Brigade intelligence officer, noted that in pacification, the United States government must appear as "the good angel"; hence, its military agents must behave in ways that would not "cause undue comment among [their] own people or among foreign governments."<sup>16</sup>

The Marines, despite some lapses in their conduct, were successful counterinsurgents in Haiti and the Dominican Republic. They engaged traditional military forces that had defied or disrupted national governments for generations. When the Marines finally withdrew, they had defeated those forces thoroughly enough and had left the central authorities strong enough that *cacos* and *caudillos* never regained their pre-intervention influence.<sup>17</sup>

It should be noted, however, that the Marines' antagonists in these wars lacked not only modern weaponry but also a modern political ideology and organization. Indeed, in the Dominican Republic, the *caudillos* and their followers resembled criminal gangs more closely than they did guerrilla revolutionaries. As a result, the enemy leaders in Hispaniola were driven by thoroughly pragmatic considerations of power and ambition; they stopped fighting for equally pragmatic reasons when it became too dangerous and difficult to resist further and when the Americans made it worth their while to quit. Even these forces might have proved more than the Marines could handle had the guerrillas been equipped with bolt-action rifles and plentiful ammunition. Nevertheless, the Marines learned many useful lessons from what was up to that time their most ambitious counterinsurgency effort, and a generation of Marine officers acquired hard-won experience. Both would stand them in good stead later in Nicaragua, where the Marines would encounter an enemy both politically and militarily more formidable than the *cacos* and *caudillos*.

## Notes

1. The evolution of the advance base mission is covered in Graham A. Cosmas and Jack Shulimson, "Continuity and Consensus: The Evolution of the Marine Advance Base Force, 1900-1920," *Proceedings of the Citadel Conference on War and Diplomacy, 1977* (Charleston, S.C., 1979), 31-36. Unless otherwise noted, the discussion of the Haitian occupation in this paper is based on the following sources: Hans Schmidt, *The United States Occupation of Haiti, 1915-1934* (New Brunswick, 1971), 43-91, 100-107, 119-23; Robert D. Heinl, Jr., and Nancy Gordon Heinl, *Written in Blood: The Story of the Haitian People, 1492-1971* (Boston, 1978), 449-73; and Headquarters, Garde d'Haiti, *The History of the Garde d'Haiti*, April-July 1934, Geographical Files, Reference Branch, U.S. Marine Corps Historical Center, Washington, D.C., 33-34, 49-67. This comprehensive history of the Haitian Gendarmerie, later renamed Garde d'Haiti, was prepared by a board of Marine officers headed by Major Franklin A. Hart and will hereafter be cited as the "Hart Report." Unless otherwise noted, the discussion of the occupation of the Dominican Republic is based on Bruce J. Calder, *The Impact of Intervention: The Dominican Republic during the U.S. Occupation of 1916-1924* (Austin, 1984), chap. 4-5, esp. 123-32, 140-43, 151-53, 162-63, 168-78; and Captain Stephen M. Fuller, USMC, and Graham A. Cosmas, *Marines in the Dominican Republic, 1916-1924* (Washington, 1974), 13-22, 28-43, 45-48, 57-58, 65. Material has been drawn also from the Records of the Military Government of Santo Domingo, Record Group 38, Entry 6, Boxes 13, 23, 24, 36, 37, 48, 50, 64, and 74, National Archives, Washington, D.C. (hereafter cited as RG 38, E6), and from the Naval Records Collection of the Office of Naval Records and Library, Record Group 45, WA-7, Boxes 755-57 and 761, National Archives, Washington, D.C. (hereafter cited as RG 45, WA-7).
2. In the Dominican Republic, in contrast to Haiti, the United States in 1916 installed a military government, which was normally headed by a navy rear admiral as military governor. The 2d Marine Brigade came under the military governor's command, and the brigade commander headed the combined ministries of War and Marine and Interior and Police, in effect making him responsible for the provincial and municipal governments, law enforcement, and national defense.
3. First quotation is from Headquarters, First

Provisional Brigade, General Order 17, 18 July 1919; the second is from Report, Military Governor of Santo Domingo to the Secretary of the Navy, subject: Claim of Dugal McPhail . . . , 19 May 1924; both of these documents are in RG 38, E6, Boxes 13 and 74.

4. The manpower needs of counterinsurgency are emphasized in Message, Flag San Domingo to OpNav, 24 November 1918, and Report, Commanding Officer, Third Provisional Regiment, to Brigade Commander, subject: Field Operations, etc., 27 February 1919, RG 45, WA-7, Boxes 756-57. For the size of the Marine brigades, see Robert D. Heinl, Jr., *Soldiers of the Sea: The United States Marine Corps, 1775-1962* (Annapolis, 1962), 237, 241-42.

5. For typical comments on manpower turbulence and its effects, see Quarterly Reports of the Military Governor of Santo Domingo, 1 October through 31 December 1919 and 1 January through 31 March 1921, RG 38, Entry 15, Box 1.

6. Commanding General, 2d Brigade, to All Officers of the Brigade, subject: General Instructions, 19 August 1921; Commanding General, Second Brigade, to All Officers of the Brigade, subject: The Brigade attitude toward the inhabitants and its place in the occupation, 15 November 1921; both letters are in RG 45, WA-7, Boxes 761 and 757. See also Headquarters, 2d Brigade, Brigade Order No. 9, 20 August 1921, RG 38, E6, Box 37.

7. Lieutenant Colonel G. C. Thorpe, 3d Provisional Regiment, Campaign Order No. 2, 4 September 1918; Order, Regimental Commander to Captain Thomas J. Watson, 9 January 1919; both orders are in RG 45, WA-7, Box 757, and illustrate patrolling procedures in the Dominican Republic.

8. Colonel C. Gamborg-Andresen, 3d Provisional Regiment, Report to Brigade Commander, 2d Brigade, subject: Field Operations, etc., 27 February 1919, RG 45, WA-7, Box 757.

9. Quotation is from Colonel C. Gamborg-Andresen, 3d Provisional Regiment, Report to Brigade Commander, subject: Field Operations, etc., 27 February 1919, RG 45, WA-7, Box 757. For an example of concern with the Germans, see study by Lieutenant Colonel G. C. Thorpe, 11 June 1918, RG 45, WA-7, Box 756. For an appreciation of the vital importance of intelligence, see Major Earl H. Ellis, "Bush Brigades," *Marine Corps Gazette* 6 (March 1921): 12-14.

10. Air operations are summarized conveniently in Lieutenant Colonel Edward C. Johnson, USMC,

*Marine Corps Aviation: The Early Years, 1912-1940* (Washington, 1974), 49-53. The value of radios in Dominican operations is indicated in Colonel C. Gamborg-Andresen, 3d Provisional Regiment, Report to Brigade Commander, subject: Field Operations, etc., 27 February 1919, RG 45, WA-7, Box 757.

11. Harllee described and defended his operations in his Report to the Commanding General, 2d Brigade, subject: Operations of 15th Regiment . . . , 2 January 1922, RG 38, E6, Box 48. See also John Harllee, *The Marine from Manatee: A Tradition of Rifle Marksmanship* (Washington, 1984), 258 and chap. 28. Brig. General Harry Lee, Report to the Major General Commandant . . . , subject: Report of activities of the 2nd Brigade . . . , for the year ending June 30th, 1922, RG 45, WA-7, Box 757, gives the brigade commander's evaluation. See also unsigned memorandum of conversation with sugar estate managers, 2 November 1921, RG 38, E6, Box 37. For the brigade order on roping suspects, see Lieutenant Colonel W. C. Harllee, 6th endorsement to report from Department of Justice and Public Instruction, 8 December 1921, and accompanying documents in RG 38, E6, Box 37. Harllee had served in the U.S. Army in the Philippine War before joining the Marine Corps. He was a veteran of Marine expeditionary service and one of the leading promoters of rifle practice in the corps.

12. Harllee, *Marine from Manatee*, 260-61, illustrates the suspicion with which Marine commanders viewed the estate managers.

13. Brig. General Harry Lee, Report to Major General Commandant . . . , subject: Report of activities of the 2d Brigade. . . for the year ending June 30th, 1922, 24 August 1922, RG 45, WA-7, Box 757.

14. Headquarters, 1st Brigade Daily Diary Report, 1 April 1920, RG 38, E6, Box 24.

15. For Lee's terms and disposition of cases, see Brig. General Lee, Report to Major General Commandant . . . , subject: Report of activities of the 2nd Brigade. . . for the year ending June 30th, 1922, 24 August 1922, RG 45, WA-7, Box 757; Rear Adm. Samuel Robison to Sugar Estate Managers, 13 June 1922; Lee, Report to Military Governor, subject: Bandits and bandit leaders, status of, 22 May 1923, RG 38, E6, Boxes 36 and 64.

16. The evolution of small wars doctrine in the Marine Corps during the 1920s and 1930s is described in Ronald Schaffer, "The 1940 Small Wars Manual and the 'Lessons of History,'"

*Military Affairs* 36 (April 1972): 46-51. For Marine views in the early 1920s, see Ellis, "Bush Brigades," 1-16, from which the quotation is taken, and Major Samuel M. Harrington, "The Strategy and Tactics of Small Wars," *Marine Corps Gazette* 6 (December 1921): 474-91; and 7 (March 1922): 84-93. Both these authors devote as much or more attention to urban street fighting as they do to rural operations against guerrillas.

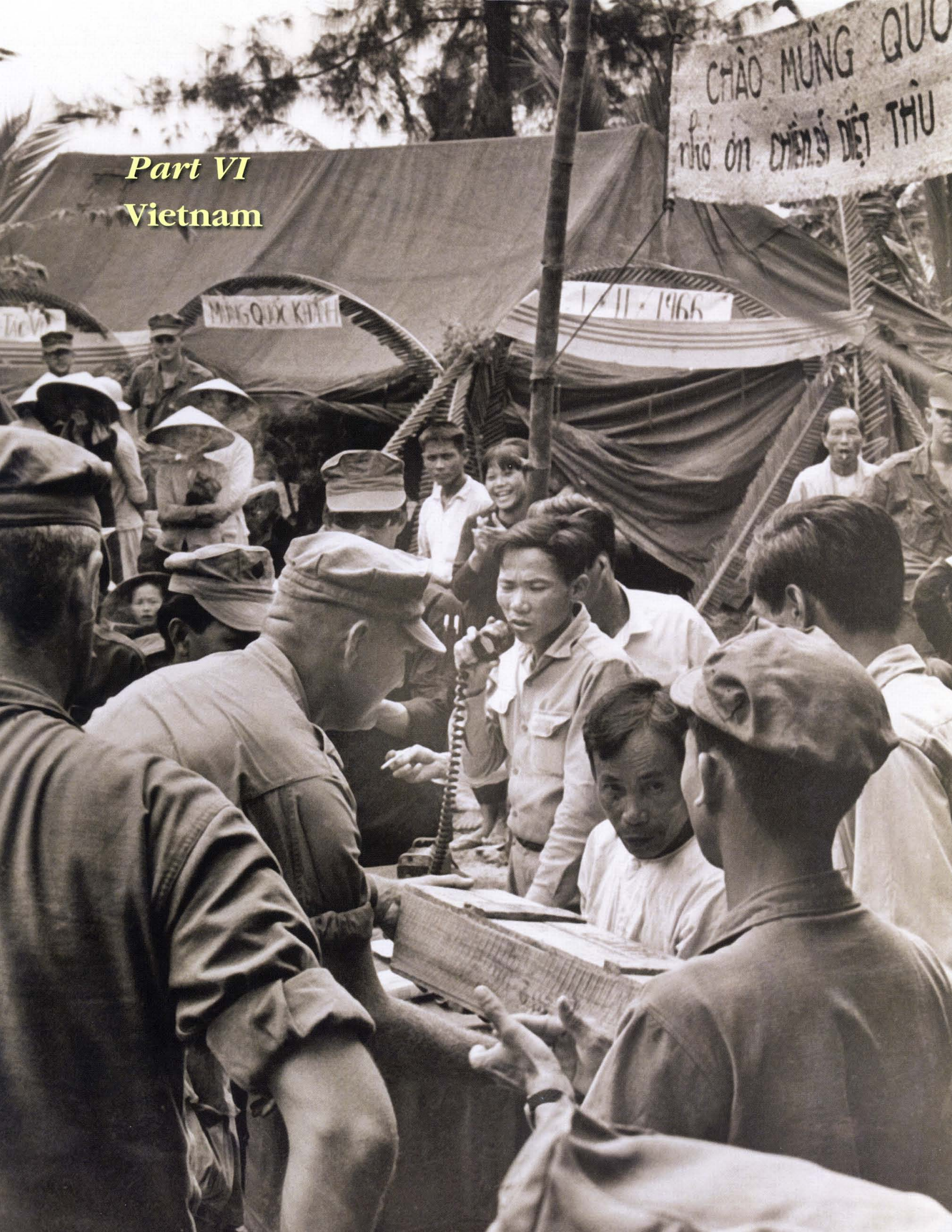
17 Calder, *Impact of Intervention*, 181-82, notes the *caudillos'* post-intervention loss of local influence.

#### **About the Author**

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*Part VI*  
**Vietnam**





# A Feather in Their Cap? The Marines' Combined Action Program in Vietnam

by Lawrence A. Yates

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Critics who argue that American troops in Vietnam were not employed effectively to fight a people's war point to the Marines' Combined Action Program as one of the few exceptions to an otherwise bleak record of U.S. counterinsurgency efforts. In this essay, Dr. Yates provides an overview and assessment of the program's origins, mission, implementation, and accomplishments. He also makes some comparisons between the Combined Action Program and the Marines' involvement in the small wars of the early 20th century.

British counterinsurgency expert Sir Robert Thompson praised it as "the best idea I have seen in Vietnam"; U.S. Army Major General William DePuy dismissed it as "counterinsurgency of the deliberate, mild sort." The object of these conflicting assessments was the Combined Action Program (CAP) employed by the U.S. Marine Corps in Vietnam from 1965 to 1971. CAP united "a Marine rifle squad with a Vietnamese Popular Force platoon to provide village security and pacification in Vietnam."<sup>1</sup> The controversy the program generated from its inception persists today in the historiographical debate over the appropriate use of American military power against the Vietcong (VC) and North Vietnamese Army (NVA). That debate is not going to be resolved any time soon. The purpose of this article is more modest: to outline the origins and evolution of CAP, to discuss some aspects of the CAP experience, and to conclude with a few observations relating CAP to the small wars tradition of the Marine Corps.

The Combined Action Program was the product of military necessity and strategic prefer-

ence.<sup>2</sup> The primary mission of the Marine combat forces that entered South Vietnam in the spring and summer of 1965 was to provide base security for the three enclaves they occupied in the I Corps Tactical Zone, comprising the country's five northern provinces. In the Marine Tactical Areas of Responsibility (TAOR) at Phu Bai, Da Nang, and Chu Lai, U.S. military installations were vulnerable to attack from nearby hamlets and villages controlled, as was most of the rural population in I Corps, by the Vietcong. To secure the Phu Bai TAOR, Marines and the local, part-time Vietnamese militia known as Popular Forces (PFs) formed a Joint Action Company.<sup>3</sup> In the fall of 1965, this improvised unit sent patrols into the area around the enclave and placed integrated platoons containing both Marines and PFs in four villages north of Phu Bai in order to disrupt Vietcong activities and to obtain much-needed intelligence. The success of this combined effort impressed Major General Lewis Walt, commander of the III Marine Amphibious Force (III MAF). In November, Walt authorized similar operations in support of base security around Da Nang; in January 1966, he and his Vietnamese counterpart extended the program of integrated operations by Marines and PFs to all Marine TAOR in I Corps.<sup>4</sup>

By this time, according to the *Pentagon Papers*, the Marine Corps "to a degree then unequalled among other American units was deeply engaged in pacification operations."<sup>5</sup> These endeavors, undertaken in I Corps largely on III MAF's own initiative, quickly involved key Marine officers in a stormy debate with the Army-dominated U.S. Military Assistance Command Vietnam (MACV) over the appropriate strategy for winning the war. In articulating the Marines' emphasis on pacification, Lieutenant General Victor Krulak, commanding general, Fleet Marine Force Pacific (FMFPac), contended that the "Vietnam conflict ultimately has to be decided among the people in the villages of South Vietnam," a point the Communists under-

stood all too well, if MACV did not. In Krulak's opinion, MACV's war of attrition against North Vietnamese and Vietcong main forces was not only counterproductive, given the enormous pool of Communist manpower, but also largely irrelevant to the more important war being waged by the Vietcong political cadre and guerrillas for the support of the people. The people's loyalty, Krulak argued, was the "real prize" in the conflict; and to win the prize, Saigon and the United States had to put "the full weight of our top level effort into bringing all applicable resources . . . into the pacification process."

Krulak specifically recommended that the United States and South Vietnam neutralize VC political cadre in the villages and "comb the guerrillas out of the people's lives," thus denying the Vietcong food, sanctuary, and intelligence. At the same time, to overcome the "provincialism" of the Vietnamese people and to help "win their allegiance and loyalty in an unbroken governmental chain stretching from the hamlet to Saigon," the United States had to "press" its ally to launch a major land reform program. The creation of a strong society also required reforms in health, education, agriculture, transportation, and communications—areas in which the U.S. military could play a direct role through the introduction of civic action programs. Americans were "far more efficient at civic action than the Vietnamese officialdom," Krulak judged, because they were "more aggressive, more resourceful, more compassionate and less venal." In I Corps, the Marines already had begun introducing a variety of civic action projects into coastal villages where most of the rural population lived. There was little hope, however, that these programs—much less more fundamental reforms—would succeed unless the people could be guaranteed protection from Communist reprisals. Emphasizing that "*if the enemy cannot get to the people, he cannot win*," Krulak concluded that "it is therefore the people whom we must protect as a matter of first business."<sup>6</sup>

All participants in the strategy debate of 1965 acknowledged this cardinal rule of counterinsurgency but disagreed sharply over whose mission it was to provide village security. General William Westmoreland, the MACV commander,

paid lip service to pacification, but in his commitment to waging a war of attrition against enemy main forces took the position that he "simply had not enough numbers to put a squad of Americans in every village and hamlet."<sup>7</sup> The Marines for their part were conducting small-unit offensives to clear their expanding TAOR of VC cadre and guerrillas, but these operations were not designed to provide permanent security for the villages and hamlets.<sup>8</sup> Many Americans argued persuasively that it was up to the South Vietnamese to secure areas cleared by U.S. forces, but the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) evinced little enthusiasm or aptitude for taking on the "village war."<sup>9</sup>

That left South Vietnamese Regional Forces (RFs) and PFs to perform the task. Of the two, the local volunteers known as PFs, who were organized into squads and platoons to defend the villages in which they lived, seemed ideally situated for the mission. The drawback was that, because they fell at the bottom of the South Vietnamese military hierarchy, PFs suffered the contempt and neglect of those above them. They consequently lacked leadership, motivation, discipline, training, and equipment. But home defense, the Marines argued, gave the PFs a "powerful motivation potential."<sup>10</sup> The question was whether that potential could be realized. The experience with combined operations around Phu Bai and Da Nang in 1965 held out the promise that, under Marine tutelage, the PFs could perform effectively. The mission of providing 24-hour protection to villages and hamlets in I Corps thus fell to an expanded Combined Action Program. What had started as a limited experiment for the defense of U.S. military bases became the linchpin in 1966 in the Marines' pacification strategy for winning the war.

On paper, the CAP concept appeared simple and effective, a marriage between Marine tradition and the peculiar circumstances of Vietnam.<sup>11</sup> The critical unit in the program was the Combined Action Platoon,<sup>12</sup> formed by integrating a Marine rifle squad of fourteen volunteers and a navy corpsman into a PF platoon of 35 men. Although district chiefs and their subordinate village chiefs retained control of PF units, the Marine squad leader (a sergeant or in some



cases a corporal) served as an adviser to the PF platoon leader and assumed de facto command of the platoon during combat operations. The remainder of the Marine squad (three four-man fire teams, not including the Navy corpsman and a Marine grenadier attached to platoon headquarters) merged with the three rifle squads of a PF platoon. The Marine fire team leaders served as squad leaders in the CAP platoon.

Once activated, a Combined Action Platoon lived in a compound built in or near a hamlet of the home village of the PFs. According to official accounts of the program, "Marine members of the CAPs live in the same tents, eat the same food, and conduct the same patrols and ambushes as their Vietnamese counterparts." When not engaged in combat operations, the Marines trained PFs in military fundamentals and counter-guerrilla methods and offered advice on civic action projects proposed by village officials. The PFs, in return, furthered the Marines' education in the language and customs of the people, provided knowledge of the terrain, and passed along vital intelligence. Marine leaders presumed that this interaction would encourage mutual trust and respect, both between the Marines and PFs and between the Marines and the villagers. As the inhabitants of a village grew accustomed to the Marine presence and came to realize that the CAP platoon would not depart each day before sundown, they would gradually welcome the Americans into the community and provide information to help the platoon destroy the local Vietcong infrastructure and keep guerrilla bands at bay. Progress could then be made in improving living conditions in the village and in making the basic reforms that would shift the people's loyalty to the national government.

Once a village attained a respectable level of stability and the PFs acquired a high degree of military proficiency, the Marines could move on to a new community in need of protection. As the Marines spread outward from minimally contested villages in their enclaves, they would, through an "oil spot" effect, create a security network that would gradually cover all of the highly populated coastal region in I Corps. The VC, isolated from the population, would become little more than a military nuisance, the insurgency

would wither, and the Marines could depart the country, "leaving behind a more substantial Vietnamese rural security structure."<sup>13</sup>

The CAP concept was ambitious. Whether or not the Marines could implement it successfully depended in part on their ability to activate more Combined Action Platoons. The Marines wanted III MAF to have 74 CAP platoons in the field by the end of 1966, but had to settle for 57 when confronted simultaneously with a Buddhist rebellion against the Saigon government, the reluctance of many district chiefs to assign PFs to the program, and large-unit operations that drained Marine manpower. A variety of other disruptions, including the demilitarized zone (DMZ) campaign, the siege of Khe Sanh, and the 1968 Tet Offensive similarly delayed realization of the 1967 goal of 114 CAP platoons until 1969, the peak year for the program.

As the number of platoons increased, III MAF made administrative changes and reorganized command and control relationships. In 1967, for example, the program acquired Table of Organization and Equipment (TO&E) status, and Lieutenant General Robert Cushman, the new III MAF commander, placed CAP under the supervision of his deputy. Under this arrangement, operational control of CAP Marines was transferred from line units to Combined Action Companies (CACOs) and, at the next higher echelon, to newly created Combined Action Groups (CAGs). In January 1970, III MAF created the short-lived Combined Action Force (CAF) as a headquarters with command status for the four CAGs then in existence; CAF was deactivated that September as part of the troop withdrawal from Vietnam. As the Marines added tiers in the CAP chain of command, the lines of coordination and control with the Vietnamese involved in the program invariably became more complex as well.<sup>14</sup>

Despite the magnitude of these changes and the added bureaucratic layers brought about by the expansion of CAP, the mission of the CAP platoon remained by and large unchanged. That mission had six parts: "destroy the Vietcong hamlet-village infrastructure; provide public security and help maintain law and order; protect the local governing structure; guard facilities and important lines of communications within the vil-

lage and hamlet; organize local intelligence nets; and participate in civic action and psychological operations against the Vietcong." The Marines in the platoon had additional missions: "conduct training in general military subjects and leadership for Popular Forces assigned to the platoon; motivate, instill pride, patriotism, and aggressiveness in the Popular Force soldier; conduct combined day and night patrols and ambushes; conduct combined operations with other allied forces; and ensure that information gathered was made available to nearby allied forces."<sup>15</sup>

Statistics were amassed by III MAF and FMFPac to prove that the Combined Action Program was an unqualified success. The basis for these statistics was a monthly reporting system initiated by General Walt in February 1966 that attempted to quantify "indicators" of pacification within a village. Although this system was replaced within a year by the more sophisticated Hamlet Evaluation System, both methods, according to FMFPac, confirmed the accomplishments of CAP.<sup>16</sup> CAP villages, for example, allegedly achieved high degrees of pacification much more rapidly than villages without CAP Marines. FMFPac assessments of counter guerrilla operations further concluded that PFs belonging to CAP platoons enjoyed lower desertion rates and higher kill ratios and generated better intelligence than PFs working without Marine supervision. In support of its figures and charts, FMFPac cited numerous examples of successful CAP field operations and constantly hammered home the point that "the clearest evidence of CAP effectiveness is the fact that the Vietcong have never been able to reestablish control over a village occupied by a CAP platoon."<sup>17</sup>

Critics then and later have regarded the mass of data and glowing reports of CAP activities as "Krulak's fables," mere propaganda in the continuing debate over strategy between the Marines and MACV. The authors of the *Pentagon Papers* charged that "the Marine strategy was judged successful, at least by the Marines, long before it had even had a real test." Others questioned the methods used in compiling the statistics or asked whether it was even possible to quantify what in fact was a state of mind—a villager's sense of security or "a man's devotion to a cause." Also,

the figures could be misleading. It was possible, a Marine colonel claimed, for CAP Marines to accumulate enough points on a survey to classify their village as "pacified," when in reality the Vietcong infrastructure, the most important of Walt's indicators, remained virtually undisturbed.<sup>18</sup>

It would be a mistake to dismiss FMFPac reports about CAP out of hand: many CAP platoons achieved significant successes in counter guerrilla operations and civic action. Still, the critics are correct in saying that the reports ignored or glossed over serious problems besetting the program, beginning with the recruitment and preparation of CAP Marines. Initially, Marines entering the program were to be combat-tested volunteers from line units—mature troops dedicated to helping the Vietnamese and free of xenophobia, racial prejudice, and other undesirable characteristics. To be sure, many such individuals volunteered, but others signed up to land what was perceived as a soft job, to escape the boredom of rear area duties, or to leave behind problems they encountered in their line units. Still other Marines were "volunteered" by commanding officers who, reluctant to relinquish their best men to CAP, sent misfits and other "problem" leathernecks instead. The CAP screening process detected many of the unmotivated and undesirable candidates for the program, but others slipped through "perfunctory" interviews by saying what was expected of them—"pretending to Christian sufferance and forgiveness," as one of the less committed Marines put it.<sup>19</sup>

Once screened, CAP Marines were to receive at least two weeks of instruction in counter guerrilla skills and Vietnamese customs and language before joining their PF platoons. Judging from the testimony of a very small proportion of the Marines who served in the program, it would appear, however, that a significant number of recruits either did not attend the course or found it wanting, especially with respect to language training, the program's "most glaring weakness."<sup>20</sup> For these Marines, CAP became an "earn while you learn" proposition in which the platoon itself provided the skills and knowledge they needed to survive and succeed.

It was not uncommon for a CAP platoon, once activated, to suffer supply and manpower shortages. Until the program attained TO&E status, it relied largely on Marine or Army line units for supplies. These units jealously guarded their materiel, making logistics an erratic and frustrating experience for CAP. To acquire equipment needed for operations, base protection, and civic action, CAP Marines scrounged, begged, borrowed, bartered, and, not infrequently, resorted to "midnight requisitions."<sup>21</sup>

The same combination of initiative and ingenuity could not so readily correct the manpower deficit that plagued some CAP platoons. It was not uncommon for the PF contingent to be well below the 35-man norm. A district or village chief, operating on his own agenda or punishing the Marines for some slight, could withdraw PFs from the program without warning. Furthermore, PFs, as part-time militia, were not always present for duty. The Marines themselves, particularly in the early days of the program and later during the withdrawal of American forces from Vietnam, frequently had to operate with rifle squads that were under strength and led by very young corporals. These conditions adversely affected the ability of CAP platoons to perform their missions and, more important, made it more difficult for them to defend against enemy attack.

Even under the best of conditions, a full-strength, 49-man platoon could not by itself hope to defeat a large VC or NVA unit. While trying to keep the enemy at bay, CAP platoons would call in fire support from nearby bases and wait for reaction forces from line units or CACOs to arrive. Without outside support, compounds were often overrun. Indeed, so frequently were they overrun during the Tet Offensive that CAP platoons sought to reduce their vulnerability by operating thereafter as mobile units without a fixed base. The decision was controversial, since many Marines regarded the compound as a symbol of CAP's 24-hour presence and the "focal point for civic action." Proponents of the mobile concept countered that abandoning the "siege mentality" of the compound led to more frequent and meaningful contact with villagers, thus compensating for the decline in civic action projects.<sup>22</sup>

The vulnerability of CAP platoons exacerbated another sensitive issue: the relationship between CAP units and regular line units. According to the operating tenets of pacification strategy, the two forces were supposed to complement one another. CAP platoons would secure villages while Marine or other friendly battalions maneuvered to clear the area of organized enemy forces. In the course of operations, line units would benefit from the intelligence and the knowledge of local conditions provided by the CAP platoons, while those platoons relied on line units for fire support and reaction forces should enemy troops in the vicinity of a CAP village attack.

What should have been a complementary relationship often degenerated into a fractious affair characterized by feelings ranging from ambivalence to outright hostility. Troops in line units constantly on the move resented what they perceived as the "easy" life of the stationary CAP Marines who had "gone Asiatic"; moreover, battalion commanders fumed when they had to divert men and weapons to "bail out" a CAP platoon under fire, often under conditions only vaguely known to the troops mounting the relief mission. CAP Marines countered by charging that line units ignored vital intelligence, provided only erratic support, and worst of all, failed to understand the nature of pacification. The mission of the battalion was to find and kill the enemy. The line Marine regarded villages as combat zones, not pacification areas, and the people living in the villages as possible enemies, not potential friends. Generally insensitive to the needs of the inhabitants and often emotionally taut from the dangers and frustrations of field operations, line Marines entering a CAP village posed a threat to the program. Whether inadvertently trampling on a garden or deliberately beating a VC suspect, the unwelcome intruders could wreck in minutes the progress CAP platoons had made over many months.<sup>23</sup>

Although CAP personnel often saw themselves as protecting villagers from friendly as well as Communist forces, the available evidence suggests that many of the CAP Marines themselves had difficulty understanding the people and the society they were defending and, through pacification, trying to change. Virtually

all Marines entering the program brought with them the cultural baggage of Western society. CAP schools could impart—at least to those who attended them—a cursory overview of Vietnamese history, politics, society, and culture, together with guidelines for what constituted proper behavior in the traditional society of the rural village. But in the time allotted, instructors could not begin to explain how customs varied from province to province or to analyze adequately the complex interactions in an agrarian society; the instructors could only hope that the Marines in time would develop a higher level of toleration and understanding for a belief and value system quite different from their own. For 18-year-old Marines, this was a tall order. Consequently, as one CAP veteran has observed, Marines and PFs met “across a deep cultural gulf.”<sup>24</sup>

That gulf often became deeper after Marines joined a PF platoon. Sanitary conditions and the personal hygiene of the Vietnamese appalled many of the Americans who were assigned to CAP platoons. Moreover, the soap and toiletries ordered by the Marines to alleviate the situation often ended up on the black market or in the possession of crooked officials. Corruption seemed endemic and in some locales contaminated the PFs who, as local henchmen of the district or province chiefs, ran “mafia-like” operations in which they used their paramilitary status to eliminate or intimidate the competition. Theft was another source of friction in some CAP villages, as PFs made off with rations, equipment, and personal items left unguarded by the Marines. Recurring thefts generated ill feelings that occasionally led to incidents of threatened or actual violence. Less likely to cause violence but equally troubling to CAP Marines were the rigid sexual mores of the Vietnamese villagers. Warned that “premarital sex is forbidden, but mutual masturbation by members of the same sex is not,” Marines were advised that it might be better to “acquiesce” in “what might seem to us homosexual advances” rather than “create an incident.” One CAP Marine probably spoke for all in observing that “one can expect an average group of young Marines to go only so far above and beyond the call of duty.”<sup>25</sup>

Cultural differences reinforced Marine complaints about the military dedication and prowess of the PFs. Rumor had it that PF platoons had been infiltrated by the Vietcong or at least had reached an understanding with the enemy about what was permissible in the conduct of military operations. Thus, many Marines began their association with PFs by “trusting none of them.” If the PFs subsequently failed to respond to training or did not carry their weight in the field, suspicion and distrust turned readily into dislike and contempt. By the time a Marine finished his CAP tour, it was not uncommon for him to look upon the PFs “with a real sense of violence.” This hostility was easily transferred to the villagers in general, with Marines deliberately violating various taboos just “to get a rise out of the PFs” and those sullen Vietnamese who regarded the Americans not as saviors but as an occupation force. Surveys conducted in Vietnam in the late 1960s revealed racial prejudice (“Luke the Gook”) and strong anti-Vietnamese feelings on the part of a significant number, albeit a minority, of Marines.<sup>26</sup>

This picture of mutual animosity can be overdrawn. There were, to be sure, CAP villages where the Marines and PFs worked together well, each learning from the other; where Marines were gradually, if not totally accepted into the community; and where the people assisted the CAP platoons in civic action and counterinsurgency campaigns. There were also Marines who came to accept, if not fully comprehend, that PFs who resorted to theft did so out of economic hardship and familial responsibility; that corruption can be found in any society, and in South Vietnam, if kept within limits, was regarded as acceptable and even as a mark of status; that family ties were key to a way of life based on a complex set of personal, impersonal, and mystical relationships; and that in the provincial world of the village, nationalism had little meaning except to a small, educated elite. “Outside Saigon and a few other places,” one CAP Marine recently noted, “there was no South Vietnam.”<sup>27</sup> Caught in the middle of an ideological war in which neutrality could prompt severe retribution, villagers who otherwise might believe they had no stake in the conflict often

ended up assisting the Vietcong out of a sense of self-preservation or because relatives, through persuasion or coercion, had joined the VC. Many CAP Marines understood such arrangements and bore no grudge against the hapless victims of the war.

Nevertheless, the conflict, whatever its impact on village society, remained a fact of life, and it was the duty of CAP platoons to help sway the outcome. Both sides, through greatly divergent means, sought to transform traditional Vietnamese society into a modern nation-state. With a strong faith in the universal applicability of Western ideals and institutions and in the efficacy of reform and social engineering, CAP Marines tried to convince villagers that an increasingly responsive government in Saigon offered the best blueprint for a more equitable, prosperous, and secure life. The effort was well-intentioned, but good intentions could only effect so much: they could often atone for inadvertent breaches of village etiquette, but they could not transform overnight, or even in a few years, what history had taken centuries to set in place. Although progress in the village war *was* being made by 1971, the extent of that progress was, and still is, difficult to assess.

Amid this uncertainty, the last CAP platoon was deactivated in 1971 as Americans gradually withdrew from Vietnam. Supporters of the program have argued then and since that had the CAP concept been applied throughout South Vietnam, the war's outcome might have been different. This seems an exaggerated claim, given the problems—both niggling and profound—that plagued the program. The question remains: What *can* be said about a program that engaged only a few thousand Marines and left behind scant testimony as to its successes and failures? While some generalizations are possible, they do not always prove as illuminating as one might wish. There were good and bad, successful and unsuccessful CAP platoons. Accomplishments varied depending on such factors as time, place, and personnel, not to mention a host of other variables that were beyond the control of CAP Marines. When engaged in counterinsurgency operations, CAP platoons often disrupted enemy activities, but few CAP units claimed to have

eliminated the VC infrastructure from their respective villages. The effectiveness of PF training varied from one CAP platoon to another, allowing some CAP Marines to relocate to new villages, but leaving others in place for the duration of the war. Moreover, despite the reforms and self-help programs that were introduced to improve the lives of the villagers, the persistence of traditional patterns of behavior caused many Marines to demand in frustration, "Why do you do that? This is crazy!" The cultural gap, one CAP Marine concluded, was simply "unbridgeable."<sup>28</sup>

Marines who had conducted counterinsurgency operations, trained indigenous troops, and engaged in pacification programs in Latin America from 1915 to 1934 would have empathized with this sense of frustration. There as in Vietnam, ethnocentrism came into conflict with alien cultures as leathernecks tried to bring stability to Hispaniola and Nicaragua. The Chesty Pullers and Smedley Butlers of the small wars era fared reasonably well against the guerrilla bands arrayed against them, but they could not impose stability based on the type of representative democracy, free enterprise, egalitarianism, and military professionalism found in the United States. By the time the Marines departed the area in the mid-1930s, they had come to recognize the limited effectiveness of American power and the limited applicability of American institutions in what would later be labelled Third World countries. The frustrations encountered in Haiti and Nicaragua dampened enthusiasm for pursuing the effort elsewhere.

This "lesson," however, did not find its way into the Marines' professional journals, school curricula, or *Small Wars Manual*. The latter, for example, addressed the social and economic causes of revolution and explained how Marines should interact with native populations, but it also perpetuated the notion that countries in the throes of revolutionary upheaval could be stabilized through the infusion of Western-style reforms.<sup>29</sup> Ethnocentrism toward the Third World remained undiluted when the United States entered Vietnam a quarter of a century later. As Edward Lansdale, one of the architects of that intervention, unabashedly avowed, "I took my American beliefs into these Asian struggles."<sup>30</sup>

So, too, did most American policymakers and soldiers, however sophisticated their appreciation of the complex dynamics and nuances of Vietnamese society. In time, hubris again yielded to disillusionment and frustration, much as it had at the end of the “banana wars” in Latin America. What the United States could not do in Haiti and the Dominican Republic—that is, restructure both countries according to an American blueprint—stood even less chance of succeeding in Vietnam. The United States had enjoyed complete control of an occupied country in Hispaniola. That was not the case in Vietnam, however. There Americans fought in an alien setting on behalf of a sovereign government that until the eleventh hour seemed unwilling or, perhaps more accurately, unable for fear of losing its hold on power to enact programs with enough grassroots appeal to win the allegiance of a large portion of the citizenry.

Just as the lessons of American’s small wars in the first half of this century failed to prevent an encore performance in Vietnam, the “lesson” of Vietnam concerning the risks involved in trying to build nations for governments of countries fundamentally different from the United States is likely to be forgotten in the long term. A belief in the universal appeal and applicability of the American way of life is too deeply ingrained in the American character to expect otherwise. Despite what happened in Vietnam, Americans have not lost faith in the “middle way,” that path of moderate and progressive reform through which the United States can lead the world to peace and harmony, while fending off the dangers of reaction on the Right and revolution on the Left.

It is in the context of ethnocentrism and cultural conflict that one must approach an assessment of the Combined Action Program. Many of the problems CAP encountered in Vietnam can be attributed to organizational growing pains. At the same time, CAP was a small but significant part of a broader strategy that, despite its admirable intentions, was predicated on the existence of the “middle way” in Vietnam, that is, on the efficacy and relevance of American-style solutions. If the “middle way” existed at all, it contained so many obstacles that it could not be

traversed easily or quickly. Given time, pacification might have worked; but time ran out. Alternative strategies appeared unattractive, so the Americans departed, the CAP platoons disbanded. Whether the Combined Action Program should be resurrected in another country under different circumstances is problematical. The possibility should not be dismissed out of hand. But before this innovative approach to local security is applied to another counterinsurgency effort, the CAP experience in Vietnam should be studied at length. For if the guiding strategy is infused with ethnocentrism and minimizes cultural differences, the prospects for the success of another Combined Action Program in the future would seem bleak.

## Notes

1. Thompson and Depuy quoted in Andrew Krepinevich, Jr., *The Army and Vietnam* (Baltimore, 1986), 174-75. The definition of CAP is taken from Bruce C. Allnut, *Marine Combined Action Capabilities: The Vietnam Experience* (McLean, Va., 1969).
2. On the origins of the Combined Action Program, see Fleet Marine Force, Pacific (FMFPac), *The Marine Combined Action Program Vietnam*, n.d. [but covers CAP from August 1965 through January 1967], in FMFPac documents, U.S. Marine Corps Historical Center, Washington, D.C. (hereafter cited as USMCHC); “Joint Action Company,” in Third Battalion, Fourth Marines Command Chronology, September-October 1965, USMCHC; Jack Shulimson and Charles M. Johnson, *U.S. Marines in Vietnam: The Landing and the Buildup, 1965* (Washington, 1978), 133-38; Robert A. Klyman, “The Combined Action Program: An Alternative Not Taken” (Honors thesis, University of Michigan, 1986), 6-16; Michael E. Peterson, *The Combined Action Platoons: The U.S. Marines’ Other War in Vietnam* (New York, 1989), 21-29; Allan R. Millett, *Semper Fidelis: The History of the United States Marine Corps* (New York, 1980), 560-66, 571-72.
3. In late 1965, the designation Joint Action Company was changed to Combined Action Company in accordance with military terminology that defines U.S. military operations with troops of another country as “combined” operations.
4. On expanding combined Marine and PF operations throughout Marine enclaves in I Corps, see Lewis W. Walt to Commanding General, I Corps, 5 January 1966; Lieutenant General Nguyen Chanh Thi to Commanding General, III MAP, 28 January 1966; Thi

to various subordinates, 28 January 1966; Walt to Commanding Officer, I Corps Advisory Group, 4 February 1966; and Walt to Commanding General, Third Marine Division, 4 February 1966—all attached to FMFPac, *Marine Combined Action Program Vietnam*. Note that in early 1966, the term “Combined Action Program” had not gained wide currency. As late as 1967, CAP and CAC (Combined Action Company) were often used interchangeably.

5. U.S. Congress, Senate Subcommittee on Public Buildings and Grounds, *The Pentagon Papers: The Defense Department History of United States Decision Making on Vietnam (The Senator Gravel Edition)*, 4 vols. (Boston, 1975), 2:534.

6. Victor Krulak, “A Strategic Appraisal,” December 1965, in Robert A. Klyman Papers, USMCHC. While my text relies on this paper to describe the Marine approach to pacification, additional information can be found in Shulimson and Johnson, *Landing and Buildup*, 37-39, 46-48, 133-46; Neil Sheehan, *A Bright Shining Lie: John Paul Vann and America in Vietnam* (New York, 1988), 629-38; FMFPac, *Operations of the III Marine Amphibious Force*, USMCHC. Originally classified secret, the FMFPac volumes contain monthly reports, each of which includes a section on the pacification program. See also “III MAP Civic Action Summary,” December 1965, Klyman Papers, USMCHC; Russel H. Stolfi, *U.S. Marine Corps Civic Action Efforts in Vietnam March 1965-March 1966* (Washington, 1968); Shulimson and Johnson, *Landing and Buildup*, 37-39, 46-48, 133-46; Jack Shulimson, *U.S. Marines in Vietnam: An Expanding War, 1966* (Washington, 1981), 11-15, 229-58; Millett, *Semper Fidelis*, 566-71.

7. William C. Westmoreland, *A Soldier Reports* (Garden City, N.Y., 1976), 166. Similarly, Westmoreland argued, “Had I had at my disposal virtually unlimited manpower, I could have stationed troops permanently in every district or province and thus provided an alternative strategy. That would have enabled the troops to get to know the people intimately, facilitating the task of identifying the subversives and protecting the others against intimidation.” *Ibid.*, 147. The debate over strategy should not be seen in terms of the Army versus the Marine Corps. Not all Marine officers shared Krulak’s views, while within the Army, a study commissioned by the chief of staff of the Army challenged Westmoreland’s attrition strategy. According to this study completed in March 1966, “Present U.S. military actions [against Communist regiments] are inconsistent with that fundamental of counterinsurgency doctrine which establishes winning popular allegiance as the ultimate goal.” Reference to this document, known as the PROVN study, together with a critique of

Westmoreland’s handling of the war can be found in Guenter Lewy, *America in Vietnam* (New York, 1978), 77-126. See also Millett, *Semper Fidelis*, 548-49; Reports, Commandant of the Marine Corps to Secretary, Joint Chiefs of Staff, “Status of the Development of Counter guerrilla Forces,” 1 February 1962 and 13 March 1962, Records of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, 1961, Record Group 218, 3360 Unconventional Warfare (10 February 1961) files, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

8. For Marine small-unit counter guerrilla operations during the first two years of the war, see *U.S. Marine Corps Forces in Vietnam, March 1965-September 1967: Historical Summary, vol. 1, Narrative*, USMCHC.

9. Millett, *Semper Fidelis*, 571; Lewy, *American in Vietnam*, 87-88, 97. In October 1966, Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara complained that ARVN had still not fully committed itself to the pacification program. *Pentagon Papers*, 4:350-51.

10. This description and assessment of the PFs is taken from FMFPac, *Marine Combined Action Program Vietnam*, 3-5.

11. Many Marines regarded CAP as a direct descendant of programs the corps employed to train native constabularies in Haiti, the Dominican Republic, and Nicaragua during the 1920s and 1930s. Shulimson and Johnson note, however, that Combined Action Platoons were much more a “cooperative effort” than the “Marine-officered” units of the “banana war” era. *Landing and Buildup*, 134-35.

12. The Combined Action Program and the Combined Action Platoon share the same acronym, CAP. For the sake of clarity, I will use the acronym solely in reference to the former and refer to the latter as “CAP platoon(s).”

13. For a more detailed description of the organization and methods of the Combined Action Platoon, see FMFPac, *Marine Combined Action Program Vietnam*; Lieutenant Colonel W. R. Corson, USMC, “Marine Combined Action Program in Vietnam,” n.d. [1967], USMCHC.

14. Details regarding the expansion of CAP can be found in the FMFPac monthly reports and in the CAF and CAG command chronologies, as well as those of the line units that prior to October 1967 had operational control over CAP platoons. These documents are located at the Marine Corps Historical Center. For cogent summaries of CAP’s growth, see Klyman, “Combined Action Program,” 12-43, and Peterson, *Combined Action Platoons*, 31-83. See also Shulimson, *Expanding War*, 239-43; Gary L. Telfer, Lane Rogers, and V. Keith Fleming, Jr., *U.S. Marines in Vietnam*:

*Fighting the North Vietnamese, 1967* (Washington, 1984), 186-94; Charles R. Smith, *U.S. Marines in Vietnam: High Mobility and Standdown, 1969* (Washington, 1988), 288-94; Graham A. Cosmas and Terrence P. Murray, *U.S. Marines in Vietnam: Vietnamization and Redeployment, 1970-1971* (Washington, 1986), 139-61.

15. Smith, *High Mobility and Standdown*, 290-91. See also FMFPac, *Operations of the III MAF*, January 1967, 37.

16. Walt's system was based on five "progress indicators": destruction of enemy units; destruction of enemy infrastructure; government of Vietnam (GVN) establishment of security; GVN establishment of local government; degree of development of new life program. Each indicator received a value of 20 points and was broken down into related subdivisions. A score of 60 points indicated "firm GVN/U.S. influence," while a score of 80 points indicated pacification. The Hamlet Evaluation System was developed by the CIA to provide a uniform measure of progress throughout Vietnam. It "borrowed freely" from the Marine system, but differed in several respects. According to FMFPac, however, the two systems reinforced one another and led to the same conclusions. Shulimson, *Expanding War*, 257-58. Allan Millett notes in his history of the Marine Corps that "a more sophisticated system of evaluating hamlet security showed that much of the Marine civic action program had produced no lasting GVN control." *SemperFidelis*, 575.

17. FMFPac, *Marine Combined Action Program Vietnam*, 3, 7-17; FMFPac, *Operations of the III MAF*, monthly reports, 1966-1971.

18. *Pentagon Papers*, 2:535; Shulimson, *Expanding War*, 258; Klyman, "Combined Action Program," 3, 17-18, 77-78 n. 6. The Marine colonel may have been exaggerating his point. According to Shulimson, each indicator "was dependent on the other, providing a balance to the total picture." In other words, a high score in four of the five indicators (needed to reach the 80-point level) could not be achieved unless progress had been made in the area of the fifth indicator. Another complaint, however, has been that the determination of points for any given indicator was based as much on guesswork as solid analysis. Shulimson, *Expanding War*, 257; Klyman, "Combined Action Program," 77-78 n. 6.

19. Peterson, *Combined Action Platoons*, 32-34, 48. Peterson indicates that many volunteers came not from line units but from combat support and combat service support units. See also Klyman, "Combined Action Program," 19, 28, 37-39; David Sherman, "One Man's CAP," *Marine Corps Gazette* 73 (February 1989):

58; Edward F. Palm, "Tiger Papa Three: A Memoir of the Combined Action Program," pt. 1, *Marine Corps Gazette* 72 (January 1988): 36-37; Edward Palm to Major Charles Driest, USMC, 5 January 1989, copy in author's possession; Harry A. Scarr, et al., *Marine Combined Action Capabilities: Training for Future Contingencies* (McLean, Va., 1971), C 9-10; James DuGuid interview, San Francisco, Calif., 14 October 1984; Colonel Byron F. Brady interview, San Francisco, Calif., 12 October 1986; Eugene H. Ferguson interview, San Francisco, Calif., 13 October 1984; Igor Bobrowsky interview, San Francisco, Calif., 3 December 1982—transcripts of each of the above interviews at USMCHC.

20. Klyman, "Combined Action Program," 23-25; Peterson, *Combined Action Platoons*, 24, 48; Sherman, "One Man's CAP," 58; DuGuid, Ferguson, Bobrowsky interviews. Palm recalled of his language training that "we went off to our respective villages armed with the Vietnamese equivalent of *la plume de ma tante* and other useless phrases." Another Marine recalled that the Vietnamese dialect taught in the CAP school at Da Nang was of no use to him in his assigned village south of the base. Palm, "Tiger Papa Three," pt. 1, 37-38; Scarr, et al., *Combined Action Capabilities*, C 34.

21. Peterson, *Combined Action Platoons*, 36, 47; William F. Lockridge interview, San Francisco, Calif., 13 October 1984, copy at USMCHC; C.W. Miller taped telephone interview with Major Driest, 1988, notes from tape in author's possession.

22. Klyman, "Combined Action Program," 30-34, 45-46, 73 n. 14; Peterson, *Combined Action Platoons*, 56-62; "A Discussion of the Mobile CAP Concept," Enclosure 7 to "Fact Sheet on the Combined Action Force," 31 March 1970, FMFPac Records, USMCHC; Scarr, et al., *Marine Combined Action Capabilities*, C 20; DuGuid, Brady, Ferguson, Bobrowsky interviews. A graphic account of a CAP compound being overrun is contained in F. J. West, Jr., *The Village* (New York, 1972), 105-27. DuGuid noted that he has yet to meet a CAP Marine whose compound was not overrun.

23. Peterson, *Combined Action Platoons*, 35-38; Klyman, "Combined Action Program," 22; author's conversations with Jack Shulimson, Washington Navy Yard, 19 July 1989, and Brig. General E. H. Simmons, USMC (Ret.), Washington Navy Yard, 20 July 1989; Brady, Miller, Ferguson, and Bobrowsky interviews.

24. Palm, "Tiger Papa Three," pt. 1, 35.

25. Peterson, *Combined Action Platoons*, 44-45, 93-94, 104; Palm, "Tiger Papa Three," pt. 1, 37; Edward F. Palm, "Tiger Papa Three: A Memoir of the Combined Action Program," pt. 2, *Marine Corps Gazette* 72 (February 1988): 69-70; Scarr, et al., *Marine Combined*



*Action Capabilities*, C 4; Simmons, Brady, Miller, Ferguson interviews.

26. Peterson, *Combined Action Platoons*, 41-43, 88; Palm, "Tiger Papa Three," pt. 1, 40-41, pt. 2, 67-68; Sherman, "One Man's CAP," 61; Simmons, Brady, Miller interviews.

27. Palm to Driest, 5 January 1989, copy in author's possession.

28. Lockridge interview; Palm, "Tiger Papa Three," pt. 1, 35.

29. U.S. Marine Corps, *Small Wars Manual* (Washington, 1940). For an enlightening analysis of American ethnocentrism toward the Third World, see Howard J. Wiarda, "At the Root of the Problem:

Conceptual Failures in U.S.-Central American Relations," *Central America: Anatomy of Conflict*, ed. Robert S. Leiken (New York, 1983), 261.

30. Stanley Karnow, *In Our Image; America's Empire in the Philippines* (New York, 1989), 348.

### **About the Author**

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## CORDS/Phoenix: Counterinsurgency Lessons from Vietnam for the Future

by Dale Andrade and  
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As the United States ends its third year of war in Iraq, the military continues to search for ways to deal with an insurgency that shows no sign of waning. The specter of Vietnam looms large, and the media has been filled with comparisons between the current situation and the “quagmire” of the Vietnam War. The differences between the two conflicts are legion, but observers can learn lessons from the Vietnam experience—if they are judicious in their search.

For better or worse, Vietnam is the most prominent historical example of American counterinsurgency (COIN)—and the longest—so it would be a mistake to reject it because of its admittedly complex and controversial nature. An examination of the pacification effort in Vietnam and the evolution of the Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support (CORDS) program provides useful insights into the imperatives of a viable COIN program.

### ***Twin Threats: Main Forces and Guerrillas***

In Vietnam, the U.S. military faced arguably the most complex, effective, lethal insurgency in history. The enemy was no rag-tag band lurking in the jungle, but rather a combination of guerrillas, political cadre, and modern main-force units capable of standing toe to toe with the U.S. military. Any one of these would have been sig-

nificant, but in combination they presented a formidable threat.

When U.S. ground forces intervened in South Vietnam in 1965, estimates of enemy guerrilla and Communist Party front strength stood at more than 300,000. In addition, Viet Cong (VC) and North Vietnamese main forces numbered almost 230,000—and that number grew to 685,000 by the time of the Communist victory in 1975. These main forces were organized into regiments and divisions, and between 1965 and 1968, the enemy emphasized main-force war rather than insurgency.<sup>1</sup> During the war, the Communists launched three conventional offensives: the 1968 Tet Offensive, the 1972 Easter Offensive, and the final offensive in 1975. All were major campaigns by any standard. Clearly, the insurgency and the enemy main forces had to be dealt with simultaneously.

When faced with this sort of dual threat, what is the correct response? Should military planners gear up for a counterinsurgency, or should they fight a war aimed at destroying the enemy main forces? General William C. Westmoreland, the overall commander of U.S. troops under the Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (MACV), faced just such a question. Westmoreland knew very well that South Vietnam faced twin threats, but he believed that the enemy main forces were the most immediate problem. By way of analogy, he referred to them as “bully boys with crow-bars” who were trying to tear down the house that was South Vietnam. The guerrillas and political cadre, which he called “termites,” could also destroy the house, but it would take them much longer to do it. So while he clearly understood the need for pacification, his attention turned first to the bully boys, whom he wanted to drive away from the “house.”<sup>2</sup>

Westmoreland’s strategy of chasing the enemy and forcing him to fight or run (also known as search and destroy) worked in the sense that it saved South Vietnam from immediate defeat, pushed the enemy main forces from the populated areas, and temporarily took the initiative away from the Communists. South Vietnam was safe in the short term, and Communist histories make clear that the intervention by U.S. troops was a severe blow to their plans.<sup>3</sup> In the end,

however, there were not enough U.S. troops to do much more than produce a stalemate. The Communists continued to infiltrate main-force units from neighboring Laos and Cambodia, and they split their forces into smaller bands that could avoid combat if the battlefield situation was not in their favor.

The enemy continued to build his strength, and in January 1968 launched the Tet Offensive, a clear indication that the Americans could never really hold the initiative. Although attacks on almost every major city and town were pushed back and as many as 50,000 enemy soldiers and guerrillas were killed, the offensive proved to be a political victory for the Communists, who showed they could mount major attacks no matter what the Americans tried to do.

Counterinsurgency, or pacification as it was more commonly known in Vietnam, was forced to deal with the twin threats of enemy main forces and a constant guerrilla presence in the rural areas. MACV campaign plans for the first two years of the war show that pacification was as important as military operations, but battlefield realities forced it into the background. In January 1966, Westmoreland wrote, “it is abundantly clear that all political, military, economic, and security (police) programs must be completely integrated in order to attain any kind of success in a country which has been greatly weakened by prolonged conflict.”<sup>4</sup> He looked to the enemy for an example of how this was done. “The Viet Cong, themselves, have learned this lesson well. Their integration of efforts surpasses ours by a large order of magnitude.”<sup>5</sup>

Westmoreland knew that he lacked the forces to wage both a war of attrition and one of pacification, so he chose the former. The argument over whether or not this was the right course of action will likely go on forever, but undoubtedly the shape of the war changed dramatically after the Tet Offensive. The enemy was badly mauled and, despite the political gains made, militarily lost the initiative for quite some time.

As the Communists withdrew from the Tet battlefields to lick their wounds, the ensuing lull offered a more propitious environment for a pacification plan. Westmoreland never had such an advantage. When American ground forces

entered the war in 1965, they faced an enemy on the offensive, but in June 1968, the new MACV commander, General Creighton W. Abrams, confronted an enemy on the ropes. Abrams plainly recognized his advantage and implemented a clear-and-hold strategy aimed at moving into rural enclaves formerly dominated by the VC. A Communist history of the war notes that “[b]ecause we did not fully appreciate the new enemy [allied] schemes and the changes the enemy made in the conduct of the war and because we underestimated the enemy’s capabilities and the strength of his counterattack, when the United States and its puppets [the South Vietnamese] began to carry out their ‘clear and hold’ strategy our battlefronts were too slow in shifting over to attacking the ‘pacification’ program. . . .”<sup>6</sup>

To cope with the new battlefield situation, the Communist Politburo in Hanoi revised its strategy in a document known as COSVN Resolution 9.<sup>7</sup> North Vietnam considered its Tet “general offensive and uprising” to be a great success that “forced the enemy [U.S. and South Vietnam] to . . . sink deeper into a defensive and deadlocked position,” but admitted that new techniques were required to force the Americans out of the war.<sup>8</sup> Rather than fight U.S. troops directly, Resolution 9 dictated that guerrilla forces would disperse and concentrate their efforts on attacking pacification. The main objective was to outlast the allies: “We should fight to force the Americans to withdraw troops, cause the collapse of the puppets and gain the decisive victory. . . .”<sup>9</sup> Implicit in the plan was a return to more traditional hit-and-run guerrilla tactics with less emphasis on big battles.

Between late 1968 and 1971, the battle for hearts and minds went into full swing, and the government made rapid advances in pacifying the countryside. Historians and military analysts still debate the merits of Abrams’s strategy vis-à-vis Westmoreland’s, but the bottom line is that the two generals faced very different conflicts.<sup>10</sup> There was no “correct” way to fight; the war was a fluid affair with the enemy controlling the operational tempo most of the time. The successes in pacification during Abrams’s command owed a lot to the severely weakened status of the VC after the 1968 Tet Offensive. Even so,

with U.S. President Richard Nixon’s order to “Vietnamize” the war, the South Vietnamese would be left to cope with both the enemy main forces and the Communist insurgency in the villages. Pacification alone simply could not do the job.

## ***Essentials of Counterinsurgency***

Insurgencies are complex affairs that defy all attempts at seeking a common denominator. The counterinsurgent’s strategy will depend on how he is organized and how he chooses to fight. The enemy is never static, and every situation will differ from the next. Still, when an insurgency is stripped to its essentials, there are some basic points that are crucial to any COIN effort.

Security forces must be prepared to use armed force to keep the enemy away from the population. To conclude that large-scale operations play no role in COIN is a mistake. The big-unit war of 1965 and 1966 robbed the Communists of a quick victory and allowed the South Vietnamese breathing space in which to begin pacifying the countryside. Without the security generated by military force, pacification cannot even be attempted.

At the same time, government forces must target the insurgents’ ability to live and operate freely among the population. Given time, insurgents will try to create a clandestine political structure to replace the government presence in the villages. Such an infrastructure is the real basis of guerrilla control during any insurgency; it is the thread that ties the entire insurgency together. Without a widespread political presence, guerrillas cannot make many gains, and those they do make cannot be reinforced. Any COIN effort must specifically target the insurgent infrastructure if it is to win the war.

These objectives—providing security for the people and targeting the insurgent infrastructure—form the basis of a credible government campaign to win hearts and minds. Programs aimed at bringing a better quality of life to the population, including things like land reform,



medical care, schools, and agricultural assistance, are crucial if the government is to offer a viable alternative to the insurgents. The reality, however, is that nothing can be accomplished without first establishing some semblance of security.

Key to the entire strategy is the integration of all efforts toward a single goal. This sounds obvious, but it rarely occurs. In most historical COIN efforts, military forces concentrated on warfighting objectives, leaving the job of building schools and clinics, establishing power grids, and bolstering local government (popularly referred to today as nation building) to civilian agencies. The reality is that neither mission is more important than the other, and failure to recognize this can be fatal. Virtually all COIN plans claim they integrate the two: The Provincial Reconstruction Teams in Afghanistan and the defunct Coalition Provisional Authority in Iraq were attempts to combine and coordinate civilian and military agencies, although neither really accomplished its objective. In this respect, the development of the CORDS program during the Vietnam War offers a good example of how to establish a chain of command incorporating civilian and military agencies into a focused effort.

### ***Foundation for Successful Pacification***

During the early 1960s, the American advisory effort in Vietnam aimed at thwarting Communist influence in the countryside. The attempt failed for many reasons, but one of the most profound was the South Vietnamese Government's inability to extend security to the country's countless villages and hamlets. This failure was, of course, the main factor leading to the introduction of American ground forces and the subsequent rapid expansion of U.S. military manpower in 1965. (U.S. troop strength grew from 23,300 in late 1964 to 184,300 one year later.) The huge increase in troop strength exacerbated the already tenuous relationship between the military mission and pacification. As a result, many officials argued that the latter was being neglected.

In early 1965, the U.S. side of pacification con-

sisted of several civilian agencies, of which the CIA, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), the U.S. information Service, and the U.S. Department of State were the most important. Each agency developed its own program and coordinated it through the American embassy. On the military side, the rapid expansion of troop strength meant a corresponding increase in the number of advisers. By early 1966, military advisory teams worked in all of South Vietnam's 44 provinces and most of its 243 districts. The extent of the military's presence in the countryside made it harder for the civilian-run pacification program to cope—a situation made worse because there was no formal system combining the two efforts.

In the spring of 1966, President Lyndon B. Johnson's administration turned its attention toward pacification in an attempt to make the existing arrangement work. Official trips to South Vietnam as well as studies by independent observers claimed there was little coordination between civilian agencies. Most concluded that the entire system needed a drastic overhaul. Johnson took a personal interest in pacification, bringing the weight of his office to the search for a better way to run the "other war," as he called pacification. American ambassador Henry Cabot Lodge received written authority from the president to "exercise full responsibility" over the entire advisory effort in Vietnam, using "the degree of command and control that you consider appropriate."<sup>11</sup>

It was not enough. Westmoreland was cooperative, yet the civilian and military missions simply did not mesh. After a trip to South Vietnam in November 1965, Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara told Westmoreland, "I don't think we have done a thing we can point to that has been effective in five years. I ask you to show me one area in this country . . . that we have pacified."<sup>12</sup>

McNamara's observation prompted quick action. In January 1966, representatives from Washington agencies concerned with the conduct of the war met with representatives from the U.S. mission in Saigon at a conference in Virginia. During the ensuing discussion, participants acknowledged that simply relying on the



ambassador and the MACV commander to “work things out” would not ensure pacification cooperation. A single civil-military focus on pacification was needed; however, the conference ended without a concrete resolution.<sup>13</sup>

Although Johnson was displeased by slow progress and foot dragging, the embassy in Saigon continued to resist any changes that would take away its authority over pacification. Then, at a summit held in Honolulu in February 1966 with South Vietnamese President Nguyen Van Thieu and Premier Nguyen Cao Ky, Johnson pushed an agenda that tasked the South Vietnamese Army with area security, allowing the U.S. military to concentrate mostly on seeking out enemy main forces. Johnson also demanded greater American coordination in the pacification effort and called for a single manager to head the entire program. In April, he assigned Robert W. Komer, a trusted member of the National Security Council, the task of coming up with a solution. Johnson gave Komer a strong mandate that included unrestrained access to the White House—a key asset that was put in writing. That authority gave Komer the clout he needed to bring recalcitrant officials into line.<sup>14</sup>

Other steps followed in quick succession. In August 1966, Komer authored a paper titled “Giving a New Thrust to Pacification: Analysis, Concept, and Management,” in which he broke the pacification problem into three parts and argued that no single part could work by itself.<sup>15</sup> The first part, not surprisingly, was security—keeping the main forces away from the population. In the second part he advocated breaking the Communists’ hold on the people with anti-infrastructure operations and programs designed to win back popular support. The third part stressed the concept of mass; in other words, pacification had to be large-scale. Only with a truly massive effort could a turnaround be achieved, and that was what Johnson required if he was to maintain public support for the war.

It was Westmoreland himself, however, who brought the issue to the forefront. Contrary to popular belief, the MACV commander understood the need for pacification, and, like a good politician, figured it would be better to have the assignment under his control than outside of it.

On 6 October 1966, despite objections from his staff, he told Komer: “I’m not asking for the responsibility, but I believe that my headquarters could take it in stride and perhaps carry out this important function more economically and efficiently than the present complex arrangement.”<sup>16</sup>

Komer lobbied McNamara, arguing that with 90 percent of the resources, it was “obvious” that only the military “had the clout” to get the job done. Komer believed that the U.S. Defense Department (DOD) was “far stronger behind pacification” than the Department of State and was “infinitely more dynamic and influential.”<sup>17</sup>

Now the DOD was on board, but the civilian agencies uniformly opposed the plan. As a compromise, in November 1966 the Office of Civil Operations (OCO) was formed, with deputy ambassador William Porter in charge. The OCO combined civilian agencies under one chain of command, but failed to bring the military into it. The entire plan was doomed from the start.

The OCO was really no different from the old way of doing business because it kept the civilian and military chains of command separate. Johnson was deeply dissatisfied. So in June 1966, Komer went to Vietnam to assess the situation. He wrote that the U.S. embassy “needs to strengthen its own machinery” for pacification. Komer met with Westmoreland, and the two agreed on the need for a single manager. “My problem is not with Westy, but the reluctant civilian side,” Komer told the president.<sup>18</sup>

### ***The Birth of CORDS***

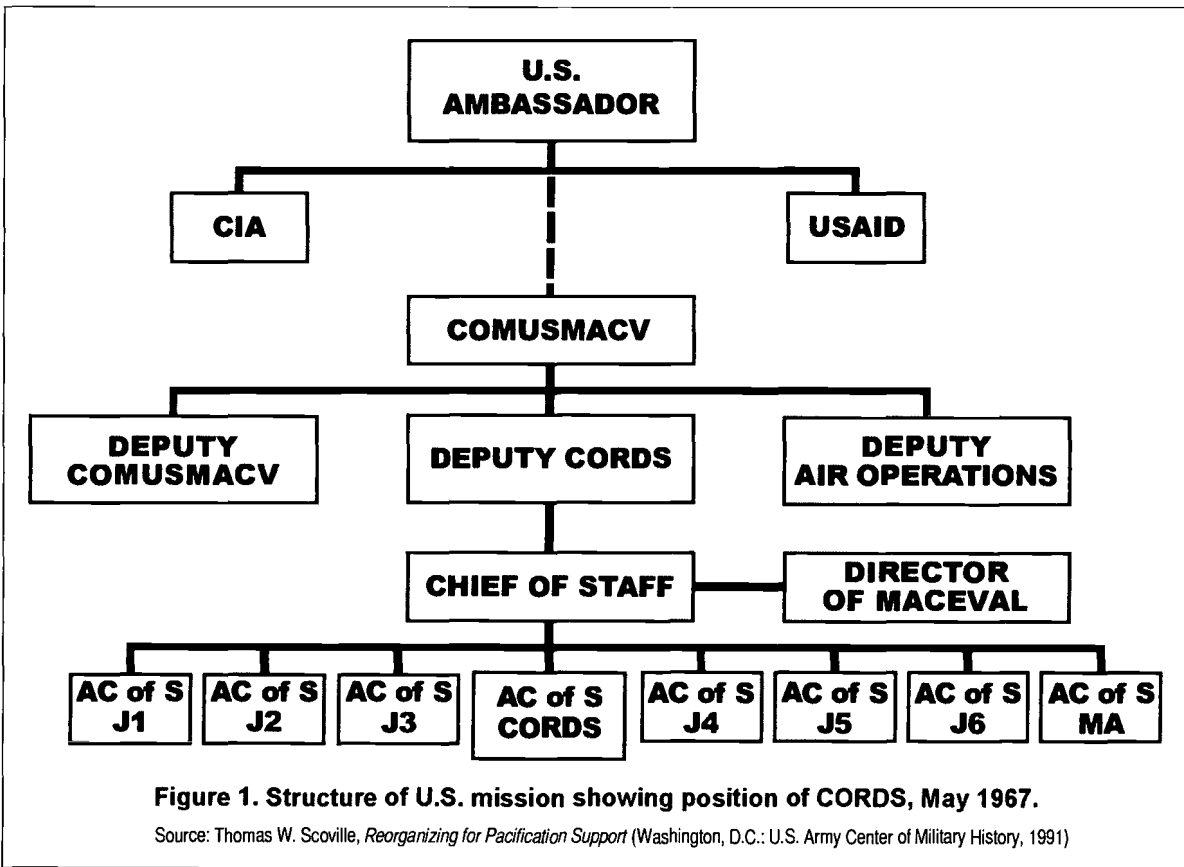
In March 1967, Johnson convened a meeting on Guam and made it clear that OCO was dead and that Komer’s plan for a single manager would be implemented. Only the paperwork remained, and less than two months later, on 9 May 1967, National Security Action Memorandum 362, “Responsibility for U.S. Role in Pacification (Revolutionary Development),” established Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support, or CORDS.<sup>19</sup> The new system unambiguously placed the military in charge of pacification. As MACV commander, Westmoreland would have three deputies, one of them a civilian with three-star-equivalent rank in charge of

pacification, and there would be a single chain of command. Komer took the post of deputy for CORDS, which placed him alongside the deputy MACV commander, Abrams. Below that, various other civilians and civilian agencies were integrated into the military hierarchy, including an assistant chief of staff for CORDS positioned alongside the traditional military staff. For the first time, civilians were embedded within a wartime command and put in charge of military personnel and resources. CORDS went into effect immediately and brought with it a new urgency oriented toward making pacification work in the countryside.<sup>20</sup> (See figure 1.)

The new organization did not solve all problems immediately, and it was not always smooth sailing. At first Komer attempted to gather as much power as possible within his office, but Westmoreland made it clear that his military deputies were more powerful and performed a broad range of duties, while Komer had author-

ity only over pacification. In addition, Westmoreland quashed Komer's direct access to the White House, rightly insisting that the chain of command be followed. Westmoreland naturally kept a close watch over CORDS, occasionally prompting Komer to complain that he was not yet sure that he had Westmoreland's "own full trust and confidence."<sup>21</sup> Their disagreements were few, however, and the relationship between the MACV commander and his new deputy became close and respectful, which started the new program on the right track.

Time was the crucial ingredient, and eventually Komer's assertive personality and Westmoreland's increasing trust in his new civilian subordinates smoothed over many potential problems. According to one study, "[a] combination of Westmoreland's flexibility and Komer's ability to capitalize on it through the absence of an intervening layer of command permitted Komer to run an unusual, innovative program within what



**Figure 1. Structure of U.S. mission showing position of CORDS, May 1967.**

Source: Thomas W. Scoville, *Reorganizing for Pacification Support* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 1991)

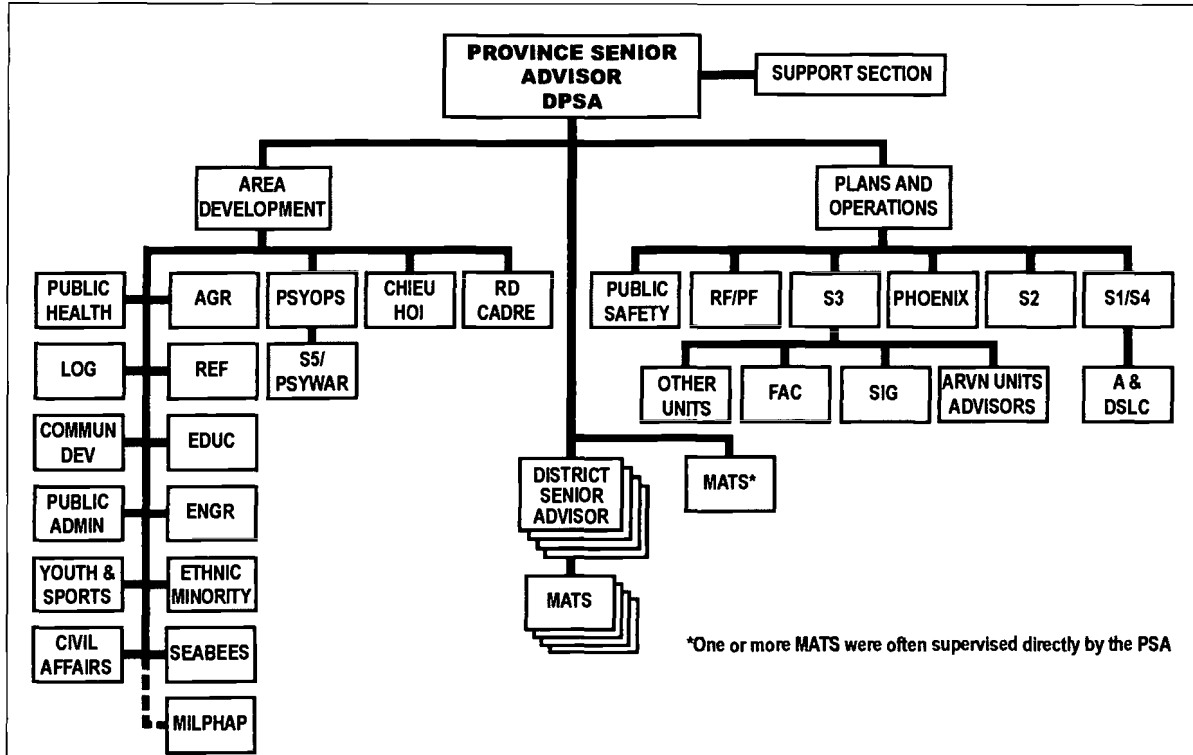


Figure 2. Organization of the CORDS team at province level.

Source: Ngo Quang Truong, *Indochina Monographs: RVNAF and US Operational Cooperation and Coordination* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 1980), p. 154

otherwise might have been the overly strict confines of a military staff.”<sup>22</sup>

With the new organization, almost all pacification programs eventually came under CORDS. From USAID, CORDS took control of “new life development” (the catch-all term for an attempt to improve government responsiveness to villagers’ needs), refugees, National Police, and the Chieu Hoi program (the “Open arms” campaign to encourage Communist personnel in South Vietnam to defect). The CIA’s Rural Development cadre, MACV’s civic action and civil affairs, and the Joint U.S. Public Affairs Office’s field psychological operations also fell under the CORDS aegis. CORDS assumed responsibility for reports, evaluations, and field inspections from all agencies.<sup>23</sup>

**CORDS Organization.** At corps level, the CORDS organization was modeled on that of CORDS at the MACV headquarters. (See figure 2.) The U.S. military senior adviser, usually a

three-star general who also served as the commander of U.S. forces in the region, had a deputy for CORDS (DepCORDS), usually a civilian. The DepCORDS was responsible for supervising military and civilian plans in support of the South Vietnamese pacification program within the corps area.<sup>24</sup>

Province advisory teams in the corps area of responsibility reported directly to the regional DepCORDS. Each of the 44 provinces in South Vietnam was headed by a province chief, usually a South Vietnamese Army or Marine colonel, who supervised the provincial government apparatus and commanded the provincial militia as well as Regional Forces and Popular Forces (RF/PF).

The province advisory teams helped the province chiefs administer the pacification program. The province chief’s American counterpart was the province senior adviser, who was either military or civilian, depending on the security sit-

uation of the respective province. The province senior adviser and his staff were responsible for advising the province chief about civil-military aspects of the South Vietnamese pacification and development programs.

The province senior adviser's staff, composed of both U.S. military and civilian personnel, was divided into two parts. The first part handled area and community development, including public health and administration, civil affairs, education, agriculture, psychological operations, and logistics. The other part managed military issues. It helped the province staff prepare plans and direct security operations by the territorial forces and associated support within the province.

The province chief exercised authority through district chiefs, and the province senior adviser supervised district senior advisers, each of whom had a staff of about eight members (the actual size depending on the particular situation in a district). District-level advisory teams helped the district chief with civil-military aspects of the pacification and rural development programs. Also, the district team (and/or assigned mobile assistance training teams) advised and trained the RF/PF located in the district. All members of the province team were advisers; they worked closely with the province chief and his staff, providing advice and assistance, and coordinating U.S. support.

**CORDS Gains Muscle.** Sheer numbers, made possible by the military's involvement, made CORDS more effective than earlier pacification efforts. In early 1966, about 1,000 U.S. advisers were involved in pacification; by September 1969—the high point of the pacification effort in terms of total manpower—7,601 advisers were assigned to province and district pacification teams. Of those, 6,464 were military, and 95 percent of those came from the Army.<sup>25</sup>

CORDS' ability to bring manpower, money, and supplies to the countryside where they were needed was impressive. Some statistics illustrate the point: between 1966 and 1970, money spent on pacification and economic programs rose from \$582 million to \$1.5 billion. Advice and aid to the South Vietnamese National Police allowed

total police paramilitary strength to climb from 60,000 in 1967 to more than 120,000 in 1971. Aid to the RF/PF grew from a paltry \$300,000 per year in 1966 to over \$1.5 million annually by 1971, enabling total strength to increase by more than 50 percent. By 1971, total territorial militia strength was around 500,000—about 50 percent of overall South Vietnamese military strength. Advisory numbers increased correspondingly: in 1967, there were 108 U.S. advisers attached to the militia; in 1969, there were 2,243.<sup>26</sup> The enemy saw this buildup as a serious threat to his control in the countryside, and Communist sources consistently cited the need to attack as central to their strategy.<sup>27</sup>

What effect did all of this have on the security situation? Numbers alone do not make for successful pacification, but they are a big step in the right direction. By placing so much manpower in the villages, the allies were able to confront the guerrillas consistently, resulting in significant gains by 1970. Although pacification statistics are complicated and often misleading, they do indicate that CORDS affected the insurgency. For example, by early 1970, 93 percent of South Vietnamese lived in "relatively secure" villages, an increase of almost 20 percent from the middle of 1968, the year marred by the Tet Offensive.<sup>28</sup>

### ***The Phoenix Program***

Within CORDS were scores of programs designed to enhance South Vietnamese influence in the countryside, but security remained paramount. At the root of pacification's success or failure was its ability to counter the insurgents' grip on the population. Military operations were designed to keep enemy main forces and guerrillas as far from the population as possible, but the Communist presence in the villages was more than just military. Cadre running the Viet Cong infrastructure (VCI) sought to form a Communist shadow government to supplant the Saigon regime's influence.

In 1960, when Hanoi had formed the Viet Cong movement (formally known as the National Liberation Front), the VCI cadre was its most important component. Cadre were the building blocks of the revolution, the mechanism

by which the Communists spread their presence throughout South Vietnam. Cadre did not wear uniforms, yet they were as crucial to the armed struggle as any AK-toting guerrilla. The cadre spread the VCI from the regional level down to almost every village and hamlet in South Vietnam. A preferred tactic was to kill local government officials as a warning for others not to come back.

Indeed, the VC's early success was due to the VCI cadre, which by 1967 numbered somewhere between 70,000 and 100,000 throughout South Vietnam. The VCI was a simple organization. Virtually every village had a cell made up of a Communist Party secretary; a finance and supply unit; and information and culture, social welfare, and proselytizing sections to gain recruits from among the civilian population. They answered up a chain of command, with village cadre answering to the district, then to the province, and finally to a series of regional commands which, in turn, took orders from Hanoi.

The Communists consolidated their influence in the countryside by using a carrot-and-stick approach. The VCI provided medical treatment, education, and justice—along with heavy doses of propaganda—backed by threats from VC guerrillas. The VC waged an effective terror campaign aimed at selected village officials and authority figures to convince fence-sitters that support for the revolution was the best course. In short, the VCI was the Communist alternative to the Saigon government.

The South Vietnamese Government, on the other hand, was rarely able to keep such a presence in the villages, and when they could, the lack of a permanent armed force at that level meant that officials were usually limited to daytime visits only. Unfortunately, in the earliest days of the insurgency (1960 to 1963), when the infrastructure was most vulnerable, neither the South Vietnamese nor their American advisers understood the VCI's importance. They concentrated on fighting the guerrillas who, ironically, grew stronger because of the freedom they gained through the VCI's strength and influence.

The VCI was nothing less than a second center of gravity. By 1965, when the United States intervened in South Vietnam with ground troops,

Communist strength had grown exponentially, forcing Westmoreland to deal with the main force threat first and making pacification secondary.

The U.S. did not completely ignore the VCI. As early as 1964, the CIA used counterterror teams to seek out and destroy cadre hiding in villages. But the CIA had only a few dozen Americans devoted to the task, far too few to have much effect on tens of thousands of VCI. The advent of CORDS changed that, and anti-infrastructure operations began to evolve. In July 1967, the Intelligence Coordination and Exploitation Program (ICEX) was created. It was basically a clearinghouse for information on the VCI, information that was then disseminated to district advisers.<sup>29</sup> Unfortunately, given the lack of anti-VCI operations during the first three years of the war, little intelligence was available at the start. A few organizations, such as the RF/PF, actually lived in the villages and gathered information, but their main task was security, not intelligence gathering.

**Phoenix rising.** In December 1967, ICEX was given new emphasis and renamed Phoenix. The South Vietnamese side was called Phung Hoang, after a mythical bird that appeared as a sign of prosperity and luck. CORDS made Phoenix a high priority and within weeks expanded intelligence centers in most of South Vietnam's provinces.

At this stage, the most important part of Phoenix was numbers. CORDS expanded the U.S. advisory effort across the board, and the Phoenix program benefited. Within months, all 44 provinces and most of the districts had American Phoenix advisers. This proved vital to the effort. Only by maintaining a constant presence in the countryside—in other words, by mirroring the insurgents—could the government hope to wage an effective counterinsurgency. By 1970, there were 704 U.S. Phoenix advisers throughout South Vietnam.<sup>30</sup>

For the Phoenix program—as with most other things during the war—the Tet Offensive proved pivotal. The entire pacification program went on hold as the allies fought to keep the Communists from taking entire cities. If there was any doubt

before, Tet showed just how crucial the VCI was to the insurgency, for it was the covert cadres who paved the way for the guerrillas and ensured that supplies and replacements were available to sustain the offensive. On the other hand, the failure of the attacks exposed the VCI and made it vulnerable. As a result, anti-infrastructure operations became one of the most important aspects of the pacification program.

In July 1968, after the enemy offensive had spent most of its fury, the allies launched the Accelerated Pacification Campaign (APC), which devoted new resources to pacification in an attempt to capitalize on post-Tet Communist weakness. While enemy main forces and guerrillas licked their wounds, they were less able to hinder pacification in the villages.

Under the APC, Phoenix emphasized four aspects in its attack on the VCI:

- ◆ Decentralization of the old ICEX command and control (C2) apparatus by placing most of the responsibility on the provinces and districts. This included building intelligence-gathering and interrogation centers (called district intelligence and operations coordinating centers, or DIOCCs) in the regions where the VCI operated.

- ◆ Establishment of files and dossiers on suspects, and placing of emphasis on “neutralizing” (capturing, converting, or killing) members of the VCI.

- ◆ Institution of rules by which suspected VCI could be tried and imprisoned.

- ◆ Emphasis on local militia and police rather than the military as the main operational arm of the program.<sup>31</sup>

This last aspect was crucial. While military forces could be used to attack the VCI, they had other pressing responsibilities, and anti-infrastructure operations would always be on the back burner. So the program concentrated on existing forces that could be tailored to seek out the VCI, the most important of these being the RF/PF militia, the National Police, and Provincial Reconnaissance Units (PRU).

Recruited locally, the RF/PF were ideally suited to anti-VCI operations because they lived in the villages. In addition to providing security against marauding VC guerrillas, the RF/PF react-

ed to intelligence sent from the DIOCC. The National Police had two units specially tailored to VCI operations: the intelligence-gathering Police Special Branch and the paramilitary National Police Field Force. For the most part, however, the police did not perform well, although there were exceptions. PRUs, which were recruited and trained by the CIA, were the best action arm available to Phoenix. However, as was generally the problem with CIA assets, PRUs were not numerous enough to deal effectively with the VCI. Never numbering more than 4,000 men nationwide, the PRU also had other paramilitary tasks to perform and so were not always available.<sup>32</sup>

**DIOCCs.** The district was the program's basic building block, and the DIOCC was its nerve center. Each DIOCC was led by a Vietnamese Phung Hoang chief, aided by an American Phoenix adviser. The adviser had no authority to order operations; he could only advise and call on U.S. military support. The DIOCC was answerable to the Vietnamese district chief, who in turn reported to the province chief. DIOCC personnel compiled intelligence on VCI in their district and made blacklists with data on VCI members. If possible, the DIOCC sought out a suspect's location and planned an operation to capture him (or her). Once captured, the VCI was taken to the DIOCC and interrogated, then sent to the province headquarters for further interrogation and trial.<sup>33</sup>

Because Phoenix was decentralized, the programs differed from district to district, and some worked better than others. Many DIOCCs did little work, taking months to establish even the most basic blacklists. In many cases, the Phung Hoang chief was an incompetent bureaucrat who used his position to enrich himself. Phoenix tried to address this problem by establishing monthly neutralization quotas, but these often led to fabrications or, worse, false arrests. In some cases, district officials accepted bribes from the VC to release certain suspects. Some districts released as many as 60 percent of VCI suspects.<sup>34</sup>

### ***Misconceptions about Phoenix***

The picture of Phoenix that emerges is not of