

Military Campaigns in Chile

From the Nineteenth Century to the Present

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SINCE time immemorial, the world's armies have had to maintain their operational capacity to be sufficiently prepared to face a potential crisis and war. For this reason, training of military forces must simulate as accurately as possible, the demands of a real war.

This preparation, called "military campaign," is defined in the dictionary of the Spanish Royal Academy as the departure of troops from their quarters each year for a training period for war operations.

Consequently, the Chilean Military Academy, since its founding in March 1817, has had to comply strictly with the military protocol—to maintain an efficient preparation for all contingencies. The process of instruction and campaigning for much of the nineteenth century was interrupted by political difficulties, as well as administrative and economic problems. These situations forced the academy to temporarily close on four occasions. Two wars Chile had to fight against Peru and Bolivia and internal revolutions also compelled the academy to close. During these periods, the academy was unable to meet the requirement to train cadets in ground warfare simulation.

In this respect, 1886 was a pivotal year. Beginning in that year and continuing well into the twentieth century, military training and campaign activities, formerly under the tutelage of French military advisers, were drastically changed in favor of the Prussian doctrine. A score of German instructors, under the direction of Lt. Col. Emilio Korner-Henze, came to Chile. The following year, a six hours per week study were devoted to the curriculum of the fourth year of school under the name "Surveying Course No. 23, recognition and topographical drawing, including the practice on the ground."

At the beginning of the twentieth century, conditions become more stable for the Army, so it was possible to initiate

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FIG 1. Cadets in training pass across the Rio Bueno in the final campaign of instruction in 1909. Note the German influence on the uniforms and accouterments. Military Geographic Institute, Military School 190-year History: 1817–2007.

a process of continual development of the cadets and in this sense, the academy began planning new processes to improve the combat readiness or preparation for war of its students. Land near Santiago, the capital of Chile, was set aside for this purpose.

In connection with the preparation, the academy introduced a three-seasons-per-year program. The first was basically training the freshmen cadets at mid-year, a campaign in winter, and finally, at the end of the school year, in more distant lands from Santiago.

In this sense, the most memorable campaign in memory, was to the top of the Andes—to the Christ the Redeemer. The cadets walked nearly five hundred miles, beginning at the academy and ending the march in the coastal city of Viña del Mar.

Since 1930, experiences learned from World War I were instrumental in modernizing military combat techniques. Given that conflict with her northern neighbors was possible, it was considered essential preparations be undertaken in desert areas. Consequently, training for future officers of arms belonging to the infantry and cavalry were moved to the city of Antofagasta and the town of Baquedano, while the artillery trained in the city of San Javier.

In the decade of the 1950s and having received and refined the lessons learned from World War II, a modernization of the curriculum began, with it the arrival of war material from the United States. Indoctrination and experience in handling heavy weapons began on land belonging to the Military Geographic Institute located outside of Santiago in a mountainous area known as La Dehesa.

The training exercises of the 1960s, particularly the end of the year, were used as a complement to the activities of public relations, especially in cities that were of importance in the Alcázar. The success of these appearances ultimately led to a diffusion process. Every city where the cadets arrived as part of their war games began with parades and a thorough review of gymnastics. Sports competitions were organized with students in provincial schools. The visits concluded with social activity including the young ladies of the region. Thus the academy was present in the provinces of Temuco, Valdivia, Osorno, Puerto Varas, Puerto Montt, Castro on the island of Chiloe in the south and La Serena, Copiapo, Antofagasta, Iquique, and Arica in the north.

Since the mid-1970s to the present, the first training campaign each year takes place in the coastal town of Pichicuy in Region IV. Here, the combat training for all students takes place without distinction of course or specialty. But what has changed since 1993, is the resumption of the old tradition of



FIG 2. Another view of the river crossing. Military Geographic Institute, Military School 190-year History: 1817–2007.

traveling to distant provinces of Chile, either south or north, giving priority of choice to the older students—those who are close to graduation as an officer and, who during the month of September (immediately after the Grand Military Parade in Santiago), embark upon a two-week journey of curriculum and instruction to the United States.



FIG 3. Cadets march in a mock battle in the campaign of 1909. Military Geographic Institute, Military School 190-year History: 1817–2007.

FIG 4. Cadets work on an early twentieth century bridge-building exercise. Armed Forces of Chile, Historical Album, (Athens Publishing Company, 1928).

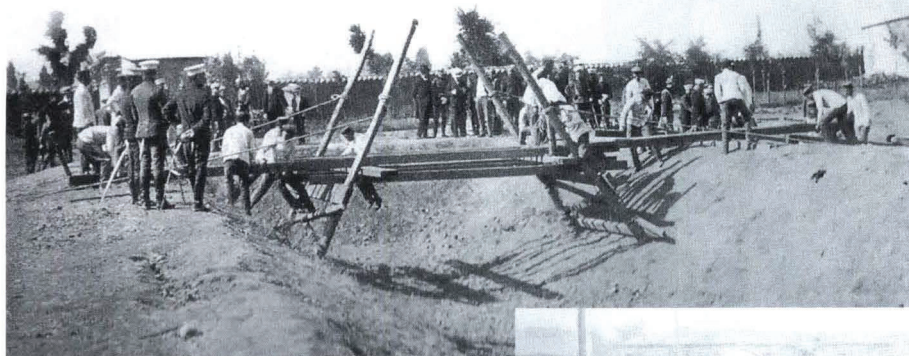


FIG 5. Third-year students in the construction of defensive trenches. 1902. Armed Forces of Chile, Historical Album, (Athens Publishing Company, 1928).



FIG 6 (above). Military Academy training march of 1928 en route to the Christ Redeemer Monument located on the Chilean-Argentinean border. Military Geographic Institute, Military School 190-year History: 1817–2007.



FIG 7. A section of cadet infantry in a mock attack during the initial campaign of 1959, La Dehesa sector, Santiago, Chile. Armed Forces of Chile, Historical Album, (Athens Publishing Company, 1928).



FIG 8. Cadets in a march during the final campaign of 1959, La Dehesa sector, Santiago, Chile. Military Geographic Institute, Military School 190-year History: 1817–2007.



FIG 9. Instruction period meal. A group of cadets at lunch during a combat exercise in 1959, La Dehesa sector, Santiago. Military Geographic Institute, Military School 190-year History: 1817–2007.



FIG 10. Planning the training exercise. Military Academy infantry campaign, Pichicuy, Region IV, 1983. Military Geographic Institute, Military School 190-year History: 1817–2007.



FIG 11. Chilean cadet in full field gear. Military Academy infantry campaign Pichicuy, Region IV, 1993. Courtesy the author.