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# **“Para Unificar La Accion” The Honduran Armed Forces Command and General Staff School**

**By**

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The Honduran Armed Forces existed for many years as an armed force without a true professional development system; aside from the Francisco Morazán Military Academy (founded in 1831 and named for the Founding Father of Central American independence), continued officer education involved primarily branch-related technical courses until the late 1960s, and the reverses suffered by Honduras in the so-called “Soccer War” of 1969 against El Salvador. From then until 1981, the task of training Honduran officers for command and staff assignments at the battalion and higher level fell to military academies in other nations: while many senior leaders of this Central American ally attended training at the U.S. Army School of the Americas, others studied at institutions throughout Latin America and as far away as Italy and the Republic of China. The costs of maintaining such a system and the desire to expand the availability of higher level professional military education argued strongly in favor of a better solution.

In response, the Honduran Armed Forces Command and General Staff School inaugurated its first class in 1981, and has since graduated ten regular courses and one course specially designed for technical service officers. Staffed with a predominantly Army faculty of some 16 officers, the School offers an eighteen month long course of study accomplishing two principal objectives: first, preparation for military tasks through the brigade level (the highest maneuver element in the Armed Forces) and on the nation’s Joint Staff; and second, continuation of civil education, resulting from the absence of a requirement for a university degree for a commission. Through an agreement with the Autonomous National University of Honduras, fully 25 percent of the program of instruction is dedicated to civil courses taught by the University’s faculty, for which graduates of the course are recognized with a Management Diploma. The remainder reads much like the American program of study: personnel administration and logistics, tactics and operations, and strategic studies.

Each course begins with around 45 majors or lieutenant commanders representing all military services. Previously, officers of the national police force also attended the Command and General Staff School with their military counterparts. However, in an important step toward establishing civilian control over the police, the Superior Institute for Police Studies opened in January of this year, providing police officers with a curriculum devoted exclusively to justice and law enforcement. In addition to Honduran officers, allied nations have maintained their presence among the student body, with the Republic of China traditionally sending an officer to each course. Officers from Guatemala have also continued their professional development here.

Since its inception, the School has included an American officer among the staff; to date, six officers have served as the “Gringo in Residence.” Because of his experience with units at the division and higher levels, the U.S. Military Exchange Officer (MEO) normally presents instruction regarding the organization and tactical employment of units above brigade level. While those echelons are not found in the Honduran military organization, students require a basic understanding of divisions, corps, and joint task forces to better integrate with American

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or other allied units during combined exercises and operations. Additionally, the MEO presents courses in ethics and leadership, human rights protection, the employment of civil affairs, and an introductory course of English, geared toward improved student comprehension of the language in a military environment. During the past two years, the MEO coordinated for civil affairs seminars to be presented at the school by specialists representing the 96th Civil Affairs Battalion and the U.S. Army Reserve's 361st Civil Affairs Brigade, providing superb instruction for the class in a topic of great relevance. In July, 1995, the foreign presence among the instructors increased as an officer from Brazil joined the School faculty, requiring students to now study classes in "Portuñol" in addition to the American officer's "Spanglish."

With the changes in the world order since the end of the Cold War, the School's curriculum has undergone substantial adjustments. Receiving far greater emphasis now are multinational and peace operations. Many changes have been prompted by the ongoing operations Honduras conducts as a member of the UN Mission to the Western Sahara, as well as such hemispheric missions as their recent participation in peacekeeping operations in Haiti. Internal defense and development instruction continues to find prominence in the curriculum as well, due in large part to the important work accomplished by the Armed Forces in rural development and efforts to protect the environment within the republic's frontiers, both of which are major peacetime missions. Periodic field and command post exercises provide opportunities for students to apply the theories and practices discussed in class in realistic settings. This year, the class enjoyed the opportunity to integrate into the staff of a multinational peacekeeping exercise sponsored by the U.S. Southern Command at Soto Cano Air Base, Honduras, also the home of USSOUTHCOM's Joint Task Force Bravo.

An annual event among the staff officers is the orientation visit to the United States under the provisions of the Secretary of the Army's Latin American Cooperation Fund, one of several programs which sponsor military-to-military contacts. Each year, the MEO plans a visit to a U.S. unit for the professional exchange of ideas on topics of current relevance. Participants usually include an instructor from the School, a senior officer from the Honduran Army staff, and the MEO as escort and Class A Agent. As examples, the 1995 visit to Headquarters, U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command, and to the 10th Mountain Division to discuss peace operations helped the Commanding General of the Honduran Army better prepare training for the Honduran contingent deploying for the Haiti mission. The visit this year provided the new Army Chief of Civil Affairs the opportunity to talk with American officers and NCOs who were veterans of civil affairs operations in Haiti, Somalia, Saudi Arabia, and Bosnia. Such trips generally result in healthy translation requirements for the MEO: a copy of FM 100-23, Peace Operations, was translated following the trip in 1995, as well as a large packet of information pertaining to Haiti and the Creole language spoken there. American Embassy support is vital to success in the MEO's mission accomplishment, and the cooperation is superb. Guest speakers from the Embassy in recent years have included the Consul General and the Economic and Political Attaches, each discussing themes related to regional strategy. During the Crisis Management Exercise conducted in collaboration with the Honduran government, the Press Attache's superlative talks on press relations and information management have become almost an institution, eagerly anticipated by each class. Such assistance by the official American community supports not only the specific subject under discussion, but underscores the importance of civil-military cooperation for the common good, a key point of instruction.

The MEO supplements formal instruction and field exercises at the School with selected civic activities to underscore and fortify the spirit of democracy among the students and faculty. While somewhat limited in scope (the MEO receives no representational funds and must cover these expenses out of pocket), annual celebrations of George Washington's Birthday, Veterans' Day, and Independence Day provide superb occasions to drive home the

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lessons of democracy: civilian control of the military, service to the Nation rather than oneself, and the constant need for members of the Armed Forces to review the ideals upon which free nations are built. These observances normally include representation from the U.S. Military Group as well, allowing interaction between senior American leadership and Hondurans in a social setting.

Perhaps the School's greatest professional challenge is the development of doctrine for the Armed Forces. The myriad of doctrinal works, representing not only American field manuals translated into Spanish but texts from other Latin American and European countries, tends to provide a mosaic of techniques rather than a unified statement of military procedures. This year, the School's Department of Doctrine (to which both foreign officers are assigned) undertook the preparation of the first Operations Manual adapted to conform to the realities of the Honduran Armed Forces. This effort, spearheaded by the MEO, will lay the groundwork for later references and establish the precedent of joint doctrine development within this center of higher military studies, enabling the School to fulfill the mandate stated its motto: "To Unify the Action."