Conscript Nation:
Negotiating Authority and Belonging in the Bolivian Barracks, 1900-1950

by

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Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Department of History in the Graduate School of Duke University

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ABSTRACT

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Abstract

This dissertation examines the trajectory of military conscription in Bolivia from Liberals’ imposition of this obligation after coming to power in 1899 to the eve of revolution in 1952. Conscription is an ideal fulcrum for understanding the changing balance between state and society because it was central to their relationship during this period. The lens of military service thus alters our understandings of methods of rule, practices of authority, and ideas about citizenship in and belonging to the Bolivian nation. In eliminating the possibility of purchasing replacements and exemptions for tribute-paying Indians, Liberals brought into the barracks both literate men who were formal citizens and the non-citizens who made up the vast majority of the population. This study thus grapples with the complexities generated by an institution that bridged the overarching and linked divides of profession, language, literacy, indigency, and urbanity.

Venturing inside the barracks, this dissertation shows how experiences of labor, military routines, punishment, teasing, and drinking led to a situation in which many conscripts became increasingly invested in military service, negotiated its terms, and built ties that transcended local power structures. In addition to examining desertion, insubordination, and mutinies, it provides an explanation of the new legal categories created by military service, such as reservist, omiso, remiso, and deserter. It then points to the 1932-1935 Chaco War and its aftermath as the period when conscription became a major force in tying an unequal nation together. The mass mobilization necessitated by the war redefined the meaning and terms of conscription, even as the state resorted to forcible mass impressment throughout the national territory while simultaneously negotiating with various interest
groups. A postwar process of reckoning initiated by the state, combined with mobilization from below by those who served, added a new hierarchy of military service that overlaid and sometimes even trumped long-standing hierarchies based on education, language, profession, and heritage.

This study thus explores conscription as a terrain on which Bolivians from across divides converged and negotiated their relationships with each other and with the state. The unique strength of this work lies in its use of unpublished internal military documents, especially court-martial records. These sources are further enriched by extensive use of congressional debates, official correspondence, reports of foreign military attachés, memoirs, and published oral histories. Through an analysis of these sources, this dissertation reveals not only elites’ visions of using the barracks to assimilate a diverse population but also the ways that soldiers and their families came to appropriate military service and invest it with new meanings on a personal, familial, communal, and national level. In the process, a conscript nation would eventually emerge that, while still hierarchical and divided by profound differences, was not merely a project of an assimilationist state but rather constructed in a dialectical process from both above and below.
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The research for this project began when I first approached the imposing gates of La Paz’s *Estado Mayor* in 2008, almost a decade after a semester abroad in southern Chile had brought me to Bolivia as a backpacker eager to explore the Potosí mines, Lake Titicaca, and Uyuni’s *salar*. Although I had dreaded Spanish class in high school, gifted language professors like Janice Jaffe and Enrique Yepes at Bowdoin College had introduced me to a world of literature that motivated me not only to master the subjunctive tense but also to explore Latin America. Also at Bowdoin, Allen Wells and Matt Lassiter offered a model of dedicated teaching and engaged scholarship that inspired me in my first encounter with the methods of historical inquiry.

After two years teaching the children of Guatemala’s elite, I entered graduate school at Duke in 2005 deeply interested in indigeneity. Courses with Pete Sigal, Orin Starn, Diane Nelson, John French, Jocelyn Olcott, and Kathryn Burns served to complicate my understandings of identification and difference and deepened my questions about how local politics and power relations articulate with broader structures. In the Triangle, I found a thriving group of Latin Americanist and Caribbeanist graduate students who provided an unparalleled intellectual community and support network. I have learned much from our exchanges during coursework, conferences, and working groups, as well as from reading one another’s work in a variety of settings. I can look forward to a career of continued exchanges with Bryan Pitts, Katharine French-Fuller, Jeffrey Richey, Reena Goldthree, Kristin Wintersteen, Ivonne Wallace-Fuentes, Alejandro Velasco, Julia Gaffield, Erin Parish, Caroline Garriott, David Romine, and Corinna Zeltsman.
Several months after I started graduate school, my attention was drawn to Bolivia by the excitement and hope generated by the election of Evo Morales. When an initial research project on the 1945 Indigenous Congress brought me back to Bolivia in 2006, I had the good fortune to meet historian Waskar Ari. Ever since our first meeting for coffee in Sopacachi blossomed into a friendship, I’ve had the honor of counting him as a mentor and collaborator. I have benefitted immensely from my engagement with his work and have deeply appreciated his reactions to my own. His ongoing advice and assistance on research, introductions, housing, and linguistic and cultural translations have been invaluable.

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countries – no easy task. He has been a constant since the first months of graduate school and has made sure that I never took myself too seriously. I cannot imagine this journey, especially the last few weeks of it, without him.
Introduction

“Bullets rained over us like grain” and “rivers of blood flowed” when the army broke the 1942 miners’ strike at Catavi, remembered Basilia during an interview with anthropologist June Nash in 1970. Born in 1912, this monolingual Quechua speaker had worked in the mines as a *palliri*, scavenging tailings, since the age of sixteen.¹ Nash recorded Basilia’s memories of this quintessential episode almost thirty years after the fact, in the midst of a series of military dictatorships in which the generals who occupied the presidential palace regularly sent the army to quell popular unrest. Despite her frank recognition of the military repression that had killed at least thirty-five mineworkers, Basilia declared her patriotic willingness to serve in those same armed forces. She imagined herself appealing directly to the president for a pension: “I wanted to enter into service to defend the country against Paraguay, Mr. President.” Alluding to the Bolivian defeat in the Chaco War (1932-1935), this fifty-eight-year-old woman described how “the young men from all the towns had to go into service, all the innocents from the countryside” as well. Yet because “there was no military service for women,” she could not participate in this rite of citizenship. Not having a son she could send to the army, Basilia concluded that she “should have gone into military service with the young men…. Perhaps it is for this that I have suffered,” she mused; perhaps “for this reason, I did not have rights.” To explain her marginalized status, she mobilized a discourse that linked military service and rights. She felt denied both because

¹ *Palliris* are women workers that pick through the slag pile by hand, looking for tin to salvage from the tailings.
“God did not want to give me a son to defend the country.”

Basilia’s narrative thus points to two separate but necessarily entwined aspects of the military’s role in the history of twentieth-century Bolivia. The first – the institution’s participation in dictatorship, war, and repression – is highly visible and well documented. It has, therefore, overshadowed the importance of the second aspect suggested by Basilia: the gradual establishment of obligatory military service as a rite of belonging in the Bolivian nation and as a powerful tool for claims-making. Yet, as Basilia notes, this process created gendered exclusions, as it was accessible only to those that became “real men” by surviving in the barracks or that provided sons to fill the ranks.

The agonizing experience of mass mobilization for the Chaco War, which had made such an impression on the young Basilia, was the first test of the conscription system established by Liberals twenty-five years earlier as part of efforts to professionalize the national army and modernize the nation while subordinating the indigenous allies who had supported them in the 1898-1899 civil war. Citing the concurrent goals of national unification and defense, Liberals instituted obligatory military service and annulled exemptions for tribute-paying Indians, declaring that Bolivia would be “great, strong, and invincible” only when she could see “a soldier in each of her sons” who would know “how to die for the patria [nation].”

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2 June C. Nash and Manuel María Rocca, Dos mujeres indígenas (Mexico: Instituto Indigenista Interamericano, 1976), 41-42. All translations are my own unless otherwise noted.


In the Bolivian and Latin American historiography, patria is often translated as “fatherland.” Following Brian Loveman, however, I choose not to translate the term, which comes from the root for father but is gendered female. See Brian Loveman, For la Patria: Politics and the Armed Forces in Latin America (Wilmington: SR Books, 1999), xviii.
Although the practice of reporting for military service spread and took root in certain areas during the 1910s and 1920s, the conscription system did not reach into the vast majority of households until the Chaco War. Combined with long supply chains, the Bolivian high command’s indecisiveness, strategic ineptitude, and personal squabbles pushed the military institution past its breaking point, leaving soldiers to die in pointless frontal assaults or from hunger, thirst, and disease. Oft-told anecdotes of deprivation, suffering, and desertion depict an incompetent army that could neither effectively deploy its men nor force them to remain in the ranks through surveillance or coercive power, much less loyalty to the nation. Despite these failures, the Chaco War represents a watershed for conscription, which increased exponentially over the next decade. The massive number of veterans and war dead meant that state agents were not the only ones invested in the postwar process of reckoning during which those who avoided service or deserted from the ranks regularized their military status. Veterans and non-veterans increasingly sent their sons to the barracks and invoked their service to make demands on the state.

The postwar period brought widespread radicalization and a series of left- and right-leaning military administrations, under which the standing army of five thousand grew steadily to as many as twenty-thousand conscripts per year. The alternation between reformist and reactionary regimes paved the way for a far-ranging revolution in 1952 that nationalized the largest mines, drastically expanded suffrage, and decreed agrarian reform. The new administration of the Revolutionary Nationalist Movement (MNR) initially

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considered abolishing the conscript army in favor of miner and peasant militias but eventually elected to eliminate the military’s political potential by drastically cutting troop levels and discharging or exiling at least a hundred opposition officers. However, the institution slowly regained a prominent role as Bolivia’s new leaders faced factionalism, economic problems, and labor unrest, increasingly relying on US aid to keep the government afloat.

By the 1964 elections, the leader of the 1952 Revolution shared the ticket with an Air Force general who overthrew him three months later. With only brief interruptions, military officers on both the right and left of the political spectrum would occupy the presidential palace for the next eighteen years. The shadow of military dictatorship thus looms large in contemporary depictions of Bolivia. Scholarly works, encyclopedias, travel guides, and even The Guinness Book of World Records cite numbers as wildly divergent as 157 and 200 in counting the number of coups the country has experienced since independence.

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factoid serves as a pithy way to signal the country’s instability (or perhaps ungovernability) and reinforces assumptions about the military.

My work, on the other hand, demonstrates that an overwhelming focus on violence and oppression has obscured the multivalent effects of military service. This dissertation details soldiers’ often-contradictory experiences of conscription alongside the coercive mechanisms set up by various governments to bring men into the barracks and deploy them on the battlefields of the Chaco. In so doing, it helps explain how Bolivia became a conscript nation and why so many young men might participate and become invested in obligatory military service, which would appear to be the spearhead of an assimilationist and oppressive state.

Yet even the few existing biographies of indigenous and labor activists hint at the complexities associated with the form of obligatory military service that emerged after the Chaco War. In his 1995 autobiography, Luciano Tapia Quisbert, who founded the Tupac Katari Indian Movement in 1972, condemned the military as practicing “acculturation, colonialism, and racist mistreatment” yet also portrayed his time in the barracks as transformative: As a conscript in 1940, he learned to write, gained leadership skills, mediated between officers and non-Spanish-speaking conscripts, and obtained the paperwork that

“accredited [him] as a Bolivian citizen.” Similarly, in elaborating his life history as part of a collaborative process with US scholars between 2006 and 2008, mining labor leader Félix Muruchi Poma judged that the “pressure to prove our manhood through military service was so strong that it overcame the hatred that miners and peasants had against the armed forces” in the mid-1960s. He recalls joining a “tremendous line that snaked more than three blocks around the base” on enlistment day; some men “had even slept on the sidewalk” to ensure their inclusion in the ranks. After being turned away because of his youth, Muruchi spent the equivalent of two days’ wages on bribes for a new birth certificate. This activist retrospectively explains military service as a “rite of passage” that he wanted to fulfill out of a “sense of camaraderie,” in order to “participate fully in fiestas,” to be able to marry, and to obtain the army discharge papers without which “everything was more difficult.”

The military-service booklet (see Figure 1) to which Muruchi and Tapia refer served to document a man’s completion of military service or legitimate exemption and was, at least officially, required to vote, conduct transactions with the state, and even obtain employment in the formal sector. Containing data on each conscript’s name, parents’ names, date and place of birth, profession, address, level of education, skin color, and distinguishing features, it was part of a state legibility project to collect information about the population and initiate

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10 Minister of War J.M. Ramírez to Prefect of La Paz #103, August 9, 1920, Prefecture-Admin box 148, Archivo de La Paz, La Paz, Bolivia (hereafter cited as ALP).
residents into a documentary regime. Muruchi and Tapia’s narratives point to the connections between the exercise of citizenship in the Bolivian nation and these documents, which came into widespread use and gained singular importance as part of the process of postwar reckoning.

![Military Service Booklet, 1927](image)

**Figure 1: Military Service Booklet, 1927**
Source: DES-16-013, AHM-TPJM

However, despite the liberal rhetoric of universality and equality that surrounded obligatory military service, Bolivia did not consider the majority of even its conscripts as rights-bearing citizens prior to 1952. In fact, the 1880 Constitution, which was in effect until 1938, defined citizenship as the right to vote and be elected and restricted it based on sex, education, ownership of assets, and not being engaged in domestic service. The 1938 and 1945 Constitutions removed property requirements and the domestic-service clause but

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retained provisions regarding literacy and sex, limiting the electorate so severely that only three percent of the population voted in the 1940 elections. The vast majority of men subject to obligatory military service in the early and mid-twentieth century would thus be non-citizen conscripts, at least under the strict measure of participating in politics through suffrage. However, as historian Laura Gotkowitz has pointed out, the discursive use of the term “citizen” was far less rigid, being loosely employed by indigenous petitioners, politicians, and even state authorities to refer to a general sense of patriotism, rights, and residency that applied far beyond the limited pool of voters. Looking at how conscripts and their families maneuvered within the gap between the meanings of “citizen” indicates that although military service alone could not lead to formal citizenship, it certainly helped legitimize claims on state power and services, as chapter 5 discusses in detail.

Because this dissertation is concerned with both formal citizenship rights and this less rigid meaning of “citizen,” I employ the term “belonging” to describe the latter. It was a sense of belonging to the Bolivian nation that military service would ostensibly instill in conscripts, who swore an oath on Independence Day to sacrifice all for the patria. The testimony and petitions of conscripts, both indigenous and non, shows how the space of the barracks generated the conditions to produce new notions of belonging, as conscripts forged

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bonds with each other, however unequal, that sometimes crossed lines of race and social class. Yet belonging was multiple and variable. Some developed a sense of belonging to a particular group of comrades, to a particular officer, or to the company or regiment to which they were assigned. In some cases, these belongings might have translated into a more abstract sense of national identity and patriotism. More importantly, however, men like Tapia and Muruchi learned the idioms with which to express this sense of national identity and patriotism in order to make claims effectively on the state.

This dissertation thus focuses on the daily interactions between the military and society, including both the literate minority of conscripts whose experiences dominate military records from the 1910s and 1920s and members of Bolivia’s popular classes, who, like Tapia, Muruchi, and Basilia, lived in urban areas, mining communities, and the countryside and occupied the many categories between white and indigenous. These categories were not, however, recognized by the state, which used a binary system to classify sixty-three percent of the population as indigenous in the 1950 census.\textsuperscript{14} Racial and ethnic categories in Bolivia can seem as etched in stone as the Andes themselves and certainly carry immense social import; however, individual classification is fluid and situational, based on shifting socio-cultural markers such as dress, hairstyle, language, diet, surname, schooling,

\textsuperscript{14} Asthenio Averanga Mollinedo, \textit{Aspectos generales de la población boliviana} (La Paz: Editorial Argote, 1956), 87. Employing more specific categories, the 1900 census classified 13% of the population as “white,” 27% as “mestizo,” 51% as “Indian,” less than 1% as “black,” and 9% as “not specified.” Oficina Nacional de Inmigración Estadística y Propaganda Geográfica, \textit{Censo general de la población de la República de Bolivia según el empadronamiento de 10. de septiembre de 1900}, vol. 2 (La Paz: J. M. Gamarra, 1904), 31. For the changing criteria used in the censuses, see Erwin P. Grieshaber, "Fluctuaciones en la definición del indio: Comparación de los censos de 1900 y 1950," \textit{Historia boliviana} 5, no. 1-2 (1985).
occupation, region, residence, and income. Basilia, for example, did not let being monolingual in Quechua prevent her from identifying as chola and aspiring to de vestido status for her daughters. Indians, she opined, were “horrible” and “bad people,” and she claimed to “throw rocks” at them in order to “get them to go away.”

Narrating his life history in a moment that valorized rather than deprecated indigeneity, Muruchi defined himself as part of an “indigenous mining family” from the Karacha ayllu [Andean communal grouping] of Potosí. Although he hailed from a rural community and did not speak Spanish until he started school, Muruchi self-identified as a miner and felt “shocked” upon realizing that most foreigners “saw me as an indigenous person.” Given this complex web of identifications, I look at the conscripts from across the social spectrum rather than focusing exclusively on those identified as indigenous.

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15 See, for example, Gotkowitz, A Revolution for Our Rights, 13; Waskar T. Ari, "Race and Subaltern Nationalism: AMP Activist-Intellectuals in Bolivia, 1921-1964" (Ph.D. diss., Georgetown University, 2004), v; Grieshaber, "Fluctuaciones en la definición del indio."; Aurolyn Luykx, The Citizen Factory: Schooling and Cultural Production in Bolivia (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999), xli, 25-21. Previous generations of scholars either took indigeneity as an ontological category or argued that ethnic and racial terms served to mask class relationships.

16 Nash and Rocca, Dos mujeres indígenas, 61-62.

During this period, cholo referred to the working class of artisans, mineworkers, and others that, although almost all were of indigenous descent, tended to considered themselves to be socially superior to rural Indians. The term means “hybrid” and comes from the Aymara word ch’ula. Cholos are characterized by a hybrid style of dress and speech that combines native and Spanish clothing and languages. De vestido, on the other hand, often serves as a synonym for mestizo/white. It literally means “wearing a dress” and stands in contrast to chola women who are de pollera, indicating that they wear multilayered, pleated skirts, which are usually paired with a manta [shawl] and bowler hat. For more on dress as marking women’s racial and cultural differences, see Marcia Stephenson, Gender and Modernity in Andean Bolivia (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1999); Elayne Zorn, "(Re)Fashioning the Self: Dress, Economy, and Identity Among the Sakaka of Northern Potosí," Chungara: Revista de Antropología Chilena 30, no. 2 (1998).

17 Kohl, Farthing, and Muruchi, From the Mines to the Streets, 3.

18 Kohl, Farthing, and Muruchi, From the Mines to the Streets, 138.

At least 275,000 young men passed through the barracks to complete obligatory military service between 1900 and 1950. From a situation in which only eight percent of nineteen-year-old men served and thirty percent registered for service in 1911, by mid-century, around forty-five percent were serving and over sixty-five percent registered. Despite these surprisingly high levels of participation, the enormous controversy occasioned by the military has converted conscription into a black box. The military would be powerless without soldiers to carry out orders, yet we have very little understanding of why these men presented for service, how their time in the barracks affected them, or how they have shaped the institution. Was conscription an inescapable obligation, enforced primarily through the state’s coercive power? Clearly not: As I show in chapter 1, the Bolivian state at the onset of conscription depended entirely on indirect rule through local authorities figures that made decisions based on their own loyalties and agendas. Conscription in Bolivia could not be imposed through an effective bureaucracy nor through domination; it instead depended on levels of individual and communal acceptance of the obligation by both men with formal citizenship rights and the non-citizens that made up the majority of conscripts. And, in different ways, both groups would also resist this imposition.

To understand how military service became so important in Bolivian society we need a better sense of the social, educational, and ethnic profile of soldiers and how they related

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21 Estimates calculated from age and sex tables of the 1900 and 1950 censuses, statistics of those that registered and served contained in the *Memoria del Ministro de Guerra* for 1908-1913, the estimates of army size cited above, and the military register from 1945-1950 located in the Registro Territorial, Archivo Central del Ministerio de Defensa Nacional, La Paz, Bolivia (hereafter cited as RT-MDN).
to officers and fellow conscripts. Only then will we be able to understand why Basilia, even if only rhetorically, lamented not having served and why so many young men like Luciano Tapia and Félix Muruchi queued up to enlist each year despite harrowing experiences of racism and violence and the fact that the military primarily deployed to repress internal strikes and uprisings.

My work lays out the historical trajectory of conscription in Bolivia from the rise of the Liberal party after 1899 to the eve of revolution in 1952, revealing the continuities and discontinuities in law and practice as conscription took root unevenly across the national territory. In a heterogeneous society, military service accrued different meanings depending on the social, cultural, and geographical location of conscripts. An embodied understanding of individuals’ experiences shows how military service not only reinforced but also altered social hierarchies based on education, language, profession, and heritage. I draw on a wide range of unpublished internal military documents, including correspondence, service records, and transcripts of military-justice proceedings, in order to delve into the space of the barracks and reveal the quotidian routines and rituals that structured conscripts’ lives during military service. Research that takes us inside the institution gives texture to the authoritarianism, classism, and racism that reigned in the barracks and brings to the fore the importance of the interpersonal bonds, sometimes across lines of difference, that formed through these experiences of not only survival but also work, competition, horseplay, and drinking.

To borrow Gil Joseph and Daniel Nugent’s turn of phrase, conscription in Bolivia can be seen as an everyday form of state formation, in which people from across divides of
region, social class, and ethnicity interact with a central state institution. The study of conscription reveals not only the state’s racist and oppressive visions of nation making but also conscripts’ varied sense of belonging, calling attention to their attempts to negotiate the terms of service. Despite the strict hierarchy implied by military rank, each group of conscripts, non-commissioned officers, and officers worked out a balance of power in a dynamic process characterized by coercion, contestation, and negotiation. Conscripts’ petitions and testimony suggest that their understandings of the nation and their role within it seldom resembled the version printed in the Soldier’s Catechism used for barracks’ instruction, which admonished them to “honor, respect, and glorify” the nation, defined as a group of citizens with “the same language, the same customs, and the same affinities of race.” This dissertation thus argues that obligatory military service exceeded its design as a state project to impose national unity by assimilating and disciplining a diverse population; indeed, it became deeply rooted precisely because of participation from below, as disparate social actors negotiated its meanings and shaped its implementation in ways that led many to see it as a useful and even meaningful endeavor in terms of their personal, political, and communal lives. These processes created a conscript nation that was more than simply disciplinary and assimilationist. From the Liberals who established conscription in 1907 to the MNR in 1952, successive governments convinced themselves they could use conscription to mold the masses into their respective visions for and of the nation. Yet the notions of belonging occasioned by conscription always exceeded these visions, as

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conscripts’ military culture took on a life of its own that was often surprisingly contestatory. Through military service, state actors and conscripts struggled over the production and reworking of new forms of social hierarchies.

The Bolivian Military: A Review of the Literature

Eighteen years of military rule with intermittent civilian episodes between 1964 and 1982 generated scholarship that forcefully indicts the military institution. For example, in his magisterial multi-volume history of the Bolivian labor movement published between 1968 and 1980, Trotskyist leader and intellectual Guillermo Lora consistently portrays a “massacring army” as playing “a direct role in all labor problems.”24 In other work, he condemns the institution as a “caste army” that used force to impose discipline and “absolute respect for hierarchy” on soldiers “recruited by force from among the serfs.”25 In addition to noting the institution’s armed support of the oligarchic power structure, Aymara sociologist and public intellectual Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui adds ethnic oppression to the mix. Her groundbreaking 1984 work, Oppressed but not Defeated, depicts military service as part of a national project that “sought to convert the Indian into a type of mestizo without definition or personality.”26 Although rhetorically powerful as condemnations of military regimes, these depictions of conscription convert this dynamic process into a black box, where serfs or Indians enter and class- and race-oppressing soldiers exit. If these statements were taken

25 Guillermo Lora, Causas de la inestabilidad política y de la crisis de las FF.AA. (La Paz: Ediciones Masas, 1983), 83, 89, 95.
26 Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui, Oprimidos pero no vencidos: Luchas del campesinado aymara y quechua de Bolivia, 1900-1980 (La Paz: HISBOL, CSUTCB, 1984), 133, see also 34 and 75.
literally, the institution would become the primary actor, effacing the experiences of those who entered the barracks and how they interpreted these experiences after completing obligatory military service.

Drawing on fieldwork performed during the neoliberal administrations of the 1990s, anthropologists Lesley Gill (1997, 2000) and Andrew Canessa (2005) were among the first to add significantly to our understanding of how the larger structures of class, race, and gender, especially a desire for a certain type of masculinity, contribute to young men’s contemporary decisions to enlist. Their conversations with young men point to the present-day importance of military-service booklets within communities and reveal conscription to be a conflictive experience of pride, sexual exploration, and profound racism.\(^{27}\) However, both studies are limited geographically – Gill’s to El Alto and Canessa’s to the community of Wila Kjarka (Sorata, La Paz) – and temporally to the 1990s. Gill includes a brief historical overview of conscription in order to argue that the transformation of “Indians” into “citizens” is the inheritance of the 1952 Revolution and that the militarization of Bolivian society is a Cold War legacy, produced by a collusion between successive governments and the US to “defend a status quo antithetical to the interests of the majority of Bolivian citizens.”\(^{28}\) While perhaps useful politically, this contemporary assessment lacks the historical depth needed to understand the role of conscription in men’s ideas about belonging to the Bolivian nation.

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\(^{28}\) Gill, "Creating Citizens, Making Men," quoted at 545, see also 536.
fact, far from being a product of 1952, discussions of conscription as a solution to the “Indian Problem” date back at least to the turn of the twentieth century.

In most of the historical literature on the Bolivian military, conscription is, surprisingly enough, absent from the discussion. Primarily authored by members of the officer corps, these works focus on the details of military campaigns, the actions of specific leaders, and the phenomenon of military rule. Bolivian scholars began writing histories of war and diplomacy in the aftermath of the Chaco defeat. Detailing military campaigns and diplomatic maneuvers, these works explore tactical decisions and commanders’ competence. The principal early histories are those of Julio Díaz Arguedas (1940, 1943) and Manuel Wilde Cavero (1963). Laden with patriotic rhetoric, these accounts highlight the few glories and explain the many defeats of Bolivian forces from independence to 1932 while emphasizing a nationalist claim to the coastal land lost in the War of the Pacific (1879-1883). This focus on the mechanics of warfare is also characteristic of works published by Bolivian and US scholars on the Chaco War. While these military histories are valuable for their encyclopedic qualities, they address a limited set of concerns, seeing the military in terms of battles and tactics. These works tend to treat soldiers as merely warm bodies following

29 Julio Díaz Arguedas, Historia del ejército de Bolivia, 1825-1932 (La Paz: n.p., 1940); Julio Díaz Arguedas, Faitos Militares de Bolivia (La Paz: Escuela Tipografica Salesiana, 1943); Manuel Fernando Wilde Cavero, Historia militar de Bolivia (La Paz: n.p., 1963).
orders rather than as diverse subjects of state engagement with their own identifications and agency. This lack of interest in the rank-and-file is suggested by the absence of reliable statistics on conscription, including mobilization for the Chaco War.

Several historical works did touch on the process of conscription by analyzing laws and levels of evasion but did so without broaching what occurred once men entered the barracks. The first serious academic engagement with the Bolivian military as an institution was James Dunkerley’s 1979 dissertation, which was finally published in Spanish in 1987. This pioneering work tracked elite debates over military service and covered conscription laws and some statistical data. Dunkerley’s overarching focus, however, was not on conscription or barracks life itself. His chief concern was rather to understand the institutional origins of dictatorship in the 1970s. He thus stressed that a “politics of insubordination” was a structural part of a military institution that had been perpetually strong in national politics despite, and perhaps because of, its internal ideological divisions.

The first to go beyond political-institutional history were several short works by Bolivian scholars that began to look at the military’s interactions with society. Focused on the 1910s, a chapter in Luis Oporto’s 2007 monograph argued that while youths from privileged backgrounds used legal exemptions to avoid military service, many members of the artisan class instead fled to the mines. He concluded that the burden therefore fell primarily on rural indigenous people, which, far from “Indianizing the Army…reinforced its

feudal character.” Although it did not lead him to discuss those that actually served, Oporto’s detailed research with prefectural correspondence and the 1913 Military Registry for the Llallagua mining region confirmed the inability of the central state to enforce the 1907 conscription law as written. Yet, as this dissertation shows, the institution was by no means entirely dysfunctional, even during this early period.

Based on prefectural and judicial archives, oral histories, and newspaper accounts, René Arze Aguirre’s excellent study (1987) of rural unrest during the Chaco War explores the profound upheaval caused by massive impressment in the countryside and richly supports arguments that Bolivia’s lack of national unity led to its defeat. Arze disagrees, however, with the claim that the war’s primary ideological effect was on the middle class, as suggested in general accounts of the period by historian Herbert Klein (1969) and political scientists James Malloy (1970) and Christopher Mitchell (1977). Instead, he shows that the war profoundly changed the countryside and affected social relations involving the state, large landowners [hacendados], agricultural workers, and indigenous communities. His work hints at soldiers’ broadening notions of patria from one of “community and of ayllu” to “a surge of national consciousness” provoked by contact with other ethnic and national groups at the frontline and in prisoner-of-war camps. These conclusions regarding the extraordinary experience of wartime mobilization indicate the potential rewards of studying

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34 René Danilo Arze Aguirre, Guerra y conflictos sociales: El caso rural boliviano durante la campaña del Chaco (La Paz: CERES, 1987), 131.
36 Arze Aguirre, Guerra y conflictos sociales, 80.
rank-and-file soldiers.

Also addressing the 1930s, a 1999 article by Roberto Fernández investigates officers’ ideological construction of the indigenous citizen-soldier. In the wake of the devastation of the Chaco War, he argues, junior officers felt identified with their soldiers’ suffering and sought to represent their needs, creating the stock figure of the Indian as martyr for the patria. Fernández characterizes as “paternalistic” and “ethnocentric” officers’ efforts to mold Indians into citizens, who would be conscious of “Bolivian history, geography, and civic values,” arguing that this model of incorporation relegated Indians to the “margins” of the national project. In adopting a wider frame, both in terms of sources and period, this dissertation moves beyond officers’ discourse to discuss how conscripts from diverse backgrounds experienced conscription and shows that the framing of the barracks as an educational space long predated the Chaco War.

Filling a major gap in the literature on the military, Juan Quintana Taborga’s Soldados y ciudadanos (1998) is the most comprehensive work to date on conscription. It provides a more robust historical overview that relies upon, but also goes beyond, Dunkerley by parsing out the changing legal framework of conscription. The heart of Quintana’s work, however, is the analysis of data on conscription from 1980-1995, including several surveys of troops in the tenth division (southern Potosí). Reflecting scholarly concerns of the 1990s, he focuses unrelentingly on conscription as the machinery of an oppressive ethnocentric state. He thus judges obligatory military service to be a “failure” because it perpetuated “colonial-type

38 Fernández Terán, "Transformaciones y prácticas de poder en el ejército boliviano," 59.
relations” by encouraging “passive citizenship” and teaching conscripts that indigeneity “was a worthless and stigmatizing cultural sign.”

Although not principally focused on conscription, Laura Gotkowitz’s 2007 monograph represents a major contribution to the historiography that reopens questions about indigenous belonging and citizenship. Gotkowitz explores both the acculturative goals central to modernizing projects of expanded citizenship and how the leaders of indigenous communities engaged with politics, the courts, and the law in “a revolution for our rights” (the title of her book). She emphasizes that citizenship, as invoked by politicians, meant not universal political rights and democratic equality but rather participation in a national project through labor and patriotism. Incorporation, therefore, meant neither the erasure of hierarchies nor unremitting domination. Instead Gotkowitz asks what citizenship might have meant to indigenous participants in petition drives, strikes, and rebellions. She suggests that these forms of engagement with the state, whether by individuals or groups, “were a way of demanding political rights by practicing them.”

Although it asks questions similar to Gotkowitz’s about rights, citizenship, and belonging, my work moves away from the study of indigenous activists to look at the daily interactions between the central institution of the Bolivian state and ordinary Bolivians from across lines of region, race, and social class. Internal documents produced by the state agents in the government and the military move the discussion beyond the public face of the military and the discourse about conscription to look at the internal dynamics of barracks life,

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which included punishment, labor, and bonds of not only authority but also friendship. I attempt to narrate, in Andrew Canessa’s words, “a plurality of histories,” in which people engaged with the state – at times to achieve autonomy and at times to achieve inclusion – as both individuals and collectivities through petitions, personal requests, popular protest, and even armed resistance. These strategies sometimes supported and at other times undermined the efforts of a central state that was internally divided and whose agents often acted in contradictory ways.

Sources and Methodology

My dissertation draws on the quantitative, qualitative, and visual materials I have gathered from twelve military and civilian archives in Bolivia, Paraguay, and the United States to study both the barracks experience and ruling elites’ and conscripts’ visions of military service as a way to achieve their goals. To understand the ideology that the state attempted to instill in conscripts, I analyze laws, congressional debates, training manuals, official correspondence, and officers’ memoirs. These same sources portray the daily routines and practices that formed relations of authority that were sometimes strong enough to convince young soldiers to open fire against their fellow Bolivians in order to break strikes and subdue rebellions. Military magazine articles offer details of life in the barracks (albeit from the perspective of officers), and the mainstream press shows the portrayal of the army among the urban, educated classes. Records produced by US military attachés and diplomats proved exceedingly useful because they lay out quotidian procedures and norms omitted by contemporaneous Bolivian participants.

The heart of this dissertation, however, lies in the internal records of the Bolivian army. I glean details of barracks routines and hierarchies, as well as evidence of the complexities of conscripts’ interactions with each other and the state, from the tribunal records in the Military History Archive, located in the Army General Barracks in Miraflores. The Territorial Registry Department of the Defense Ministry Archives’ holdings of military registration books, discharge records, and individuals’ military-service records inform my analysis of the data that the central state collected about conscripts as well as providing the names and locations of military units, the principal centers of conscription, and the trajectories of particular conscripts. Located in the Central Archive of the Defense Ministry, lists and petitions from the Chaco War and the postwar reckoning process that regularized the status of evaders and deserters reveal the politics of exemption that reigned during and after the war. These military sources, which comprise orders, resolutions, lists, service records, testimonies, and petitions from across the national territory, informed my decision to make this a national-level study, complemented by departmental-level sources from the Prefecture of La Paz. Further research is needed, however, to elucidate the regional differences in military service.

Because my central sources come from state archives, the visions of state agents come through most sharply. While the handful of memoirs and published oral histories offer some insight into the perspectives of conscripts and their communities, I draw on a rich array of petitions written to the state and the testimony recorded in 305 military-justice cases. Even though these archival sources are attributed to conscripts and their communities, they are accessible to historians precisely because they were formulated in a way that made them
legible to the state. While these sources do not directly reveal conscripts’ motivations or intra-community discussions about military service, they demonstrate how a range of social actors communicated with the state, presenting requests and demands in ways calculated – some more successfully than others – to achieve specific ends. Using literary methods to understand narrative frames, I analyze how these actors portrayed themselves and formulated demands. Highly mediated, these sources cannot, of course, be read as the direct expressions of the petitioner or deponent. Instead, they must be understood in terms of composite or co-authorship. In historian Kathryn Burns’s words, such documents are “an echo chamber of blended, collaborative agencies.”

Although written in the first person, petitions to the state by indigenous individuals and communities regularly carry the signature of another due to the petitioner’s illiteracy and lack of fluency in Spanish. Indigenous communities had a long tradition of alternative literacies, in which state decrees were passed on orally and specific individuals served as trusted escribanos that composed petitions for community leaders and members. However, indigenous people living outside of or in marginal communities probably relied on writers less invested in the outcome of petitions. Except for one oral history, however, we know very little about the army of notaries, tinterillos, escribanos, lawyers, and advocates who made their living facilitating indigenous-state interactions by translating petitions into official writing. These men probably ranged from indigenous to white, from just barely literate to highly educated, from invested in the outcome of petitions to unscrupulous profit seekers.

44 Leandro Condori Chura, El escribano de los caciques apoderados = Kasikinakan puriraranakan gillqiripa (La Paz: HISBOL; THOA, 1992).
As the crafters and signers of petitions, they were one means through which indigenous people spoke to the state, but they were often barely identified through their (sometimes illegible) signatures at the foot of petitions. These documents thus resulted from complicated, and likely multilingual, interactions among several individuals, and must be read as such. One must, of course, always be aware that expressions of desires, loyalty, and patriotism could easily be stock language added by the writer.

Testimonies in military-justice proceedings were also clearly mediated by third parties, usually the conscripts, NCOs, or junior officers assigned to serve as secretary during proceedings to transcribe questions and answers. However, internal evidence indicates a far more complicated process of mediation and sometimes even translation. For example, these records are all transcribed in fairly proper Spanish, even those that contain a note like the one appended to Ambrosio Chambi’s testimony: “The deponent does not speak one word of Spanish and expresses himself with difficulty even in his own language (Aymara).” Few report who served as translator in these cases or on the circumstances under which these testimonies occurred. Indicating a much more complicated interrogation of Federico Paniagua than the straightforward questions and answers transcribed, one judge wrote, “The deponent manifested signs of cretinism and even idiocy. His memories are confused and he does not… seem to have any notion of dates or places.” Yet even in these cases, the statements read smoothly and coherently. These notes highlight the constructed nature of these documents and remind us that they must not be mistaken for direct transcriptions of

46 Federico Paniagua statement, December 27, 1932, DES-16-011, AHM-TPJM.
Working with military-justice records, the reader quickly realizes that many statements are persuasive tracts if not outright fabrications calculated to get the speaker out of a difficult situation or get personal enemies into one. In fact, the stakes were quite high for many conscripts testifying in these cases. The outcome could determine whether they or their fellows would face imprisonment and disgrace, or, during wartime, perhaps even a firing squad. As with any source, these records require reading against the grain, with attention to normative elements and deviations. Yet deponents’ statements also contain a wealth of detail about daily life in the barracks and norms of treatment that are often offered spontaneously and confirmed in various accounts. I thus at times read these records with the grain in addition to analyzing them to understand the process of military justice and the discursive strategies employed by various actors.

**Dissertation Structure**

Beginning with the 1899 civil war, the first chapter of my dissertation introduces the conscription system and the nature of the Bolivian state and population. It sheds new light on Liberals’ interactions with indigenous communities by analyzing the origins of the obligatory military-service law, efforts at implementation, and societal engagements with this duty. Building on the work of James Dunkerley and Luis Oporto, I show how the Bolivian state depended on indirect rule through local authorities, who had few incentives to comply with directives and made decisions based on their own loyalties and agendas. The minister of war and departmental prefects thus had to threaten and cajole local authorities to comply with the letter and spirit of the conscription law. This allowed for significant local variation.
and resulted in the uneven spread of military service across the national territory. However, deeply engrained hierarchies of culture, race, and class inevitably trumped liberal rhetoric of universal service and equality. Influenced by hierarchies they did not ostensibly embrace, officers and legislators overlooked the evasion of formally educated men as the burden of military service fell primarily on the indígenas and artisans they believed would most benefit from the civilizing power of the barracks. The new hierarchies built around military service reconfigured racial- and class-based hierarchies in the meritorious terms of ability, morality, and patriotism. The chapter ends with a close reading of several documents related to the military service of Celestino Coico, an indigenous community member seeking a medical exemption from service in 1924. His petitions document the spread of conscription in the Bolivian countryside and reveal complicated understandings of the conscription law and his own relationship to the state.

The second chapter examines soldiers’ experiences in the barracks during the 1910s and 1920s, narrating military service as a formative time during which young men built friendships, learned literacy skills, and displayed their manliness and bravery. However, the transition from an army based on impressment, where brutality served as a motivator, to one based on patriotic service was neither smooth nor easy, especially given the pervasive authoritarianism and racism that characterized Bolivia’s diverse and divided society. The chapter shows how the ideal of citizen-soldiers’ learning to respect, serve, and defend their patria was often stymied by fiscal constraints and individual decision-making. Some conscripts thus received tattered uniforms, ate rotting food, and slept on the floor. They performed nonmartial labors in fields and on roadways in addition to (and sometimes to the
detriment of) preparing for war and conserving order. And, ignoring regulations, individual officers profited from conscripts’ labor, fraternized with subordinates, and brutally punished soldiers. Despite these conditions, ideas about soldiers’ honor and rights spread as military service slowly became entrenched in the lives of particular families and communities. This was not a one-sided process, however: Officers, administrators, politicians, conscripts, and communities constantly negotiated the terms of service in the courts, press, congressional chambers, and even the barracks, contesting not only particular punishments, labors, or living conditions but also the very purpose of conscription.

The third chapter focuses on four conscript-led mutinies in La Paz that occurred in the wake of coups in 1920 and 1930. It shows how an atmosphere of conspiracy provoked authorities to intensely scrutinize acts of insubordination by conscripts, fearing that they might signal a countercoup. The chapter opens by narrating how, with the reemergence of partisan conflict after 1914, members of the opposition seized upon the gap between regulation and daily practice in military service, both in terms of discipline and conditions of soldiering, as an avenue through which to contest the ruling party. Turning to the mutinies, it shows that the accused came from a thin subset of literate and often politically engaged conscripts who already understood themselves to be citizens with rights and duties. I argue that, emboldened by partisan upheaval and a highly mobilized urban environment, these conscripts bypassed the command structure and used insubordination to press demands related to their grievances about the conditions of military service. They drew on a discourse of citizen-soldiers to defend their actions, arguing that their rights had been violated.

Examining the 1932-1935 Chaco War, the fourth chapter analyzes archival
documents produced by governmental and military sources in both Bolivia and Paraguay in order to move beyond the narrative produced by contemporary intellectuals that has dominated understandings of the conflict. It reveals how little we actually know about mobilization procedures, the extent of participation and evasion, and the composition of frontline troops. Building on the excellent contributions of René Arze Aguirre, it looks at the successive mechanisms implemented by the state to recruit far more men over three years than had served during the twenty-five years since the passage of the obligatory military-service law. It additionally shows how recruitment practices changed in unpredictable ways over the course of the war as the government negotiated with various interests groups. Analyzing military-justice records and sources produced by the Paraguayan government, it also offers new perspectives on the conditions to which frontline soldiers and prisoners of war were subject.

Covering both the war and the postwar period, the final chapter analyzes how first the army and then successive civilian and military administrations in La Paz reckoned with the “bad sons” who had deserted from the ranks or evaded service during the war. In the process, it shows how the state’s investment in enforcing a document-based regime brought to prominence new hierarchies based on whether and how men had fulfilled calls to mobilize. The chapter demonstrates the continuation of racialized ideas used by civilian and military leaders not only to offer leniency to indigenous evaders and deserters but also to justify the failure to extend formal citizenship to all Chaco-War veterans. However, through an analysis of the petitions of indigenous veterans and their speeches during the state-sponsored 1945 National Indigenous Congress, the final two sections show how these actors
nonetheless appropriated patriotic discourse and used their wartime service to make personal and collective demands, sometimes to surprising effect.
Chapter 1: Liberals’ Drive to Establish Universal Male Conscription: Contending with a New “Sacred Duty”

In 1905, Bolivian Lieutenant Colonel Carlos Nuñez del Prado sought to rescue the heroism of the common soldier from the “deep abyss of indifference and obscurity” through an article printed in Bolivia’s first official publication for military officers.¹ Told in a creative if undocumented fashion, his story of an Aymara soldier named Quilco appeared at a dramatic moment in the army’s history. Four years earlier, the newly triumphant Liberal president, who had attained power with Aymara support, had ended military exemptions for tribute-paying Indians while putting his former indigenous allies on trial. His successor had recently begun implementing conscription laws for the first time in Bolivian history and had even contracted with a French military mission to professionalize the institution. Published in the Revista Militar, the story reflected a shared belief among this generation of reformist officers that the armed forces had to break with a past marred by violence towards its soldiers and involvement in partisan politics. Above all, it revealed his confidence that only a modernized army could save Bolivia from humiliation by rising above “politics” and training its people to be patriots.² In his fable, military discipline, even when distorted by violence, would prove capable of transforming a “poor shepherd” into “a son, always faithful to the

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² This view of the armed forces as a nationalist guardian above partisan politics was developing across Latin America. See Brian Loveman, For la Patria: Politics and the Armed Forces in Latin America (Wilmington: SR Books, 1999); Brian Loveman and Thomas M. Davies Jr., eds., The Politics of Antipolitics: The Military in Latin America, 2nd revised and expanded ed. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1989); Frederick M. Nunn, Yesterday's Soldiers: European Military Professionalism in South America, 1890-1940 (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1983).
Set fifty years in the past, the article vividly describes Quilco’s forcible impressment when the Granaderos Battalion passed through his “isolated hamlet in the mountains” en route to suppress one of many revolts against the administration of Manuel Isidoro Belzu (1848-1855). The drama of the story lies in the traumatic contrast between Quilco’s “placid and serene” life as a *colono* [tenant laborer] and the physical and cultural violence involved with the shearing of his braids, the replacement of his indigenous attire, and repeated physical abuse. After being “kidnapped from among his sheep and llamas,” Nuñez del Prado writes, Quilco suffered the ministrations of an “obliging soul” who “came bringing scissors large enough to scare a squad of mules and launched an attack on the unlucky Quilco, who was cruelly sheared in a moment, displaying a shocking coiffure.” After stripping him of “his black pants of rough wool,” soldiers “tore off his jacket adorned with antique copper buttons… and snatched the poncho from his hands!…. His new poncho, his beautiful new poncho that had inspired the envy of his fellows.” Quilco responded, in Nuñez del Prado’s story, with tears that “flooded his cheeks; tears big as hazelnuts, uncontainable as a stream; sobs and moans launched from his breast.” However, the author writes, “a crack of the whip, dealt by an energetic and skillful hand, soon brought him back to reality, making him forget… his sad memories of the stolen clothing, now forever lost; it was the corporal of his squad, the dreadful Corporal Endara of the 6th company… who from then on would be his shade, his nightmare, his terror!”

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3 Nuñez del Prado, “Grandezas y pequeñeces - El centinela.”
4 Nuñez del Prado, “Grandezas y pequeñeces - El centinela.”
5 Nuñez del Prado, “Grandezas y pequeñeces - El centinela.”
Over the course of the story, Nuñez del Prado describes the horrific whippings and blows inflicted on Quilco while condemning the use of corporal punishment for routine discipline. Yet he reserves his most condemnatory language for a military system in which a soldier “invested all national sentiment in a caudillo [strongman] rather than the Patria, sacrificed himself for the man rather than the Nation, [and] spilled his blood for an illegitimate idea rather than the beloved national flag, as was his duty!” This framing of the issues allows Nuñez del Prado to describe the soldier Quilco as a patriot and hero. The moment of patriotic transfiguration comes when Quilco, not having received orders to stand down from guard duty, refuses to allow his battalion to exit the Oruro barracks in order to join the forces backing a caudillo. The author hails the heroic Quilco for shooting his perfidious Lieutenant Colonel; in the aftermath, the other soldiers bayonet and trample Quilco, leaving his dead body to become, in this 1905 account, a “vigorous protest against murderers and horrible anathema to traitors.”

As an officer who preached respect for hierarchy, Nuñez del Prado might be expected to condemn Quilco’s killing of his superior. Yet oddities abound in this account. While criticizing corporal punishment, the author uses almost loving language (“obliging soul”, “skillful hand”) to describe the brutality used to produce Quilco’s obedience to orders, thus showing that he did not entirely repudiate these methods. And, although he celebrates Quilco’s trampled body as the emblem of an apolitical army, he does not explain Quilco’s actions as based on patriotism. Rather, Quilco acts patriotically because he so faithfully – if stupidly – complies with Corporal Endara’s orders not to “allow anyone to enter or leave the

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6 Nuñez del Prado, “Grandezas y pequeñeces - El centinela.”
barracks, not even the Everlasting Father.” Although a reformist officer, Nuñez del Prado could not break with ingrained prejudices about the natural subordination of indigenous Bolivians by portraying Quilco as an independent rather than unwitting actor with motives beyond blind obedience. In repudiating the past at a moment a new army was being built, Nuñez del Prado nonetheless reproduces attitudes towards the indigenous majority long characteristic of Bolivia’s ruling elites.

In truth, the Quilco fable had little to do with indigenous life – other than acknowledging violent methods of domination. Rather, it reveals a deeply rooted belief among officers that proper military training could produce “a complete transformation in the ideas, habits, and customs” of men brought into the institution through conscription. Liberal politicians shared this sentiment, imbuing military service with the power to transform Bolivia’s indigenous population through positivist social hygiene. During debate over the 1907 conscription law, Deputy Aurelio Gamarra from Nor Yungas (La Paz) went so far as to argue that “the indigenous class” had the most to gain from obligatory military service because it would “awaken him from his ignorance…. It is the solution for an entire social problem for us, of civilizing the indígena.” The crafters of this law argued that universal male conscription, as part of a professional military institution, would not only fulfill Bolivia’s geopolitical needs but also create a Bolivian nation. The army would be a

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7 Nuñez del Prado, “Grandezas y pequeñeces - El centinela.”
nationalizing institution that would convert the country’s Indians into disciplined soldiers who spoke Spanish, willingly obeyed authorities, and were unfailingly loyal to a national-level patria. Describing the army as the “foundation of national grandeur,” Liberal politician and then-Minister of War José S. Quinteros made use of what would become a persistent metaphor when he invoked the “sacred interests of the Republic” to justify the state’s “legitimate right” to demand “sincere collaboration” with conscription.\textsuperscript{11} Liberal rhetoric thus elided the fact that the majority of the men eligible to be conscripted would be non-citizen conscripts since they did not meet the property and literacy requirements for citizenship. Yet this rhetoric does suggest what Liberal politicians imagined indigenous conscripts would receive in return for their service: an entrée into the “modern” world and salvation from their communities’ backward practices.

Like Nuñez del Prado, the Liberal politicians who led Bolivia into the twentieth century renounced a military past marked by violent coercion of soldiers, repeated coups, and humiliating defeats at the hands of neighboring nations. They envisioned a new army that would fulfill their goals on several fronts: It would protect Bolivia’s territory, establish control over the countryside and mines, and nationalize the country’s multiethnic, multilingual, and regionally diverse population. Not acknowledging the potential tensions among these goals, Liberals asserted that European-style professionalism and the establishment of effective legal norms for conscription would not only erase the army’s anarchic past but would allow it to create a modern Bolivia.

Despite financial, administrative, and geographic constraints, the Liberals left as one

\textsuperscript{11} Minister of War José S. Quinteros memo to Prefects, January 21, 1907, Boletín militar del Ministero de Guerra, vol. 3, (La Paz: Intendencia de Guerra, 1907): 21-28.
of their most important legacies the first sustained and surprisingly successful effort to implement universal male conscription. This chapter analyzes the origins of the 1907 obligatory-military-service law, efforts at implementation, and societal engagements with this duty in order to establish the patterns that would come to define conscription in Bolivia. Revealing the substantial power wielded by provincial authorities over conscription procedures, it explores profound disagreements among ruling elites and the astoundingly local nature of implementation. Unable to unilaterally impose conscription, army officers and the minister of war combined pleas with threats to convince individual conscripts, their communities, local authorities, and even legislators to comply with not only the letter but also the spirit of the law. The rhetoric surrounding conscription emphasized liberal notions of universality and equality, but service would never be truly universal due to Bolivia’s budgetary limitations and a geopolitical context that did not necessitate a large standing army.

12 Only two scholars, historian James Dunkerley in 1979 and sociologist Juan Ramón Quintana in 1998, have examined the history of military service in Bolivia. Sharing many common sources, these works and this chapter all present statistics on conscription, noting the prevalence of evasion and the civilizing nature of the project. The differences are ones of depth and emphasis. In his pioneering treatment, Dunkerley devotes twelve pages to the era’s military reforms, offering an overview of the 1907 law, its limited results, and the localized nature of implementation. I build on his conclusions regarding state formation, using recent research on the 1899 civil war to provide a deeper political context of the law’s origins and conflicted aims vis-à-vis the indigenous population. See James Dunkerley, *Orígenes del poder militar: Historia política e institucional del Ejército Boliviano hasta 1935*, trans. Rose Marie Vargas (La Paz: Quipus, 1987), 86-98. James Dunkerley, "The Politics of the Bolivian Army: Institutional Development to 1935" (Ph.D diss., Nuffield College (Oxford), 1979). Dunkerley’s unrevised 1979 dissertation was translated into Spanish (along with a 1981 article) and finally published in 1987. All direct quotations come from the English-language dissertation; however, due to its wider availability, citations point to the 1987 published work. Quintana’s twenty-two-page treatment of the period represents the most comprehensive work to date on conscription. While I agree with many of his conclusions regarding the negative impact of military service on indigenous Bolivians, my research reveals a more flexible relationship between soldiers and the state. Because of Quintana’s overarching interest in oppressive mechanisms, he is not concerned with the relationships between different arms and levels of the state and thus effaces disagreements among ruling elites and the local nature of implementation. See Juan R. Quintana Taborga, *Soldados y ciudadanos: Un estudio crítico sobre el servicio militar obligatorio en Bolivia* (La Paz: PIEB, 1998), 33-54.
This fact left much room for men to avoid obligatory military service through patron-client connections, exemptions, evasion, and the lottery. The selectivity of service facilitated the trumping of liberal rhetoric by deeply engrained hierarchies of culture, race, and class.

Officers and legislators thus tended to overlook the evasion of formally educated men as the burden of military service fell primarily on non-citizen conscripts, namely the indígenas and artisans they believed would most benefit from the civilizing power of the barracks. Yet my research reveals a relationship between the state and its soldiers (both indigenous and non) that was far from monolithic and shows a wide range of responses and adaptations to the law.

**The Origins and Provisions of the 1907 Conscription Law**

When discussing nineteenth-century Bolivia, it is “somewhat misconceived,” in the words of historian James Dunkerley, “to refer to the army rather than armies.” National in name only, these armies better resembled the personal forces of caudillos. Yet they consumed between forty and seventy percent of the national budget, which was primarily derived from indigenous tribute. They were also top heavy with officers: In 1846 the rolls counted one officer for every six soldiers. Even as late as 1876, the army consisted of 384 officers, 637 non-commissioned officers (NCOs), and only 825 troops. The duty of men to serve in the army had existed on paper since independence, but the conscription laws had always provided for replacements and myriad forms of exemptions, including for all tribute-paying Indians. In practice, then, Bolivia’s nineteenth-century line army recruited mostly through

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13 Rates of participation in the Bolivian military during the twentieth century were on par with other Latin American countries but far lower than in European countries. Miguel Angel Centeno, *Blood and Debt: War and the Nation-State in Latin America* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2002), 225.
impressment. Despite the long terms of service prescribed by law (five to eight years), regiments experienced rates of turnover as high as seventy-five percent per year due to desertion.\textsuperscript{14}

As a landlocked country that had suffered recent territorial losses, Bolivia watched with concern as its neighbors brought in European military advisors and instituted obligatory military service. The nation had lost its Littoral Department in the War of the Pacific (1879-1884), during which Chile fought Bolivia and Peru over guano-rich lands. Bolivia effectively pulled out in the war’s first year after the effort of recruiting and funding its locally organized regiments, combined with political conflict at home, challenged “its organizational capacity as a nation-state.”\textsuperscript{15} The intra-elite disputes brought into relief by the war produced the Liberal and Conservative parties in 1883 and 1884. Although the two parties shared an adherence to more or less conservative variants of European-style liberalism, Liberals concentrated in La Paz advocated re-entering the conflict to preserve Bolivia’s territorial claims, whereas Conservatives in Sucre sought to maintain lucrative commercial ties to Chile.\textsuperscript{16} The divisions over the Catholic Church, which in other countries marked the differences between the two sides, played only a minor role in Bolivia due to the church’s weak position dating back to 1826 when President Antonio José de Sucre took control of tithes, confiscated the church’s mortgages and private estates, eliminated cofradías, and closed

\textsuperscript{14} Dunkerley, \textit{Orígenes del poder militar}, 11-17; Quintana Taborga, \textit{Soldados y ciudadanos}, 17-25.
smaller monasteries.\footnote{Herbert S. Klein, \textit{A Concise History of Bolivia} (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 107-9.}

The 1884 elections brought Conservatives to power under silver-mine owner Gregorio Pacheco. In a period marked by political violence, Conservative governments pursued liberal policies of eliminating corporate privileges and developing the export sector. Their efforts to restructure tribute and implement the 1874 Disentailment Law, which privatized communal lands, met with significant indigenous resistance. However, the power and reach of the central state grew considerably as Conservatives kept taxes on mining low while investing in transportation networks, isolated colonization projects, and financial institutions.\footnote{Klein, \textit{A Concise History of Bolivia}, 146-56; Brooke Larson, \textit{Trials of Nation Making: Liberalism, Race, and Ethnicity in the Andes, 1810-1910} (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 219-21; Erick D. Langer, \textit{Economic Change and Rural Resistance in Southern Bolivia, 1880-1930} (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1989), 20-28; Gotkowitz, \textit{A Revolution for Our Rights}, 26-35; Dunkerley, \textit{Orígenes del poder militar}, 46.}

Following a regional trend, they took the first steps to transform the military into a modern bureaucratic institution in 1888 by replacing \textit{rabonas} [female camp followers] with institutionalized meal service, founding a military academy in 1891, and establishing the quartermaster corps in 1899.\footnote{Julio Díaz Arguedas, \textit{Historia del ejército de Bolivia, 1825-1932} (La Paz: n.p., 1940), 23-25, 57, 177; Dunkerley, \textit{Orígenes del poder militar}, 57.}

The legislature also passed a conscription law in 1892 that substantially revised the 1875 precedent; however, neither the Baptista (1892-1896) nor the Alonso (1896-1899) administration seriously attempted to implement this law.\footnote{Ley de servicio militar, August 6, 1875 and September 20, 1892.}

The crash in the silver market that followed international adoption of the gold standard decisively shifted the balance of economic power from the Conservative south to the Liberal north.\footnote{Langer, \textit{Economic Change and Rural Resistance}, 27-30; Forrest Hylton, "Reverberations of Insurgency: Indian Communities, the Federal War of 1899, and the Regeneration of Bolivia" (Ph.D. diss., New York}
alliance with key Aymara leaders based on a platform of Federalism, tax abatement, and the return of communal lands. When the Liberals of La Paz rose up in December 1898 under then-Colonel José Manuel Pando, the situation seemed to favor President Sergio Fernández Alonso, given his control of the national treasury and army. Yet significant dissent within the army command reduced Alonso’s forces by approximately one-third because of a decision to dismiss many officers and troops with ties to the La Paz region. The Federalists, on the other hand, built up their forces while relying militarily on indigenous allies led by Pablo Zárate Willka, Juan Lero, Lorenzo Ramírez, and Feliciano Condori. Battles occurred in four of Bolivia’s nine departments as the war subsumed local conflicts and expressed them in partisan terms, with massacres and abuses occurring on all sides. In early March of 1899, one such incident occurred in Mohoza (Inquisivi, La Paz) when Aymaras under Ramírez killed over a hundred Federalist cavalrymen, thus revealing the limits of Pando’s power to command his indigenous allies.22

In pursuit of victory, Pando continued to fight alongside Aymara forces despite Mohoza. After the Battle of the Second Cross (Oruro) ended the war in early April, however, he quickly moved to dissolve indigenous irregular forces and arrest their leaders, whom he accused of massacring Liberal troops at Mohoza and landowners in Peñas (Paria, Oruro).

The subsequent Peñas and Mohoza trials ran from 1899 to 1902, and appeals extended into

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1905.\(^{23}\) Resulting in the public execution of dozens, these trials publicly reconfigured Aymara participation in the 1899 conflict as a violent ‘race war’ rather than a political alliance. Historians Gabrielle Kuenzli and Forrest Hylton have analyzed the trial transcripts and press coverage to argue that this trope facilitated Liberals’ drive to exclude their Aymara allies from the fruits of victory while criminalizing this population and deepening racial divides in Bolivia.\(^{24}\)

After decisively defeating their rivals in Sucre, Liberals moved the seat of government to La Paz but soon shed Federalism and adopted familiar tactics of electoral interference. Despite their patriotic protestations of 1899, they officially ceded the coast to Chile in a 1904 treaty in exchange for three hundred thousand pounds and the promise of a railroad from Arica to La Paz. As tin exports boomed, they also welcomed the defeated Conservatives back into the fold as reinforcements for the social order. After all, these former rivals shared much in common, including an orientation towards Europe, a broad adherence to certain liberal tenets, and a desire to incorporate Bolivia fully into international markets.\(^{25}\) Liberals also took up Conservatives’ project of military professionalization by establishing a school for non-commissioned officers in 1900.\(^{26}\) The following year, President Pando nullified provisions dating back to 1838 that prohibited the recruitment of tribute-

\(^{23}\) Hylton, "Reverberations of Insurgency" (diss.), 91-92, 183-83, 234-38.  
\(^{26}\) Díaz Arguedas, *Historia del ejército*, 162.
paying Indians into the army.²⁷ This gesture of inclusivity seemed to conform to liberal ideals of legal equality but also served to discipline the indigenous population. Their incorporation into the national army not only imposed a new labor obligation but also sought to ensure that they would never again form autonomous irregular forces.

The drive for military reform also gained steam from events in Acre on the northern border with Brazil. Rising rubber prices had caused the area’s population to balloon, but Brazilians made up the majority of the new settlers and the only viable export route was through that neighboring country. When settlers declared this Amazonian territory an independent republic in April 1899, Bolivian troops did not arrive until December due to the distance from La Paz. Soldiers quickly quelled the revolt, but Liberal leaders concluded that they lacked the capacity to administer the territory and decided instead to rent it to a foreign-owned rubber company. Citing concerns about imperial encroachment, Brazil responded by sending its forces to the region, and although Bolivia won the majority of the ensuing skirmishes, its leaders eventually decided on a diplomatic resolution. The Treaty of Petrópolis, signed in November 1903, ceded 191,000 square kilometers to Brazil in exchange for two million pounds and a promise to build a railroad to bypass rapids on the Madeira River.²⁸

In 1904, Pando passed the presidency to a fellow military man, General Ismael Montes, who had served as minister of war and led forces in the Federalist and Acre

²⁷ Dunkerley, Orígenes del poder militar, 87. For provisions that prohibited recruitment, see ministerial order of June 28, 1838, which was reiterated on March 12, 1860 and December 30, 1881. José Flores Moncayo, Legislación boliviana del indio: Recopilación, 1825-1953 (La Paz: Ministerio de Asuntos Campesinos Departamento de Publicaciones del Instituto Indigenista Boliviano, 1953), 104, 186, 283.
campaigns. Montes contracted with a small French mission under Colonel Jacques Sever in 1905 to reorganize the army and take charge of officer training.\(^{29}\) In this, Montes followed the lead of neighboring Chile, Peru, and Argentina, which had first engaged European missions in 1886, 1896, and 1899.\(^{30}\) His stated goal was a professional army characterized by civilian control, professional training, and merit-based promotion. The new army would be a unitary institutional actor and would banish the specter of factionalism, military coups, and interference in partisan elections. Active-duty officers and troops were therefore not only expressly prohibited from participating in politics but also denied suffrage and the right to run for public office.\(^{31}\) Under Liberals, Montes asserted, the army would finally adhere to the clause included in every constitution since 1831 that defined it as a “fundamentally obedient” institution and prohibited officers from even discussing political matters [\textit{deliberar}].\(^{32}\) No longer would troops serve a particular party or \textit{caudillo}, as Quilco’s battalion had done in the 1850s.

With Sever’s help, Montes also set out to operationalize the existing framework for


\(^{30}\) Chile contracted with Prussian Captain Emilio Körner in 1886, and a contingent of thirty-six officers joined him there in 1895. French Captain Paul Clément arrived in Peru in 1896 with a staff of four officers. By 1914, thirty-one French officers had worked in Peru. Following the lead of their neighbor across the Andes, Argentina contracted retired Prussian Colonel Alfred Arent in 1899 along with three officers. Nunn, \textit{Yesterday's Soldiers}, 3, 100-104, 112, 117, 123.

\(^{31}\) Art. 2, Supreme Decree, February 24, 1908.

military conscription. These efforts culminated in the 1907 obligatory-military-service law, which, with minor changes, regulated conscription in Bolivia for the next half century. Like the contracting of European missions, Bolivia’s turn to universal male conscription represented a regional trend, as every South American country except Venezuela and Uruguay passed similar laws between 1896 and 1916. Based on French and German precedents, these laws sought to replace armies based on the forcible recruitment of the dregs of society with ones made up of honorably conscripted citizen-soldiers.

Bolivia’s 1907 law set forth a military obligation for all men between the ages of 19 and 49. It mandated that eighteen-year-olds register for the draft between August 1 and September 30 by personally presenting at the local registration table. Registrants had to produce baptismal certificates, supplied free of charge by the civil registry or local parish, or oral testimony proving their age. The authorities who registered these men were to note each one’s name, parents’ names, place of birth, profession, address, level of education, skin color, and distinguishing features. These data would be sent to the prefect and the minister of war to compile an annual military census and be crossed checked with lists of men born that year furnished by parish priests. Each registrant would receive a certificate proving his

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33 See Minister of War circular of June 7, 1905, and supreme decrees of September 27, 1905, December 17, 1905, February 7, 1906, and April 13, 1906.
34 Ley de servicio militar, January 16, 1907. The next major law governing conscription was the ley orgánica de las fuerzas armadas de la nación, December 20, 1963.
35 Loveman, For la Patria, 73.
36 In departmental capitals, this table would be manned by the mayor de plaza and two high-ranking officers. In provincial seats, the commission would consist of the subprefect, corregidor, and a military officer. The corregidor and one officer would register men at the canton level; in the absence of an officer, the second seat could be filled by a civilian named by the subprefect.
compliance with the law.\textsuperscript{37}

To mark the distance from the caudillo era when men could buy a replacement, the law defined service as a “personal” and “inescapable” obligation, with exceptions granted only to the physically and mentally unfit. Regulations listed 126 ailments, deformities, and mental deficiencies that made men absolutely unfit for service, eighteen cases whereby marginally fit registrants would be assigned to auxiliary services rather than military training, and five causes of temporary unfitness that could postpone service for up to two years. An additional four categories of men were entitled to a reduction of service from two years to three months: only sons who were sustaining their parents or siblings, men whose brother(s) had died in an international war, married men with children, and those who would earn a university degree or professional title during the term of service. Convicts sentenced to corporal punishment, vagrants, and ne’er-do-wells [\textit{mal entretenidos}] were excluded from the rank-and-file but put at the disposition of the minister of war to work in the country’s northwest for the duration of their military service. The law allowed for those studying abroad to join the reserves upon return, but Bolivians outside the country’s borders for other reasons were expected to repatriate in order to serve.\textsuperscript{38}

After registering at eighteen, men seeking exemptions, postponements, or reductions had to petition the departmental prefect during the period of July to September. This authority would review testimony or order independent medical exams. Unless they could prove absolute poverty, men granted exemptions or reductions had to pay a tax ranging

\textsuperscript{37} Ley de servicio militar, January 16, 1907; Reglamento del servicio militar, April 6, 1907, \textit{Boletín militar del Ministro de Guerra}, vol. 3, (La Paz: Intendencia de Guerra, 1907): 121-48.

\textsuperscript{38} Ley de servicio militar, January 16, 1907; Reglamento del servicio militar, April 6, 1907, \textit{Boletín militar}. 121-48.
from twenty to two hundred bolivianos, with the exact amount to be determined based on individual circumstances. The law further decreed that by December 15, all nineteen-year-old men not granted official exemptions were to travel to their provincial capitals. The subprefect would then send them on to the departmental capital. These men would receive a daily payment from that day forward. If the number of conscripts arriving on January 1 exceeded the department’s quota, the prefect would hold a lottery. Those whose names were drawn [sorteados] would serve for two years; the rest would receive three months of training before being discharged. Conscripts arriving between January 1 and 31 lost the right to participate in the lottery and automatically served for two years. Men who missed this window became omisos [draft evaders] along with those who had failed to register. Regulations mandated that they be “incessantly pursued;” when captured, they would serve four years rather than two.

Whatever their term of service, soldiers were to learn how to march in formation, use weapons, and guard installations. They would become physically and mentally prepared to fulfill their duties as citizen-soldiers by following a regimented exercise program and

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30 Ley de servicio militar, January 16, 1907; Reglamento del servicio militar, April 6, 1907, Boletín militar 121-48. Robert Smale reports that the daily wage for mineworkers in 1907 was two bolivianos. Robert L. Smale, "I Sweat the Flavor of Tin": Labor Activism in Early Twentieth Century Bolivia (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2010), 53.

40 Scholars have tended to assume that these lotteries were rigged but have not yet produced evidence to support this conclusion. See Luis Oporto Ordoñez, Úncia y Llallagua: Empresa minera capitalista y estrategias de apropiación real del espacio (1900-1935) (La Paz: IFEA, Plural Editores, 2007), 124.

41 Ley de servicio militar, January 16, 1907; Reglamento del servicio militar, April 6, 1907, Boletín militar 121-48.

42 After completing their initial service commitment, all men would remain in the active reserves until the age of 25, owing thirty days of service per year. Men from 25 to 32 belonged to the ordinary reserves and then passed to the extraordinary reserves until the age of 40; these categories carried a commitment of between twelve and twenty training days per year. The territorial guard consisted of 40- to 49-year-olds, who would be responsible for maintaining internal order during international war. Ley de servicio militar, January 16, 1907; Reglamento del servicio militar, April 6, 1907, Boletín militar 121-48.
listening to superiors explain military theory and civic obligations. Before being discharged, they would swear allegiance to the flag and participate in war maneuvers to gain the battlefield experience that would prepare them to defend Bolivia.\textsuperscript{43} Their training would be overseen by professional officers, recipients of a specialized education at the military academy, while NCOs would be responsible for much of the daily drilling and discipline. If not enough graduates from the NCO school were available, officers would, after initial training, promote suitable conscripts to the rank of private first class \textit{dragoneante}, corporal, and then sergeant. President Montes and Minister of War Quinteros set out the following criteria for these promotions: 1) that they entered through the draft rather than evading service, 2) that they had or were working on a university degree or professional title, and 3) that they had “good, moral conduct, characterized by subordination and discipline and excelling in his studies and moral education.”\textsuperscript{44}

Unlike the nineteenth-century system that Nuñez del Prado had described, the Liberals’ conscript army would eschew corporal punishment in favor of modern disciplinary techniques. The power to transform the population through military service depended on rigid but fair hierarchies that would teach conscripts to immediately obey authority figures without question. European instructors would train a professional corps of officers, who, constrained by rules, would implement a strictly hierarchical and bureaucratic regime. A 1907 ministerial resolution, for example, declared that discipline could not be maintained by punishment alone but must be achieved through the “moderate and gentle treatment that

\textsuperscript{43} Minister of War to Prefects, January 21, 1907, \textit{Boletín militar}: 21-28.

\textsuperscript{44} Ministerial Resolution, January 22, 1907, \textit{Boletín militar del ministerio de muerra} Tomo III (La Paz: Intendencia de Guerra Talleres, 1907): 38-39.
should be given to soldiers, who, fulfilling a legal obligation, selflessly serve the patria.” The resolution warned officers to closely monitor that NCOs “give correct and strictly military treatment to the soldiers, without inflicting them with blows” that “would motivate desertions and an aversion to a career at arms.” The minister of war professed that it was his duty to ensure that “military service be, if not pleasant, at least bearable with patriotic compliance.” General Sever’s memorandum to inform commanders of this resolution more clearly expressed the role of honor in this injunction by expressly prohibiting “outrages or humiliating acts.” Soldiery would thus become respectable, even a source of pride. To refigure service as a privilege rather than a punishment, the new law banned the enrollment of vagrants and other delinquents. Clauses entitling men to a reduced term of service if they supported children or elderly parents would win popular sympathy by ensuring that no family shouldered an overly harsh burden. Self-disciplined conscripts would thus replace violently impressed troops whipped into submission, as Quilco had been.

Liberals frequently insisted that obligatory military service would be a sacred duty shared by the population as whole. The prohibition of replacements and the end of exemptions for tribute-paying Indians meant that the sons of prominent families, artisans, and Indians would meet during service to forge a unified nation in the barracks. No longer would volunteers and victims of forcible recruitment fill the army’s ranks. Upon announcing the 1907 law, President Montes declared that the barracks would become “a practical

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45 Minister of War Ministerial Resolution, March 25, 1907, Boletín militar, 84.
46 General Jacques Sever, Circular #61, March 26, 1907, Boletín militar, 86. In December 1905, Bolivia conferred the rank of Brigadier General on French Colonel Jacques Sever, who served as Chief of Staff from 1906 until the mission contract expired in 1909. Bolivia. Ministerio de Guerra, Escalafón militar de 1906 (La Paz: Intendencia de Guerra, 1908), 6; Díaz Arguedas, Historia del ejército, 64.
training ground for equality” and that “everyone without distinction of race or class” must be prepared “to give his blood in tribute to the nation.” The Liberal press went further by presenting the barracks as a site “where the tycoon’s son gives up his courtly airs upon coming into contact with the artisan and the Indian and realizes the democracy and the love owed to all social classes, having mixed with them and suffered the same fatigues and hardships of service.”

These pronouncements primarily served to reassure a literate audience that the barracks served an important function to the nation and were honorable places to send their sons. To go along with these more subtle overtures, the law and regulations for its implementation also created deterrents to noncompliance. The first was a series of provisions designed to anticipate and prevent corruption: The military registry had to be well advertised and open during fixed hours, particular authorities had to be present for registrations, lotteries were to be public events, and unbiased physicians had to certify exemptions. Also serving this function were the documents that men would receive to certify their observance of the law at each stage of this process. These papers would be necessary for employment, to conduct official transactions, and to protect oneself from impressment. Regulations mandated that each new soldier be photographed and issued a military-service booklet that would record his personal information, training, promotions, discharge, and subsequent reserve service. The law decreed that these booklets be verified before men could vote, receive a university or professional title, enter a monastery or be

47 Ismael Montes quoted in “La nueva ley militar,” El Comercio, January 20, 1907, 3; Ismael Montes quoted in Dunkerley, Orígenes del poder militar, 86.
48 “La nueva ley militar,” El Comercio, January 20, 1907, 3.
49 “La nueva ley militar,” El Comercio, January 20, 1907, 3.
ordained, attain a mastery, or hold a government position. These provisions directly threatened the class position and citizenship rights of men from Bolivia’s upper classes and thus pressured them to comply with the law.

However, these sanctions were irrelevant to the majority of Bolivians, who lacked not only access to such degrees and positions but even basic citizenship rights. The mechanisms Liberals used to persuade (rather than coerce) these non-citizen conscripts to enter the barracks are less clear. Some might have become soldiers for the pragmatic purpose of gaining food, clothes, and a place to sleep. Many would have needed military-service documents in order to protect themselves from the unpredictable threat of being captured as an *omiso*. Others might have responded to promises of literacy training during obligatory military service. And perhaps some saw in obligatory military service an avenue by which they could make claims – for land, protection, education, etc. – on the state.

In its ideal form, obligatory military service would mold Bolivia’s population according to a model of modernity adopted from Europe, strengthening the state and serving multiple objectives of the Liberal government. Having ceded over 600,000 square kilometers to Chile and Brazil between 1867 and 1904, legislators first emphasized that conscription would protect “our threatened borders” by ensuring that the entire male population had military training. Secondly, conscript labor would also be used to build Bolivia’s infrastructure, construct border posts, and staff the military colonization projects.

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50 Ley de servicio militar, January 16, 1907; Reglamento del servicio militar, April 6, 1907, *Boletín militar*: 121-48.
that would begin to populate peripheral regions. Obligatory military service would also teach the indigenous population, even the suspect and potentially dangerous Aymaras, not only obedience, as with Quilco, but also to identify with and serve the nation. In this imagined egalitarian system, the sons of Indians, artisans, and privileged families would share in the duty of defense since all were theoretically equal before the law. Finally, conscription functioned as a legibility project for social control, a means by which the state collected information about its population and initiated residents into a documentary regime.

A “Not Very Encouraging” Census: Bolivia’s Population and Geography

Immediately after coming to power, Liberals conducted a national census that laid bare the challenges they would face in implementing the 1907 law. While the lowlands remained largely unexplored, much of the population lived at high altitude in a terrain marked by mountainous peaks, thirty of which soared to over nineteen thousand feet. Nascent transportation and communication networks reached only a fraction of this large but thinly populated territory. And Bolivia’s population was listed as fifty percent indigenous, seventy-five percent rural, and more than eighty percent illiterate. However, as shown below, census results overestimated Bolivia’s territory, population, urbanity, and literacy rates while underestimating its indigenous population. The challenges to implementing and centrally

administering compulsory military service would be even greater than these statistics had initially suggested.

According to the geographic section of the census, Bolivia had three regions: the western altiplano, the valleys of the central region, and the eastern lowlands. Defined by mountainous terrain, high altitudes, and a cold climate, the altiplano (see Figure 2) extended over three of Bolivia’s eight departments (La Paz, Oruro, and Potosí). This “vast and arid”

Figure 2: Relief Map of Bolivia, with Contemporary Borders
Source: http://www.boliviabella.com/maps.html

zone supported only llamas, sheep, potatoes, barley, and quinoa but contained the mineral deposits (including gold, silver, tin, bismuth, copper, wolfram, and salt) that represented the nation’s primary exports.\textsuperscript{56} Covering parts of Cochabamba, Chuquisaca, Tarija, La Paz, and Potosí, the temperate valleys and humid yungas of the fertile central region provided wheat, corn, coffee, cacao, coca, fruits, vegetables, and quinine. The lowlands spanned Beni, Santa Cruz, Tarija, and northern La Paz making up almost two-thirds of Bolivia’s territory. This region included diverse habitats such as savanna, pampas, Amazonian rainforest, and the dry scrub forest of the Chaco. The more populated areas bordering the central region provided land for cattle ranching, sugarcane, and rice. Outside of these settlements, the lowlands drew interest only with the discovery of exportable commodities, such as rubber and, later, oil.\textsuperscript{57}

The census account of Bolivia’s transportation and communications networks reflected these geographic challenges. Of the one hundred postal offices within the country’s borders, La Paz boasted thirty whereas Santa Cruz had only twelve and Beni a mere four. Since the telegraph’s arrival in Bolivia in 1880, the state and private companies had laid a combined 5,013 kilometers of lines to connect only a third (31) of postal offices.\textsuperscript{58} Moreover, only 2,297 kilometers of roads linked the cities of La Paz, Oruro, Corocoro, Achacachi, Cochabamba, Sucre, Potosí, Challapata, Uyuni, and La Quiaca, and torrential rains made many of these impassable for four months a year. Lamenting the geographical challenges to building and maintaining roads, officials wrote that railroads would be more efficient and cost-effective. But almost half of the 1,129 kilometers of railroad tracks claimed in the

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\textsuperscript{58} Bolivia. Oficina Nacional de Inmigración, \textit{Censo general v. 2}, lxxxi-xlci.
census lay on soil lost to Chile during the War of the Pacific. Oriented towards export routes rather than internal transportation, the two major lines connected the city of La Paz to the port of Guaqui on Lake Titicaca and the mines of Oruro and Potosí to Antofagasta, by then a Chilean port. Looking forward, the census boldly projected an additional 4,339 kilometers of rail, some under construction and others only in planning stages, to link Cochabamba, Sucre, Santa Cruz, the Argentine border, and the Chilean port of Arica.\(^5\)

Administratively, the census explained, Bolivia consisted of eight departments and a northwestern territory [*Territorio Nacional de Colonias*]. In this highly centralized system, the president appointed the prefects who governed each department as well as naming, at least officially, the subprefects charged with running the departmental subdivisions – called provinces. The subprefects, in turn, appointed the corregidores who administered each of the provinces’ cantons and vice-cantons.\(^6\) As shown in Table 1, the number and size of these administrative divisions varied widely.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Department</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Area (km(^2))</th>
<th>Density</th>
<th>Provinces</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>La Paz</td>
<td>445,616</td>
<td>139,277</td>
<td>3.19</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cochabamba</td>
<td>328,163</td>
<td>60,417</td>
<td>5.43</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Potosí</td>
<td>325,615</td>
<td>126,390</td>
<td>2.57</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Santa Cruz</td>
<td>209,592</td>
<td>336,128</td>
<td>0.57</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chuquisaca</td>
<td>204,434</td>
<td>68,420</td>
<td>2.98</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tarija</td>
<td>102,887</td>
<td>183,606</td>
<td>0.56</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oruro</td>
<td>86,081</td>
<td>49,537</td>
<td>1.71</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beni</td>
<td>32,180</td>
<td>264,455</td>
<td>0.12</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colonias</td>
<td>31,883</td>
<td>497,931</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>2 regions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>1,766,451</strong></td>
<td><strong>1,726,161</strong></td>
<td><strong>0.98</strong></td>
<td><strong>55</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Cities, Villas, Cantons, Vice-Cantons, Missions**

| La Paz      | 137        |
| Cochabamba  | 97         |
| Potosí      | 133        |
| Santa Cruz  | 80         |
| Chuquisaca  | 73         |
| Tarija      | 68         |
| Oruro       | 42         |
| Beni        | 26         |
| Colonias    | 52 settlements |

**Source:** Littoral Department omitted. *Censo General v. 1*, 11-13, 272-27; *Censo General v. 2*, 18-25.

Population density proved a central concern of the census: The first four pages of


results calculated this statistic and compared it to neighboring and European countries. Claiming an area of 1.82 million square kilometers and population of 1.816 million, Bolivia had a population density of 0.99. However, even this represented an overly generous calculation since the population figure included multiple estimates: 49,820 people living in the lost Littoral department, 41,841 missed by census takers, and 91,000 “unpacified” Indians in the north and east. The third largest country by size in South America at the time, Bolivia ranked seventh in population and won last place for population density.

Officials thus bemoaned the “complete depopulation” of fertile lands supposedly capable of supporting millions.

Similar concerns emerged from statistics that counted the number of rural and urban dwellers in each department, province, canton, vice-canton, mission, and colonizing settlement. Of the 359 urban centers identified, only thirteen had more than 3,000 residents; five of these had a population of more than 15,000, but only one (La Paz) could boast over 50,000. Despite an overly broad definition of an urban area as any settlement with over two hundred residents, census takers still designated a mere twenty-five percent of Bolivia’s population as urban. This would make conscription procedures difficult: Administrators would have to travel long distances into the countryside to raise awareness of this obligation,


62 The territorial figure also included 66,170 kilometers attributed to the Littoral Department. The 1904 treaty would cede 120,000 kilometers. Bolivia. Oficina Nacional de Inmigración, Censo general v. 1, 11-14.


and young men would have to do the same to register and report for service.

Statistics on education also signaled a potential barrier. Men who had never attended school would be less likely to learn of the duty to serve in the military, and illiterate men would need assistance to read newspaper or handbill notifications. Lamenting the lack of information about school locations, curricula, and attendance rates, census officials were unable to report statistics on formal school attendance. Instead, they opted to count “the inhabitants who know how to read and write, or simply read.” In their words, the results were “not very encouraging.” Only 16.6 percent of those over the age of seven who participated in the census had even minimal literacy skills. Even discounting women raised this figure only slightly (to 19.5 percent).66 In fact, these statistics overestimated the population’s level of schooling by including only the 1.6 million people formally accounted for in the census. Whereas most educated people probably participated in the census, those missed by census takers, including the 91,000 ‘unpacified Indians,’ were the most likely to be illiterate.

The census determined that the majority of the rural population, including those “unpacified” Indians, belonged to some eighty different socio-linguistic groups, which together formed the indigenous “race.” Census takers divided the population into the following races: indigenous (50.8%), mestizo (26.82%), white (12.75%), and black (0.22%).67 Looking forward to the 1950 census, which categorized sixty-three percent of the population as indigenous, Erwin Grieshaber has convincingly hypothesized that the 1900 census

66 Bolivia. Oficina Nacional de Inmigración, Censo general v. 2, 42-44.
67 The additional 9.43% were listed as ‘not reported.’ These included people whose race was not reported by census takers and a 5% augmentation used to estimate those missed by census takers. Bolivia. Oficina Nacional de Inmigración, Censo general v. 2, 30-35.
counted only tribute payers as indigenous rather than relying on other socio-cultural markers such as language and dress. Based on this method of calculation, the officials who penned the census could express the belief that the indigenous population had been “mortally wounded” by drought, famine, pestilence, and alcoholism and thus predict the “slow and gradual disappearance of the indigenous race.”

These words, of course, represented ruling elites’ fondest hope for Bolivia. They were hard pressed to imagine a path to modernization that did not depend upon the eventual assimilation and disappearance of indigenous peoples, whom they viewed as alcoholic, rural, and uneducated – in a word, backward. These beliefs lay behind almost every section of the census. Not surprisingly, this document effaces the existence of ayllus and other indigenous communal structures. And lamentations about sparse population, illiteracy, and the predominance of rural living were in essence iterations of complaints about Indian “backwardness.” For example, when classifying people as urban or rural, officials expressed concern about the “quality” of many of those being counted as urbanites: “Some have opined that any town where the indigenous element is predominant should not be considered an urban population.” No progress would be possible, they believed, in places where Indian ways of life predominated.

These ethnocidal ideologies of assimilation and whitening also motivated the legislation that officially eradicated communal structures, imposed obligatory military service,
and created later educational reforms.\textsuperscript{71} By removing indigenous men, even if temporarily, from their rural environs, be it a hacienda or a community, these institutions would introduce them to “civilized” ways of living. Officers and legislators spoke reverentially of the barracks as an educational space where conscripts would learn basic literacy skills, discover the importance of hygiene, and be exposed to the benefits of modern living. Compulsory military service would thus address many of the obstacles noted in the 1900 census.

**Convincing Conscripts and Authorities to Comply with Obligatory Military Service**

As depicted in the 1900 census, Bolivia’s geography and demography would pose a significant challenge to implementing the 1907 conscription law. Would the population, the majority of which was indigenous, illiterate, and rural, know about and understand their obligation? Would they be able to document their precise age, register for the draft, and understand their entitlement to exemptions or reductions of service? Could they feasibly travel the great distances involved during the time allocated? And would the government be able to feed, house, clothe, and pay every nineteen-year-old man, even if only for three months? After completing service, how and where would former conscripts perform training mandated for reserve troops? Most importantly, how would the government enforce this law among those who failed to register or present for service?

Given formidable barriers, the 1907 law produced surprisingly successful, if somewhat limited, results in its initial years. In 1910, Minister of War Andrés Muñoz wrote hopefully that obligatory service had “already become a habit, representing our youth’s best school for education and for national unification.”\(^\text{72}\) A successor in the position gleefully proclaimed five years later that the number of conscripts had “exceeded all expectations,” with so many presenting that only thirty-seven percent could serve two years.\(^\text{73}\) Despite these optimistic pronouncements, however, the small size of the standing army meant the majority of men still avoided conscription, be it through ignorance of the law, willful disregard, legitimate or fraudulent exemption, or the protection of powerful patrons. Military authorities thus found their ambitions limited by the inability to punish most evaders and to control the inefficient and recalcitrant provincial authorities responsible for local implementation.

President Montes’s hand-chosen successor, Eliodoro Villazón (1909-1912), remained deeply committed to military professionalization. The officer corps, however, was divided between Francophiles and advocates of German training.\(^\text{74}\) When its contract came up for renewal in May 1909, the French mission fell victim to this dispute as Villazón and Minister of War Muñoz decided that German military methods would be “more appropriate for our army” and contracted with a much more substantial German mission.\(^\text{75}\) Major Hans Kundt

\(^\text{72}\) Memoria que presenta el Ministro de Guerra de Bolivia Doctor Andrés S. Muñoz ante el Honorable Congreso Ordinario de 1910 (La Paz: Intendencia de Guerra, 1910), 7.

\(^\text{73}\) Memoria de Guerra y Colonización (La Paz: n.p., 1915), 12.

\(^\text{74}\) Brockmann, El general y sus presidentes, 34.

\(^\text{75}\) Memoria de 1910, 40.
arrived in La Paz in April 1911 with three captains, one lieutenant, and thirteen sergeants from the Prussian army, thus initiating a volatile relationship between Kundt and the Bolivian political elite that would stretch into the 1930s. Kundt, promoted at first to colonel in the Bolivian army, soon took Sever’s seat as Chief of Staff and began churning out regulations for military training, salutes, physical education, and barracks regimen while his colleagues took on training tasks in the military academy and regiments. The army not only adopted the Prussian goosestep and uniform style but also imported five million marks’ worth of equipment and arms from German vendors.

This period also saw the consolidation of conscription procedures: Men queued up to register for service, petitions for exemption flowed into the prefectures, and lotteries determined how long each conscript would serve. The quartermaster corps printed military-service booklets, sewed uniforms, and cobbled shoes or sandals for each contingent. Army photographers had even developed portraits of 2,731 soldiers by August 1908. Upon presenting for service, conscripts received medical exams and smallpox vaccinations. Those designated for three months of training were discharged in February or March while the rest remained until October of the next year; all received military-service booklets attesting their

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76 Memoria que presenta al Congreso Ordinario de 1911 el Ministro de Guerra y Colonización Coronel Julio La-Faye (La Paz: Talleres Gráficos ‘La Prensa’), 15; Memoria que presenta al Honorable Congreso Nacional de 1912 el Ministro de Guerra y Colonización, Coronel Julio La Faye (La Paz: Intendencia de Guerra, 1912), 22.
77 Díaz Arguedas, Historia del ejército, 763; Sanjinés Goitia, El militar ingeniero, 352; Bieber, “La política militar alemana en Bolivia, 1900-1935,” 97-100; Dunkerley, Orígenes del poder militar, 94.
78 Memoria presentada al Congreso Ordinario de 1908 por el Ministro de Guerra Doctor José S. Quinteros (La Paz: Talleres Gráficos ‘La Prensa’, 1908), xxvi-xxvii.
79 Memoria de 1911, 21; Memoria de 1912, 32.
compliance with the law.\textsuperscript{80} Thus, many of the mechanisms set forth in 1907 had been put into effect, albeit in a limited fashion.

The Boletín Militar portrayed conscription as a functioning and transparent bureaucratic process by publishing all military regulations and ministerial resolutions. Included therein was the acceptance or rejection of every petition for discharge, exemption, reduction, and postponement; these notices sometimes even included the amount of tax paid.\textsuperscript{81} For example, it reported that Clodomiro Aparicio from San Lorenzo (Tarija) received an exemption in 1908 after paying the maximum tax of two hundred bolivianos and submitting documentation that proved his age, registration for the draft, and that he suffered from chronic bronchitis.\textsuperscript{82} Although the vast majority of successful petitions came from professionals with Hispanic surnames, at least one identified an indigenous petitioner – rural laborer Benigno Vasquez. Hailing from Aquerama (Cochabamba), he produced documents that proved him the only support of impoverished parents and thus entitled to serve only three months in 1908. After showing his “utter poverty,” Vasquez was exempted from paying any tax.\textsuperscript{83} Obligatory military service did not yet reach into every household, but it had been established as a functioning bureaucratic system.

Reflecting on the system’s effectiveness in 1911, Minister of War Julio La Faye noted that “despite the nonattendance of some conscripts, the military-service law continues to

\textsuperscript{80} Yearly reports submitted by the minister of war to Congress reflect these discharge dates. Only in 1916 were the conscripts chosen for three months of training discharged immediately after the lottery. Memoria de Guerra y Colonización (La Paz: n.p., 1916), 36.
\textsuperscript{82} Bolivia. Boletín Militar del Ministro de Guerra, Tomo IV. (La Paz: Intendencia de Guerra Talleres, 1908), 307.
\textsuperscript{83} Bolivia. Boletín Militar del Ministro de Guerra, Tomo III. (La Paz: Intendencia de Guerra Talleres, 1907), 484.
yield satisfactory results.” It produced enough men to fill the ranks, which, he noted, had
“never occurred under the previous law.”84 As shown in Table 2, thousands of men
registered for service, hundreds paid the prescribed tax after receiving exemptions or
reductions, and over a thousand presented each January 1 to participate in the lottery.

### Table 2: Conscription Statistics, 1908-1913

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Army Size</th>
<th>Men Registered</th>
<th>Conscripts Presented</th>
<th>Lottery: 2 Years</th>
<th>Exempted Service</th>
<th>Reduced Service</th>
<th>Postponed Service</th>
<th>Tax Collected</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1908</td>
<td>3200</td>
<td>4124</td>
<td>1754</td>
<td>680</td>
<td>452</td>
<td>386</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1909</td>
<td>3000</td>
<td>8110</td>
<td>945</td>
<td>578</td>
<td>199</td>
<td>155</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1910</td>
<td>2953</td>
<td>5450</td>
<td>1279</td>
<td>934</td>
<td>228</td>
<td>258</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1911</td>
<td>3430</td>
<td>4257</td>
<td>1336</td>
<td>801</td>
<td>278</td>
<td>294</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1912</td>
<td>3750</td>
<td>6281</td>
<td>1239</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>329</td>
<td>129</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>6225 bs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1913</td>
<td>4150</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>2319</td>
<td>1439</td>
<td>332</td>
<td>144</td>
<td>124</td>
<td>8380 bs.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Chart compiled by author based on the Boletín militar, Memoria del Ministro de Guerra (and Anexos), and the yearly laws that regulated the army’s size. Dashes indicate unavailability of statistic in these sources. However, these sources offer several figures that often differ, even within single annual volumes. The most variation occurred for statistics regarding exemptions, reductions, postponement. When these contradictions occurred, I chose to use the number offered in August of that year during the Minister of War’s report to Congress rather those from summary tables included in later reports. This accounts for the contradictions between this table and those compiled by Dunkerley and Quintana, neither of whom cite specific years or pages of the Memoria or Boletín. Sources: Memoria presentada al Congreso Ordinario de 1908 por el Ministro de Guerra Doctor José S. Quinteros (La Paz: Talleres Gráficos ‘La Prensa’, 1908), ix-xiii, 200; Boletín militar del Ministerio de Guerra Tomo V (La Paz: Intendencia de Guerra, 1909), 56, 92, 185; Memoria que presenta el Ministro de Guerra de Bolivia Doctor Andrés S. Muñoz ante el Honorable Congreso Ordinario de 1910 (La Paz: Intendencia de Guerra, 1910), 59, xxxiv, xxxvi, cvii-cx; Memoria que presenta al Congreso Ordinario de 1911 el Ministro de Guerra y Colonización Coronel Julio La Faye (La Paz: Talleres Gráficos ‘La Prensa’), 35, 146; Memoria que presenta al Honorable Congreso Nacional de 1912 el Ministro de Guerra y Colonización, Coronel Julio La Faye (La Paz: Intendencia de Guerra, 1912), 4; Anexos de la memoria de guerra y colonización (La Paz: Intendencia de Guerra, 1912), 89-90; Memoria de Guerra y Colonización (La Paz: n.p., 1913), 8; Anexos de la memoria de guerra y colonización (La Paz: Intendencia de Guerra, 1913), 5-6, 113-14; Ley que fija el número de plazas, November 16, 1907, October 30, 1908, February 5, 1910, January 28,1911, November 30, 1911.

These statistics not only demonstrate the existence of a functioning bureaucratic system but also that the army’s needs for manpower were more than met by those who chose to present themselves for service. In fact, the conscription system would have been totally overwhelmed if every nineteen-year-old Bolivian had indeed appeared for service. The funds

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84 Memoria de 1911, 36.
annually allocated by Congress to feed, house, and pay conscripts would not have covered even their expenses for travel to departmental capitals, and the one army surgeon sent to each center to verify their physical fitness would have thrown up his hands in despair.

As historian Luis Oporto notes in his study of conscription in the mining district of Llallagua, men belonging to the working class of artisans and miners registered “religiously” but then usually failed to present or fled if chosen in the lottery. The national-level statistics presented in Table 2 support this conclusion: Almost half of the men who registered for service neither presented nor arranged for an exemption, resulting in over eight thousand evaders during the first six years of the new law. This number did not include the thousands of men whose names never graced a military register. Extrapolating from the age statistics reported in 1900, each cohort of nineteen-year-olds consisted of approximately thirteen thousand men, which meant that only thirty to sixty percent registered each year. In the face of these numbers and numerous petitions claiming ignorance of the law, military and political authorities compromised by granting exceptions. The resulting decrees represented a tacit admission as to the aspirational nature of the law and attempted to persuade more Bolivians to comply with obligatory military service.

Issued in December 1908, the first of these exceptions temporarily suspended the capture of indigenous draft evaders until October 1909 and gave them a ten-month extension to register. The decree attributed this measure to the remoteness of many indigenous communities and the many petitions “received from indígenas in diverse regions.

85 Oporto Ordoñez, Úncia y Llallagua, 120-24.
86 Bolivia. Oficina Nacional de Inmigración, Censo general v. 2, 27-29. This finding supports the minister of war’s 1916 estimate that only thirty percent of each cohort registered. Memoria de 1916, 61.
[that] express a failure to comply with the current regulations due to ignorance of the laws.”

These petitions identified the basic assumption on which the conscription law was based: that all residents would be familiar with the law’s provisions. They thus successfully mobilized assumptions about Indians’ backwardness to obtain this concession. At least in one case, the prefect of La Paz diligently followed this decree: After eleven draft evaders from Caupolicán arrived in La Paz in January 1909, the prefect sent Mariano Mento, Manuel Chipana, and Andrés Anco home rather than to military units, citing this extension. These exceptions for indigenous men allowed authorities to portray the central government as a forgiving father figure, whose duty, Minister of War Juan María Zalles maintained, was to help “the indigenous class, [who,] for their lack of education and social conditions, has not been able to precisely comply” with the law. He therefore instructed the military commissions charged with conscription in January 1913 to accept all indigenous men who presented, regardless of age or registration status.

Other ministers of war declared similar windows of exception, for all omisos in 1910 and 1918 but only for indigenous omisos in 1916. These decrees acknowledged the difficulties of implementation and attempted to coax all Bolivians – but especially indigenous Bolivians – into following the law rather than punishing them all for noncompliance, which would have been extremely difficult given budgetary and geographic impediments. They hoped that these exceptions would convince more men to serve and allow the practice of

87 Supreme Decree, December 16, 1908.
88 Prefect of La Paz to Quartermaster of Caupolicán, January 2, 1909, Prefecture-Exped box 170, d. 247, Archivo de La Paz, La Paz, Bolivia (hereafter cited as ALP).
89 Ministerial resolution, December 28, 1912, Anexos de 1913, 20.
90 Memoria de 1910, 10; Memoria de Guerra y Colonización (La Paz: n.p., 1916), 21; Memoria de Guerra y Colonización (La Paz: n.p., 1918), 15.
military service to take root in communities across Bolivia. Such exceptions to bureaucratic procedure acknowledged that, first and foremost, obligatory military service depended upon individual acceptance of this duty. Army representatives could not feasibly travel to every town, not to mention each rural dwelling, to inform men – both indigenous and non – of the law, register them for service, check their military-service documents, and capture draft evaders. They therefore depended on local authorities for implementation and enforcement. Successive ministers of war repeatedly enjoined these authorities to do everything in their power to ensure that all men registered for the draft; however, the frequency of these pleas indicates the limits of these officials’ willingness or ability to accomplish the task.

Memoranda to subprefects and corregidores quoted the pertinent legal passages and threatened severe sanctions for noncompliance. In particular, the minister of war counseled local authorities regarding the obligation to register indigenous men, suggesting that they enlist parish priests to “make the indigenous race understand their obligation to register and serve in the Army.” He also recommended that they threaten legal action against property owners and indigenous communal authorities who “hamper in any way the enrollment of their colonos” and community members. Yet the reliance on local authorities to implement conscription meant that if an individual corregidor decided it was not worth his effort to negotiate with local power brokers over registering and conscripting their workers and community members, he could simply fail to carry out these orders, ignoring or deflecting military requests even though he directly owed his position to the central state.

91 Oporto Ordoñez, Uncía y Llallagua, 120.
92 Minister of War to Prefects #304, June 16, 1916. Prefecture-Admin box 149, ALP.
The subprefect of Ingavi, for example, replied in 1913 that the registration of Indians in his region was “impossible” because the “Indian, suspicious and distrustful by nature, avoids indicating the number of people in his family” and disappears as soon as he realizes that a census has begun.\textsuperscript{93} Another such authority, the corregidor of Cohoni, wrote of the hundreds of men living on haciendas who, “supported by their \textit{patrones},” willfully disobeyed the law.\textsuperscript{94} Evidence suggests that some local administrators even altered the documentary record to help men avoid service. In one case, the corregidor of Italaque denounced his substitute for registering twenty-four-year-old Jacinto Riveras as if he were only eighteen. This act of patronage provided Riveras with a registration certificate he could apparently use to obtain a government post “without first fulfilling his sacred duty to the \textit{Patria}.”\textsuperscript{95} This reliance on local authorities allowed individuals to maneuver in the gap between theory and practice, relying on luck, negligence, and personal relationships to save them from military service.

The unreliability of provincial authorities in implementing conscription did not escape the notice of top officials. In their annual report to Congress and regular flow of memoranda to departmental prefects, successive ministers of war blamed these administrators for the ever-increasing number of draft evaders. In 1909, La Faye criticized the actions of corregidores who ignored “legal orders” to protect friends’ children and laborers from conscription. Suggesting that corruption had snuck into the system, he

\textsuperscript{93} Subprefect of Ingavi quoted in Prefect of La Paz to Minister of War #41, January 6, 1913. Prefecture-Admin box 147, ALP.

\textsuperscript{94} Corregidor of Cantón Cohoni quoted in Prefect of La Paz to Minister of War #272, January 29, 1913. Prefecture-Admin box 147, ALP.

\textsuperscript{95} Corregidor de Italaque Zacarias Verdé to Prefect of La Paz, September 8, 1913, Prefecture-Admin box 147, ALP.
declared that the only remedy would be to appoint non-local corregidores.\textsuperscript{96} He used
stronger language several years later to condemn provincial authorities for encouraging “this
evil through malicious impunity or neglect,” and his successor in 1913 even accused civil
authorities of using the conscription law to “enlarge their haciendas and take advantage of
Indians’ labor for their own benefit.”\textsuperscript{97}

Instituting the use of military-service documents was a similarly dependent and,
therefore, uneven process. In theory, these documents would provide their holders with
opportunities, and their absence would make men unemployable and vulnerable to
impressment. To put this theory into practice, the minister of war and departmental prefects
repeatedly ordered local authorities to demand military-service documents from workers.\textsuperscript{98}
They also reminded police officers of their responsibility to inspect the military-service
booklets of all young men, capturing those without documents and immediately sending
them to the nearest army unit.\textsuperscript{99} Mining companies even received orders to comply with new
regulations in 1913 that stated: “Every mine owner, to give a job to a Bolivian individual, will
demand a military-conscription booklet.”\textsuperscript{100} These instructions, constantly reiterated in
Prefecture and War Ministry records, indicate both the determination of government

\textsuperscript{96} “Memoria de 1909” in Boletín militar del ministerio de guerra Tomo V (La Paz: Intendencia de Guerra, 1909), 186.
\textsuperscript{97} Memoria de 1912, 6; Memoria de 1913, 10.
\textsuperscript{98} For examples, see: Luis Zalles C., Prefect of La Paz to Police Intendant, #2637, October 22, 1909,
Prefecture-Exped box 170 d. 273; Prefect of La Paz to Police Intendant of Larecaja, #13, January 3, 1911,
Prefecture-Exped 181 d. 163; Minister of War memorandum to Prefects, #173, August 15, 1913,
Prefecture-Admin box 147; Minister of War to Prefect of La Paz, #212, March 13, 1914, Prefecture-
Admin box 148, ALP; Memoria de 1910, 13.
\textsuperscript{99} Minister of War Col. Julio La Faye memorandum to Prefects, #118, February 3, 1912, in Anexos de
1912, 33.
\textsuperscript{100} Minister of Industry José S. Quinteros to Prefects, July 14, 1913, quoted in C. Morales to Subprefects,
officials to enforce the law and their inability to do so as effectively as they hoped. As Luis Oporto notes, many miners enjoyed de facto dispensation from military service, as mining companies used their political sway to protect their labor forces. Yet evidence does suggest that these documents were beginning to be recognized as necessary, especially for men who travelled away from their communities. For example, when Juan Postigo, a rubber-industry worker from Apolo, was “in transit in La Paz” in 1909, he begged the Prefect to certify his registration for the draft, stating “I fear the patrols in the street.”

The vast majority of draft evaders, however, never faced consignment to military units. Since the number of conscripts who chose to present always exceeded the limits set by Congress, the army did not have to expend scarce resources scouring the countryside for evaders. Yet this did not mean they never entered the ranks. A sampling of records from the La Paz Prefecture shows that departmental authorities sent at least 142 evaders to military units between 1908 and 1919. However, their capture and manner of transmission again depended almost exclusively on the decisions of the subprefects and corregidores who represented the state in the provinces and cantons. Some evaders arrived with police escorts, whereas others travelled alongside the conscripts presenting from the province. In one particularly striking case, the corregidor of Laja (Omasuyos) ordered ten men, who self-identified as rural indigenous laborers, to escort twenty evaders to La Paz. According to their erstwhile guards, the captives chose a “solitary place” near the Huaña-ahuira River, where

101 Oporto Ordoñez, Uncía y Llallagua, 126.
102 Juan Postigo to Prefect of La Paz, March 31, 1909, Prefecture-Exped, box 170, d. 584, ALP. See also petition by Francisco Cirón, December 30, 1909, Prefecture-Exped box 169, d. 37, ALP.
103 Statistic compiled by author based on records in Prefecture-Admin boxes 147, 148, ALP; Prefecture-Exped boxes 164 (d. 47), 170 (d. 116, 247, 349, 414, 416, 470), 178 (d. 33, 52, 145), 181 (d. 158), 182 (d.126), 189 (d. 26), 190 (d. 4), ALP.
they “collectively rose up and, armed with rocks, began to run, so that we had to fight them.” After recapturing thirteen, they finished the journey to La Paz. The corregidor’s decision to commission a small group of unarmed (and almost certainly unpaid) men to escort the evaders had allowed seven to fight or bribe their way to freedom.104

Even though the 1907 law did not produce a conscription juggernaut, many indigenous comunarios [those living in communities] and colonos followed state procedure in registering and presenting for service. Some may have done so voluntarily or even “with great enthusiasm,” to quote the Quartermaster of Viacha in describing five indigenous conscripts from San Andrés de Machaca (Pacajes, La Paz).105 The province of Carangas (Oruro) offers an especially instructive example. In 1910, Minister of War Muñoz lamented the “laziness of the authorities in the province of Carangas, where it is known that, up to now, there has not been even one enrollment in the military register this year.”106 Yet, only three years later, the prefect of Oruro noted with surprise that more than a hundred young men from Carangas had reported for service.107 His successor in 1914 described the 225 conscripts from Carangas as “robust soldiers and enthusiastic to carry out their patriotic duties.”108 In this traditionally Aymara region where indigenous communities controlled virtually all of the land, indigenous men, Robert Smale hypothesizes, may have embraced

104 Petition from Martín Poma, José Valencia, Pedro Villeca, Juan Alejo, Bonifacio Condori, Gumercindo Flores, Tiburcio Poma, Blas Ticona, and Dámaso Ticona signed by Tomás Alba to Prefect of La Paz, December 27, 1912, Prefecture-Exped box 190, d. 4, ALP.
105 Quartermaster of Viacha to Prefect of La Paz, January 26, 1909, Prefecture-Exped box 170, d. 230, ALP.
106 Memoria de 1910, 50.
military service as part of a pact of reciprocity with the state whereby they expected to receive recognition of their land claims in exchange for labor.\textsuperscript{109}

The implementation of the conscription law demonstrates the Bolivian state’s dependence on indirect rule through the subprefects that administered provincial capitals and the corregidores of cantons. Despite the fact that they directly owed their positions to the central state that appointed them, most apparently had few incentives to comply with directives from La Paz and made decisions based on their own loyalties and agendas. The minister of war and departmental prefects thus had to threaten and cajole them to comply with the letter and spirit of the law. This allowed for significant local variation in conscription and resulted in the uneven spread of military service across the national territory. Financial, geographical, and practical constraints meant that authorities could neither ensure universal awareness of the law nor enforce it by capturing all who failed to register or present for service. Obligatory military service in early twentieth-century Bolivia could not be imposed through effective bureaucracy nor through domination; it instead depended on individual and communal acceptance. Rather than uniformly punishing noncompliance, state agents added flexibility to the law by decreeing periods of exception during which men of all ages could present without penalty. This tactic served multiple ends: It maintained the pretense of state control, communicated the state’s benevolence, and attempted to draw more people into the conscription system. In the absence of imminent

\textsuperscript{109} Robert L. Smale. "Conscription, Class, and Ethnicity in Oruro, Bolivia before the Chaco War." Presented at "Beyond the Battlefield: The Labor of Military Service in Latin American and the Caribbean," Duke University, April 1-2, 2011. This argument works off of Tristan Platt’s argument that a pact existed between the state and indigenous communities whereby they paid tribute in exchange for state protection from landowner encroachment. Tristán Platt, \textit{Estado boliviano y ayllu andino: Tierra y tributo en el norte de Potosí} (Lima: Instituto de Estudios Peruanos, 1982).
international conflict, the small size of the standing army meant that state agents could hope that conscription would take root and did not have to resort to mass, arbitrary impressment to fill the ranks. Successive ministers of war could thus express satisfaction with the law’s results even as they registered concern about recalcitrant local authorities and the ever-multiplying number of evaders.

“Odious Privileges”: The Struggle over Exemptions and Omiso Status

The 1907 law may have successfully filled the barracks, but, when judged by Liberals’ criteria that military service be a sacred duty shared by all social classes, it was an utter failure. Minister of War Fermín Prudencio’s 1918 remarks were certainly hopeful at best when he praised the “uniform and spontaneous manner with which all ranks of the republic offer their quota of blood, from the aborigine of our countryside to the young man of the most distinguished social class.” Legal loopholes, fraud, favoritism, and the punishment of evaders with extra years of service meant that little cross-class mixing occurred in the barracks and that poor and indigenous Bolivians shouldered the burden of service. Legislators, caught in a contradiction between the ideal of service to country and the realities of the nation’s “best sons” spending two years in uncomfortable barracks, refused to close loopholes and even attempted to lessen the obligation. Most formally educated men who did enter the barracks became NCOs or served in the more prestigious cavalry or artillery regiments. The new hierarchies built around military service thus reconfigured racial- and class-based hierarchies in the meritorious terms of ability, morality, and patriotism.

Regulations implementing the conscription law reflected the liberal ideal of

110 Memoria de Guerra y Colonización (La Paz, n.p., 1918), 4.
unmarked citizens and thus expressly prohibited the officials charged with military
conscription from recording race. Yet indigeneity lay at the center of the 1907 law, which
would teach Indians to be Bolivians and introduce them to the wonders of literacy and
hygiene. Indigenous status thus morphed from race to class as the minister of war demanded
that registrars note conscripts’ social class, suggesting “indígena, artisan, cholo, [and]
gentleman” as possibilities. Obviously uncomfortable with the proximity of these categories
to racial ones, he offered assurances that these data would serve only to prevent the
confusion of men with similar names. Registration guidelines instructed officials to record
each conscript’s skin color but explicitly stated that they must judge this factor based on only
the hue of his face, “without taking race into account under any circumstance.”

111 Tellingly, this order asked them to ignore race while still assuming that races existed as easily
identifiable ontological categories. Such admonishments, however, were routinely violated by
officers and government officials, who, while they may have subscribed to the liberal ideals
that motivated this policy, lived their daily lives in a society defined by racial hierarchy. Thus,
of the 96 deserters reported to the prefect of La Paz between 1911 and 1916, 66 (almost 70
percent) were identified as belonging to the white, mestizo, or indigenous race.

112 Prohibited from recording race but seemingly unable to omit certain types of
indigeneity, national-level statistics on conscripts used indígena as an occupational rather than
racial category, including it as equivalent to “artisan,” “student,” and “lawyer.”

113 Although

111 Memorandum from Minister of War to Prefects, #12 quoted in Prefect of Oruro V.E. Sanjines to
subprefects, June 6, 1907. Document courtesy of Gabrielle Kuenzli.
112 Statistic compiled by author based on records in Prefecture-Admin boxes 147, 148, 149, 208, ALP;
Prefecture-Exped box 178 d. 120, ALP.
113 Which, of course, implied that anyone classified as indigenous in this matrix was a rural laborer.
this method certainly underestimated the indigenous men in the ranks, these statistics show that illiterate artisans and *indígenas* constituted an overwhelming majority of conscripts. Seventy-two percent (see Table 3) of the cohort that presented in 1910, for example, fell into these two categories. Including the next largest professional category (“*comericante*,” which encompassed both storekeepers and petty traders, some of whom almost certainly would have identified as indigenous) brought this statistic up to eighty-seven percent. Successive ministers of war explicitly described the majority of conscripts as “belonging to the lower classes of society and the indigenous race.”

Table 3: Conscripts by Department and Profession, 1910

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Profession</th>
<th>Chuq.</th>
<th>La Paz</th>
<th>Cocha.</th>
<th>Oruro</th>
<th>Potosí</th>
<th>Tarija</th>
<th>Santa Cruz</th>
<th>Beni</th>
<th>Total</th>
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<tr>
<td>Lawyers</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>12</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>10</td>
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<td>Professional Students</td>
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<td>14</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary Graduates</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
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<td>14</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
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<td>38</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
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<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
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<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traders / Storekeepers</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>191</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Artisans (illiterate)</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>128</td>
<td>211</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>138</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>682</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indígenas (illiterate)</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>237</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>111</strong></td>
<td><strong>268</strong></td>
<td><strong>319</strong></td>
<td><strong>116</strong></td>
<td><strong>230</strong></td>
<td><strong>60</strong></td>
<td><strong>145</strong></td>
<td><strong>24</strong></td>
<td><strong>1273</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: *Memoria de 1910*, clvii.

The 1900 census classified the majority of the population as rural and illiterate. However, this majority, as shown in the previous section, consisted precisely of those men

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114 *Memoria de 1912*, 10; *Memoria de 1913*, 17. See also *Memoria de 1913*, 70, *Memoria de 1914*, 63.
whom authorities struggled to register for service. They resided furthest from departmental capitals and most likely did not need military-service documents, given that they would not be running for public office or seeking degrees. While most ayllus [Andean communal groupings] had leaders who kept themselves abreast of the state’s legal framework, this information was often filtered through many layers before reaching the average eighteen-year-old. And these leaders were just beginning to forge ties with colonos during the early twentieth century.  

Many rural indigenous men thus remained (or at least could claim to be) ignorant of both the duty to serve and the procedures for obtaining a legal exemption. Even those who recognized the obligation could not always produce the required proof of age. So what could account for their robust representation in the army? In short: other groups’ use of exemptions to avoid service and the extra years in the ranks imposed on draft evaders.

Maneuvering through the bureaucratic procedures to obtain exemptions and reductions in service required more than a passing familiarity with the law. For example, when Isidro Quispe from the ex-community of Pomani (Sicasica, La Paz) petitioned for reduced service in 1908, he first had to rectify a clerical error that had listed him as eighteen in 1906, which would mean he was already a draft evader. He attached testimony proving he had not yet turned eighteen, was the only son and support of a widowed mother, and that “through our condition as indígenas, both my mother and I are utterly poor” and therefore exempt from paying the required tax. However, the minister of war advised Quispe to

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115 See Waskar T. Ari, "Race and Subaltern Nationalism: AMP Activist-Intellectuals in Bolivia, 1921-1964" (Ph.D. diss., Georgetown University, 2004); Gotkowitz, A Revolution for Our Rights.

116 When the 1874 disentailment law officially abolished indigenous communities, many community members began referring to themselves as ex-comunarios and their land as an ex-community. See Larson, Trials of Nation Making, 219.
present immediately for service, denying his petition because it had not been filed at the proper time. Thus, although Quispe should have been entitled to reduced service, he would likely serve four years as a draft evader.

As shown in Table 2, over three thousand men received exemptions, reductions, or postponements of service between 1908 and 1913. Quispe, however, did not typify these petitioners. Statements by the minister of war indicate the “tendency of the upper social classes to evade service” by faking illness, studying abroad, or obtaining temporary employment with exempt industries. Despite measures to prevent corruption, military administrators believed many medical exemptions to be the fraudulent result of “friendship or favoritism” by unscrupulous physicians who “certify imaginary sicknesses and impediments.” Year after year, the minister of war decried the prevalence of medical exemptions along with other “odious privileges.” He thus repeatedly condemned laws passed in 1910 and 1911, which, ostensibly to facilitate progress, granted telegraph, telephone, steamship, and railroad employees exemptions from military service, provided they filed the proper paperwork and paid the required tax. He also begged Congress to limit medical exemptions, force men studying abroad to serve when they returned, and change the provision that allowed many students to serve only three months.

Although these pleas resulted in some practical and legal changes, they were minor victories in an unwinnable war. For example, a March 1911 resolution prohibited railroad

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117 Correspondence between Isidro Quispe, Prefect of La Paz, and Minister of War, February 21-March 13, 1908; Minister of War to Prefect of La Paz, March 13, 1908, Prefecture-Exped box 164, d. 32, ALP.
118 Memoria de 1912, 6.
119 Memoria de 1910, 50; Memoria de 1912, 3.
120 Memoria de 1910, 8.
companies from hiring eighteen-year-olds, but the companies simply ignored the law, at least according to the war ministry’s annual reports in 1913, 1914, and 1918.\textsuperscript{122} And after resolving in 1914 that medical exemptions could only be approved in person by military physicians, the minister of war proudly noted that these physicians had sent to the barracks 71 petitioners whom others had declared unfit for service.\textsuperscript{123} However, although the practice continued, young men apparently found ways to trick or persuade commissioners, since ministers of war throughout the 1920s complained of educated men who “faked illnesses of all types.”\textsuperscript{124} In 1921, Minister of War Pastor Baldivieso bewailed the fact that men with “even a somewhat respectable official situation” commonly attempted to wheedle exemptions not only for their “sons and close relatives but also compadres, abijados, and even servants.”\textsuperscript{125}

Many Bolivians privileged enough to call in favors, understand loopholes, or even bribe officials thus obtained military documents without actually entering the barracks. Although draft evaders in spirit, they did not usually face legal consequences. Their possession of valid documents ensured that the new social category of omiso would not apply to them. This term comes from the Latin root omissus, meaning remiss or negligent, and translates (at least in Bolivia and Peru) as draft evader or shirker.\textsuperscript{126} Describing those who failed to register or present for service, omiso status left men vulnerable to immediate

\textsuperscript{122} Memoria de 1911, 36; Memoria de 1913, 11; Memoria de Guerra y Colonización (La Paz: n.p., 1914), 17-18; Memoria de Guerra y Colonización (La Paz: n.p., 1918), 19.
\textsuperscript{123} Memoria de 1914, 7; Memoria de 1915, 15.
\textsuperscript{124} Memoria de Guerra y Colonización (La Paz: n.p., 1921), 65.
\textsuperscript{125} Memoria de 1921, 65.
impressment for a term of four years.

Although budgetary and administrative factors limited the military’s ability to capture the average *omiso*, this vulnerability made the conferral of *omiso* status a particularly attractive tactic for resolving issues unrelated to military service.\(^{127}\) Private individuals involved in land disputes and local authorities hoping to rid themselves of rabble-rousers could report their enemies as *omisos* and perhaps have them banished to the army for up to four years. Evidence internal to these denunciations or from *omisos’* appeals indicates that this may have occurred in at least nineteen cases in just the department of La Paz.\(^{128}\) To cite two of the many examples in the Prefecture records, Subprefect Rodolfo Valdivia of Muñecas triumphantly reported having captured Mariano Chuquimia as an *omiso* in 1912. Even before citing the failure to serve, Valdivia described Chuquimia as a dangerous character “who constantly threatens the region” and should be separated from the community “for immoral acts.”\(^{129}\) Similarly, Asthenio Miranda claimed that Major Astigueta was using the pursuit of *omisos* as a pretext to capture “indígenas who would not submit to his service because the property was in litigation.”\(^ {130}\)

Non-state actors, both indigenous and non, could also use *omiso* status in attempts to convince the state to dispose of their enemies. After convincing authorities in the capital to capture Mariano Mamani as an *omiso*, José Valdez begged the prefect to block the efforts of

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\(^{127}\) Luis Oporto makes a similar point about local authorities using military service to enact revenge, citing a 1905 memorandum to prefects. Oporto Ordoñez, *Uncía y Llallagua*, 131.

\(^{128}\) Statistic compiled by author based on records in Prefecture-Admin boxes 147, 148, 149, ALP; Prefecture-Exped boxes 170, 190, 196, 222, 235, 237, 244, ALP.

\(^{129}\) Prefect of La Paz to Minister of War #3093, September 13, 1912, Prefecture-Admin box 147, ALP.

\(^{130}\) Prefect of La Paz to Minister of War #868, April 8, 1913; Minister of War to Prefect of La Paz #881, April 11, 1913, Prefecture-Admin box 147, ALP.
Mamani’s “patrons, compadres, and lawyers” to release him from service. Signed for Valdez by one Gregorio Miranda, this 1914 petition identified both the accused and accuser as indígenas.\footnote{José Valdέz to Prefect of La Paz, June 14, 1914, Prefecture-Exped box 196, d. 25, ALP.} In a particularly striking case, four indigenous men from Ichoca (Inquisivi) denounced their corregidor, José Salinas, as an omiso and successfully convinced the minister of war to order his capture in 1920.\footnote{Minister of War to Prefect of La Paz #129, June 16, 1920, Prefecture-Admin box 148, ALP.} This, however, may not have been quite the coup it initially seems. As Laura Gotkowitz notes, corregidor was an unsalaried position often held by local landowners or members of the indigenous elite; not all were necessarily fully literate.\footnote{Gotkowitz, \textit{A Revolution for Our Rights}, 53, 63, 217. See also Thomas Alan Abercrombie, \textit{Pathways of Memory and Power: Ethnography and History Among an Andean People} (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1998), 86-90; Platt, "Bolivian Liberalism", 284-87.} One of the whistle-blowers in this case may well have been a candidate to take over Salinas’s post. Most omisos certainly did not live in constant fear of capture, but the existence of the category and its corresponding punishment could serve as powerful tools for people from all walks of life.

Within the barracks, omiso was a stigmatized social category used to distinguish honorable conscripts from men who had failed in their patriotic duty. Most documents explicitly noted which soldiers had entered as omisos, indicating the importance of this status. Some lawmakers even expressed the belief that the state did not owe omiso soldiers dignified treatment. For example, after impassionedly describing the horrific conditions suffered by soldiers marching to the eastern border, Deputy Mariano Saucedo Sevilla from Santa Cruz argued that this “terrible situation” was “perhaps justified for the omisos” but was appalling
for “those who faithfully comply with the law of military conscription.”

Since the vast majority of omisos were almost certainly rural indigenous men who were unaware of the law’s provisions, this status provided an official excuse for the differential treatment of these soldiers. In 1912, for example, the subprefect of Ingavi captured Simeon, Francisco, and Juan Limachi of Tiahuanacu along with Mariano Quispe and Domingo Tonkoni of Tiripucho for failing to serve. Four days later Major Alfredo Richter reported the desertion of “these Indians” from the Machine Gunners Battalion and complained about their very presence, calling them “completely useless for this combat arm.” His description of their escape indicated their exclusion and markedly different status. Ostensibly due to “lack of room,” they had not been sleeping alongside the conscripts and were thus able to bore a hole in the wall of the “fuel storeroom next to the stables” where they had been quartered.135

Richter’s comment about the Indians’ unsuitability for “this combat arm” points to the hierarchies used by military authorities to assign soldiers to particular units. Geographical considerations and prejudices that equated formal education with ability ensured that different social classes would seldom mix in the barracks. In order to minimize transportation costs, conscripts typically served based on where they reported for service.136 Urban Paceños therefore tended to remain near their families, whereas conscripts from the

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135 Minister of War to Prefect of La Paz #754, April 17, 1912, Prefecture-Admin box 147, ALP. Tonkoni’s name is also spelled Ticona in other correspondence.
136 The first attempt to use conscription to promote interregional mixing occurred in 1925 when the Chief of Staff decided to distribute conscripts from Santa Cruz among altiplano regiments in order to “strengthen feelings of solidarity” and “combat the regionalism [that is] so pernicious in the country.” Memoria de Guerra y Colonización 1925 (La Paz: Intendencia de Guerra, 1925), 11.
departments of Santa Cruz and Tarija staffed garrisons on the harsh frontiers of the east and southeast. More significantly, administrators primarily assigned illiterate soldiers to infantry regiments, reserving space in cavalry and artillery units for the “more qualified conscripts” needed for these more technical arms. The literacy rates of two units garrisoned in the La Paz department in 1917 offer an instructive example: Over eighty-six percent of the Abaroa Cavalry Regiment were literate as compared to fewer than half the conscripts in the Campero Infantry Regiment.

Even within units, military hierarchy explicitly benefitted educated soldiers based on the idea that they were a civilizing force that would regulate and elevate their less-educated countrymen. Educated conscripts thus served as the NCOs responsible for much of their peers’ daily drilling and discipline. They played an indispensable role in military training, serving, in the words of one legislator, as the “framework through which conscripts are broken in.” The 1907 guidelines for promotion to NCO valued formal education and “moral conduct” above physical ability, guaranteeing that whiter men from “better” families would rapidly regain the social status that had supposedly been erased by “the democratic equality in military service that does not recognize the odious distinction of social class.” Affirming that the only hierarchy in the military was one of “competency and morality,”

137 Memoria de 1913, 60. See also 37a Sesión ordinaria, September 27, 1917, Redactor de la H. Cámara de Diputados, Tomo I (La Paz, 1917): 491-502.
138 Memoria de 1915, 18. See also memorandum #201 from Minister of War Néstor Gutiérrez to Prefect of Chuquisaca, November 18, 1913 in Anexos de la memoria de guerra y colonización (La Paz: Empresa Editora de ‘El Tiempo’, 1914), 85-87; Memoria de 1916, 36; Memoria de 1917, 65.
these promotion guidelines reframed social class as an earned rather than granted status.\footnote{\textit{Ministerial Resolution, January 22, 1907, Boletín Militar del Ministerio de Guerra Tomo III (La Paz: Intendencia de Guerra Talleres, 1907): 38-39.}}

Modifications to the 1907 law affirmed the use of education to establish military hierarchies among conscripts. Echoing German models, legislative projects in 1916 and 1917 debated the article that provided reductions in service for men who would earn a university degree or professional title during the term of service. Despite the minister of war’s plea to eliminate this privilege, the legislature proposed extending it to all literate men. Although this project failed, a 1917 law postponed and limited all students’ service. Proponents argued that due to their “extensive scientific and moral preparation,” literate men acquired the necessary military training at a faster rate and had thus “worked twice as much” in a shorter period.\footnote{11a Sesión ordinaria, August 18, 1916, Redactor de la H. Cámara de Diputados, Tomo I (La Paz, 1916): 211-212; \textit{22ª, 37ª, 50ª} sesiones ordinarias, September 10, September 27, October 13, 1917. Redactor de la H. Cámara de Diputados, Tomo I-II (La Paz, 1917): 237-242 (I), 491-502(I), 241-249, (II). Representative Sánchez A. quoted on 244.} This argument worked to recode preferential treatment based on social class as merit-based. The resulting law allowed students to be discharged after the first year of service and become reserve NCOs and officers, despite having received less training.\footnote{Military service law, November 24, 1917.}

A fundamental ambivalence about the project of universal military service lay at the heart of these promotion guidelines, refusals to close loopholes, and efforts to limit the service of educated men. Legislators discursively constructed the barracks as the cradle of the nation, yet they were aware of the sacrifice of time, comfort, and physical well-being that service entailed. While acknowledging that all Bolivians should share in this duty, they perhaps had trouble imagining their own sons’ serving in far-away barracks alongside
unlettered Indians. Demographics and legal forms of evasion ensured the majority of the troops would be non-citizen conscripts drawn from the ranks of artisans and rural laborers. Assignment methods, promotion requirements, and ominišo status then worked in combination to reinforce social divisions while delinking them from factors such as race. Differences in economic and cultural capital were thus reconfigured as differences of honor and morality, making hierarchies in the barracks appear to occur based on factors such as patriotism and service to country rather than education, skin color, profession, and financial means.144 A far cry from the egalitarian ideal promulgated in 1907, the structures that formed around conscription thus served to legitimize and reproduce hierarchical justifications for domination.

**Advocating “for My Freedom”: Celestino Coico and the Burden of Military Service**

These discussions of the law and battles over implementation reveal very little about how young men, especially from rural areas, perceived this obligation. Lacking the funds and political will to impose the 1907 law through violence and domination, Liberals hoped that awareness of the law would spread throughout the countryside as former conscripts returned home. They would act as disciples, converting friends and family to the idea of military service as a sacred duty to the national-level patria. Later cohorts would thus consent to conscription. In practice, of course, understandings of this duty differed based on communal norms. Many indigenous men may truly have been “anxious to serve,” as one US observer

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reported in 1928. Others, whose communities lay far from trade routes and cities, likely remained blissfully unaware of this duty. The in-depth analysis of one 1924 case indicates not only a complicated understanding of the law and the obligation it imposed but also the existence of a budding industry to process exemption petitions and even provide fraudulent military-service booklets.

Celestino Coico’s 1924 petition for exemption from military service identified him as an *indígena* from the ex-community of Guairiu (Yungas, La Paz). Dated January 7, the petition went out long past the statutory limit of September for exemptions and reductions. Coico, in fact, had already presented in the provincial capital and then travelled to La Paz for the lottery. His petition mobilized a combination of legal, moral, and logical arguments to plead for exemption:

In conformity with the requirements of the Military Conscription Law, I now appear to declare that I am unfit for the following reasons. Article 15 of the Military Service Law exempts the physically unfit and I am among those, as much because I suffer from a chronic illness, which is obvious at first sight, *que los naturales el Sextite*, which is a rash on the *órganos húmedos* that does not allow me to work, much less move in violent and unnatural ways. Unluckily abandoned by my parents, who have died, by necessity I had to contract matrimony six months ago so that I could be cared for, and I beg that I also be exempted from service according to what is established by Article 17 Subsection 4 of the aforementioned law. Also, as a contributing *indígena*, I recognize my obligation to pay the territorial contribution, which I would not be able to do in the barracks and which would defraud the State. For that and for regular conduct and prerequisite report of the Señor Commander, I

145 “Bolivia: Combat Estimate,” January 10, 1928, RG 165, NM 84-77, b. 557, f. S-C Intelligence Reference Pubs, National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, MD (hereafter cited as NARA).

146 Coico’s community is alternatively identified as Guaruruni and Guayruru; two documents identify it as belonging to canton Irupana while a third identifies Coripata as the closest administrative district. While the alternate spelling of Coico’s community is not surprising given the variety of possible transliterations for indigenous-language place names, the disparity in the canton is harder to explain since Coripata and Irupana are located in different provinces of the Yungas.
ask for a medical exam by a *Jefe del servicio*, so that it can convince him of the obstacle that makes me unfit for service and result in exempting me from the service, which we all must complete, but that, unfortunately, I cannot for being physically impossible.\textsuperscript{147}

The first argument of physical unfitness for service leads to the second argument, which invokes the legal article stipulating that married men with one or more children only serve three months. Perhaps Coico or his scribe misunderstood this clause since the petition cites only his marriage without mentioning children. Yet even these legal arguments slip in and out of a professional voice, adopting a language of pathos to describe his illness and orphanhood. The third argument draws on a very different logic than the liberal idea of military service as a universal duty that would civilize and incorporate the indigenous population. The mention of his “obligation to pay the territorial contribution” invokes the corporate logic that had previously exempted certain Indians from conscription and forcible recruitment because of their tributary status.\textsuperscript{148} Coico was not alone in professing this exemption long after its abolition: Bacilio Pillco’s 1911 petition for discharge similarly invoked “my condition as a tribute payer” to explain his unsuitability for service.\textsuperscript{149} These petitions indicate the continuation of a tributary logic among some indigenous people and its use in combination with newer legal provisions.

Coico’s first petition carried the signature of Benjamín Choque, and Pillco’s was signed for him by someone with the surname Crespo. Such petitions must, of course, be understood in terms of composite or co-authorship rather than read as the direct

\textsuperscript{147} Celestino Coico to Minister of War, January 7, 1924, Prefecture-Exped box 260, d. 106, ALP.
\textsuperscript{148} Although an 1882 law formally abolished tribute at the national level, it (under the new name of “contribución territorial de indígenas”) would remain a significant part of departmental budgets for several decades. Gotkowitz, *A Revolution for Our Rights*, 29-30.
\textsuperscript{149} Bacilio Pillco to Prefect of La Paz, November 14, 1911, Prefecture-Exped box 182, d. 126, ALP.
expressions of indigenous people. After all, illiteracy was fundamental to the matrix of social, racial, and cultural factors that determined an actor’s indigenous status. Thus nearly all documents in the early twentieth century that identified an indigenous petitioner were signed by “for the presenting party” by the notaries, tinterillos, escribanos, or lawyers who translated petitions into official writing. Although these men were integral to indigenous people’s interactions with the state, the relationships, processes, and interactions that produced these petitions remain obscure.

Written in the first person, Coico’s petition presents itself as his own words. Yet the signature of Choque at the bottom of the page and the petition’s use of stock legal language points to a more complicated authorship. What was the relationship between Coico and Choque? In what language did the interaction that produced this petition take place? What, if anything, did Choque charge for his services and how was he paid? What changes did Choque make in the process of translating both the language and form of Coico’s request into terms that would be legible to the state? The petition’s confusing construction, grammatical errors, and multiple arguments point to at least two possibilities: Either Choque was not making much of an effort to translate Coico’s request into legible terms or he was not highly qualified to do so. Perhaps Choque knew certain phrases and how to invoke legal articles but then transcribed or translated Coico’s speech, creating a confusing run-on sentence of personal and medical information.

The minister of war quickly denied this petition after receiving a report from the recruitment commission stating that Coico had been declared fit for service after being

“extensively examined by the Commission’s surgeons.”\textsuperscript{151} Coico then pled for reconsideration, this time in a petition signed by a different person, whose signature is illegible. His second petition altered strategy, making a claim based solely on physical unfitness for service. Why did Coico switch writers and abandon two of his arguments? Perhaps he did not know either writer personally and just employed a convenient literate person. Or perhaps the negative result of his first petition convinced him to place his appeal in other hands; the fact that this petition focused on the only argument that could legally exempt him from service supports this supposition. Again written in the first person, Coico’s second petition also contains grammatical errors but uses different terms to refer to the military’s medical personnel, indicating that these words probably came from the writer rather than Coico. It opens by cleverly reinterpreting state rhetoric about the sacred nature of defense in personal rather than national terms:

\begin{quote}
The right to defense is sacred, even more so if it means the defense of personal health. I have seen, Señor Minister, the report of the military commission and regrettably it has declared [me] fit for service, which, if it were true, I would aspire to and the resolution assuredly has been confirmed. I regret that a detailed exam, on which the existence of a citizen or indígena depends, has overlooked my bad state, not by pretext, but rather to present to the Surgeon General, \textit{que ha lamentado la incuria y mandadome} to ask your respectable Minister for the examination of the ulcers, which are not only visible but also spread out on the body, that, if it wouldn’t offend your respectable authority, I would beg that you see them and measure them, like they examine and give reports, in order to make up the guardians of order. For that reason, I ask you to order that the Surgeon General of the Army perform a personal exam of my anemic state and of the gangrenous ulcers I have all over my skin and, seeing that, deign to reconsider the resolution.\textsuperscript{152}
\end{quote}

While offering a token acknowledgement of the state’s vision of military service (“right to

\textsuperscript{151} President of Recruitment Commission of La Paz to Minister of War, January 8, 1924.

\textsuperscript{152} Celestino Coico to Minister of War, January 14, 1924, Prefecture-Exped box 260, d. 106, ALP.
defense is sacred”, “I would aspire to”, “guardians of order”), the petition primarily makes a graphically personal appeal. It repeatedly cites the sores on his skin in an attempt to persuade the minister of war of his agent’s error in declaring Coico fit for service. After implying that if only the minister could personally see and measure this bodily evidence, he would be persuaded of the error, the petition insists that the Surgeon General of the Army personally examine Coico. This petition also indicates an understanding of a pact whereby “a citizen or indígena” presents for service and receives from the state a thorough and fair medical exam to ensure that unfit men do not further ruin their “personal health” through military service. If Coico was as ill as his petitions claimed, the examination process suffered from major deficiencies.

When this petition was immediately denied, Coico enlisted one Dr. Molina to write a final appeal, in which he claimed to be “prostrate in my bed with pain” and called on the minister’s “humanitarian feelings.” Again written in the first person, the petition further complicates authorship when it refers to the writer (Dr. Molina) in the third person as a witness to Coico’s debilitated state.153 None of these petitions provided Coico with an exemption: After he sent an unnamed “advocate” to the lottery on January 18 rather than presenting personally, the minister of war ordered his capture as an omiso.154

Coico again enters the documentary record three weeks later when the Chulumani (Yungas, La Paz) police captured him along with fellow community member Estanislao

153 Celestino Coico to Minister of War, January 18, 1924; Minister of War to Prefect of La Paz, January 22, 1924, Prefecture-Exped box 260, d. 106, ALP.
154 Commander of Northern Military Zone to Minister of War, January 19, 1924, Prefecture-Exped box 260, d. 106, ALP.
Coico testified to spending eight days in La Paz as a conscript and paying Dr. Néstor Molina nine bolivianos “to advocate for [para que me defienda] my freedom.” When he could not get “a favorable military-service booklet” through Molina, he paid Dr. Donato Millán 37.50 bolivianos. Millán, Coico reported, “succeeded in getting my freedom, giving me my release booklet [liberta de libertado].” Apaza told a similar story of presenting with Coico, obtaining liberty through payments to Molina and Millán, and then “returning from La Paz to our residence.”

This case indicates not only the surprising success of the 1907 law but also the immensity of the challenge of achieving mass individual acceptance. Men like Celestino Coico were not yet queuing up to enlist and adopting Liberals’ discourse of military service as a sacred duty to the patria. However, the conscription system functioned in that some provincial authority in the Yungas ensured that Coico and Apaza registered and presented for service. However, far from viewing conscription as a sacred duty with which they were honored to comply, Coico and Apaza apparently understood it as a burden from which they should seek liberation. Their case also provides evidence that a small industry had sprouted, at least in La Paz, of professional intermediaries who composed petitions and perhaps also bribed officials or falsified military-service booklets. The growing importance of these documents also becomes apparent in a military commander’s statement that that Coico and Apaza.

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155 Coico’s name is spelled Cuyo in this set of documents, yet the match in circumstances, community, and the assistance of “Molina” indicate that they refer to the same man.

156 Statements of Celestino Cuyo and Estanislao Apaza, February 8, 1924, quoted in Col. Hermógenes Ibañez, Commander of Northern Military Zone, to Prefect of La Paz, #8, February 13, 1924, Prefecture-Admin box 208, ALP.
Apaza had returned “armed with said booklets.” Far from being outside of state structures, these two men from a rural indigenous community were part of the conscription system; one had even engaged with the state by submitting petitions that reinterpreted obligatory military service through not only a personal (“the defense of personal health,” “on which the existence of a citizen or indígena depends”) but also a corporate (“as a contributing indígena”) relationship with the state.

Conclusions

In a surprisingly short period of time, Liberals’ efforts to implement the 1907 conscription law filled the ranks of Bolivia’s standing army and convinced many men of the need to obtain military-service documents. Less easily achieved, however, was the goal of an egalitarian system that would bring men from all social classes together in the barracks in order to form a unified nation. In fact, daily practice in recruiting stations and barracks constantly contradicted liberal notions of equality. Even as legislators pontificated about creating a modern nation of equal citizens, they were unwilling to part with the benefits of living in a hierarchical society dependent on racialized difference. Nor was incorporating indigenous Bolivians on their own terms thinkable; they would have to change their way of life in order to join the nation as citizens. Military and political authorities thus focused on the “problem” of making the Indian (defined as backwards) into a modern man by eliminating markers of indigeneity through military service.

Perhaps comparing Coico’s experience with that of Quilco, the fictional Aymara man with whom this chapter began, offers a way to evaluate Liberals’ attempt to create a

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157 Col. Hermógenes Ibañez, Commander of Northern Military Zone, to Prefect of La Paz, #10, February 15, 1924, Prefecture-Admin box 208, ALP.
conscript army based on consent and legal norms rather than violent coercion. Coico, unlike his fictional counterpart, had some understanding of military service as a pact under which both the state and conscripts had duties and rights. Although both men viewed soldiering as a form of captivity, documents rather than fear of the whip kept Coicio from abandoning La Paz. Only after he and Apaza were “armed with said booklets” did they return home. A documentary regime apparently existed in at least some rural communities by the 1920s. However, new forms of fraud that developed in conjunction with the 1907 law meant that conscription was less effective at keeping Coico in the ranks than the fear and brutality that had transformed Quilco into a soldier.

In that he presented for service, Coico did not represent the average Bolivian of the period. The law created approximately forty-four thousand omisos in just the first five years. In the coming decades, both the size of the army and the number of men who presented for service grew, but the number of omisos could only multiply over the years. The vast quantity of omisos points to the fiction of centralized authority. Corruption appears to have been rampant on all levels, as subprefects, corregidores, and members of military commissions ignored orders, helped friends, and collected bribes to grant extraofficial exemptions. Advocates of universal service thus had to battle for converts. They had to persuade local authorities, individuals, families, and communities that military service was truly a “sacred duty” not to be avoided, shirked, ignored, or used for profit.

158 The war ministry stopped reporting the number of men registered and presented after 1912. 159 For one of many reports of this practice, see report that the corregidor of Yanacachi (Sud Yungas, La Paz) was charging indígenas 20 bolivianos “not to require them to present for military service.” Col. Hermógenes Ibañez, Commander of Northern Military Zone, to Prefect of La Paz, #3, January 19, 1924, Prefecture-Admin box 208, ALP.
To precisely map the spread of this obligation among particular communities, researchers must locate and analyze early conscription records. Evidence from prefecture archives, however, shows that many conscripts like Coico did present for service, sometimes walking for weeks to reach the departmental capital. For example, ten men who presented in the Muñecas province (La Paz) in March 1913 had reportedly travelled from “the remote rubber regions of Sangaban, San Carlos (Peru), Mapiri, Achiquiri, and Charipampa.” Despite the late date, the subprefect implored the minister of war to treat them as conscripts rather than as omisos, given the long and difficult distances they had voluntarily traversed.160

Yet this plea points to a contradiction inherent in the 1907 law. The goal of making military service honorable could not be met as long as extra years in the barracks were being used to punish evaders. Soldiering could not be both an honor and a punishment. Nor had the system achieved anything close to the ideal of universality: The low numbers needed to fill the ranks meant that Bolivia only needed a partial recruitment regime. Most of the men who presented for service would become soldiers, and most of those who evaded – whether as omisos or through legal exemptions – would not suffer any consequences. This chapter has thus shown the successes and shortcomings of the conscription process in the years following 1907. Through an examination of soldiers’ experiences in the barracks, the next chapter will evaluate the other factors by which, according to the law’s goals, it must be judged: creating an apolitical force above partisan politics, banishing violent coercion from the barracks, and ‘civilizing’ indigenous conscripts by teaching them not only Spanish and literacy skills but also obedience and allegiance to a national-level patria.

160 Rodolfo Baldivia G., Subprefect of Muñecas quoted in Prefect of La Paz to Minister of War, #632, March 6, 1913, Prefecture-Admin box 147, ALP.
Chapter 2: Life and Labor in the Barracks: Sociability, Discipline, and the Reshaping of Inequalities

Colonel Alfredo Richter’s 1921 political-tract-cum-memoir opens by recounting the dark days of his time as a young officer in the early 1900s when many of “the bad habits of the older systems” still reigned. Comparing soldiers to criminals attempting to break out of jail, Richter draws a bleak portrait of officers combing local bars and slums for missing conscripts, sleeping with their men on the “foul” barracks floor to discourage potential deserters, and dreading the weekly trip to wash underclothes in the river because of the sheer quantity of soldiers attempting to flee.1 He vividly portrays a disciplinary system that imposed authority through harsh physical punishment and humiliation, reporting that the band would play a joyful tune as NCOs stripped a captured deserter of even his underwear, ordered fellow soldiers to grab each of his limbs, subjected him to however many lashes the commander had ordered, and then filled his “bloody wounds” with “an infusion of salt and urine.”2

Richter wrote these lines from jail, a political prisoner suspected of conspiring against the Republican regime that took power in a July 1920 coup.3 He had built his career during the Liberal era, accepting a commission as a sub-lieutenant under the new regime in 1899 after having abandoned his studies as a military cadet during the Conservative-led 1890s.4 As a young officer, Richter advocated for military reform in the mainstream press,

wrote frequently for the Revista Militar, and participated in a group charged with reforming the military academy. He then spent 1907 to 1909 in France, where he was first embedded in infantry and artillery regiments and then wrote a thesis on machine gunnery. Upon his return, Richter began translating and writing military textbooks and regulations, most prominently the Soldier’s Catechism, which was to be used in basic training. First published in 1909, the Catechism was in its seventh edition in 1952. In 1910, he helped found the Machine Gunners Battalion and took command of it the following year, a position he held until joining the Ministry of War in 1917.

A principal intellectual of military reform, Richter bitterly lamented his beloved institution’s support for the Republican coup and blamed the ambitions of undisciplined junior officers for the disaster. Allowing politics to permeate barracks life, he warned, would reveal that the army’s “brittle foundations [were] riddled with woodworm” and lead to the “fatal downfall of this beautiful institution” that Liberals had “patiently built over more than twenty years.” Richter invoked a shameful history of desertion and abuse precisely in order to argue that the coup had halted the military’s steady march to progress and had inaugurated a return to the dishonorable past. His bleak narrative of life in the barracks thus played on societal fears that associated military service with political interference, forced

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5 Richter, En el puesto del deber, 21, 27-34.
8 The unit’s name changed to the Ballivián Machine Gunners Regiment in 1914. Richter, En el puesto del deber, 47-57. Minister of War to Prefect of La Paz #754, April 17, 1912 and Prefect of La Paz to Minister of War #3008, August 27, 1912, Prefecture-Admin box 147, Archivo de La Paz, La Paz, Bolivia (hereafter cited as ALP); Memoria de 1915, 55; Memoria de 1916, 62; Memoria de 1917, 63.
9 Richter, En el puesto del deber, 86-87.
labor, unhealthy living conditions, and the enactment of violent and deeply personal punishments on troops’ bodies.

The transition from an army based on impressment, where brutality served as a motivator, to one based on patriotic service was neither smooth nor easy, especially given the pervasive authoritarianism and racism that characterized Bolivia’s diverse and divided society. The law’s crafters imagined that most soldiers would self-regulate and subordinate themselves to military hierarchy; those who faltered would be punished according to transparent bureaucratic procedures. Under the new system, legislators understood military service as a pact between the state and its residents, recognizing that if soldiering were not at least bearable then men would neither respond to the call nor feel compelled to remain in the barracks. Nevertheless, the ideal of citizen-soldiers’ learning to respect, serve, and defend their patria was often stymied by fiscal constraints and individual decision-making. Some conscripts thus received tattered uniforms, ate rotting food, and slept on the floor. They performed nonmartial labors in fields and on roadways in addition to (and sometimes to the detriment of) preparing for war and conserving order. And, ignoring regulations, individual officers profited from conscripts’ labor, fraternized with subordinates, and cruelly punished soldiers.

Rather than being bureaucratically administered according to military regulations, punishments were arbitrary and often deeply personal. Granted the power by military hierarchy to exercise personal control over conscripts, some superiors used public humiliation and the performance of gendered domination to maintain relations of authority

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that, ideally, would have been established through respect for rank and uniform. Commonly associated with pre-modern forms of statecraft, this type of punishment as a public spectacle served to prove, in a highly visible and theatrical way, the direct power of one individual over another. These experiences likely affected conscripts’ understanding of authority; rather than establishing a legitimate right to rule, certain officers and NCOs enacted a personalized regime of physical dominance that used ideas about sexuality and masculinity as a way to dominate and control conscripts.

These brutal conditions were by no means reserved for less privileged conscripts who hailed from rural communities, mining regions, and the urban working class. In fact, my evidence of these practices and conditions primarily comes from military-justice records, which were the result of an elaborate and extended process that seems to have been reserved for prosecuting officers, politically connected conscripts, and particularly high-profile cases. Although contemporaneous actors described the ranks as majority indigenous, not one of the 238 conscripts who testified in 25 military-justice cases from 1916 until the start of the

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12 A convening military authority, such as the minister of war, chief of staff, or commander of a regiment, initiated the military-justice process and then appointed officers to act as examining magistrate, prosecutor, and secretary for the indictment. Ostensibly an investigative rather than adversarial process, the indictment involved taking testimony, examining evidence, and consulting with experts in order to determine what occurred, who was responsible, and whether there were any aggravating or mitigating circumstances. At the conclusion, the prosecutor recommended indictment, dismissal, or further investigation to the magistrate, who made his own recommendation and sent the results to the convening authority. After an auditor checked the legality of the process, the convening authority decided whether to accept the magistrate’s recommendation or return it for further investigation. If they agreed to indict, the case went to a plenary body, called the war council. Only once this body took the “confession” of the accused was he entitled to a defender. After further testimony and oral arguments, this body voted on verdict and sentence. However, most extant military-justice proceedings from the early twentieth century stalled during or immediately after the indictment stage, leaving the fate of the accused unclear. See: Bolivia. Ministerio de Guerra, *Códigos militares de la República de Bolivia* (La Paz: El Comercio de Bolivia, 1905).
Chaco War in 1932 were described as indigenous, and at least 220 were literate enough to
affect their signatures to their depositions.\textsuperscript{13} The experiences of indigenous soldiers therefore
remain particularly opaque, refracted primarily through the writings and statements of
officers, journalists, and formally educated conscripts. Such evidence, of course, reveals far
more about the prejudices and hopes of these actors than it does about their subjects. The
skewed representation in military-justice proceedings indicates that certain conscripts had
greater access to rights within the military. If these relatively privileged soldiers still suffered
violent punishment and performed hard manual labor, we can only imagine that the
experience of rural, indigenous soldiers serving on the frontier or in peripheral garrisons was
more extreme.

The prevalence of negative images of barracks life makes the widespread acceptance
of obligatory military service in the decades following the 1907 law even more striking. This
chapter details life and labor in the barracks in order to understand what service might have
meant for the men who participated. The first section explores the routines of barracks life
from the first day of service until discharge, including drills, meals, literacy training, and the
physical spaces that structured these experiences. It shows how officers attempted to instill a
sense of patriotism and belonging to the Bolivian nation through public performances such
as parades, inspections, and oath-swearing ceremonies. Tracing the origins of conscripts’
diverse labors, the second section explores the potential meanings of their daily tasks. The

\textsuperscript{13} Of the remaining eighteen deponents, fifteen were described as illiterate or had their statements signed
by another party. I do not have the signature page for the final three witnesses. Data compiled from boxes
1, 15, 42, 45, 59, 69, 71, 94, Tribunal Permanente de Justicia Militar, Archivo Histórico Militar, La Paz,
Bolivia (hereafter cited as AHM-TPJM). I did not have the opportunity to review the additional thirteen
cases in the archive that date from the period and involved conscripts.
final section takes up the gap between the ideal and practice of discipline, arguing that this was a terrain on which conscripts negotiated the terms of service, as well as ideas about masculinity and honor. Together, these sections show that the experience of military service was never within the control of the liberal state that instituted it as part of a nation-making project. In the barracks, soldiers cultivated their own countervailing cultural practices within a larger military culture, both investing in and contesting the norms, punishments, labors, and living conditions imposed by their officers.

In detailing these experiences, the chapter argues that interpersonal ties, patriotic discourse, and a bureaucratic system that discouraged noncompliance combined to inspire men to present for service each year and to forgo opportunities to desert. For many conscripts, military service was a formative and even valuable experience in which they developed friendships, practiced sports, learned literacy skills, and displayed their manliness and bravery. Many former soldiers must have felt proud of their martial accomplishments and ability to endure the discipline and privations of barracks life. These experiences combined with gendered hazing and punishments to make the barracks a site where many conscripts learned to perform a particular brand – almost a caricature – of normative masculinity. Military service thus insinuated itself into ideas about masculine honor and slowly became entrenched in the lives of particular families and communities. The bonds formed during training, punishment, and over alcohol also meant that many men developed personal loyalties to fellow conscripts. Experiences of barracks life thus helped form conscripts’ sense of exclusion from or belonging to a particular company, regiment, and sometimes even nation. The quotidian happenings – such as drill, punishment, horseplay,
and teasing – detailed in this chapter were the fundamental building blocks of a conscript nation.

**Routines, Friendships, and Exclusions: The Social Lives of Conscripts**

Each January, a new set of conscripts entered into military service in regiments across the nation. From that moment on, the sound of the reveille would wake them in the early morning, and the bugle would call for silence each night. A new conscript ideally received a uniform (see Figure 3) and basic equipment, including shoes or sandals, gaiters, underwear, shirt, pants, belt, handkerchief, cap, canteen, water jug, soap, towel, comb, and blanket.\(^\text{14}\) He would be subject to periodic inspection of these items and faced garnished

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**Figure 3: Soldiers’ Uniforms, c. 1925**

Uniforms used by Bolivian troops after the arrival of the German military mission. From left to right: Service dress of soldier in the Pando 1\(^{\text{st}}\) Engineers Regiment (note the sandals), service dress of soldier in Loa 4\(^{\text{th}}\) Infantry Regiment, parade dress of soldier in Colorados 1\(^{\text{st}}\) Infantry Regiment, and service dress of soldier in Ballivián 2\(^{\text{nd}}\) Cavalry Regiment. Source: Augusto Fernández Asturizaga. *Uniformes militares bolivianos*, 1991.

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wages for any loss or damage. During his first days of service, a conscript learned how to
dress in uniform, maintain personal hygiene, keep the dormitory clean, and follow basic
routines of barracks life. Officers warned him, for example, not to: brush off his clothes
indoors, “put underwear between the cot and mattress,” lie down with his boots on, smoke
or eat in bed, or “spit anywhere but the spittoons.” He learned how to salute and that in
order to speak with a superior, he should stop six steps in front of him, ask permission to
approach, and then identify himself before presenting any message, request, or complaint.
For the first few Sundays and holidays, new conscripts could leave the barracks only if
accompanied by a NCO to ensure that they did not embarrass the unit by deserting, failing
to properly salute a superior, or otherwise behaving in a manner that might besmirch the
uniform.

Regulations surrounding the arrival of soldiers included procedures that would
cultivate interpersonal bonds not only between members of the new contingent but also
with conscripts in the second year of service, NCOs, and officers. Officers often paired new
conscripts with more experienced ones, making these “godfathers” responsible for instilling
routines and preventing their charges from deserting. Starting in the 1910s, the chief of
staff ordered squad leaders to have literate conscripts write a brief autobiography and to

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15 Lt. Simón B. Aguirre statement, March 8, 1921, March 19, 1921, MOT-71-002A; Pando Regiment
Commander to 2nd Division Commander, September 21, 1931, ABA-01-003; Ricardo Pacheco statement,
November 4, 1921, INS-59-003; Lt. Col. Alberto Sotomayor statement, October 1, 1931, ABA-01-004,
AHM-TPJM.


17 Acting Chief of Staff Col. Carlos M. de Villegas, Circular #181, December 15, 1910, in Anecos de la
memoria presentada a la Legislatura de 1911 (La Paz: Talleres Gráficos La Prensa, 1911), 49-51.

18 For an explanation of how this system functioned in 1920, see Gral. Ovidio Quiroga Ochoa, En la paz y
Correspondence regarding individual desertions also mentions godfathers’ negligence as a factor. See
March 28, 1914 letter, Prefecture-Admin box 148, ALP.
question each illiterate conscript in detail about his life, profession, habits, and family. In addition to the immediate goal of predicting to where each might flee if he deserted, this procedure endeavored to foster trust and make conscripts feel as if their superiors cared about their individual circumstances. Similarly, the instructor urged his new charges to inform him if they felt ill so he could escort them to the doctor but combined this gesture with a warning that feigning ailment to avoid work was “laziness unworthy of a man” and would meet with “severe punishment.”

Some conscripts lived in the “model” barracks built in Oruro (c. 1908), Viacha (c. 1913), the Miraflores neighborhood of La Paz (c. 1914), Guaque (1916), and Coro Coro (c. 1922), whereas others slept in jails, churches, and rental properties barely worthy of the name “barracks.” In 1909, for example, the Loa Battalion bunked in the Penitentiary of La Paz and the Campero Battalion was quartered in a rental space so inadequate that one night it “rained more in the rooms used as dormitories than in the patios… the soldiers have not slept even an instant.” Although administrations intermittently invested in building and repairing barracks, they could never keep up with demand. In 1920, the Director of Military Health reported that the unsanitary conditions of the Reserve Battalion barracks in Caraguichinca (a sector of the city of La Paz) had caused an outbreak of tuberculosis among soldiers. He enumerated the following flaws: small and insufficient rooms holding up to 56

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19 Army Chief of Staff Colonel Carlos M. de Villegas memorandum to commanders, #181, December 15, 1910 in Anecos de la memoria presentada a la legislatura de 1911 (La Paz: Talleres Gráficos ‘La Prensa’, 1911), 49-51.
20 Richter, Catecismo del soldado, 35.
21 Minister of War Muñoz to Minister of Justice and Public Instruction #356, October 7, 1909; Germán Zegarra at Ministry of War to Minister of Justice and Public Instruction #349, December 31, 1909, Ministerio de Educación box 307, ALP.
beds, lack of ventilation, fumes from the dirty river, and the existence of only 4 bathrooms for 340 people. And although the Loa, Camacho, and Abaroa Regiments had hygienic and “relatively comfortable” barracks in 1925, the Sucre Regiment resided in an old convent, part of the Perez Regiment slept in space rented from the municipal government, and the Ballivián Regiment occupied two private residences.

Most new conscripts entering these barracks were nineteen-year-old single men. Some, however, had left behind wives and even children in order to complete their service; omiso soldiers often fell into this category as they were necessarily older than the average conscript. Statistical data for the years after 1911 on soldiers’ ethnicity, profession, level of education, and community of origin have yet to be found, but officers and other observers in the 1920s consistently averred that indigenous men made up the majority. Most barracks were therefore multilingual spaces, where even educated conscripts who did not identify as indigenous sometimes spoke indigenous languages. For example, Ricardo Pacheco, a nineteen-year-old student serving in the Technical Battalion, spoke both Spanish and

22 Minister of War Fermín Prudencio to Prefect of La Paz #128, June 14, 1920, Prefecture-Admin box 148, ALP.
23 Memoria de 1925, 43-44.
24 Married conscripts were likely underrepresented in military tribunal records and overrepresented in desertion records. Even so, of the deserters found in the La Paz Prefecture records for 1911-1932 for whom marital status was recorded, 72 percent were single. And of the 236 conscripts who testified in military tribunal proceedings between 1916-1932, only 3 were married (1 percent). Statistics compiled based on records in Prefecture-Admin boxes 147, 148, 149, 208; Boxes 1, 15, 42, 45, 59, 69, 71, and 94, AHM-TPJM.
25 See Chapter 1 for a lengthy discussion of omiso; the term described those who had failed to register or present for service at the designated time and were thus vulnerable to immediate impressment for a term of four years.
Aymara although he did not understand the other conscripts when they spoke in Quechua. And some officers and NCOs also spoke enough Aymara or Quechua to effectively train monolingual conscripts, allowing the minister of war to credibly brag in 1914 of frequently meeting “Indian conscripts who do not even speak the national language well” but still have a “comprehensive knowledge of handling weapons and their role as elements in a company.”

Although urban and educated soldiers tended to win assignments in the more prestigious cavalry and artillery regiments, men from different ethnicities and social classes still mixed within units. As noted by Saturnino Alsuarás, a literate trader from Guaqui (La Paz) who began his service in the Ballivián Cavalry Regiment in 1932, “There are all types of people in the barracks.”

A conscript’s social background inevitably affected his experience of barracks life. Although some viewed it as a burden, others yearned to serve, seeking adventure, a prospect for stable sustenance, independence from familial demands, or even escape from a compromising situation. Disapproving father Daniel Centeno, for example, complained that his son had abandoned his studies at Seminary High School in La Paz and lied about his age in order to enroll in the Abaroa Cavalry Regiment in January 1919. Once they entered the barracks, however, relatively privileged conscripts like Centeno likely viewed the living conditions as a hardship. An anonymous writer in a 1928 La Paz newspaper noted that “whites” from the “upper and middle classes” had trouble adapting to the “deprivations and discomforts of barracks life” due to the “hard and cold bed, the frugal and unrefined

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27 Ricardo Pacheco statement, November 4, 1921, INS-59-003, AHM-TPJM.
28 Memoria de 1914, 55.
29 Saturnino Alsuarás statement, May 15, 1932, ABA-01-006, AHM-TPJM.
30 Daniel Centeno to Prefect of La Paz, March 25, 1919, Prefecture-Exped box 235, d. 142.
communal meals.” Yet for the more impoverished, these were perhaps an improvement over their homes. Military officers certainly assumed that this was the case for indigenous recruits. Drawing on established discourses that portrayed Indians as malnourished, childlike, and stoic, they argued that military service improved indigenous conscripts’ physical and social well-being. Officers writing in the Revista Militar repeatedly bragged about conscripts’ weight gain and depicted indigenous soldiers as “taciturn” men who became self-realized through military service. One even described indigenous soldiers’ “true delight in the pocket mirror given to them” and their “characteristic start of joy, especially when they try on their new shoes.”

For breakfast, lunch, and dinner, conscripts lined up with their plates and utensils to receive their rations – usually a heavy soup and bread. These communal meals had been prepared by fellow conscripts and paid for by the regiment with forty cents garnished from each soldier’s daily wage. Many noted that food in the barracks was “very bad in quality but abundant in quantity,” with some blaming the quality on the conscripts tasked with cooking, noting that “there were weeks that it got better and others in which it worsened.”

31 “Monografía del soldado boliviano,” La Razón, July 3, 1928, 2.
33 Mario Legrand, Un civil en campo militar: Grandes maniobras del Ejército Boliviano, Comentarios y observaciones del enviado especial de “El Diario”, de La Paz (La Paz: Arnó Hermanos, 1930), 36.
34 On conscripts’ preparing meals, see Julio Rendón and Ricardo Pacheco statements, November 4-5, 1921, INS-59-003; Francisco Vargas statement, November 23, 1931, ABA-01-004, AHM-TPJM. For wage garnishments, see: Memoria de 1910, 19; Minister of War Circular to Commanders Circular #221, May 21, 1914 in Anecdos de la memoria de guerra y colonización (La Paz: Empresa Editora de El Tiempo, 1914), 95-98; 88th ordinary sesión, November 23, 1914, El redactor de la H. Cámara de Diputados Tomo IV (La Paz: Imp. y Lit. Boliviana Hugo Heitmann & Cia, 1914), 420.
35 Justo Fernandez and Francisco Vargas statements, November 23, 1931, ABA-01-004. See also Valentín Gazon statement, April 25, 1932, SED-94-004, AHM-TPJM.
Roberto Camacho particularly objected to the type of food served in the Ballivián Cavalry Regiment in early 1932, complaining about “a period in which we were subjected to quinoa and lakua [a thick soup made with corn flour].” The disdain with which he refers to these foods typical of the altiplano suggests that Camacho, a secondary-school graduate from Cochabamba, thought himself above such fare.

Given the absence of a centralized provisioning system, each regiment received instructions to purchase products from local vendors at market prices. This system offered ample opportunities for corruption, allowing many to take advantage of their power to obtain goods cheaply, falsify the regimental ledger, and line their pockets with the profits. For example, farmers living in the vicinity of Viacha complained in 1909 that artillery soldiers used “force of blows” to buy “sheep and other articles of prime necessity for less than a fourth of their value.” The petition of Hilario Chávez, an indígena from Pucarani, alleged a similar “sale” of his livestock: When officer Leon Prada inquired as to the price of his cattle, Chávez asked for 320 bolivianos since he had purchased them for 260 and had invested in fattening them. Prada, however, “flung two packets of bills of one hundred bolivianos each, telling me that he could not pay any more because the purchase was for the Government, and since I refused to pick them up, he and his assistants treated me very roughly, using their leather straps [lonjais].” Although they did not claim to have been

36 Roberto Camacho statement, May 15, 1932, ABA-01-006, AHM-TPJM.
37 For prohibitions see: Prefect of La Paz to Minister of War #1220 and reply, May 26 and May 30, 1913, Prefecture-Admin box 147, ALP; Minister of War Circular to Commanders Circular #221, May 21, 1914 in Anexos de la memoria de guerra y colonización (La Paz: Empresa Editora de El Tiempo, 1914), 95-98.
38 Petition of Santiago Mollo, Cecilio Antonio, Pablo Lardon, Leandro Callisaya, and Rafael Choquehuanca to Minister of War, January 22, 1909, Prefecture-Exped box 168, d. 123, ALP.
39 Hilario Chavez to Prefect of La Paz, April 8, 1908, Prefecture-Exped box 164, d. 21, ALP.
similarly whipped, municipal authorities in Guaqui, where the Abaroa Cavalry Regiment had its permanent barracks, reported in 1913 that every day they provided “ten sheep, fourteen loads of fuel, eight arrobas of potatoes, rabbits, eggs, hens, etc… at the price that they [the regiment] set” despite the existence of a “local market where they can obtain whatever they need for a fair price.”

Even in 1922, indigenous men from the Larecaja province claimed that although they had “voluntarily contributed barley and corn husks for the mounts,” soldiers had ruined their fields and purloined most of their fodder. This habitual use of forced extractions amounted to an unofficial tax levied on the surrounding population that not only reinforced the social order but could also give communities an opportunity to pressure the institution to remove a particular officer, whether or not abuse had actually occurred.

During the first three months of service, infantry, cavalry, and artillery regiments shared a routine of classroom instruction in the theory of combat and weapons-use, practical training in the same, and physical-fitness programs that emphasized endurance and precise obedience to orders. Prior to receiving a rifle and bayonet, each conscript learned to name and clean every part of the weapon. He then endured weeks of theoretical instruction in lectures that explained trajectory, line of fire, and range before ever setting foot on the training grounds. An educated conscript commented on the ineffectiveness of these teaching methods, remembering: “When I was new, the veteran soldiers… made us all stand at attention” and read descriptions of the military penal code, “but, since there are so many

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40 Quoted in Prefect of La Paz to Commander of Abaroa Regiment #44, September 2, 1912, Prefecture-Exped box 190, ALP.
41 Andrés Arquipa, Santos Choque, Luis Arquipa and Martín Cadena to Minister of Government, June, 27, 1922, Prefecture-Exped box 247, d. 25, ALP.
things that a novice has to learn in the barracks, it all got confused in my head.” 42 If this nineteen-year-old student, who was literate and fluent in Spanish, felt overwhelmed, we can only imagine how much his rural counterparts with no formal education understood of these lessons. 43 In fact, Ambrosio Chambi, an illiterate Aymara-speaker from Hacha Chilcani in the Carangas province of Oruro who served in the Colorados Regiment in the late 1920s, used this presumed lack of understanding to plead ignorance of the obligation to mobilize during the Chaco War. When the examining magistrate asked Chambi if he had learned about the duties of reservists during classroom instruction, he responded, “Yes, they taught me; but since I don’t understand Spanish, I didn’t understand very well.” 44

After three months of theoretical and practical instruction, the combat training programs split: Cavalry soldiers learned to manage their mounts as a squad and perform reconnaissance, artillery soldiers transported and manned cannons, and infantry soldiers drilled at the company, battalion, and regimental levels in shooting, marching, building fortifications, and field service. 45 Once conscripts from all the arms completed basic training, most commanders began assigning them to guard duty on a rotating basis. To prevent soldiers from deserting and outsiders from accessing weaponry, all garrisons posted sentries at their entrances, as shown by the construction of a guard room, called the prevención, on either side of the main entrance. This room not only housed sentries but also served as a

42 Ricardo Pacheco statement, November 4, 1921, INS-59-003, AHM-TPJM. Similarly, a private first class testified that he thought he had learned about the military penal code during theoretical instruction. Lucio Benavides statement, April 26, 1932, SED-94-004.
43 Gen. Gonzalo Jáuregui affirmed that it was very little, see “Las razas indígenas en Bolivia y su educación en los cuarteles,” Revista militar 55 (1926): 533-37.
44 Ambriosio Chambi statement, December 16, 1932, DES-16-009, AHM-TPJM.
45 Acting Chief of Staff Col. Carlos M. de Villegas, Circular #181, December 15, 1910 and General Order #283, January 12, 1911, in Anecos de la memoria presentada a la Legislatura de 1911 (La Paz: Talleres Gráficos La Prensa, 1911), 43-45, 49-51; Richter, Catecismo del soldado, 81-83.
place to punish or imprison errant conscripts. Marking the ideal of hierarchal separation between officers and the rank-and-file, each barracks had two such rooms, one for officers and the other for troops. Regulations dictated that sentinels must stand at the ready, their rifles armed with bayonets, and prohibited them from “talking, sitting, reading, singing, or distancing themselves more than twenty steps from the sentry box.”

Conscripts also participated in military exercises to train for combat. For example, the Azurduy Infantry Regiment marched from their La Paz barracks to the training grounds in nearby Caiconi Chico to practice flanking maneuvers on a Tuesday in November 1921. Alberto Arguedas’s testimony offers a sense of these labors: “The NCO of my squad was soldier Felipe Cruz, who was given the mission to attack near the railroad tracks…. We marched in single file, with the NCO in the lead. I was near the center. When we saw the enemy, the NCO ordered us into position.” Conscripts typically trained with blanks or unloaded weapons, both to save money and to minimize the potential for accidents. Deaths still occurred, however, which is why Arguedas’s experience even entered the historical record. Another member of his squad, a literate conscript from the capital named Humberto Mercado, had found a live cartridge presumably dropped by an officer and loaded his rifle with it in hopes of hunting viscacha [a rabbit-like rodent] spotted in the region. As he approached those simulating the enemy, Mercado’s accidently fired his rifle, killing a fellow

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46 For evidence of this use, see FAS-42-002 (1917); MOT-71-001 (1920); ABA-01-002 (1927); INS-59-004 (1930); MOT-71-004 (1930); ABA-01-004 (1931), AHM-TPJM.
47 See 1930 map of Abaroa barracks included in HOM-45-003A, AHM-TPJM.
48 Richter, Catecismo del soldado, 42.
49 Alberto Arguedas Aguilar statement. November 24, 1931, HOM-45-005, AHM-TPJM.
Each contingent of conscripts entered the barracks as a group and suffered the rigors of training together, thus building up a sense of cohesiveness and even a reputation among officers, who would refer to one contingent as troublemakers or another as particularly industrious. A perpetual shortage of professional NCOs meant that certain conscripts, after six months of training, received promotions to private first class or even corporal and thus gained additional responsibilities and authority over their fellows. Although the criteria for promotion set out in 1907 prioritized university or professional education over military prowess, Richter’s Catechism offered promotion as a reward for any conscript who showed “skill in shooting, dexterity in physical training, vigor and good conduct, personal hygiene, dress, and self-abnegation in service.” All of the soldiers promoted to private first class or corporal who testified in military justice proceedings were at least semi-illiterate but quite a few claimed trades such as cobbler, barber, tailor, mechanic, carpenter, bricklayer, or even rural laborer rather than the more typical student, telegraph operator, or chemist. These conscripts serving as NCOs learned their duties on the job and thus replicated patterns set by those who preceded them, which could lead to persistent gaps in training.
Even if not promoted to NCO, every conscript who completed his first year of service became an *antiguo*, who had the privilege of seniority over the novices entering the barracks and oversaw much of their physical training and instruction in military routine.\(^{55}\)

The power given *antiguos* made the arrival of new conscripts a situation ripe for hazing that could range from “extravagant stories of life in the barracks” to taunting and physical abuse.\(^{56}\) Some in fact saw the latter as a right, like the 1931 contingent of *antiguos* in the Ballivián Cavalry Regiment. Their officers had a particularly negative opinion of these soldiers and thus gave them less leeway with the novices. Stymied in their attempts to reproduce the liberties taken by the *antiguos* who had initiated them into barracks life, they planned a mutiny after the officers “prohibited them from punishing the soldiers in the new contingent” and advised the novices “not to trust [the *antiguos*] with their garments,” presumably suspecting that they would purloin or play pranks with the clothing issued to novices.\(^{57}\)

Educated *antiguos* sometimes participated in efforts to provide basic literacy skills to those serving in infantry units, such as the Loa Regiment, which reported 152 students in 1912 and 229 in 1916.\(^{58}\) Nor were these simply administrative fictions: Several conscripts testifying in military-justice proceedings spontaneously mentioned literacy classes; one even

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*Arguedas, Historia del ejército de Bolivia, 1825-1932* (La Paz: n.p., 1940), 162. For an example of gaps in training, see the testimony of Ricardo Pacheco, a private first class responsible for training new conscripts, who claimed ignorance of military law due to poor instruction by his NCOs. Ricardo Pacheco statement, November 4, 1921, INS-59-003, AHM-TPJM.

\(^{55}\) Humberto Marquez statement, May 15, 1932, ABA-01-006, AHM-TPJM.


\(^{57}\) Sarg. Hernán Cortez statement, April 25, 1932, SED-94-004, AHM-TPJM.

\(^{58}\) *Memoria de 1912*, 34; *Memoria de 1916*, 61. The Murillo Regiment also reported 132 literacy students in 1914. See *Memoria de 1914*, 74.
noted that a particular officer “always made sure that they [illiterate conscripts] attend their classes.” The form of this training varied, with Murillo officers receiving orders to spend an hour each day on primary education whereas those in the Sucre Regiment only offered weekly classes. Literacy instructors could be officers, conscripts who had attended normal school, and sometimes even paid regimental teachers.

Officers especially emphasized indigenous conscripts’ enthusiasm for literacy classes. Articles in the Revista Militar drew on tropes that portrayed rural Indians as children who, after centuries of cruel neglect, responded positively to the tender guidance of compassionate officers. For example, Lieutenant C. Bleichner wrote of having gained the confidence of three indigenous soldiers after discovering them in the forage storehouse “attentively reading their syllabaries and drawing letters on the ground.” Fearing punishment for studying when they should have been cleaning their rifles, the conscripts told him of their disappointment with the literacy instructor and their desire to “learn to read and write in order to send some alphabetic characters to their parents, giving them a pleasant surprise.” Instead of meting out punishment, Bleichner assigned two educated conscripts to teach these men, explaining to his readers that fulfilling their desire for education would make them dedicated soldiers and better Bolivians: “From that day on, they gave maximum effort in their daily work, always trying to please me. These soldiers grew fonder of the

59 Sarg. Humberto del Castillo statement, October 8, 1931, ABA-01-004, AHM-TPJM. See also the mention of literacy classes by Zenón Castillo, July 15, 1930, INS-59-004, AHM-TPJM.
60 Memoria de 1916, 57-59.
61 Memoria de 1916, 59; Memoria de 1917, 62; Memoria de 1918, 63; Memoria de 1921, 51.
62 Memoria de 1926, 57; Memoria de 1927, 63.
barracks, of their officers, and were grateful to the *patria.*

The idea of using kindness to build loyalty and win converts to military service commonly appeared in the *Revista Militar,* as its editors attempted to persuade officers that building personal ties through benevolent but exigent behavior would produce better soldiers than verbal and physical abuse. Captain Alfredo Peñaranda presented such an argument in a story published in 1926 about fictional indigenous conscript Andrés Quispe’s sojourn in the barracks. After three days in the Fourth Regiment, Quispe considers deserting to escape from “the rage of the wicked sergeant.” Yet the following day, Lieutenant Enrique Indaburo takes over their training. According to Peñaranda, the soldiers saw him as “a ray of sunshine on a cold winter’s morning” after he learned their names, asked if any were ill, and played sports with them. Under this leadership, Quispe, far from deserting, became a “model soldier” and grew to love Indaburo with “almost filial affection.”

Written by officers for other officers, these stories featuring Indaburo and Bleichner modeled the ideal officer that Richter had presented in the *Soldier’s Catechism.* Acting as a father-figure, he would nurture indigenous conscripts, guiding them “to give all” and become “good citizens, respectful of authority and conscious of their duties.” This idea of loyalty to the Bolivian nation was the first lesson conscripts were supposed to learn when they entered the barracks. Colonel Alfredo Richter’s definitions of patriotism, the *Patria,* and military honor opened his *Catechism,* which was meant to be followed by officers in basic

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65 Richter, *Catecismo del soldado,* 6, 15.
training. Conscripts would memorize phrases professing their duty to love and serve the 
\textit{patria}, which Richter defined as “the Bolivian nation,” “our common mother,” and even “all that we have and all that we can be.”\textsuperscript{66} Such statements assert soldiers’ unconditional love for the \textit{patria}, but these stories show that officers recognized the importance of interpersonal bonds in forming dedicated and industrious soldiers. They hoped that soldiers’ eagerness to please a favorite officer would eventually translate into the more abstract sense of national identity and loyalty to the \textit{patria} that was the overarching goal of obligatory military service.

All conscripts publicly performed this belonging to the Bolivian nation, though perhaps without sharing or understanding it, when, in their eighth month of service, they participated in the patriotic ritual of swearing an oath to the flag (see Figure 4) during

\begin{figure}[h]
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\caption{Oath by Colorados Regiment, Miraflores Barracks, La Paz, 1922}
\end{figure}


\textsuperscript{66} Richter, \textit{Catecismo del soldado}, 1.
independence celebrations. When possible, units travelled to the capital so conscripts could participate in ceremonies of great pomp, with the republic’s president administering the oath. Bedecked in their finest uniforms, conscripts ritually intoned, “Yes, we swear,” as military bands played the chorus of the national anthem: “We have kept the lofty name of our Patria / In glorious splendor / And on its altars we once more swear / To die, rather than live as slaves.” Although the precise text of the oath varied in the early years, it always expressed an ideal similar to that of the anthem: the individual conscript’s willingness to sacrifice his life for the nation. The language set in 1924 and subsequently printed in each conscript’s military-service booklet repeated this theme and added a profession of obedience: “Swear before God and the Patria to defend your flag even to the sacrifice of your life, never to abandon those who command you during war, and to apply yourself to superiors’ orders.”

In addition to printing images of the elaborate parades that occurred in La Paz after the oath, the Revista Militar asserted national unity by delivering visual evidence of this ritual’s observance even on Bolivia’s frontier (see Figure 5).

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67 Military-justice tribunals apparently viewed this oath to be of utmost importance, as judges asked most conscripts who testified whether or not they had participated, apparently using this indicator to determine that a conscript should have been familiar with military laws. The first evidence of this oath dates from 1910. Memoria de 1910, 65.

68 Minister of War to Prefect of La Paz #904, July 29, 1913, Prefecture-Admin box 147; Gen. Adalid Tejada Fariñas, Commander of Northern Military Zone, to Prefect of La Paz, August 4, 1919, Prefecture-Admin box 148; Minister of War Pedro Gutierrez to Prefect of La Paz #31, July 5, 1925, Prefecture-Admin box 149, ALP. I have adapted the translation of the national anthem from Xing Hang, ed., Encyclopedia of National Anthems (Lanham, ND: The Scarecrow Press, 2003), 72-74. Richter, En el puesto del deber, 15-18, 21.


70 Decreto supremo que fija la fórmula del juramento, August 4, 1924.
Independence Day was not conscripts’ only opportunity to perform militarized belonging. Those chosen to guard government installations were a constant visible presence in cities such as La Paz, Oruro, and Sucre.\textsuperscript{71} And entire regiments, always accompanied by their brass bands, paraded on occasions such as Good Friday, regimental anniversaries, and upon completing combined military exercises.\textsuperscript{72} Images of such events in La Paz (see Figure 6) show large crowds lining the streets as conscripts in parade uniforms goose-step in lines of five and those in service dress march single file on either side. Newspapers noted that the crowds that gathered on these occasions heartily cheered and gave “thunderous applause” at the sight of conscripts’ “martial gait.”\textsuperscript{73} One journalist even reported that hundreds of Indians from surrounding communities had traveled to Guaqui in 1930 to observe the

\textsuperscript{71} SED-91-004 (1920) and ABA-01-004 (1931), AHM-TPJM.
\textsuperscript{73} “Dos mil jóvenes conscriptos desfilan por las calles,” \textit{El Diario}, January 14, 1927, 2; \textit{Memoria de 1924}, 20; Legrand, \textit{Un civil en campo militar}, 103-108.
parade that took place at the close of the military exercises. Even if these reports vastly exaggerated the size and enthusiasm of these crowds, conscripts must have felt proud as they performed publicly as soldiers, marching in unison and demonstrating the results of months of training.

![Figure 6: Military Parade, La Paz, c. 1925](image)

Not all conscripts who left the barracks did so with their superiors’ blessing, however. In fact, barracks practically hemorrhaged soldiers, who lied, ran, or jumped over walls to escape from the ranks. The military penal code in force at the time offered scant opportunity for soldiers to be absent without leave. It defined desertion during peace time as any unsanctioned absence from duty for more than six days, any soldier captured further

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75 Nor did the category of “bad Bolivians” who deserted from the rank-and-file consist of only Indians. The Prefecture records for the Department of La Paz report on 111 conscripts who deserted from various army units between 1911 and 1921. Of these, only 18 percent (20 men) were classified as indigenous; 37 percent (41 men) were listed as mestizo, and 7 percent (8 men) were categorized as white. Statistics compiled based on records in Prefecture-Admin boxes 147, 148, 149, 208; Prefecture-Exped box 178 d. 120, ALP.
than three leagues from the rest of his unit without a passport, or any soldier captured wearing civilian clothes. Desertion fundamentally shaped the social structure of regiments since officers rightly feared that it, like an infectious disease, could quickly decimate their army. In addition to posting sentries, they used threats and social ties to discourage such behavior. During training, they insisted that deserters would bring shame upon their families and forever wear “the black shroud of cowardice.” Such statements transformed an affront to the nation (as represented by the military institution) into a cause for personal and familial shame. Officers also fostered “godfather” relationships between conscripts, making the more experienced personally responsible for their charges and ensuring that potential deserters knew that their godfathers might also suffer for their sins.

Despite these measures, determined soldiers could always find a means of escape. Typical of deserters at the time was Santiago Aguirre, described in military records as a twenty-four-year-old indigenous farm worker from Callapa (La Paz) garrisoned at Uyuni (Potosí). Only months after entering service in 1914, he faked illness and fled as a fellow soldier escorted him to the hospital. Others simply drifted out of military service, presumably to return to their civilian lives or start anew. Feliciano Carlos, Andrés Marca, and Celestino Quintanilla, for example, quietly disappeared from the ranks of those marching to

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76 Bolivia. Ministerio de Guerra, Códigos militares, 244-48.
78 For an explanation of how this system functioned in 1920, see Quiroga Ochoa, En la paz y en la guerra, 61. Correspondence regarding individual desertions also mentions godfathers’ negligence as a factor. See March 28, 1914 letter, Prefecture-Admin box 148, ALP.
79 Commander of Uyuni Garrison Capt. Justiniano Céspedes to Minister of War and Prefect of La Paz #35, April 15, 1914, Prefecture-Admin box 148.
the Northeast in February 1913. And one Sunday in 1921, the Loa Infantry Regiment lost conscripts Concepción Mamani and Valentín Murillo when they failed to return from an afternoon off in Oruro. Murillo, an illiterate agricultural laborer from Tumusla (Potosí), turned himself in a month later. When asked why he had deserted, he invoked the bonds of family, framing desertion as a logical reaction to the many months he had been away from “my wife, my children, abandoned.” That Sunday, he testified, “I got drunk in the city, and in that state, remembering my family, I bought a train ticket and left.” Mamani, an illiterate mestizo laborer from Tocla (Potosí), also blamed alcohol for his offense but spun a less poignant story: “I was fed up with the barracks, and I wanted to leave.”

Most soldiers, however, passed up such opportunities to desert and completed their terms of service. Even the most recently constructed barracks were not, after all, formidable fortresses. In fact, security was so limited in the Aviation School that conscript Hugo Tapia could drunkenly wander out of the El Alto barracks around one in the morning and head to his aunt’s house in the Chijini neighborhood of La Paz, where he spent the night. Tapia returned of his own volition the next day as did the many conscripts who left the barracks to mail letters or run errands. Nor did most soldiers desert when spending Sunday afternoons outside of the barracks visiting family members, sauntering around the plaza de armas, or drinking with friends at local establishments.

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80 Minister of War to Prefect of La Paz #649, February 6, 1913, Prefecture-Admin box 147, ALP.
81 Valentín Murillo and Concepción Mamani statements, March 13 and April 22, 1921, DES-15-007, AHM-TPJM.
82 Hugo Tapia statement, September 12, 1930, MOT-71-004, AHM-TPJM.
83 Vicente D. Torres statement, December 17, 1909, Prefecture-Exped box 175 d. 61, ALP.
84 Manuel Guzmán statement, September 8, 1930, MOT-71-004; Cabo Cecilio Valderrama statement, July 24, 1920, SED-94-001; Sub. Lt. Sergio Rivera statement, October 27, 1927, ABA-01-002, AHM-TPJM.
These soldiers chose to return because military service was not only a duty imposed by a faceless bureaucracy but also an opportunity for sociability and to build interpersonal bonds. Men forged or strengthened friendships as they worked side-by-side and slept in communal dormitories. During rests from marches and free time in the barracks, soldiers often sang “with fervor” tunes typical of their region in Spanish, Quechua, or Aymara. They invented nicknames for one another and developed strong opinions about their fellows’ personalities, describing one as “calm” and “a joker” and another as “repudiated for unfriendliness to his compañeros.” Some had known each other “since childhood” whereas others had met during service, but, as several educated conscripts in the Loa Battalion noted, “the intimate life of the barracks” produced deep relationships and created “inseparable friends” who “lived like brothers.” The intimacy of these friendships even appears in posed photographs like Figure 7, which depicts forty conscripts, three officers, and four civilians (including a woman who was presumably the company’s madrina [godmother, sponsor]) from the sixth company of the Sucre Infantry Regiment in 1924. The two men in the front left of the photograph sit close together, one with his arm casually slung over the other’s shoulder.

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86 Capt. Humbero Eguino statement, October 15, 1919, FAS-42-003; Rodolfo Cordero statement, December 11, 1931, HOM-45-005, AHM-TPJM; Alberto Villegas statement, December 18, 1922, Prefecture-Exped box 251 d. 7, ALP.
87 Vicente D. Torres, Dalio Fernandez, and Aparicio Morales statements, January 15 and 28, 1910, Prefecture-Exped box 175 d. 61, ALP.
88 See chapter 4 for a discussion of the role of madrinas during the Chaco War.
Officers promoted such connections, recognizing the role of camaraderie in mission effectiveness. When writing the *Soldier’s Catechism*, Colonel Richter praised camaraderie as an “indispensable… bond that unites men who work together for a common cause.”  

90 Officers and military administrators thus encouraged conscripts to socialize through athletics, organizing Olympic-type tournaments and cheering during soccer matches in which “soldiers compete for the satisfaction of triumph.”  

91 Other forms of sociality were more furtive, as when conscripts in the Technical Battalion chatted and strummed a guitar to while away the hours of guard duty. And soldiers playing cards in the dormitory after lights out “rapidly” hid the evidence when their captain entered during routine rounds. One conscript even attempted to help another pass inspection by shedding his pants as soon as he was


91 Julio Rendón, Cornelis Schneider, and Ricardo Pacheco statements, November 4, 1921, INS-59-003, AHM-TPJM.

92 Capt. Luis Emilio Aguirre, Cabo Enrique Murillo, Cabo Walter Candia, and Frucuoso Jemio statements, March 12, April 14, 18, 21, and 26, 1921, March 19, 1921, MOT-71-002A, AHM-TPJM.
inspected and passing them to his friend, whose own pants were presumably ripped or otherwise out of regulation.\textsuperscript{93}

The intimacy of barracks life could also lead to exclusion and conflict. For example, Antonio Rosell, a painter from Cochabamba, lamented his lack of friends in the Murillo Regiment, and several conscripts in the Camacho Regiment complained of Aurelio Achá’s tendency to “gossip and scheme.”\textsuperscript{94} Nor was petty thievery uncommon: Several of his peers in the Azurduy Regiment suspected that Benigno Orellana was responsible for the loss of their possessions and triumphantly pointed to the damning evidence that he had been found “with someone else’s underwear.”\textsuperscript{95} Language, region, and social class of course played important roles in determining friendships, with those who spoke the same language often banding together.\textsuperscript{96} One conscript even testified to feeling left out of plans made by his fellows “in Quechua, since I do not understand.”\textsuperscript{97} And an indigenous soldier from Estancia Jiscajarana (Pocoata, Chayanta, Potosí) mobilized (albeit unsuccessfully) his “ignorance of the Spanish language” in an attempt to secure a discharge, arguing that being monolingual in the La Paz-based Loa Battalion “makes it impossible for me to learn military service and has caused as much suffering for my superiors as for me.”\textsuperscript{98}

The role of alcohol in conscripts’ lives continually troubled those in charge of the barracks. Drawing on the stereotype of the drunken Indian, articles in the Revista Militar

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{93} Reg. Pando Commander to 2\textsuperscript{nd} Division Commander, September 21, 1931, ABA-01-003, AHM-TPJM.
\item \textsuperscript{94} Antonio Rosell statement, March 19, 1921, MOT-71-002A, AHM-TPJM; Hernán Quiroga statement, December 20, 1922, Prefecture-Exped box 251 d. 7, ALP.
\item \textsuperscript{95} Rodolfo Cordero statement, March 23, 1932, ABA-01-007, AHM-TPJM.
\item \textsuperscript{96} Gen. Gonzalo Jáuregui, “Las razas indígenas en Bolivia y su educación en los cuarteles,” Revista militar 55 (1926): 533-37
\item \textsuperscript{97} Ricardo Pacheco statement, November 4, 1921, INS-59-003, AHM-TPJM.
\item \textsuperscript{98} Bacilio Pillco to Prefect of La Paz, July 10, 1911, Prefecture-Exped box 182 d. 126, ALP.
\end{itemize}
offered advice about using sports and education to keep indigenous conscripts away from this “shameful vice.”

Although regulations prohibited drinking in the barracks, alcohol was a mainstay of conscripts’ lives, both within and outside of the barracks. Officers frequently noted that their men returned drunk on Sunday evenings and complained about “frequent benders” in the dormitories. Nor did educated conscripts serving as NCOs offer a model of abstention. Conscripts in the Technical Battalion described nights interrupted by NCOs drunkenly “banging tables, making a ruckus, yelling, etc.,” and one corporal in the Loa Regiment disclosed that the ranking NCOs of each company “frequently got together in the weapons room, where they drank alcoholic beverages until late in the night.”

In contrast to officers’ frequent admonitions against alcoholism and the numerous instances of drunkenness recorded in conscripts’ testimony, these sources remain silent as to soldiers’ sexual lives despite the fact that anthropological accounts emphasize the importance of prostitutes to the late-twentieth-century conscript experience. Statistics on venereal disease, however, do suggest that many conscripts were sexually active. Out of an army of approximately 4,000 men, health officers reported 203 cases of venereal disease among

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100 Richter, Catecismo del soldado, 11. A November 9, 1923 supreme decree explicitly prohibited alcohol from all garrisons in order to maintain morale, discipline, and health. See Memoria de 1924, 7. See also statements by Hugo Tapia, Alfredo Ponce, Manuel Guzmán, and Alberto Salazar, September 8-12, 1930, MOT-71-004, AHM-TPJM.

101 Sub. Lt. Sergio Rivera statement, October 27, 1927, ABA-01-002; Sub. Lt. Juan Antonio Rivera to School of Aviation Director, September 9, 1930, MOT-71-004, AHM-TPJM.

102 Ricardo Pacheco statement, November 4, 1921, INS-59-003; Cabo Luis Gallardo statement, April 25, 1921, March 19, 1921, MOT-71-002A, AHM-TPJM.

conscripts in the first six months of 1911 and 438 cases in 1913.\textsuperscript{104} These could, of course, have been misdiagnosed or contracted prior to service, but, given that military physicians were supposed to check for venereal disease during the recruitment process, many of these cases were likely contracted during service.\textsuperscript{105}

Armed men roaming the countryside also presented opportunities for rape, yet this crime only appears twice in my sources. As part of a long list of accusations against Colonel Viataliano Ledezma and the Abaroa Cavalry Regiment in 1922, indigenous authorities on the Vilaque Farm (Sicasica, La Paz) accused soldiers of raping “married women, like the wife of Bacilio Yupanqui.”\textsuperscript{106} The second reference comes from an officer’s testimony in 1932, which mentioned accusations that Domingo Delgado and Alberto Hurtado had raped two Indian women; he mustered this fact as character evidence in order to persuade the examining magistrate that these soldiers’ complaints against his colleague for abuse of authority should be discounted because they were “among the worst in the Regiment.”\textsuperscript{107}

Officially silencing this crime, the military penal code did not contemplate rape as an offense against military laws or discipline, and offenders were apparently referred to non-military courts.\textsuperscript{108}

\textsuperscript{104} Memoria que presenta al Congreso Ordinario de 1911 el Ministro de Guerra y Colonización (La Paz: Talleres Gráficos La Prensa, 1911), 23; Dirección de Sanidad Militar, “Morbosidad general correspondiente al año 1913,” Anexos de la memoria de guerra y colonización (La Paz: Empresa Editora de El Tiempo, 1914), 162.

\textsuperscript{105} Reglamento del servicio militar, April 6, 1907, Boletín militar del Ministerio de Guerra, vol. 3, (La Paz: Intendencia de Guerra, 1907): 121-48.

\textsuperscript{106} Mariano Alvarez, Ermógenes Martínez, and Ildefonso Cruz to Prefect of La Paz, June 7, 1921. Local authorities eventually investigated these crimes, questioning more than thirty colonos, including Yupanqui’s wife, who denied the incident. Subprefect of Sicasica to Prefect of La Paz, June 18, 1921, Prefecture-Exped box 245 d. 13, ALP.

\textsuperscript{107} Lt. Víctor Ballivián statement, May 10, 1932, ABA-01-006, AHM-TPJM.

\textsuperscript{108} See 1935 case against Sub-Lieutenant Mario Quiroga C. for rape of a minor, which was marked “does not correspond to Military Justice,” VIO-107-003, AHM-TPJM. Rape is neither mentioned in the 1905
The barracks were spaces where conscripts learned, negotiated, and performed what it meant to be a man as they formed homosocial relationships in the dorms and on the training field. Conscripts frequently offered evidence that their fellows had invoked a normative masculinity that equated bravery with manliness in order to pressure them to take a particular action. José Mendez, for example, testified in 1920 that when he had objected to Raúl Camargo’s plans for insubordination, Camargo had mocked him as a “coward” who “merely looks like a man.”109 Similarly, several conscripts who had deserted en masse in 1921 later testified to going along with the plan “so that my compañeros wouldn’t call me a coward,” in order to defend regional pride and disprove those saying that men “from Sucre are cowards,” and in response to taunts such as “if they were men, they would do it despite the consequences.”110 Corporal Bernardino Fernández, a student serving his second year in the Loa Infantry Regiment, appeared voluntarily before the tribunal to implicate fellow NCOs who had used gendered insults in an attempt to provoke him into joining their mutiny. He testified that when he refused to get out of bed, they had called him “a fool [cojudo]” who “should put on polleras [skirts worn by indigenous and chola women].” These taunts were military penal code nor in any modifications up to 1948. Bolivia. Ministerio de Guerra, Códigos militares; “Código penal militar,” in Códigos de justicia militar de Bolivia, ed. Ramón Salinas Mariaca and Carlos Manuel Silva (La Paz: 1948).

In her work on slander lawsuits, Laura Gotkowitz (drawing on a case from 1884) notes that “‘india’ was the term used when slanderers referred to victims of rape. In all such cases, the insulted woman was blamed for permitting a man to force her to have sex with him.” Laura Gotkowitz, "Trading Insults: Honor, Violence, and the Gendered Culture of Commerce in Cochabamba, Bolivia, 1870s-1950s," Hispanic American Historical Review 83, no. 1 (2003): 98. More work is needed on the meanings and prosecution of rape in early-twentieth-century Bolivia in order to interpret the omission of this offense from the military penal code. Were sexual offenses (especially against low-status women) ignored as a necessary by-product of military life? Was rape seen as an indecent matter and therefore omitted from the written record?

109 José Mendez statement, November 5, 1920, MOT-71-001, AHM-TPJM.
110 Quotations from José Siñani and Víctor Zambrana statements, November 5-6, 1921. Luis Canturín and Ricardo Pacheco made similar statements. INS-59-003, AHM-TPJM.
quite effective, at least according to Fernández, who testified that “I had to get up out of pure self-respect.”

In all of these cases, the conscripts mobilized such insults while testifying in military-justice proceedings as part of attempts to excuse their own participation in acts of mutiny, insubordination, and desertion. They apparently expected that the examining magistrate would understand the power of insults that questioned their manliness by challenging their bravery and comparing them to women and that he would consider these insults to be mitigating factors when judging their actions. These reports reveal a normative masculinity within the barracks that was, in part, constructed through the use of gendered insults. Defining bravery as a willingness to challenge authority, this masculinity worked against the idea presented in the Catechism that being a good man meant serving the patria through obedience to officers.

Each October or November, the regiments discharged those conscripts who had completed their term of service – two years for most but only one for those granted reductions in service or favored by the lotteries held in regiments with a surplus of soldiers. Administrators acknowledged an institutional responsibility to arrange for their journey home, providing, at least officially, travel allowances and railway vouchers. Some regiments marked the end of service with an official ceremony in which conscripts stood at attention while commanders thanked them “in the name of the Nation, for having fulfilled,

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111 Bernardino Fernández statement, April 11, 1921, March 19, 1921, MOT-71-002A, AHM-TPJM.
112 Ministerial Resolution, December 17, 1913, Anexos de 1914, 20; Memoria de 1914, 31; Memoria de 1925, 12.
113 Anexos de 1910, xlvii-xlviii.
with loyalty and abnegation, the military duty imposed by law.”¹¹⁴ Participants then reiterated their oath to sacrifice all for the patria and “hug[ged] their comrades goodbye” as the band played patriotic tunes.¹¹⁵

They then became reservists, responsible for presenting to the nearest military authority when mobilized for war or military exercises. Reservists left the barracks with military-service booklets in hand that documented their completion of this “sacred duty” and that could set them on a path to citizenship. Some carried other tangible mementos of their service, such as badges that displayed their proficiency in military skills. All left with memories of negative and positive experiences in the barracks, where they had worked, trained, suffered privations, expanded their social networks, and perhaps even changed their views of Bolivia. Many likely felt a mix of relief, accomplishment, sadness in leaving friends, and anticipation of returning to their families, communities, and girlfriends.

Officers and journalists often waxed poetic imagining the emotions of recently discharged conscripts. Fulfilling their own expectations regarding the effects of conscription on indigenous men, they depicted these reservists as proud of their service, profoundly identified with the nation, and far better educated than when they had entered. Captain Peñaranda, for example, depicted his fictional Andés Quispe as proudly returning home “with a marksmanship ribbon pinned to his chest,” marrying his beloved María, supporting his family, and becoming an “honorable, good, hard-working” Bolivian.¹¹⁶ A journalist writing in El Diario in 1930 similarly praised the effectiveness of the military-service law:

¹¹⁴ Ministerial Resolution, December 24, 1907, Boletín militar del Ministerio de Guerra (La Paz: Intendencia de Guerra, 1908): 581-89.
¹¹⁵ “Servicio militar,” El Diario, October14, 1917, 6.
“Almost all the Indians” who completed two years of service, he effused, left the barracks “knowing how to read and write and how to express themselves in the national language.” They were no longer “timid or unsociable” and spoke “with pride” about “their memories of the barracks.” Aymara soldiers in particular, he reported, used “reservist” as a title that marked accomplishment; he cited the community of Sajama (Carangas, Oruro), where men wrote phrases such as “Manuel Choque, Reservist of the Campero Regiment” on the entrances of their homes.117 These officers and journalists assured their audiences, perhaps too vigorously, that military service was fulfilling its crafters’ vision of making “the Indian a useful citizen for the Nation.”118 They wrote hopefully of the “thousands of Indians who have passed through the army’s ranks” and who, returning to “their huts, communities, haciendas, or ayllus, are the best proponents of military service” and cause a “geometric progression each year in the percentage of indigenous conscripts.”119

Defend, Repress, and Build: The Martial and Nonmartial Ends of Military Labor

A lieutenant writing in a 1924 issue of the Revista Militar idealistically referred to the barracks as “sacred grounds” where “men are made” because “they learn comradeship, a fondness for work, and, above all, discipline.” He then clarified: “The barracks is not a correctional site, nor is it a group of men required to do forced labor.”120 Yet, taken together, the compulsory nature of military service, the illegality of refusing orders, the social status of

119 Legrand, Un civil en campo militar, 99.
most conscripts, and the nonmartial quality of many tasks indicate the opposite. Principal among the ends of obligatory military service was the martial goal of creating a formidable army capable of defending Bolivia’s borders and perhaps even regaining access to the coast. But the realities of a weak state in a thinly populated territory meant that Bolivian conscripts often deployed to guarantee elections and break strikes as well as laboring on nonmartial projects such as building roads, harvesting, and serving officers. And pervasive fears of “race war” likely reinforced this orientation since many rural elites felt profoundly ambivalent about militarizing indigenous conscripts. Arming them with the tools of work rather than the weapons of war provided a convenient solution. Yet these labors did not go uncontested. In what amounted to a low-intensity conflict over the purpose of the armed forces, military professionals such as the minister of war routinely objected to the use of troops on national infrastructure and in resolving disputes over land and labor, arguing that these assignments irreparably harmed military preparedness.

Although draped in words like “duty,” “service,” and “sacrifice,” soldiers’ tasks are nonetheless work. Conscription is a form of coercive labor that fills the ranks by combining a discourse of patriotic service with a bureaucratic system that discourages noncompliance. Nor can conscription be considered voluntary labor due to its compulsory nature and harsh penalties for those who reject such employment or, in fact, any direct order. Bolivian conscripts and officers certainly thought of their daily activities as labor; they consistently referred to the “labors of the troops” and to the “work” of drilling and weapons-training.\(^\text{121}\)

\(^{121}\) Quotation from Commander of Sucre Regiment, October 25, 1927, ABA-01-002. For other references to work, see Sarg. José Alvarez, Capt. Humberto Eguino, and Cabo Felix Portocarreo statements, October 15, 1919, FAS-42-003; Sub. Lt. Manuel Heguegone, Moises Rivas statements, November 17-18,
To make sense of the diversity of conscripts’ labors, I define all activities they performed under superiors’ orders as labor. I distinguish, however, between martial and nonmartial labor.

Under this framework, martial labor consists of armed tasks directly related to maintaining internal order and defending the national territory, including fighting international wars, repressing internal unrest, protecting state installations, patrolling borders, and the training necessary to prepare for these eventualities. Martial labor thus comprised not only battles and maneuvers in the field but also quotidian tasks such as guard duty, weapons training, and maintaining armament. The Revista Militar commonly printed images (see Figure 8, Figure 9, Figure 10) that highlighted these martial labors, depicting soldiers in pristine uniforms manning machine guns, scrambling up ropes, and completing resistance marches through the bare altiplano.

Figure 8: Machine Gun Nest, 1924

1920, MOT-71-001; Sub. Lt. Emilio Orihuela statement, October 2, 1931, ABA-01-004; Rodolfo Cordero statement, December 11, 1931, HOM-45-005; Dgte Lucio Benavides statement, April 26, 1932, SED-94-004; Saturnino Aluarás statement, May 15, 1932, ABA-01-006, AHM-TPJM.
Fulfilling the army's constitutional mission to “conserve order,” conscripts frequently repressed rural uprisings and mining strikes during the first decades of the twentieth century.122 In the telegrams and letters that constantly flowed to government offices, prominent figures professed themselves desperate to preserve their lives and

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122 The 1851 Constitution first included this mission in the army’s responsibilities, and the 1880 Constitution, which was in force until 1938, reiterated it. See: Marcelo Galindo de Ugarte, Constituciones bolivianas comparadas, 1826-1967 (La Paz: Editorial Los Amigos del Libro, 1991), 608.
property from “being cruelly and brutally victimized by these Indians.” Conscripts thus marched into indigenous communities and rural properties at least forty times between 1911 and 1925 in just the department of La Paz and repressed mining strikes in 1912 (Pacajes), twice in 1919 (Coro Coro and Huanani), and in 1923 (Uncía).

Most often, military administrators did not hesitate to send troops in response to pleas for “repressive measures” to carry out judicial orders, enforce the demarcation of boundaries, or simply “reestablish order.” However, disputes over what “conserving order” meant and whether it could take priority over military training sometimes arose. The frequency of landlords’ petitions for armed reinforcements in 1913 prompted the civilian minister of war, Dr. Néstor Gutiérrez, to respond that previous requests “had lacked all truthfulness” and that troops had “failed to find any type of uprising.” Although Gutiérrez argued that these missions only served “to prejudice training” and “discredit” the military, he still yielded to landowner José Gosalvez’s demand and sent fifteen soldiers to his estate in Corpa (La Paz).

Officers in command of such missions also voiced objections to these labors. Captain Samuel Alcoreza, for one, described his troops’ repressive labor as arduous and futile. Responding to an urgent appeal to secure the property of the Mallea Balboa family in

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123 "Otra sublevación indígena en Cochabamba," _El Diario_, April 6, 1919, 7.
124 For rural cases, see correspondence in Prefecture-Admin boxes 147, 148, 149, 208, ALP. For deployments to mining zones, see: Prefect of La Paz to Minister of War #1073; reply #751, April 13, 1912, Prefecture-Admin box 147, ALP; "Informaciones sobre los sucesos de Corocoro," _El Diario_, January 16, 1919, 5; Robert L. Smale, _"I Sweat the Flavor of Tin": Labor Activism in Early Twentieth Century Bolivia_ (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2010), 88-91.
125 Prefect of La Paz to Minister of War #101, 189, 743, January 11, January 21, and March 26, 1913, Prefecture-Admin box 147, ALP.
126 Minister of War to Prefect of La Paz #884, April 22, 1913, Prefecture-Admin box 147, ALP.
127 Minister of War to Prefect of La Paz #883, April 21, 1913, Prefecture-Admin box 147, ALP.
1915, he led thirty artillery soldiers on “a full night’s trek through paths full of water and mud, in which the troops have suffered the indescribable” only to arrest “defenseless Indians who were sleeping” in their homes. Alcoreza reported that there had been “no attempted uprising” and bluntly accused the landowner of “intimidating the Indians with armed forces.”

The next year, Captain Enrique Tellería was more diplomatic in his report on a mission in command of four soldiers to contain a possible uprising in Chuma. Despite finding “the town in complete tranquility,” they remained for an entire month at the subprefect’s request “as a precaution” and to assuage the fears of villagers and artisans.

Serving as minister of war in the months leading up to the 1920 Republican coup, General Fermin Prudencio routinely denied petitions by landowners and subprefects to have army detachments “reestablish order” in rural areas. He dismissed appeals as “matters of mere personal interest,” in which “the Army, made up of only conscripts” could not interfere because training the new contingent had to take priority. However, only months later, he did not hesitate to personally request that the new minister of war, one J.M. Ramírez, send armed forces to “subdue the rebellious indígenas on his property called Achuta.” In response, Ramírez graciously agreed to send one officer and ten soldiers from the Abaroa Cavalry Regiment to “capture the ringleaders.”

Such requests, denials, and concessions were an arena in which power played out, as military administrators attempted to balance obligations and personal connections to

128 Minister of War to Prefect of La Paz #1730, January 30, 1915, Prefecture-Admin box 148, ALP.
129 Quoted in Minister of War to Prefect of La Paz #1851, December 19, 1916, Prefecture-Admin box 149, ALP.
130 Minister of War to Prefect of La Paz #82, January 20, 1920; Prefecture-Admin box 148, ALP.
131 Minister of War to Prefect of La Paz #101, March 8, 1920, Prefecture-Admin box 148, ALP.
132 Minister of War to Prefect of La Paz #159, December 4, 1920, Prefecture-Admin box 148, ALP.
prominent individuals against their ambition to create a professional military devoted to armed training that could protect Bolivia against external aggression. The small number of soldiers deployed for these missions points to military administrators’ doubt that any real threat to public order existed and tacit acknowledgement that the goal of these martial labors was intimidation in the service of powerful individuals.

Similar disputes about the institution’s priorities occurred surrounding conscripts’ nonmartial labor, as administrators such as Prudencio attempted to balance martial training against fiscal constraints and the urgent need for national infrastructure. Nonmartial labor is defined as tasks not directly related to defense that were also commonly performed by civilians. Of course, the labors of soldiers throughout the world have always included nonmartial tasks in support of martial ends. Domestic work, such as cleaning, washing, and food preparation, ensured a productive workspace and healthy soldiers. Conscripts assigned the role of auxiliary nurse became responsible for transporting medications and for basic first aid. And conscripts served as the mechanics who maintained vehicles and the drivers who transported troops. In cavalry units, soldiers also cared for the mounts: Conscript Humberto Mamani, a carpenter from the Sacaba province of Cochabamba in his first year of service in early 1932, described a morning spent cleaning the stable troughs and an afternoon of carrying fodder from one part of the barracks to another. These examples represent only a few of the myriad nonmartial tasks needed to garrison, train, and field an

134 Vicente Ledezma statement, November 19, 1920, MOT-71-001, AHM-TPJM. See also Aniceto Montesinos statement, November 19, 1920, INS-59-002 and Cornelis Schneider, Ricardo Pacheco, and José Siñani statements November 4-5, 1921, INS-59-003, AHM-TPJM.
135 Humberto Marquez statement, May 15, 1932, ABA-01-006, AHM-TPJM.
army.

Some conscripts had additional nonmartial duties as “assistants” to officers. For example, conscript Juan Chuquimia, a mechanic from La Paz, used the “moments that I had free from service” to carry out “the duties that, as an assistant, I had to do” for Lieutenant Casto Soria.\textsuperscript{136} Internal regulations limited assistants’ work to “the washing of garments, the cleaning and training of horses;” mandated that officers pay them a defined monthly salary; and insisted that these soldiers were not “domestics,” were not to provide childcare, and could not be obligated to serve as assistants.\textsuperscript{137} Even if precisely followed, these rules provided for assistants to take on work that would otherwise be performed by family members or presumably better-remunerated servants, which allowed officers to maintain the lifestyle of a higher social class. Assistants’ work was thus part of life in the barracks but was less clearly connected to martial ends than some other nonmartial labors.

Conscripts’ nonmartial labor assignments often led them outside of the barracks in service of both martial and nonmartial ends. They prepared land for colonization; populated border regions; logged forests; built and repaired roads, barracks, ports, wells, dams, embankments, irrigation channels, public pools, schools, hospitals, and stadiums; manufactured items; grew foodstuffs; extorted low prices from townspeople; and even followed orders to steal goods. These nonmartial labors were physical tasks that ranged from the dangerous to the banal, some of which were legal and others illegal but sanctioned by officers. Soldiers in units primarily devoted to manual labor tended to be less educated, more

\textsuperscript{136} Juan Chuquimia statement, October 8, 1931, ABA-01-004, AHM-TPJM.
\textsuperscript{137} Assistants’ monthly salary was set at a minimum of eight bolivianos. Legal copy of Reglamento de régimen interno no. 6, October 2, 1931, ABA-01-004, AHM-TPJM. I suspect that these rules were followed only loosely and perhaps faded altogether for those garrisoned far from urban centers.
indigenous, and less likely to speak Spanish. For example, the members of the 1921 Technical Battalion assigned to build new barracks in the windswept western reaches of the copper-mining district of Coro Coro were, according to one educated conscript, majority Indian. Dominant ideas about the correlation between “ethnicity” and ability likely meant that conscripts who fell toward the indigenous end of the spectrum disproportionally performed nonmartial labor of the more abject sort.

The earliest evidence of soldiers’ nonmartial labor outside the barracks comes from accounts of frontier units in the 1910s and 1920s. Principal among Liberals’ goals was the protection of Bolivia’s claims to vast and sparsely populated border regions, especially given recent territorial losses to Brazil and Chile. Minister Julio La Faye thus affirmed in 1911 that “the sovereignty of our Republic over the borders will not be real and effective until our citizens, through systematic and progressive occupation, incorporate these extensive regions into the national community and the rule of its institutions.”

Despite various schemes for settling these lands with European immigrants or Bolivian families, Liberals soon determined military colonies to be the most practical option. They departed from Conservative administrations’ ministerial pairing of education and colonization by first devoting a ministry exclusively to colonization (1904-1910) and then revising the duties of the minister of war to include colonization (1910-1929).

Under the auspices of military colonization, small detachments of soldiers

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138 Victor Zambrana Flores statement, November 6, 1921, INS-59-003, AHM-TPJM.
139 Memoria que presenta al Congreso Ordinario de 1911 el Ministro de Guerra y Colonización Coronel Julio La-Faye (La Paz: Talleres Gráficos 'La Prensa'), 1.
140 Supreme decree of December 23, 1910. They would remain conjoined until 1929. President Pando actually first paired the colonization and war ministries in 1903; however, they split into two ministries the next year. See supreme decree of January 1, 1903 and law passed October 18, 1904.
established outposts in the vast savannahs of the east, in the scrubland of the Chaco, and on river ports in the dense rainforests and pampas of the north and northeast, staffing at least fifty different forts, garrisons, and colonies between 1910 and 1928. Conscripts assigned to these outposts received military training, patrolled the area, and prepared the land for colonization. Despite numerous schemes offering soldiers free titles to cleared land if they would stay to populate the region, the minister of war and colonization noted: “The majority of our young conscripts, when their service is finished, renouncing all prospects, prefer to return to their homes.”

Because the state had little infrastructure in these regions and few towns from which to provision the troops, these soldiers had to be self-sufficient. One officer explained that a conscript in these garrisons did “rough work” and had to be “a farmer and also a bricklayer, woodcutter, and boat builder.” In at least one case, they therefore received military training only in the mornings so afternoons could be spent on “farming and other work.” These conscripts were as likely to hunt monkeys, plant manioc, or cut swathes in the jungle as they

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141 Memoria que presenta el Ministro de Guerra de Bolivia Doctor Andrés S. Muñoz ante el Honorable Congreso Ordinario de 1910 (La Paz: Intendencia de Guerra, 1910), 9, 28-31; Memoria que presenta el Honorable Congreso Nacional de 1912 el Ministro de Guerra y Colonización, Coronel Julio La Faye (La Paz: Intendencia de Guerra, 1912), 45; Memoria de Guerra y Colonización (La Paz: n.p., 1913), 60, 70; Memoria de Guerra y Colonización (La Paz: n.p., 1914), 71, 74, 81-83, 97; Memoria de Guerra y Colonización (La Paz: n.p., 1915), 31, 64; Memoria de Guerra y Colonización (La Paz: n.p., 1917), 71, 76-77; Memoria de Guerra y Colonización (La Paz: n.p., 1918) 93, 104, 113; Memoria de Guerra y Colonización (La Paz: n.p., 1919), 63, 73, 77; Memoria de Guerra y Colonización (La Paz: n.p., 1921), 52, 82, 122, 157; Memoria de Guerra y Colonización (La Paz: n.p., 1922), 22; Memoria de Guerra y Colonización (La Paz: n.p., 1923), 67; Memoria de Guerra y Colonización (La Paz: Intendencia de Guerra, 1925), 37; Memoria de Guerra y Colonización (La Paz: n.p., 1928), 107, 128-29.

142 Memoria de 1923, 66-67. For references to programs encouraging conscripts to stay on, see: Memoria de 1912, 57-58; Memoria de 1915, 64; Memoria de Guerra y Colonización (La Paz: n.p., 1916), 103-4, Memoria de 1917, 113; Memoria de 1928, 130.

were to stand guard, march, or clean their weapons.\textsuperscript{144} One officer lamented this fact, reporting that the “training demanded by military regulations has not been properly fulfilled because much of a soldier’s time must be devoted to working the land.”\textsuperscript{145} Long hours also characterized frontier life: A different officer proudly described the troops he commanded in the Chaco as working “from five in the morning until nine at night on military training, building homes, opening roads, making mud bricks, and many other tasks.”\textsuperscript{146}

Conscripts assigned to these units travelled long distances, suffered from excessive temperatures, performed fatiguing labor, risked exposure to new illnesses, and faced formidable natural obstacles. A captain stationed in Fort Heath on the Peruvian border described a posting marked by marshes, swamps, flooding, and torrential rains. These conditions caused his soldiers to be constantly ill and in desperate need of replacement footwear and undergarments due to continuous perspiration and the rigors of canoe transport.\textsuperscript{147} Frontier conscripts were thus more likely to perish during service or return with diminished capacities. In 1908, for example, authorities in the northwestern territories reported that seven soldiers of the Montes Battalion had recently perished in Santa Rosa del Abuná and Chibé; at least one had drowned in the Madre de Dios River.\textsuperscript{148} Gregorio Valencia and Esteban Valcarcel, two soldiers from Apolo (Caupolicán, La Paz), completed their service with the same battalion the following year. Their unit had marched from the colonies to Cochabamba, where they were discharged with not only military-service booklets

\textsuperscript{145} Capt. José Angel Rivero to Delegado Nacional, June 2, 1913, in Informe que eleva al Ministro de Guerra y Colonización el Delegado Nacional en el Territorio de Colonias (Riberalta: n.p. 1913), 191.
\textsuperscript{146} Sub. Lt. Emilio Orihuela statement, October 2, 1931, ABA-01-004, AHM-TPJM.
\textsuperscript{147} Capt. José Angel Rivero to Delegado Nacional, June 2, 1913, in Informe de 1913, 190-92.
\textsuperscript{148} Ministro de Guerra, Boletín Militar Tomo IV, (La Paz: Intendencia de Guerra, 1908), 257.
but also malaria. Their petition claimed that they had paid their own expenses to reach La Paz and begged the prefect for help returning to their homes since they were “gravely ill, attacked by sicknesses that we contracted” in the “deadly territory of Acre.”

Closely connected to the frontier initiative was the use of military laborers to dig roads between these regions and population centers. Evidence indicates that at least some conscripts in sapper units followed a modified service schedule, receiving infantry instruction from January until June and then exclusively working on roads during the dry winter months that stretched from June to October. Soldiers in the Juana Azurduy Infantry Regiment, for example, hewed a road between Sucre and the Chaco in 1928, using dynamite to break apart solid rock. Observers described an “unending line of soldiers, each wielding a pick or a shovel” in order to turn “crags, earth, gravel” into “the wide roadways for automobiles.” Their work with these tools could be just as dangerous as brandishing a loaded rifle, as shown by another writer’s portrayal of these same conscripts “inclined over horrifying abysses, levering apart the rocks with their crowbars, placing quarried blocks from considerable heights.”

Far from concealed, nonmartial labors on the frontier and building roadways were conspicuously celebrated in the military press. Especially in the 1920s, the Revista Militar commonly published articles that documented in words and images the diverse labors of frontier service. For example, Figure 11 depicts the 1926 contingent stationed in Riberalta,

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149 Gregorio Valencia and Esteban Valcarcel to Prefect of La Paz, July 15 and 22, 1909, Prefecture-Exped box 169 d. 81 and 91, ALP.
150 Memoria de Guerra y Colonización (La Paz: n.p., 1926), 68.
151 “¡Obras son amores...!” Revista militar 75 (1928): 177-79.
near the northern border with Brazil. The uniformed troops stand at attention in the patio of seemingly spacious and well-ventilated barracks. The inclusion of such images of robust conscripts and pristine barracks perhaps endeavored to persuade officers, troops, and their families that frontier service was not only safe but also bringing much-needed progress to Bolivia’s hinterlands.

![Garrison and Troops, Riberalta, 1926](image)

*Figure 11: Garrison and Troops, Riberalta, 1926*
*Source: Revista Militar 50 (1926), cover.*

Photographs of sapper labor similarly characterized the army as the principal motor of progress. In these images, partially completed roads and bridges appeared before backdrops of dense forests, impenetrable mountains, and rapid rivers, thus portraying conscripts as conquering nature’s challenges with not only wheelbarrows and shovels but also dedication. Although photographs like Figure 12 and Figure 13 depict men performing taxing and decidedly nonmartial labor, their uniforms, the orderly manner of work, and the presence of an officer calmly overseeing their performance remind viewers that these are conscripts serving their *patria.*
Although the daily labor of frontier and sapper conscripts was distinctly nonmartial, this work fell to the army for strategic reasons: Populating the frontier and connecting Bolivia's disparate regions would secure borders, achieve food security, and facilitate the transportation of resources to internal and external markets. In fact, mainstream journalists used militarized language to describe this labor, arguing that Bolivian soldiers were
“conquer[ing] with hoe and machete what has not been done with sword and rifle.” The connection between these tasks and national defense, however, was significantly more abstract than it was for guard duty and weapons training. The martial ends of their work clearing land, planting seeds, and carving out roadways became clear only if soldiers linked their work to the argument that Bolivia would be formidable and able to defend itself when it had a strong economy that united its territorial claims.

Diverse labors on the frontier laid the intellectual groundwork for using urban soldiers for similar tasks even if they lacked a logical link to national defense. As it became acceptable for uniformed labor to build national highways, it was less of a conceptual leap to ask soldiers to repair urban roads. If soldiers on the frontier were planting seeds, why couldn’t more centrally located units become self-sufficient or even be deployed in the harvest if there was a shortage of local workers? If soldiers in border units were building their own barracks, why not use urban soldiers to build schools? Conscripts stationed in population centers thus began to perform manual labor on public-works projects like wells, levees, schools, hospitals, and stadiums. For example, when the telegraphs director could not find workers in Pelechuco (La Paz) to install lines in 1913 due to fears of an Indian uprising, he called on military labor to finish the job. And Technical Battalion soldiers stationed in Coro Coro (La Paz) reported spending their days excavating stones, building irrigation channels, leveling land, and carrying water in 1921.

Military labor provided an attractive way for the state to establish a minimal presence

154 Prefect of La Paz to Minister of War #1849, August 16, 1913, Prefecture-Admin box 147, ALP.
155 INS-59-003, AHM-TPJM.
throughout the territory and to build and maintain infrastructure at low cost. The obligatory nature of military service allowed the state to furnish itself with a labor pool compelled by law to work for low pay. Although the government had to invest funds in order to pursue deserters and recruit, discipline, transport, house, and feed troops, it paid conscripts only cents a day. The very term used to describe these wages—socorros (literally “aid”)—indicates they were seen not as remuneration for labor but rather as an allowance provided by a benevolent state. As a sub-lieutenant explained in a 1929 issue of the Revista Militar, obligatory military service allowed the nation to “economize in maintaining the army because it has no reason to pay a large salary to people who are not professionals” but who instead are “paying a tribute imposed by Law.” Put simply, “the salary received by a conscript is better thought of as a bonus to cover his necessities.” Yet officers could garnish this “bonus” to replace lost or damaged items. And soldiers in serving in a 1931 infantry regiment complained of additional involuntary garnishments to purchase copies of the Soldier’s Catechism. They added that they had to use their “reduced socorros to acquire shoes, sandals, and underwear” since their officers had failed to issue them these items.

Bolivia’s turbulent economy weighed heavily in decisions to assign conscripts non-martial tasks that would lessen budgetary commitments to the army and infrastructure.

156 Except for a brief period in 1915 when all ranks of the military earned thirty percent less, soldiers earned eighty cents a day between 1910 and 1919, but half of that was immediately diverted to pay for communal meals. See: Memoria de 1910, 19; Minister of War Circular to Commanders #221, May 21, 1914 in Anexos de la memoria de guerra y colonización (La Paz: Empresa Editora de El Tiempo, 1914), 95-98; 88th ordinary sesión, November 23, 1914, El redactor de la H. Cámara de Diputados Tomo IV (La Paz: Imp. y Lit. Boliviana Hugo Heitmann & Cía, 1914), 420; Minister of War Circular #247, December 14, 1914, in Anexos a la memoria de guerra y colonización (La Paz: Intendencia de Guerra, 1915), 36; Memoria de 1919, 24.
158 Seventeen soldiers to 2nd Division Commander, September 21, 1931, ABA-01-004, AHM-TPJM.
projects. Liberals had effectively bought off the opposition with positions in the expanding bureaucracy and massive public works, both of which were funded through international loans secured by booming tin exports. However, dependence on foreign trade for state revenues meant that slight fluctuations in the world economy could threaten Bolivia’s ability to service its growing debt. Slowing exports caused a short but profound crisis in 1913-1914, which ultimately led to the fracturing of the Liberal party and the emergence of the opposition Republicans. Although the economy recovered in the wake of the First World War, another short depression threatened debt payments in the early 1920s. Bolivia was then one of the first countries to feel the effects of the Great Depression as tin prices plummeted sixty percent between 1927 and 1932.159

Although nonmartial labors were already quite prevalent prior to the economic crises of the 1920s, they were often contested by members of the military establishment who argued that they prejudiced training. In the 1910s, the institution sometimes even followed through on this rhetoric by contracting with civilians to build barracks rather than using the labor of conscripts.160 Expressing the goal of reducing nonmartial components of military service, however, seems to have been more common than action. The 1914 commander of the Tarija Cavalry Regiment, for example, reported his hopes to “reduce the use of soldiers in foreign labors.”161 And Minister of War Fermín Prudencio informed Congress in 1917


161 *Memoria de 1914*, 84.
that he sent frequent messages to frontier garrisons reminding them that “conscripts not be used for tasks foreign to their military condition.”  

Yet he noted in the same report, parroting the commander of a regiment in the northern colonies, that “the frontier soldier… should not learn only tactics but rather become [habilitarse] a factor of work, completing truly useful public works for the nation.” Among such works, he cited farms, roads, buildings, and communications networks. These vacillations indicate that the use of conscripts for these nonmartial tasks was a subject of debate among officers and administrators.

The atmosphere of budgetary constraints certainly affected military rhetoric and practice, however. Liberal and Republican ministers of war repeatedly complained that economic woes prevented the military from achieving its goals, be they the staging of annual maneuvers, the training of reservists, or the construction of hygienic barracks. As the state’s economic problems worsened, officers began to boast in reports and military magazine articles of the savings that their soldiers’ nonmartial labors brought to state coffers. For example, Major Julio Sanjinés reported in 1915 that “with the goal of economizing,” the Abaroa Cavalry Regiment had sown and harvested seven thousand quintals of fodder for the mounts at a cost of only six thousand bolivianos, thus saving the state eight thousand bolivianos under market prices. His calculations, of course, did not include the cost of cavalry conscripts’ labor and time away from military training. Major Julio Bretel made similar omissions when he bragged in 1922 of having slashed the expenses of the forces stationed in

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162 Memoria de 1917, 13.
163 Memoria de 1917, 76-77.
164 Memoria de 1916, 35; Memoria de 1917, 64, 71; Memoria de 1922, 18; Memoria de 1925, 6; Memoria de 1928, 3, 88-91, 160.
165 Memoria de 1915, 58.
Beni by having the conscripts at each outpost cultivate crops.\textsuperscript{166}

In the early 1920s, the minister of war’s annual reports to Congress began to read like laundry lists of troops’ nonmartial labors, perhaps in order to stave off looming budget cuts. He reported in 1921 that the Sapper Regiment in the Cochabamba department had built a road, repaired another, and cleared pasture and farmland.\textsuperscript{167} The next year, he updated Congress regarding conscripts’ progress on a road in Santa Cruz.\textsuperscript{168} Members of the border unit stationed in Carangas (Oruro), he informed in 1924, had completed a road, laid telegraph lines, and built a modern garrison for two hundred soldiers.\textsuperscript{169} Yet the following year, he issued an order warning that the use of soldiers for manual labor “might be detrimental to military instruction.”\textsuperscript{170} Despite the widespread use of military laborers on infrastructure projects, no consistent position had yet emerged as to the balance of costs and benefits of assigning conscripts to these nonmartial tasks.

The severe and prolonged crisis of the late 1920s, however, apparently eclipsed these doubts since soldiers’ nonmartial labors, especially in urban areas, intensified. In 1927, the Colorado\n
\textsuperscript{167} Memoria de 1921, 84.
\textsuperscript{168} Memoria de 1922, 19.
\textsuperscript{169} Memoria de Guerra y Colonización (La Paz: n.p., 1924), 32.
\textsuperscript{170} Orden Suprema, February 18, 1925, \textit{Anuario de leyes y disposiciones supremas de 1925} (La Paz, 1926): 228-29.
\textsuperscript{171} "En la región de Killi-Killi ocurrió un desplome de tierra," \textit{El Diario}, August 24, 1927, 8.
Chapare.\textsuperscript{172} And Captain Arturo Enriquez advocated an even more prominent role for military sappers in 1929, citing the institution’s ability to build roads with “personnel who do not overly tax the national budget.”\textsuperscript{173} In the face of increasing deficits, the minister of war issued orders in 1931 that soldiers repair their own barracks “in order to economize for the national treasury.”\textsuperscript{174} The commander of the Colorados Infantry Regiment, which was stationed in the capital city that year, thus reported ordering each company to make 2,500 mud bricks per week and sending twenty soldiers to spend several days “cleaning, channeling, and clearing” the river embankment of the minister of war’s residence.\textsuperscript{175} That same year the Revista Militar reported that the Bagé Engineering Regiment's labors had produced “almost all the local progress in Cobija,” where soldiers had built urban roads and bridges, cleaned cemeteries, erected a stadium, installed street lighting, and constructed public works to collect, channel, and distribute drinking water.\textsuperscript{176}

Although the labors they performed often resembled those of their civilian peers, soldiers who made oral, written, or physical attempts to better their working conditions were deemed mutineers, arrested, and judicially processed. Thus “mutinies” that resemble strikes dot the military history of twentieth-century Bolivia; some soldiers even used the language of work stoppage to express their demands and defend their actions. In 1906, for example, soldiers abandoned Puerto Heath on the Peruvian border, citing “excessive work,” having

\textsuperscript{172} Memoria de 1928, 22-24.  
\textsuperscript{174} Minister of War to Chief of Staff, January 26, 1931, ABA-01-004, AHM-TPJM.  
\textsuperscript{175} Lt. Col. Alberto Sotomayor statement, October 1, 1931, ABA-01-004, AHM-TPJM.  
\textsuperscript{176} "Crónica," Revista militar 117 (1931): 776-79.
served double the promised tour, and their complaint that “our Patria pays us poorly.”

And various groups of conscripts in the 1920s were formally accused of mutiny for collectively requesting promotions, petitioning that a specific commander remain in the regiment, and objecting to, in their words, “working like donkeys” or doing “excessive work, day and night.”

Martial visions of military service meant that nonmartial labor experiences could become a subject of debate from below, especially when educated soldiers posted to urban areas were ordered to perform work they viewed as unbefitting their status and uniform. At least one officer reinforced this sense of entitlement to the martial labor of training by threatening his conscripts with roadwork in the Chapare if they misbehaved. Nonmartial labor, for these soldiers, thus became a punishment rather than part of their sacred duty. Educated soldiers therefore invoked official rhetoric of what military labor should do (defend the patria) in their written complaints and oral statements during military-justice proceedings. In a striking 1931 case of adopting official rhetoric to make demands, a group of seventeen soldiers from the Colorados Regiment sent a letter to the division commander to complain about superiors who “imposed forced labor upon us” and made “us complete work that does not correspond to military service, like making mud bricks.” Nonmartial labor thus became an arena of contestation as the gap between theory and practice opened a

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177 Ignacio Torres and Sarg. Manuel Flores statements, November 18, 1906 and November 28, 1907, Prefecture-Exped box 189, d. 177, ALP.
178 Soldiers to Minister of War, November 1, 1920, MOT-71-001; Julio Rendón and José Siñani statements, October 4, 1921 and November 17, 1921, INS-59-003; soldiers to Junta de Gobierno, November 18, 1920, INS-59-002, AHM-TPJM.
179 Sub. Lt. Manuel Heguirgar statement, November 17, 1920, MOT-71-001, AHM-TPJM.
180 Seventeen soldiers to 2nd Division Commander, September 21, 1931, ABA-01-004, AHM-TPJM.
space for dissent and different ideas about the nature of military service clashed.

The social status of the majority of conscripts likely influenced ideas about the acceptability of assigning soldiers to nonmartial tasks in agriculture, on public-works projects, or as officers’ “assistants.” Because most of the men entering the barracks were miners, artisans, and rural agriculturalists rather than students or urban professionals, military administrators and officers were perhaps more comfortable picturing them as wielding shovels rather than rifles. This hypothesis raises a question about the differences between obligatory military service and other contemporaneous forms of labor extraction, such as postillonaje [mail service] and prestación vial [obligatory road tax/work].

Whether conscripts understood military service as an onerous labor tax or as an honorable rite of passage varied by individual. Unfortunately, since illiterate conscripts from rural areas rarely testified in military-justice hearings or registered their thoughts about military service in writing, we cannot know whether nationalist rhetoric affected their opinions about this labor obligation. Some perhaps perceived a substantive difference between work done in uniform for the state and work done in the home and fields of the patrón.

Many formally educated conscripts certainly saw donning a uniform to defend their patria as an honorable duty and would have rejected any comparison between obligatory

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181 Postillonaje was quite common despite its abolition in 1904. That same year, a law established the prestación vial road tax, which could be paid in cash or labor, depending on region and/or social status. See: Laura Gotkowitz, *A Revolution for Our Rights: Indigenous Struggles for Land and Justice in Bolivia, 1880-1952* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 304-5 n.1. For a general overview of extractive labor practices, see Brooke Larson, *Trials of Nation Making: Liberalism, Race, and Ethnicity in the Andes, 1810-1910* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 249.
military service and institutions like the colonial mita. Student-turned-conscript Ricardo Pacheco, for example, expressed the pride that he and his fellow conscripts took in having “come to the barracks to serve our patria.” One image of conscripts working on a road in the Chapare in 1924 brings these questions into relief. Not a rifle in sight, the men are shown digging drainage ditches by the side of the road. Several of those in the foreground appear not even to be wearing a military uniform. Little distinguished these soldiers from coerced laborers unless they, as Pacheco apparently did, saw themselves as different, as laboring to build their nation and as becoming men who honorably served their patria.

**Insolent Conscripts, Tyrannical Officers, and “Barbarous Punishments”**

“Without discipline,” Colonel Alfredo Richter wrote in the Soldier’s Catechism, “the army would be nothing more than a group of dangerous men, incapable of achieving anything.” However, he then offered a carefully worded definition of discipline that revealed some anxiety over how to reconcile the need for soldiers to blindly obey all orders with the idea of filling the ranks with thinking citizens: “Discipline is complete submission to all military regulations and absolute obedience to all commanders. *It is not an imposed servility but rather the duty of a free man to the army as a national institution* [italics in original].” Discipline, he thus argued, had to be freely given by patriotic soldiers rather than imposed. By comparing it to the discipline necessary “in the family, society, and all civilian tasks,” Richter attempted to make the idea of military discipline seem less alien to new recruits. He encouraged conscripts to self-regulate, asserting that discipline and punishment should ultimately be antithetical;

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182 Adapted from an Incaic labor system, the mita was an infamous colonial-era form of corvée labor used to extract silver, especially from Potosí.
183 Ricardo Pacheco statement, November 4, 1921, INS-59-003, AHM-TPJM.
punishment only existed for those “who stray from their duty and do not want to adapt to
the demands of discipline.” Tellingly, however, even in his optimistic formulation,
punishment still played an important role in achieving military discipline. The text thus
implied that real men would be good sons to their patria by governing themselves and
subordinating themselves to military hierarchy; those who failed to self-regulate in a manner
that conformed to military regulations would have discipline physically imposed upon them.

Indeed, evidence from military-justice records indicates that officers and NCOs
routinely used physical violence as a training tool to ensure compliance with orders and to
instill discipline. Convened in order to address accusations of mutiny, insubordination,
assaulting a superior, and abuse of authority, seventeen cases document an array of authority
relationships and disciplinary practices. Conscripts in the 1910s, 1920s, and even on the eve
of the Chaco War in 1932 narrated how their failure to conform to officers’ expectations
provoked immediate punishment that, depending on individual circumstances and
personalities, could include confinement, forced exercise, “obscene words that would hurt
the honor of anyone,” physical beatings, and various other “humiliating punishments.”

Officers often used exercise as a punishment for those who erred in military training
or barracks comportment. This type of punishment produced bodily pain and proved
officers’ power over their charges. Typical was the punishment of “making the troops jog
around the training grounds for a long while until they are completely worn out.”

185 Richter, Catecismo del soldado, 4-5.
186 Quotations from: Teodocio H. Uzquiano to District Prosecutor of La Paz, September 21, 1931, ABA-01-003 and Twelve soldiers to 2nd Division Commander, May 6, 1932, ABA-01-006, AHM-TPJM.
187 Cabo Félix Portocarrero statement, October 15, 1919, FAS-42-003, AHM-TPJM.
exhaustion.” These punishments could also take more creative forms: Disappointed with his soldiers’ “lethargy” and failure to maintain alignment during training in close-order formation, one sub-lieutenant in 1930 corrected them various times and then, still not satisfied with their work, ordered them to repeatedly run, throw themselves on the ground, crawl, and then kneel.

Also requiring strength and endurance was the punishment of forced standing [plantón], during which soldiers had to stand at attention, sometimes holding weights, for a period that could range from twenty minutes to several hours. This was the most common punishment mentioned in military-justice records from the period, occurring in thirteen of the seventeen cases. Offenses provoking this punishment included not only severe breaches such as insolence, insubordination, and drunkenness but also minor faults. Sub-Lieutenant Juan Antonio Rivera, for example, punished an entire company of conscripts assigned to the Aviation School with forced standing “for an hour in the morning for having gotten drunk the night before and then again in the afternoon for not obeying the signal to fall in at attention.” A colleague in an infantry regiment administered the same punishment to a soldier who he perceived as having “greeted me with disdain, whistling and refusing to salute me.” Although conscripts usually carried out this punishment in the guard room, training grounds, or barracks’ patio, one cavalry conscript recalled being forced to stand for

188 Antonio Mamani statement, October 29, 1927, ABA-01-002, AHM-TPJM.
189 Sub-Lt. Olmos to Commander of Bolivar Artillery Regiment, July 14, 1930, INS-59-004, AHM-TPJM.
190 See FAS-42-002 (1917); FAS-42-003 (1919); MOT-71-001 (1920); INS-59-003 (1921); ABA-01-002 (1927); INS-59-004 (1930); MOT-71-004 (1930); ABA-01-004 (1931); ABA-01-007 (1932); SED-94-004 (1932); ABA-01-005 (1932); ABA-01-006 (1932), AHM-TPJM; Prefecture-Exped box 251, d. 7 (1922), ALP.
191 Alberto Sanchez statement, September 10, 1930, MOT-71-004, AHM-TPJM.
192 Sub. Lt. Emilio Orihuela statement, October 2, 1931, ABA-01-004, AHM-TPJM.
several hours in a bathroom “with four rifles in his arms,” which certainly compounded the humiliation of punishment.  

In many cases, officers resorted to physical beatings if they could not successfully impose exercise or forced standing, were dissatisfied with the manner in which conscripts performed these punishments, or lost control of their own rage. Other officers and NCOs used their fists, boots, and weapons to reinforce orders, correct errors in form, and discourage foot-dragging. A cavalry conscript in 1917 reported receiving “various kicks” for failing to rise promptly from bed, while his counterparts in 1932 recalled that their sub-lieutenant often made “the group dismount to hit them with his riding crop.” Infantry soldiers told a similar tale: “My lieutenant called me over and asked me why I had laughed and then punished me with six or so saber blows to the body.” And conscripts in the Train Battalion complained that Lieutenant Armando Ballón had tweaked the ears of one of their number for “not responding correctly to a question,” made another’s tooth fall out by hitting him “in the jaw with the butt of a rifle” for incorrectly positioning his body during target practice, and kicked a third while saying, “I’m going to make you march well.” A similar group serving in the Technical Battalion depicted their captain as overly eager to physically assault them: “he hit me on the arm with a stick… until he broke the stick”; “he tried to trample me with his mare”; “he punished us with a whip [chicote], telling us we were

193 Seventeen soldiers to 2nd Division Commander, September 21, 1931, ABA-01-004, AHM-TPJM.  
194 Rosendo Villarroel, May 18, 1917, FAS-42-002; Twelve soldiers to Commander of Second Division, May 6, 1932, ABA-01-006, AHM-TPJM.  
195 Celestino Mendoz statement, October 30, 1927, ABA-01-002, AHM-TPJM.  
196 Quartermaster Colonel Raimundo González Flor to Surgeon of Quartermaster’s Corps, Dr. Luis Martínez Lara, October 14, 1919; Pablo Carreón, Manuel Mollo, and Ramon Venegas statements, October 14-15, 1919, FAS-42-003, AHM-TPJM.
naughty”; “he walloped and punched me.”

Although they might have disagreed as to the details of these incidents, most of these officers and NCOs generally admitted to having used physical force. They typically defended their actions as necessary to maintain authority, curb indiscipline, and ensure proper military training. Yet conscripts’ perceived violations varied widely. The officers claimed that the offending conscript had failed to dress properly, had stood sloppily at attention, had been “negligent in work,” had “complied with ill will,” and had even assumed an “attitude of mockery.” Violence, they argued, was necessary as an immediate measure in these cases to prevent conscripts from “making a mockery of my authority.” Acts of indiscipline had to be “harshly reprimanded” to forestall repetition. Corporal Enrique Murillo, for example, testified to administering “a few lashes with a belt to soldier Felipe Medina.” And Sub-Lieutenant Natalio Pereira almost boasted in a 1917 report about taking a cavalry conscript “by his chest” and “making use of my saber, I punished his insolence” until “I made him obey me.” His counterpart in a 1930 artillery regiment, Sub-Lieutenant Olmos, reacted in a similar way when a conscript resisted his use of exercise to punish the company. After twenty minutes of compliance, Vicente Rodríguez “stayed standing when I ordered him to kneel. Then I approached him and gave him a kick, I should [be able] to punish [them]

197 Cornelis Schneider, Julio Rendón, and José Siñani statements, November 4 and 17, 1921, INS-59-003, AHM-TPJM.
198 Pando Regiment Commander to 2nd Division Commander, September 21, 1931, ABA-01-003; Sof. Casto Pabón and Sarg. Huberto del Castillo statements, August 18 and October 8, 1931, ABA-01-004, AHM-TPJM.
199 Lt. Leonicio Menacho statement, September 23, 1931, ABA-01-003, AHM-TPJM.
200 Sub. Lt. Emilio Orihuela statement, October 2, 1931, ABA-01-004, AHM-TPJM.
201 Cabo Enrique Murillo statement, April 14, 1921, March 19, 1921, MOT-71-002A, AHM-TPJM.
without giving them any explanation.”

As these officers’ statements make clear, the use of physical violence affirmed their power over conscripts. And military hierarchy was clearly not the only type of power at play during these incidents, given the prevalence of phrases questioning or affirming manliness. In the above-referenced episode between Olmos and Rodríguez, for example, Rodríguez responded to the kick by arming his bayonet. Olmos, rather than immediately quelling this blatant act of insubordination, chose to face Rodríguez as equals in order to defend the perceived threat to his masculinity. He reportedly yelled that “if he [Rodríguez] was a man, he should come [and] we’ll duel with our fists, and if [not then] he is a coward, even if he has a loaded rifle.”

Although masculinity is often seen as a way of encouraging normative discipline in the military, the form of masculinity expressed by Olmos and the conscripts who used gendered insults to encourage insubordination actually served to violate rather than impose discipline and hierarchy.

Some incidents also had strong overtones of sexual dominance: Pacífico Arce, a student from Cochabamba serving in the Ballivián Cavalry Regiment in 1931, accused Sub-Lieutenant Aníbal Cusicanqui of “putting a saddle on me, mounting me, and spurring me in front of those in my group.” Another conscript alleged that his NCOs had forced soldiers to stand naked for two hours as punishment for interfering in a fight between NCOs. And

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203 Sub-Lt. Olmos to Bolivar Artillery Regiment Commander, July 14, 1930, INS-59-004, AHM-TPJM.
204 Abelino Romay statement, July 14, 1930, INS-59-004, AHM-TPJM.
205 Pacífico Arce statement, June 10, 1932, ABA-01-006, AHM-TPJM.
206 Ricardo Pacheco statement, November 4, 1921, INS-59-003, AHM-TPJM.
at least two soldiers reported being kicked in the testicles.\textsuperscript{207} It remains unclear how or why these disputes became sexualized, but since Cusicanqui admitted having punished Arce but roundly denied the saddle incident, we can assume that at least this type of overtly sexualized punishment exceeded disciplinary norms. Indeed, these conscripts may have formulated such accusations anticipating that they would gain more traction than stories of forced labor or beatings.

Tellingly, conscripts’ testimony often focused more on the public humiliation suffered than the physical pain. They emphasized that officers’ beatings and insults drove them to tears, which displayed weakness to fellow conscripts or authority figures. One soldier bitterly recalled how his captain not only dealt him blows but then told him to “go home to cry,” and, to make it worse, did so in front of Major Ayoroa, “who started to laugh.”\textsuperscript{208} Another recalled his officer’s unspecified “words” that had “humiliated me, and I left that place crying.”\textsuperscript{209} These incidents were humiliating because, when their officers had violently enforced military hierarchy in a public manner, these conscripts had submitted rather than resisting based on a masculine ideal of bravely challenging unjust authority.

Violence and humiliation, however, did not make these incidents exceptional. This type of treatment was certainly common but only entered the historical record when conscripts overtly resisted by assaulting an officer, plotting a mutiny, or publicly registering complaints. Conscripts’ social status was also a determining factor. None of the thirty-four

\textsuperscript{207} Quartermaster Colonel Raimundo González Flor to Surgeon of Quartermaster’s Corps, Dr. Luís Martínez Lara, October 14, 1919, FAS-42-003; Manuel Valdez statement, May 6, 1932, ABA-01-005, AHM-TPJM.

\textsuperscript{208} Julio Rendón statement, November 17, 1921, INS-59-003, AHM-TPJM.

\textsuperscript{209} Juan Vicente Rodríguez statement, July 15, 1930, INS-59-004, AHM-TPJM.
conscripts involved in the incidents detailed above were Aymara- or Quechua-speaking agriculturalists. In fact, most of them served in the more prestigious cavalry and artillery units, and at least eighty-five percent (twenty-nine of thirty-four) were fully literate. Pursuing occupations such as bakers, barbers, cobblers, and mechanics, the majority belonged to the urban artisan class. Also among their number, however, were four university students, an accountant, a telegraph operator, a typesetter, and a white-collar employee.\footnote{See FAS-42-002 (1917); FAS-42-003 (1919); MOT-71-001 (1920); INS-59-003 (1921); ABA-01-002 (1927); INS-59-004 (1930); MOT-71-004 (1930); ABA-01-004 (1931); ABA-01-007 (1932); SED-94-004 (1932); ABA-01-005 (1932); ABA-01-006 (1932), AHM-TPJM; Prefecture-Exped box 251, d. 7 (1922), ALP.}

Largely absent from the historical record, then, is the treatment of rural conscripts, especially those stationed outside of urban centers. Accustomed to hacienda and mining overseers who often used whipping, beating, and sexual abuse to maintain authority, these actors were less inclined to blatantly challenge their officers.\footnote{See Gotkowitz, \textit{A Revolution for Our Rights}, 149, 156; Waskar T. Ari, "Race and Subaltern Nationalism: AMP Activist-Intellectuals in Bolivia, 1921-1964" (Ph.D. diss., Georgetown University, 2004), 142-43, 169; Smale, \textit{"I Sweat the Flavor of Tin"}, 88, 164.} They likely chose more subtle forms of resistance, such as foot-dragging or feigned misunderstanding.\footnote{James C. Scott, \textit{Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance} (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985).} And if they did assault an officer or plot mutiny, the incident likely remained unreported, with officers personally handling infractions rather than relying on military tribunals, which, as we have seen, were reserved for educated conscripts and high-profile incidents. Yet we can still be sure that less-privileged conscripts also suffered brutal treatment – probably to a greater extent than their urban counterparts. In fact, one educated conscript from Oruro serving in 1921 justified his superior’s unsanctioned use of “the stick or the whip,” saying that legal disciplinary methods only worked with “other elements, more intelligent and better educated
than the *indígenas* who make up a large percentage of the Technical Battalion."\(^{213}\)

The urban artisans and professionals involved in these cases were precisely the class of men that high-level administrators most hoped to attract to the army’s ranks. Rumors of violent treatment, however, discouraged their compliance with conscription. If men were to serve because of a sense of duty to the *patria*, their treatment in the barracks had to be appropriate to that end; soldiering had to be honorable. High-level policy makers had thus long attempted to prohibit such punishments: As early as 1893, legislators had insisted that an officer be tried for whipping a conscript.\(^{214}\) The chief of staff and minister of war also worked to counteract negative beliefs about life in the barracks, warning officers not to “inflict soldiers with blows or engage in outrages or denigrating acts” and, later, “absolutely banning degrading punishments.”\(^{215}\) While frequent, these amorphous pronouncements defined neither what constituted a degrading punishment nor how officers should maintain control over their troops in their absence. The minister of war thus called for official disciplinary regulations in order to discourage “non-uniform” methods.\(^{216}\) In 1916, the military officially regulated sanctions for minor infractions by conscripts and NCOs. A list of twenty-seven offenses like carelessness in physical hygiene, “tepidness in service,” and the theft of low-value articles could be punished only through extra cleaning duties, different levels of confinement for a prescribed number of days, and *plantón* for a certain number of

\(^{213}\) Víctor Zambrana statement, November 6, 1921, INS-59-003, AHM-TPJM.


hours.\textsuperscript{217} All more serious offenses had to be referred to military justice, which had long been restricted from meting out physical punishments.\textsuperscript{218}

Despite official policy, however, punishment in the barracks was typically a personal rather than a bureaucratic process. Desertion offers a fitting example. Official policy classified it as a serious crime to be tried in military tribunals. If found guilty without any aggravating or mitigating circumstances, first-time offenders would be subject to six months’ confinement and an additional year of service.\textsuperscript{219} However, records of military-tribunal cases against conscripts for desertion during this period are practically non-existent, which – along with other evidence – supports the hypothesis that authorities dealt with offenders unsystematically and with little use of prescribed bureaucratic procedures.\textsuperscript{220} A commander could ignore desertion or zealously pursue missing conscripts. Upon their capture, he could initiate official proceedings, mete out punishment, or simply reincorporate them into the ranks. And a subaltern officer could fail to even inform his superior of the breach, instead exercising similar autonomy in deciding offenders’ fates.

The pursuit of deserters depended on individuals’ choices and willingness to expend resources on the endeavor. Some commanders sent commissions to search the roads, train

\textsuperscript{217} Memoria de 1916, 33. For a later version of the text see: "Reglamento de faltas disciplinarias y sus castigos, no. 23 de 1938," in Códigos de justicia militar de Bolivia, ed. Ramón Salinas Mariaca and Carlos Manuel Silva (La Paz: 1948), 207-18.

\textsuperscript{218} Art. 27, Military Penal Code, 1905, published in Bolivia. Ministerio de Guerra, Códigos militares, 190.

\textsuperscript{219} Art. 214 Military Penal Code, 1905, published in Bolivia. Ministerio de Guerra, Códigos militares, 244-46.

\textsuperscript{220} The majority of desertion judicial cases in the pre-war era prosecuted officers. In fact, I found only one file of a pre-Chaco-War desertion indictment of conscripts in the military-tribunal records. See 1921 case against Concepción Mamani and Valentín Murillo, DES-15-007, AHM-TPJM. Another case from 1921 also involved desertion, but the principal charge was insubordination. See INS-59-003. In the correspondence files of the Prefect of La Paz, I have found references to three other judicial processes of conscripts for desertion during this era. See, for example, an April 25, 1916 letter from Minister of War to Prefect of La Paz regarding deserter Feliciano Loza, Prefecture-Admin box 149, ALP.
stations, and even deserters’ homes.\textsuperscript{221} Others delegated the task by writing to departmental prefects with the soldier’s physical description and asking that local authorities determine his whereabouts and secure his capture.\textsuperscript{222} This method was often ineffective, as signaled by the 1915 minister of war’s complaint that most deserters enjoyed impunity due to the negligence of local authorities.\textsuperscript{223} However, even when authorities captured deserters, commanders seldom bothered to set the wheels of military justice in motion, instead reincorporating their errant charges after meting out informal punishment. Such was the case for Julio Suárez Colque, an illiterate baker who deserted on July 16, 1921, during the celebration of a regional holiday and was soon captured by the corregidor of Ayo Ayo. Mentioning this offense during an unrelated military-justice proceeding, Suárez failed to specify his punishment, stating vaguely: “I had the experience that it wasn’t good to abandon the barracks.”\textsuperscript{224} Perhaps a superior had berated him, explaining the gravity of his error, or perhaps he had received an immediate physical reprimand, but he certainly had not faced a military tribunal.

This routine failure to follow procedure shows an imperfectly professionalized officer corps in which many were not capable enough or willing to implement the strictly hierarchical and bureaucratic regime for which Colonel Richter yearned. Some officers even collapsed hierarchies by fraternizing with their subordinates. Alcohol often facilitated these

\textsuperscript{221} For examples, see: Campero Regiment Commander My. Jenaro Blacut to Prefect of La Paz, March 8, 1926, Prefecture-Admin box 149, ALP; Richter, \textit{En el puesto del deber}, 18; Quiroga Ochoa, \textit{En la paz y en la guerra}, 61-62.

\textsuperscript{222} See the thirty-four letters asking for the capture of specific deserters sent to the Prefect of La Paz by various commanders and the Minister of War during 1914-1915, Prefecture-Admin box 148, ALP.

\textsuperscript{223} Minister of War to Prefects #263, April 23, 1915, Prefecture-Admin box 148, ALP. See also similar language in complaint regarding local authorities’ failure to capture deserter Fidel Bustillos Gódoi, May 22, 1919, Prefecture-Admin box 148 and Campero Regiment Commander My. Jenaro Blacut to Prefect of La Paz, March 8, 1926, Prefecture-Admin box 149, ALP.

\textsuperscript{224} Julio Suárez Colque statement, November 5, 1921, INS-59-003, AHM-TPJM.
breakdowns in military hierarchy, as when a professional NCO like Sub-Officer Castor of the Ballivián Cavalry Regiment shared a bottle of pisco with his soldiers or when a junior officer like Lieutenant Jimenez of the Technical Battalion, “drank with the troops” while on guard duty, “fell asleep completely drunk in the bed of a soldier,” and then borrowed some aspirin from a conscript the next day. These were not the uniform relationships of a strictly controlled bureaucracy; experiences of military service depended on personal relationships with individual authority figures.

One example from 1917 reveals the intense power struggles that could play out in the barracks. When six educated soldiers in the Abaroa Cavalry Regiment failed to rise from their beds at the sound of the reveille, Sub-Lieutenant Natalio Pereira ordered that they be punished with two hours of plantón after the completion of morning training. Since conscript Francisco Gallardo, a nineteen-year-old student, was serving as sergeant of the guard that day, Pereira tasked him with monitoring this punishment. However, the soldiers refused to assume the forced standing position, claiming to be ill, and three of their number fled to protest the punishment to the regiment’s commander, Lieutenant Colonel Julio Sanjinés, who, they reported, replied that he “would fix it.” Although both the appeal and Sanjinés’s apparent assent fundamentally violated military hierarchy, this case enters the historical record because of one of the conscripts who stayed behind. Roberto Delgado, a literate musician, eventually consented to forced standing, but when sergeant of the guard Gallardo attempted to add weights, Delgado again refused, stating, “If he [Pereira] was a man, he’d

225 Ricardo Pacheco and Cornelis Schneider statements, October 4, 1921, INS-59-003; Domingo Delgado statement, April 28, 1932, SED-94-004, AHM-TPJM.
226 Enrique Gutierrez, Gabriel Vasquez, Renato Arnez, and Francisco Gallardo statements, May 18 and June 16, 1917, FAS-42-002, AHM-TPJM.
come and make me do it himself.” Gallardo then fetched Pereira, who reportedly yelled
“Who am I? You have to respect me!” as he drew his saber and hit Delgado with it. Delgado
responded, “nobody can hit a soldier with weapons,” grabbed one of the unloaded rifles
being used as weights, and wielded it against Pereira.227

At its heart, this dispute concerned power and hierarchy. The apparently routine
assignment of conscripts (who had not yet even been promoted to low-level NCOs) to fill
roles such as sergeant of the guard and to oversee the punishment of their fellows indicates
the fungibility of power in these barracks. More important, however, was the fact that
Delgado and his fellows did not accept Pereira’s punishment as legitimate despite his rank.
Their conviction that appealing to a higher authority would lessen rather than add to their
punishment confirmed Pereira’s relative lack of power in the regiment and suggests a
systemic failure to maintain strict respect for hierarchy. Delgado’s words and deeds
questioned not only Pereira’s right to command but also his honor as a man, which
provoked him to draw his saber in order to physically affirm his power over the conscript.
He would win Delgado’s respect through violence and punish his insolence. Drawing on the
same idea of defending an affront to his masculine honor, Delgado responded in kind,
despite the consequences of taking up arms against his superior. Delgado’s retort about the
illegality of physically attacking a soldier indicates the growing honor attached to soldiering
and that notions about soldiers’ rights were circulating among certain sectors of Bolivian
society. Unsurprisingly, however, these words only compounded Pereira’s ire by suggesting
limits on his power.

227 Roberto Delgado, Renato Arnez, Eustaqui Almaras Copa, and Francisco Gallardo statements, May 18
and June 16, 1917, FAS-42-002, AHM-TPJM.
Indicted for attacking a superior officer, Delgado fought back in the press, where he accused Pereira of physical abuse and unsanctioned punishment.\textsuperscript{228} Pereira disagreed. In reporting the incident to the commander, he baldly stated, “The only offense that I believe I committed was not having killed him.”\textsuperscript{229} The examining magistrate and the regimental commander supported Pereira, recommending Delgado’s indictment for attacking a superior.\textsuperscript{230} And Lieutenant Colonel Sanjinés defended Pereira’s use of his saber as necessary to “maintain his authority.”\textsuperscript{231} In his view, order in the barracks and respect for rank clearly outweighed regulations barring such punishments. Yet rank was apparently not always paramount for Sanjinés, given the testimony of several conscripts that he had agreed to intercede with Pereira on their behalf.\textsuperscript{232} That they even felt comfortable soliciting such an intervention suggests that Sanjinés’s daily actions did not inculcate strict respect for hierarchy.

Although the officers accused of abusive acts sometimes received a mild rebuke by the examining magistrate or convening authority for using physical violence as a punishment, only very rarely did they face imprisonment, loss of rank, or even investigation. In one case, the examining magistrate acknowledged that a captain’s “strict” methods of discipline had hurt morale but placed all blame on the poor quality of conscripts, characterized primarily by

\textsuperscript{228} Lorenzo Delgado to Prefect of La Paz, June 9, 1917. FAS-42-002, AHM-TPJM. \textit{La Verdad}, May 23, 1917. \\
\textsuperscript{229} Sub. Lt. N. Pereira to Abaroa Regiment Commander, May 17, 1917, FAS-42-002, AHM-TPJM. \\
\textsuperscript{230} Conclusions of examining magistrate Sub-Lieutenant Raphael Gonzalez, June 19, 1917, FAS-42-002, AHM-TPJM. \\
\textsuperscript{231} Lt. Col. Julio Sanjinés to Prefect of La Paz, February 9, 1918, FAS-42-002, AHM-TPJM. \\
\textsuperscript{232} Enrique Gutierrez, Gabriel Vasquez, Renato Arnez, and Francisco Gallardo statements, May 18 and June 16, 1917, FAS-42-002, AHM-TPJM.
“complete ignorance,” who populated the army’s ranks. Yet officers sometimes lost the protection of their superiors and faced prosecution for abuse of authority, either through luck or because they had overstepped some unwritten boundary in how or whom they punished. While these cases may represent particularly brutal behavior, evidence suggests that other factors (such as the specter of mutiny, political conflict outside of the barracks, and the personal connections of individual conscripts) more often triggered investigations. Similar disciplinary methods were likely widespread, especially with illiterate conscripts assigned to outlying units who did not have the skills or connections necessary to contact the press, inform a politician, or pressure a commander to investigate.

One of these rare cases of an officer prosecuted for abuse of authority arose from events that occurred in the Sucre Regiment in October 1927. Sub-Lieutenant Sergio Rivera was left in charge of the conscripts who had committed various small offenses during the week and thus had lost the privilege of leaving the barracks on Sunday afternoon. Upon calling them to attention at two o’clock, Rivera realized that six had decamped for town with the other conscripts. In his own words, this “lack of obedience upset me a bit.” Several conscripts on guard duty that day testified that Rivera was also displeased with the manner in which the sixteen remaining soldiers lined up, so he “punished several soldiers with his saber” before leading the group to a hallway where they would spend the afternoon cleaning weapons.

Citing some unspecified “absolute lack of the respect that should be shown to a

\[233\] Conclusions of examining magistrate, Lt. José Manuel Criales, February 4, 1922, INS-59-003, AHM-TPJM.
\[234\] Lt. Sergio Rivera statement, October 27, 1927, ABA-01-002, AHM-TPJM.
\[235\] Francisco Andrade and César Toro statements, October 27 and 29, 1927, ABA-01-002, AHM-TPJM.
superior,” Rivera later set the conscripts to forced standing in the patio. When he returned to check on them, he reported finding “them fooling around, some chatting, others playing with their hands, and, finally, others had left.” This so “outraged” Rivera that he ordered them to run around the patio for twenty minutes and then do push-ups. Because their push-ups were not up to his standards, he thought “they were making a double mockery of me,” which was “the last straw for my exasperation, and I punished many soldiers with my saber.” He set them to forced standing for a second time and ordered other conscripts to monitor them. Displeased with their form upon his return, Rivera again resorted to his saber before throwing them all in the brig. Other witnesses described the incident slightly differently, asserting that one soldier had slightly twitched during the forced standing, that the run had lasted several hours, that Rivera had forced the soldiers to do push-ups “until they couldn’t anymore and then I saw them cry,” and that he had “punished them with the saber and grabbed them, kicking many in the head.”

The record of this case does not specify why the regimental commander initiated the case against Rivera. Perhaps it was a report from the unit’s doctor that several of the soldiers had “stopped attending training for many days” as a result of these events. He certainly did not hear of it from Rivera’s immediate superior, Captain Emilio Mendoza, who dismissed reports of soldiers’ complaints because “these murmurs and protests on the part of the troops frequently occur when they are punished, whether it be just or unjust.”

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236 Lt. Sergio Rivera statement, October 27, 1927, ABA-01-002, AHM-TPJM.
237 Felix Gutierrez, Celestino Mendoza, and Antonio Mamani statements, October 28-30, 1927, ABA-01-002, AHM-TPJM.
238 Recommendation of examining magistrate November 4, 1927, ABA-01-002, AHM-TPJM.
239 Capt. Emilio Mendoza statement, October 27, 1927, ABA-01-002, AHM-TPJM.
Mendoza encountered claims of abuse quite often but considered them a nuisance to be ignored rather than an invitation to more closely monitor his subordinates. The examining magistrate, on the other hand, recommended Rivera’s indictment for abuse of authority but noted that the soldiers’ indiscipline should be considered a mitigating factor.\footnote{Recommendation of examining magistrate December 1, 1927, ABA-01-002, AHM-TPJM.}

Of the other extant cases for abuse of authority in the period, no other was initiated by a commander: One began when a conscript’s guardian filed a complaint about his treatment, another responded to accusations printed in the press, and the final two stemmed from the defense of conscripts on trial for mutiny.\footnote{See ABA-01-003 (Pando Engineering Regiment 1931), ABA-01-004 (Colorados Infantry Regiment 1931), ABA-01-005 (Azurduy Infantry Regiment 1932), ABA-01-006 (Ballivián Cavalry Regiment 1932), AHM-TPJM.} After hearing evidence of violent physical punishments, judicial authorities determined that, in three out of the four cases, the officers’ actions were merely “disciplinary infractions” rather than a crime.\footnote{Findings of 2nd Division Commander, September 26, 1931, ABA-01-003; Recommendation of the military prosecutor, October 21, 1931, ABA-01-004; Recommendation of the examining magistrate, June 22, 1932, ABA-01-006, AHM-TPJM.} The fourth officer, perhaps because his means of “making him [the conscript] obey” had received exposure in the press, was sentenced to two months arrest.\footnote{Sentence of Disciplinary Council, May 24, 1932, ABA-01-005, AHM-TPJM.}

The results of these cases reveal a profound ambivalence among military authorities towards the changes in their institution. They theoretically agreed that allowing whipping and other forms of degrading physical punishment would lead to an aversion to military service and the ultimate failure of universal male conscription. Prohibiting such punishments was thus fundamental to making soldiering honorable and to instituting a model whereby men would remain in the barracks willingly, out of respect for their officers and fearing the stigma...
of desertion more than the bodily consequences of defiance. The exercise of legitimate authority in the barracks should depend, they agreed, on a fair and uniform disciplinary regime that treated conscripts as honorable citizen-soldiers. The legitimate coercive mechanisms set forth in the 1907 law would thus replace older methods, by then seen as illegitimate and counterproductive.

Yet, in practice, officers and even some administrators were unwilling to completely depart from older forms in which ultimate authority resided in the individual officer rather than in bureaucratic regulations. Especially the subaltern officers who interacted regularly with troops clung to these punishments, averring that military hierarchy would disappear without them. They acknowledged the benefits of using non-violent disciplinary techniques to inspire self-regulation, but, when faced with perceived challenges to their authority, they often resorted to violent and humiliating forms of punishment. They then rationalized this treatment by arguing that errant soldiers had failed to self-regulate because they lacked an “intimate conviction of duty” and were therefore not truly citizen-soldiers.244 Not all troops, they argued, deserved respectful treatment, and maintaining discipline easily trumped regulations prohibiting violence. The failure of governmentality led to physical assaults that both soldiers and officers perceived as challenging their honor and masculinity. The new disciplinary norms of Richter’s Catechism and the 1916 regulations thus regularly came into conflict with the established habitus of the officer corps.

Conclusions

As part of a liberal project to instill patriotism and extract labor, conscription

244 Conclusions of examining magistrate, Lt. José Manuel Criales, February 4, 1922, INS-59-003, AHM-TPJM.
reproduced and reinforced many of Bolivia’s inequalities. The construction of the barracks as an exclusively male space ensured the perpetuation of gendered exclusions by denying women access to this rite of passage. And officers often drew on traditional hierarchies based on socio-cultural markers such as language, income, and education when promoting conscripts and allocating labor assignments, thus ensuring the continuation of social and racial divides in the barracks. However, even given these privileges, the barracks were not a segregated space: Educated young men did serve alongside non-citizen conscripts, such as illiterate Indians and artisans. Conscription not only reproduced hierarchies but also reshaped them by adding the completion of military service to other long-standing distinctions. Moreover, conscripts could use their service to make claims on the state; some probably even improved their position within their communities after having entered the barracks, worn a uniform, worked for the state, handled weapons, and maybe even gained literacy skills or built patron-client ties to an officer. In fact, based on fieldwork in southern La Paz during the early 1960s, Carter and Mamani argue that, by 1932, young men in this particular indigenous community considered “going to the barracks and complying with obligatory military service to be acts of prestige.”

In some ways, conscription did begin to create the nation of which Liberals dreamed. However, as this chapter has shown, the state never controlled this process since officers continued to exercise unsanctioned forms of authority and conscripts began to construct their own norms, social ties, and exclusions. In so doing, officers and conscripts joined a host of actors who were negotiating the terms of service and even the very purpose of conscription in the press, military tribunals, and

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barracks.

Despite the prevalence of violent punishment, nonmartial labor, inedible meals, and unsanitary barracks, ideas about soldiers’ honor and rights still spread among certain sectors of society, as shown by the eagerness of some conscripts, especially those linked to powerful patrons, to report perceived violations. Julio Rendón, for example, convinced fifteen of his fellows to abandon the Technical Battalion barracks in 1921 to report the deplorable conditions, unbefitting honorable soldiers of the patria, that they had suffered under the command of Captain Melitón Brito. They complained of “working like donkeys,” of the “intolerable” cold within the barracks, and of the legendary temper of their commander.246 Rendón, a student from a well-connected family in Sucre, decided to report these violations directly to General Pastor Baldivieso, the current minister of war and a personal friend of his grandfather.247

Relatively privileged conscripts like Rendón brought to the barracks their own ideas about legitimate forms of punishment and the labor appropriate for soldiers. These ideas brought them into conflict with officers, especially those accustomed to training less privileged troops. One group of educated soldiers serving in 1931 felt so confident of their rights that they sent a letter to the divisional commander in which they complained about forced labor, unfair salary deductions, abusive punishments, and not being given leave on Sunday afternoons. They even offered a definition of discipline that implied a reciprocal relationship between the state and its soldiers: “The obligations imposed by military discipline are bilateral; the soldier must comply with superiors’ orders that conform with

246 Leovegildo Ortuno and José Siñani statements, November 5 and 17, 1921, INS-59-003, AHM-TPJM.
247 Julio Rendón statement, November 4, 1921, INS-59-003, AHM-TPJM.
regulations, and the superiors, principally, must not exceed their authority; they are not permitted to impose inhuman punishments, on the contrary, they should, without relaxing discipline, care for their subordinates, giving them the consideration due to all rational beings.” These soldiers asserted the primacy of bureaucratic regulations and their own right to assess the legitimacy of orders based on whether they conformed to these regulations. In this definition and elsewhere in the letter, they further limited their superiors’ power based on an idea of “natural rights that cannot be trampled on, not even under the pretext of military discipline.” They were a far cry from the definition of discipline in Richter’s Catechism and certainly from officers’ insistence on strict obedience to military hierarchy.

The clash between fundamentally different concepts of legitimate authority and the army’s purpose resulted from the recent turn to universal male conscription and thus constantly resurfaced in the barracks, military tribunals, the press, and even the legislature. In theory, soldiers were honorable citizens who eagerly presented for duty, and officers were professionals who treated their soldiers fairly, earning respect because of their training and experience. In practice, however, soldiers existed on a spectrum that included those violently impressed, reluctantly conscripted, and eagerly volunteered. And each officer acted according to his own individual personality and previous experience with conscripts. Some men thus entered the barracks with ideas about their own honor based on their social status whereas many of their officers believed that this honor had to be earned through daily action and strict respect for authority. Although violent punishments by officers and NCOs affirmed their immediate physical power over conscripts, they ultimately called its legitimacy

248 Seventeen soldiers to 2nd Commander, September 21, 1931, ABA-01-004, AHM-TPJM.
into question, since their illegality opened a space for dissent. The very fact that these grievances were recorded shows that dominance was not absolute and that there was ample room for both official and more hidden forms of resistance.
Chapter 3: Partisan Conflict and Conscript Insubordination in La Paz, 1914-1931

On July 12, 1920, Bolivia experienced its first coup of the twentieth century when officers and conscripts with ties to the Republican Party took La Paz’s Plaza Murillo (see Figure 14) in the early morning hours and installed a civilian junta. This coup clearly marked the return of political instability and suggested the failure of the Liberal project for progress and modernization. Over the subsequent decade, periods of heightened fear and suspicion punctuated life in the seat of government as civilian administrations declared states of siege and exiled enemies in hopes of staving off the next coup, which finally came in June 1930. In the army, the era was characterized by instances of rebellion throughout the national territory as officers engaged conscripts in plots to bring favored civilians to power. This decade would also see the repeated staging of military-justice proceedings in La Paz to
investigate acts of mutiny led by small groups of literate conscripts. During these investigations, the accused mutineers expressed quotidian grievances related to the conditions of military service. However, we cannot understand these mutinies and the reactions that they provoked among politicians, the press, and military authorities without taking the larger political context into account. Nor can we understand this period of Bolivian politics, especially the 1920 coup, without accounting for the claims-making of such literate and often politically engaged conscripts.

These particular insubordinate acts entered the historical record because of the political moment, the strategic importance of La Paz, and the social position of the conscripts involved. After a coalition of disaffected politicians formed the Republican Party in 1914, their successful fracturing of Liberal dominance had inaugurated a period of civil and military unrest centered in the administrative capital of La Paz, which housed the president, legislature, main arsenal, and Quartermasters Corps, not to mention over 100,000 inhabitants (see Figure 15).¹ Those in power assigned multiple armed units to this city during periods of political uncertainty in order to increase the likelihood that plots would be discovered and to ensure that a single dissident commander could not overthrow the government. Thus, as the new president assumed his post in 1921, four regiments, the military cadets, and a battalion of police resided in the administrative capital.² Ten years and one coup later, at least three regiments were garrisoned in the city in addition to the NCO

² MOT-71-002A (1921), Tribunal Permanente de Justicia Militar, Archivo Histórico Militar, La Paz, Bolivia (hereafter cited as AHM-TPJM).
Figure 15: Map of La Paz, 1912

Plaza Murillo is the light colored square in the middle. Source: La Paz, 450 años, Tomo I, 128.
School, the Military Academy, and police. Belonging to these strategically important units, the leaders of the mutinies treated in this chapter hailed from the minority of conscripts who were already citizens. As opposed to non-citizen conscripts, they not only expressed a sense of belonging to the Bolivian nation but also met the property and literacy requirements for the franchise. Many were the students and professionals who made up the emerging middle class and would have an important impact on national politics over the next decades.

Although other participants held less prestigious occupations such as mechanic, carpenter, or tailor, their literacy distinguished them from the disenfranchised majority. The implications of political upheaval were thus particularly profound for these literate conscripts stationed in the nexus of partisan action.

In each of these cases, officers acting as military magistrates drew on Bolivia’s Military Penal Code to indict conscripts on charges that ranged from insubordination to mutiny, sedition, and rebellion. Written in 1904 and not substantially revised for seventy years, the Military Penal Code that defined these offenses was part of the scaffolding constructed by Liberals to govern their new army. This code defined rebellion as an uprising of the army or “a more or less numerous part of it” with the intention of forcing a change in administration, impeding the functioning of the legislature, interfering with elections, or imposing institutional reform. Although not explicitly stated, the law’s crafters clearly contemplated rebellion to be a crime of officers, mandating that if no leader could be determined, the officer under whose immediate orders the rebels fell would be punished as

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3 ABA-01-004 (1931), HOM-45-005 (1931), ABA-01-003 (1931), AHM-TPJM; “Anoche se amotinó el Regimiento Colorados,” La Razón, September 11, 1931, 8.

the instigator. The crimes of sedition and mutiny, on the other hand, involved the prosecution of either officers or conscripts for collective acts of insubordination against superiors. In contrast to rebellion, which had political purposes, sedition and mutiny related to internal matters such as demanding the dismissal of an officer, resisting orders, or opposing a punishment. These crimes differed in that sedition involved an explicit conspiracy that resulted in an armed uprising whereas mutiny could be unplanned and could occur with or without weapons. More broadly defined than sedition, mutiny consisted of any collective (defined as four or more people) resistance to superiors’ orders. This crime also included collective oral or written petitions for a host of service-related complaints, including for leave or discharge, the payment or augmentation of wages, the improvement of rations, and lenience for those accused of crimes.

Although sedition and mutiny fell under the category of “crimes against constitutional order and security,” their definitions involved the internal order of the company, regiment, or army rather than the government. In substance, then, these offenses more clearly related to insubordination, which was categorized as a crime “against military duty.” Like mutiny, insubordination involved showing lack of respect for superiors, resisting orders, presenting petitions, and subverting internal order. It differed, however, in that it could be either an individual or a collective act.5

During this decade, a crisis in constitutional politics arose out of and fueled a crisis of authority in the military institution. The return of the coup to the Bolivian political scene in 1920 had shifted the balance of power in the barracks; the loyalty of conscripts suddenly

5 Bolivia. Ministerio de Guerra, Código militares de la República de Bolivia (La Paz: El Comercio de Bolivia, 1905), 237-38.
mattered quite deeply and thus was subject to intense scrutiny during periods of upheaval. Rather than remaining within the barracks’ walls, the grievances of literate conscripts, who were often already partisan actors, could easily become linked to larger political movements. Although not all mutinies were tied to partisan politics, they entered the documentary record precisely because of such fears. Focusing on La Paz as the main stage where partisan politics played out, this chapter analyzes four such mutinies in light of the turbulent politics of the period, arguing that a culture of insubordination had developed among this subset of soldiers that was directly related to ideas about their rights and duties as Bolivian citizens.

Exploiting Conscript Grievances: The Republican Drive to Fracture the Liberal Power Bloc

In their efforts to break Liberal dominance, members of the newly formed Republican Party championed disaffected groups, such as workers and indigenous communities. They also attacked Liberals’ administration of leader Ismael Montes’s signature piece of legislation: obligatory military service. In re-founding the army, Liberals had sought to banish forever the specter of Bolivia’s nineteenth-century experience of frequent coups by officers leading what were ostensibly national forces but better resembled private armies. This earlier army (characterized by personal power, schisms, and successive revolts) served as an explicit foil to what Liberals were trying to build: a new, unified, and strictly hierarchical military that submitted to a civilian government and followed bureaucratic procedures. Liberals seemed to have achieved these goals as conscription took root (albeit unevenly), officers received professional training, and, despite the often brutal treatment of

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6 Díaz Machicaco characterizes the military as the “pride and glory of the Montes administration” and quotes the Liberal press as referring to the army as Montes’s “masterpiece.” Porfirio Díaz Machicaco, Saavedra, 1920-1925 (La Paz: Alfonso Tejerina, 1954), 23, 31.
soldiers, the army grew steadily without a visible hint of unrest. The appearance of a seemingly apolitical force subordinate to constitutional authority was easy to maintain in the climate of economic and political stability that prevailed during a decade of unopposed Liberal rule. Republicans, however, began to crack this veneer by attacking the Liberals’ army as no different from the nineteenth-century force that had repressed the populace, served personal ambitions, and abused its soldiers rather than treating them as honorable citizens. While supporting the principles behind obligatory military service, Republicans argued that the conditions created by Liberal rule served neither to promote national unity nor to inspire men to identify with the patria. In the process, they sought out the service-related grievances explored in chapter 2 and brought them onto the national stage.

Primarily led by Ismael Montes (Figure 16), Liberals had faced no organized opposition since 1904 because the Conservatives, who had been in power before 1899, and the puritano faction, which had emerged to oppose Montes’s election in 1904, had all joined the ruling party, retired from political life, or run as independents. Along with Liberals who felt slighted by the distribution of political posts, these groups stayed relatively quiet during the prosperous years under Montes (1904-1909) and his hand-chosen successor Elidoro Villazón (1909-1913). However, the unity of the Liberals’ new army would face its first test after Montes reassumed the presidency in 1913 and tried to push through unpopular monetary policies during a period of economic crisis. Lawyer Bautista Saavedra seized on the opportunity, convincing independents and disaffected Liberals to unite under the
amorphous banner of the Republican Party in late 1913. Most prominent among those Saavedra recruited to the Republican cause were Senator Daniel Salamanca and Montes’s erstwhile mentor, General José Manuel Pando, a well-known war hero who had served as the first Liberal president. These leaders organized a national convention, but President Montes, in an attempt to end the movement in its infancy, declared a state of siege, sent forty Republicans into exile, and closed opposition newspapers on August 7, 1914, just days before the convention was to take place.

As the legislature inaugurated its annual cycle of sessions (see Figure 17) in this context of political repression, irate members of the opposition began dragging unpleasant aspects of obligatory military service out of the barracks in order to attack the government.

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Elevated onto the national stage, conscripts’ quotidian grievances about the poor quality of food and harsh physical punishments became weapons for Republicans to wield against Montes. Starting on August 11, for example, Republican Deputy Rafael de Ugarte inveighed against the “cruel and inhuman treatment” of conscript Gerónimo Santalla and demanded an explanation from the Liberal minister of war. Raising this incident in successive sessions, this representative from Cochabamba gave impassioned speeches that Bolivia must not return to the “disastrous times” of the nineteenth century, when tyrannical officers regularly administered “barbarous punishments.” Since conscripts were complying with a sacred duty, Ugarte argued, punishments like that given to Santalla would “kill the military institution.” “The barracks,” he admonished, “are not filled with a herd of helots that do not think or feel… there meet youths who leave the comfort of their homes to pay tribute to their patria;
there congregate wretched *indígenas* who need to be taught their duties; but not with a whip in hand but rather with kindness.” Ugarte further threatened that he would prefer that “the Army disappear before the conscript who fulfills his duty is tortured.” When the deputy demanded that the unit’s commander face a military tribunal for his treatment of Santalla, Minister of War Néstor Gutiérrez (a Montes appointee) told the legislature that he would resign before he would prosecute an officer for his efforts to “preserve discipline and morality in the regiments.”

Accusing Liberals of neglecting soldiers, Republicans also harped on the army’s failure to feed conscripts properly. During the legislative session of August 17, Deputy Abel Iturralde of La Paz claimed that three soldiers from the Loa Infantry Regiment had fainted due to undernourishment after being served “a meal of revolting *harina* that was not even cooked, and the soldiers hurled the food in disgust.” Since raw *harina* was commonly served to dogs, Iturralde’s description of this institutional failure implicitly accused the army of cruelly dehumanizing the soldiers who patriotically fulfilled their duty to Bolivia. Ugarte and Iturralde thus promoted the common conscript and showed little deference to officers they accused of abuse and corruption. In so doing, they undermined military hierarchy and encouraged conscripts and dissident officers to voice their grievances through the Republican Party.

When Montes lifted the state of siege in December 1914, the Republicans

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10 4a, 6a, 8a, and 9a, sesiones ordinarias, August 11, 13, 16, and 17, 1915, *Redactor de Diputados*, 38, 128, 180-190, 236-273.


12 Soldiers at the time would have associated raw food with animals and cooked food with humans. Personal communication from Waskar Ari, March 7, 2011.
immediately organized a convention for January 1915. The new party, officially led by Senator Daniel Salamanca, issued a platform that attacked Montes for absolutism and ruining the economy and that called for free elections, decentralization, and limits on executive power. With the Republicans running a full list of candidates in 1915, 1916, and 1917, a new system of structured electoral violence emerged, as both parties used threats, bribes, alcohol, and patron-client ties to win votes. Local leaders on each side funded “clubs” that employed election-day violence to prevent members of the opposition from entering the main plaza to vote, leading to pitched battles between opposing “clubs.” With an electorate of only sixty thousand and no secret ballot, these measures often determined elections.

The reemergence of partisan conflict shattered the illusion of a professional military above the political fray. Historian James Dunkerley notes that, prior to 1914, “the rite of ‘non-intervention’” could be “regurgitated with singular satisfaction” because the army “naturally identified loyalty to the government with loyalty to the Liberals.” However, latent divisions among the officer corps came to the fore as the ruling elite again fractured into partisan camps, especially given that one of the camps actively campaigned for the support of conscripts and dissident officers by railing against corrupt and abusive practices in the barracks. Liberals, having written the legislation and provided the funds that made the post-1899 army possible, expected the institution to subordinate itself to Liberal authority.

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15 Dunkerley, Orígenes del poder militar, 102.
An apolitical army, in their view, would maintain internal order by guaranteeing their election and suppressing unrest in the cities, mines, and rural areas. Yet the political situation had so deteriorated by 1918 that officers were openly debating politics in the barracks and Liberals were accusing Republicans of “‘seducing’ officers with bribes and the promise of promotion and foreign travel.”

These conditions meant that Montes could no longer count on the army’s unconditional support. He thus formed a paramilitary force called the Guardia Blanca [White Guard] to deliver the 1917 presidential race. Although Montes successfully orchestrated the election of José Gutiérrez Guerra in May, the murder of former president and prominent Republican José Manuel Pando in June threw the country into chaos. Despite evidence that Pando’s death was not politically motivated, Republicans seized on this opportunity to bring down Montes by accusing him of assassination. They moved to impeach him in Congress as troops battled opposition crowds in the streets of La Paz.

The first months of the Gutiérrez Guerra administration were thus characterized by violence and political wrangling. Perhaps in attempts to win the loyalty of La Paz-based regiments, both sides hailed conscripts, whether as heroes of the nation or victims of mistreatment. Liberals, for their part, praised the work of soldiers in repressing “the unconscious masses” who had taken to the streets to support the Republican cause. The

16 Dunkerley, Orígenes del poder militar, 102-3.
18 Díaz Machicao, Saavedra, 22-29, 47; Dunkerley, Orígenes del poder militar, 101-2; Klein, Parties and Political Change, 52-54.
Liberal organ *El Diario* reported that one such protest had forced troops to patrol the city throughout the night since the protestors were attacking the offices of Liberal newspapers, setting off “explosions,” and chanting “death” to Montes and the Liberal Party. When these “mobs” “drunkenly” attempted to invade Plaza Murillo, the soldiers guarding the presidential and legislative palaces “valiantly” resisted, which resulted in the death of conscript Benjamín Echalar, described in the press as a “distinguished youth from Sucre” serving in the Second Infantry Regiment. In later articles, *El Diario* praised the thirty conscripts in Echalar’s unit for forming an “insurmountable barrier to detain the multitude, drunk on alcohol and hatred” and thereby proving that they each had “the soul of the soldier-citizen, conscious of his duties.” The editors wrote: “We feel proud of having achieved” the stage where “the Bolivian conscript” is a soldier who takes pride in “serving his patria and his flag and in defending order and the constitution.” In these accounts, *El Diario* also lauded the unit’s performance and Echalar’s sacrifice as evidence that Liberal administrations had built an outstanding army that instilled a sense of duty in conscripts and taught them loyalty to the constitutional order, which they would continue to protect, the organ implied, from uneducated mobs trying to bring down the government. These words simultaneously served to woo educated conscripts to the Liberal cause and to persuade them to carry out their duties as soldiers by siding with the forces of order rather than the opposition.

Instead of emphasizing conscripts’ duty to the *patria*, opposition politicians pointed

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19 “Las masas republicanas provocan el más grave conflicto; Conscriptos muertos y heridos,” *El Diario*, December 6, 1917, 2-3.
out the government’s failure to fulfill its obligations to soldiers. Republicans thus returned to the tactic of exposing negative conditions in the barracks, positioning themselves yet again as champions of the common conscript. Deputy Mariano Saucedo Sevilla of Santa Cruz, for example, vehemently protested the “sad spectacle” of “almost naked” soldiers marching “to protect our eastern border, with a rucksack holding a few pounds of rice for their sustenance.” The prevalence of officers who have “given themselves over to excesses and abuses of all sorts,” he added, produces conscripts who “hate their superiors and find military service repugnant.” His colleague David Meza, who represented Totora (Oruro), also chimed in, relaying a report by Republican newspaper *La Razón* that officers in the Abaroa Cavalry Regiment had forced soldiers “to carry mud bricks” and garnished their wages, “thus killing the patriotic spirit of the contingents that enter our barracks.” These politicians argued that the conditions of military service would neither promote national unity nor inspire men to identify with the *patria*. Instead, they asserted, Liberals’ failures were dooming universal male conscription and destroying the very fabric of the army.

As Republican politicians and journalists became known for defending conscripts, supporters likely brought them similar stories of their own experiences or those of their sons. Pursuing ammunition in their war with Liberals, Republicans may have sought out or even incited these grievances, perhaps frequenting locales where conscripts drank on Sunday afternoons. Republicans’ wooing of conscripts and dissident officers was part of what appears to have been an increasingly desperate quest to gain power by cultivating parties marginalized by Liberal rule. Sharing the Liberal elite as a common enemy, Republicans had

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begun to gain widespread support among the working classes in urban areas and the mines, with Bautista Saavedra hailed as a savior and patron.\textsuperscript{22} Many highland indigenous communities opposed Liberal rule since prominent party members had been the principal purchasers of communal lands under the 1874 Disentailment Law.\textsuperscript{23} Saavedra thus maintained ties with the \textit{Cacique Apoderado} movement, whose leaders were seeking legal support in their efforts to reverse the extensive expropriation of communal land and the persecution of indigenous leaders.\textsuperscript{24} While their ultimate goals were always at odds, Saavedra counseled \textit{Apoderado} movement leader Santos Marka T’ula on a 1916 land claim and introduced congressional measures in 1919 that would review land boundaries and require

\textsuperscript{22} Robert L. Smale, "I Sweat the Flavor of Tin": Labor Activism in Early Twentieth Century Bolivia (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2010), 83-85.

\textsuperscript{23} Roberto Choque Canqui and Cristina Quisbert Quispe, \textit{Líderes indígenas aymaras: Lucha por la defensa de tierras comunitarias de origen} (Unidad de Investigaciones Históricas UNI-PAKAXA, 2010), 130-33; Erwin P. Grieshaber, "Resistencia indígena a la venta de tierras comunales en el departamento de La Paz, 1881-1920," \textit{Data: Revista del Instituto de Estudios Andinos y Amazonícos} 1 (1991): 121.

\textsuperscript{24} Saavedra was perhaps the ideal figure for such contact, having first risen to national prominence after being appointed to the defense team that represented the Aymara-speaking Indians accused of massacring their Liberal allies at Mohoza during the 1899 civil war. He seized this opportunity to become indispensable to Liberals’ civilization project to remake the nation by forging a strong state that would rescue Indians from exploitative landlords, \textit{corregidores}, and priests. As such, Saavedra published “Aymara Criminality and the Mohoza Trial” in 1901 and, two years later, \textit{The Ayllu}, a sociological study that advocated the eradication of “backward” communal structures. In keeping with these publications, his overtly racist defense in the Mohoza trial portrayed the defendants as brutal savages who had indeed waged a race war but argued that they were victims of social conditions and therefore should not be held responsible for their actions. A canny political operator, Saavedra drew on his reputation as an expert “sympathetic” to Indians’ plight to court the support of highland indigenous groups as he searched for a power base after breaking with the Liberal party. Members of the \textit{Cacique Apoderado} movement were, in turn, seeking legal support in their efforts to reverse the expropriation of communal land and persecution of indigenous leaders that had occurred under Liberal rule. On the Mohoza trial, see Brooke Larson, "Redeemed Indians, Barbarized Cholos: Crafting Neocolonial Modernity in Liberal Bolivia, 1900-1910," in \textit{Political Cultures in the Andes} 1750-1950, ed. Nils Jacobsen and Cristóbal Aljovín de Losada (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 233-34; Forrest Hylton, "Reverberations of Insurgency: Indian Communities, the Federal War of 1899, and the Regeneration of Bolivia" (Ph.D. diss., New York University, 2010), 250-64.
that haciendas establish schools.\textsuperscript{25} The indigenous communities and workers’ groups to whom Republicans had turned for support grew increasingly restless towards the end of the decade as the government deployed troops to break strikes among mining, railway, and telegrapher workers in 1919 and 1920.\textsuperscript{26} Adopting incendiary language in the press and legislature, Republicans fanned the flames of these conflagrations in order to further erode Liberals’ hold on power.

In this climate of heightened tension, the opposition intensified its attacks on Liberals’ administration of obligatory military service. \textit{La Verdad}, a La Paz-based newspaper owned by Republican congressman Abel Iturralde, launched a concerted campaign to undermine the Liberal party by exposing the conditions suffered by conscripts in the barracks. In January 1920, its editors printed the story of a young man from southern Bolivia who they claimed had enthusiastically “reported to fulfill his civic duty.” They narrated his disillusionment after being issued an old and discolored uniform, which caused him to “suffer intensely” since he was able to smell and see “in all of its folds... the form of the soldier who had been stripped of these garments, the traces of sweat that had cracked the fabric like the skin of an animal.”\textsuperscript{27} An April article in the same organ reported on frequent complaints by conscripts, who, the newspaper maintained, were being “treated like animals” and training “in clothing so old that it was in tatters.” These comments served to introduce


\textsuperscript{26} Smale, “I Sweat the Flavor of Tin”, 88-91; Dunkerley, \textit{Orígenes del poder militar}, 102.

allegations about barracks life attributed to Murillo Regiment soldiers stationed in La Paz. These conscripts claimed to be owed back wages and to be insufficiently nourished, sometimes not even getting bread for breakfast despite having to perform taxing labor. They wrote: “the *rancho* [communal meal] is worse than for a dog…. There are nights that we don’t eat because [the food is] raw, awful, and without seasoning.” The letter closed by rhetorically asking whether “we are slaves of a hierarchy or servants of a free and independent *patria*.” These *La Razón* articles used descriptive language to depict an institution that dehumanized its soldiers by treating them as slaves and animals rather than as citizens patriotically fulfilling their duty to Bolivia. Adding raw food, pungent smells, and the sharing of sweat-soaked uniforms to their arsenal, the opposition escalated their portrayal of Liberals as miserably failing to meet their obligations to conscripts.

In February 1920, Republicans seized on another opportunity to grandstand against Liberals’ corruption of the armed forces and exploitation of indigenous communities. On the floor of the Chamber of Deputies, Abel Iturralde and Bautista Saavedra accused powerful Liberal landowner Benedicto Goytia and his son-in-law Lieutenant Colonel Julio Sanjines of using the Abaroa Cavalry Regiment in Guaqui as a personal police force to exploit and contain their indigenous enemies in the region, which was located on the Peruvian border, about fifty miles west of La Paz. Announcing that indigenous leader Prudencio Callisaya had died under suspicious circumstances in the Abaroa barracks, the Republicans demanded that the ministers of war and justice investigate the incident and

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report back to the legislature.\textsuperscript{29} Callisaya, as apoderado of the Sullkata ayllu, had been filing petitions and lawsuits against Goytia’s land claims for at least six years when the local police arrested him on February 4, 1920, based on accusations that he had killed a man by the name of Flores. They then transferred Callisaya to the Abaroa Regiment, citing fears that his followers might attempt to free him. Around eleven o’clock the next morning, a soldier found Callisaya dead in his cell. Military officials claimed that he had hung himself from a beam with his sash, but Callisaya’s family testified to having seen visible cuts on his corpse and his mouth filled with blood.\textsuperscript{30}

In making Callisaya’s death a national scandal, Republicans positioned themselves not only as the defenders of indigenous peasants’ property claims but also as the restorers of an apolitical army that would protect the people rather than the politically connected. Repeatedly demanding an impartial investigation, Iturralde vehemently protested that the barracks should not be “jails” to imprison an individual who was only “trying to defend his property.” Practically apoplectic out of frustration with Republican attacks on his institution, Liberal Minister of War Fermín Prudencio warned: “Do not play politics with the army!!” He expressed consternation that anyone would give credence to such accusations: The barracks were obviously not the “dens of savages” that the Republican press portrayed but rather were led by “honorable officers” and filled with “conscripts from all social classes; servants of the patria.” “Is it possible to believe,” he rhetorically asked, “that soldiers who have gone to the barracks to comply with a sacred duty would, based on a superior’s simple order, kill

\textsuperscript{29} Sesión ordinaria, February 12, 1920, Redactor de la H. Cámara de Diputados, Tomo VI (La Paz, 1920): 10-12.
\textsuperscript{30} Choque Canqui and Quisbert Quispe, \textit{Líderes indígenas aymaras}, 130-70.
someone in such a horrific way?" Sounding uncannily like the soldiers who claimed the right to evaluate their superiors’ orders, Prudencio argued that citizen-soldiers’ honor could trump military hierarchy; conscripts would evaluate orders and decide whether or not to comply (the very definition of insubordination and mutiny).

During these six years of opposing Liberals, Republicans had cultivated allies among conscripts, workers, and indigenous groups as part of their quest for political power. In the process, they sought out and amplified soldiers’ grievances. In a different political climate, incidents such as Santalla’s beating and Callisaya’s death may have appeared in military-justice records or Apoderados’ petitions but would not have been debated in the press or the halls of the legislature. Republicans’ maneuvering gave these episodes a heightened visibility and transformed them into national scandals. Politicians such as Ugarte, Iturralde, and Saavedra promised to better serve the army by dismissing corrupt officers like Sanjines, focusing on national defense rather than internal repression, and ensuring that conscripts received the treatment they deserved as honorable soldiers of the patria.

**After the Coup: Bautista Saavedra and Conscript Mutinies**

Shaking the army’s hierarchical structure, conscripts were active agents in the July 1920 coup that finally ended Liberal rule. Conspiracy and intrigue marked the ensuing months as Bautista Saavedra consolidated his hold on power. These months also saw the prosecution of mutiny charges against two groups of La Paz-based conscripts due to suspicions that their actions had been politically motivated. Although both groups made service-related demands, they sought to resolve grievances through direct contact with

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31 Sesión ordinaria, February 12, 1920, Redactor de Diputados, 11-14.
political authorities, displaying overt insubordination and expressing a sense of entitlement to dictate the conditions of military service. The Saavedra administration and the military-justice system intensely scrutinized these conscripts’ actions and political ties because their loyalty to particular officers or political groups could mean regime change.

On July 12, 1920, Republicans’ efforts led to what Dunkerley calls “the first modern golpe [coup] in Bolivia, complete with the replacement of key officers at Staff headquarters, telephoned ultimatums, selective capture of barracks and minimal bloodshed.”32 Convinced of the impossibility of electoral victory due to Liberals’ manipulations, Bautista Saavedra had been cultivating military contacts since 1918 but was unpopular with much of the officer corps – unsurprising, given his intense criticism of the army’s administration. However, he eventually won over Lieutenant Colonels Gumercindo Heguigarre and Andrés Valle, who gradually swayed several other officers.33 Saavedra’s campaigns on behalf of the popular classes had already won the support of many among the rank-and-file troops – so many that Republicans writing the history of the July “revolution” could make the exaggerated claim that “there wasn’t a conscript who didn’t show ardent enthusiasm for the future triumph of the Republican Party.”34 After Saavedra called off several planned coups at the last minute, Colonel Valle, along with Colonel Juan J. Fernández and two captains, went to the Campero Regiment’s barracks the night of July 12, stripped the officer on guard of his weapon, and woke the troops with orders to arm themselves. Valle delivered a rousing speech and then marched the 780 conscripts to the city center; en route, they reportedly yelled, “Long live the

32 Dunkerley, Orígenes del poder militar, 104-5.
34 El International, Las verdaderas crónicas de la revolución, 32.
great Republican Party! Down with the doctrinaire thugs! Separating into companies, they quickly took 230 police prisoner in their barracks and convinced the NCO School and Colorado Regiment to join the coup, encountering only minor resistance from some Military Academy cadets. Although President Gutiérrez Guerra did not resign until that afternoon, troops loyal to the Republicans had installed Bautista Saavedra in the Presidential Palace by dawn.

The son of a minor government functionary and a mother characterized by contemporaries as of “American blood,” Saavedra (see Figure 18) had an accent

Figure 18: Bautista Saavedra, 1926

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characteristic of Aymara speakers and was known as a cholo. Yet he was clearly a member of the intellectual class, having attended the prestigious Colegio San Calixto in La Paz and earned a law degree at the Universidad Mayor de San Andrés. He held several posts under Liberal administrations before leaving the party in late 1913. Rather than immediately taking sole power, Saavedra formed a ruling junta with fellow civilians José María Escalier and Manuel Ramírez to lessen the chance of a countercoup. Chile, alarmed by Republicans’ rallying cries to reclaim a Pacific port, reacted by deploying troops to the border; the ensuing crisis also diminished the possibility of military intervention. Recognizing the end of Gutiérrez Guerra’s administration, leading officers, including staunch Liberal Colonel Alfredo Richter, publicly professed loyalty to the new regime in order to “safeguard the public order and national honor by ensuring that the country does not fall into bloody anarchy.” Saavedra thus did not immediately purge the officer corps although many, like the lieutenant colonel involved in the Callisaya incident, judiciously retired.

40 Montes sent Saavedra to Spain to research a boundary dispute in 1903. His successor, Eliodoro Villazón, appointed Saavedra Minister of Education and later posted him to the diplomatic corps in Lima. Klein, Parties and Political Change, 67; Gómez, Bautista Saavedra, 31-40.
41 Dunkerley, Orígenes del poder militar, 105; Díaz Machicaco, Saavedra, 55-59.
42 Joint statement of officers quoted in Díaz Machicaco, Saavedra, 57-58.
43 On the purge, see Dunkerley, Orígenes del poder militar, 105. Although Dunkerley lists Julio Sanjinés as an officer sympathetic to the coup, Choque and Quisbert state that he commanded the regiment only until July 12, 1920, and retired from the army later that year. Choque Canqui and Quisbert Quispe, Líderes indígenas aymaras, 131. General Order 15-20, issued on August 10, 1920, granted him indefinite leave based on his request. Ordgen20_25_0036, Ordenes Generales 1920-1925, Archivo Central del Ministerio de Defensa Nacional, La Paz, Bolivia (hereafter cited as AC-MDN). Other archival sources from March and June of 1921 confirm his retirement, referring to Sanjinés as an ex-lieutenant colonel. See: Tomás Fuentes statement, March 19, 1921, MOT-71-002A, AHM-TPJM; Tomás Parra to Minister of War, June 14, 1921, Prefecture-Exped box 244 d. 332, Archivo de La Paz, La Paz, Bolivia (hereafter cited as ALP).
As part of efforts to secure his rule, Saavedra formalized the status of an armed group of supporters that would come to be called the Republican Guard. The day after the coup, he placed his steadfast ally Colonel Valle in command and assigned several loyal cadets to this unit, which quickly grew to a force of 750 men. In a dramatic projection of his power, Saavedra established its headquarters in the La Merced church, only a block from the seat of power in Plaza Murillo (see Figure 19 and Figure 20). The September 1920 La Razón article announcing the creation of the Republican Guard declared that it would consist of former conscripts, be subject to military discipline, and primarily serve a policing role. Few were convinced by denials that the Republican Guard constituted “a body loyal to the

Figure 19: Detail of La Paz Map, 1912 (La Merced)
The La Merced church that housed the Republican Guard is building #41 on the lower right, located on calle Illimani, a block from Plaza Murillo. Source: La Paz, 450 años, 1548-1998 Tomo I, 128.

44 El International, Las verdaderas crónicas de la revolución, 67-72.
45 Built in the early eighteenth century, La Merced belonged to the Mercedarios until this religious order closed in 1912. Gonzalo Simbrón García, Imaginatelapaz: Cuando el pasado era presente (La Paz: Gente de Oficio Editores, 2009), 95.
new government” and claims that the denominator “republican” was utterly unrelated to the party.⁴⁶

Despite the creation of the Republican Guard, the national army was still a powerful force, and the majority of high-ranking officers had strong ties to Liberals.⁴⁷ However, Saavedra had widespread support among the lower ranks, with many conscripts stationed in La Paz expressing a sense of personal loyalty to him.⁴⁸ The junta member in fact cultivated this relationship by directly addressing the troops the day after the coup to thank them for

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⁴⁶ “Guardia republicana,” La Razón, September 25, 1920, 3.
⁴⁷ Brockmann, El general y sus presidentes, 62
⁴⁸ Sarg. Miguel Carreón statement, November 24, 1920; Sarg. Emilio Miranda to Magistrate Judge, December 4, 1920, MOT-71-001; Tomás Fuentes statement, March 19, 1921; Cabo Domingo Peña confession, July 18, 1921, MOT-71-002A, AHM-TPJM.
their “noble sacrifice.”

However, conscripts had overlapping loyalties and social ties. Not all who entered the barracks had the same partisan leanings, having been shaped by the electoral violence of the past five years. Once in the barracks, they also developed patron-client relationships with the officers who trained them and even, at times, with the regimental commander. Interwoven with these factors were the ties of friendship and rivalry among soldiers that could also affect each man’s decisions. The political unrest occasioned by Saavedra’s rise and attempt to consolidate power created situations in which conscripts’ multiple allegiances could come into conflict. Discontent thus smoldered among the rank-and-file in La Paz as their officers received new postings and many favorites were banished to frontier units.

The almost-instantaneous fracturing of Republican unity after the July 1920 coup created the political conditions that brought these loyalties into conflict and fostered insubordinate behavior among conscripts in La Paz. Within weeks of the coup, prominent Republicans such as Daniel Salamanca expressed discontent with the junta’s membership and decision-making, laying the groundwork for a vicious battle to lead the party. In this atmosphere, Saavedra began jockeying to be elected in his own right, using his position in the junta to secure votes. To ensure the continued support of the regiments in La Paz, Saavedra placed trusted followers among the ranks to “watch the commanders, officers, and troops as spies” in August 1920. One of these spies, twenty-three-year-old tailor Miguel Carreón, testified that he and his fellows routinely visited Saavedra’s home to ask for

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49 Díaz Machicano, Saavedra, 60.
50 Dunkerley, Orígenes del poder militar, 110.
payment of the promised salary and to report on their findings.\textsuperscript{51} Some of these men had completed their obligatory military service and had become NCOs through reenlistment (rather than professional training); others who had not yet finished their initial term of service also received promotions. The existence of Saavedra’s spies among the troops likely did not remain secret and must have created a climate of fear among officers who did not know who was surveilling whom. The dual roles of these spies made a mockery of military hierarchy, unofficially placing subaltern NCOs outside of the command structure and entrusting them to monitor their superiors.

Trouble began in the Campero Regiment in October 1920 when a new commander took charge and several favored officers found themselves relegated to the frontier, likely because of ties to Liberals or the wrong faction of Republicans. Conscripts and NCOs later testified that sentiment against the new commander, Lieutenant Colonel Carlos de Gumucio, was brewing throughout the ranks. Meeting in the dorms, guard room, and supply depot, soldiers and NCOs spread rumors about Gumucio’s “bad character,” calling him a “tyrant” and hatching a plan to publicly reject his command.\textsuperscript{52} In acts that clearly fell under the Military Penal Code’s rubric for mutiny, the armed soldiers yelled in unison during combined exercises that they wanted to speak with their former commander, Major Ovando. When Ovando arrived, he scolded them for their indiscipline and assured them that Gumucio was “not as bad as they imagined him to be.”\textsuperscript{53} The soldiers complied with the punishment of forced standing for their insubordinate acts, but five of their number later traveled to

\begin{footnotes}
\item[51] Sgto. Miguel Carreon statement, November 23, 1920, MOT-71-001, AHM-TPJM.
\item[52] José Méndez, Juan Bustillos, Ignacio Hidalgo, Teófilo Claros, and Moises Rivas statements, November 5, 18, and 19, 1921, MOT-71-001, AHM-TPJM.
\item[53] Moises Rivas statement, November 18, 1921, MOT-71-001, AHM-TPJM.
\end{footnotes}
Bautista Saavedra’s house to negotiate as “representatives” of their fellows. Having fought on Saavedra’s behalf in July, they made a direct and personal appeal that Gumucio be replaced by Ovando and that orders assigning one of their sub-lieutenants, Manuel Heguigarre, to a frontier garrison be revoked.\textsuperscript{54} Far from rebuking this blatant violation of military hierarchy and law, Saavedra received them graciously. He patiently explained that a regiment as important as Campero needed to be commanded by a lieutenant colonel rather than a major. Nor could their request regarding Heguigarre be fulfilled since he had “cheered for Montes and the Liberal Party,” and there could not be “traitorous officers in the army.” Despite refusing their requests, Saavedra attempted to retain their loyalty by encouraging them to visit him again if they had any concerns and even rewarding them with five bolivianos to “have a beer in my name.”\textsuperscript{55}

Yet neither Saavedra nor the three officers who mediated the troops’ public act of mutiny reported these incidents up the command structure. Records exist only because the Minister of War later received an anonymous letter attributed to conscripts in the Campero Regiment. Determining that the letter’s request for promotion constituted a mutiny because of the “insolent terms employed,” the regiment’s commander ordered an investigation.\textsuperscript{56} These far more mutinous episodes of collective public and private demands came to light only in the process of deposing members of the regiment about this letter. Tracking the

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{54} Macario Coronel, Teófilo Vargas, Pedro Calderón, and Sarg. Miguel Carreón statements, November 19 and 24, MOT-71-001, AHM-TPJM.
  \item \textsuperscript{55} Macario Coronel, Teófilo Vargas, and Pedro Calderón statements, November 19, 1920, MOT-71-001, AHM-TPJM.
  \item \textsuperscript{56} The magistrate found no evidence that anyone in the Campero Regiment wrote the letter, and several conscripts suggested that their counterparts in the Muillo Regiment might have been the authors. Letter to Minister of War, November 1, 1920; Commander Campero Regimento to Lt. Delfín Arias, November 4, 1920; Raul Camargo, Teófilo Vargas, Jab Mendez, Daniel Araujo, and Macario Coronel statements, November 5, 1920, MOT-71-001, AHM-TPJM.
\end{itemize}
officers involved also reveals the speed at which individuals could fall out of favor in this moment of upheaval: Ovando had played a key role in the success of the July coup, and Heguigarre was the son of one of Saavedra’s oldest supporters, Lieutenant Colonel Gumercindo Heguigarre.\(^{57}\) Saavedra’s respectful treatment of the five conscripts, which even included a gratuity to temper the denial of their petition, suggests his conviction that the loyalty of the rank and file could keep him in power or facilitate his downfall; officers would indeed struggle to effect political change without willing troops bearing arms behind them. The support of this small group of conscripts held particular importance since they came from the small portion of Bolivian society that was literate and therefore had suffrage.\(^{58}\)

Saavedra and the three Campero officers involved likely chose not to report these incidents because they were each in the process of maneuvering for position – albeit at different levels – and hoped to manage these conscripts’ demands to their own advantage.

Some evidence suggests that the prosecution of this case (and the fate of the mutineers) represented a struggle for control of the military. At least one of the accused again invoked partisan loyalty in his petition for provisional liberty: Sergeant Emilio Miranda, a carpenter from La Paz, submitted a petition that asserted the absurdity of the charges because he was “obedient to \textit{sumiso} and respectful of the current government, to whose glory \textit{exaltación} I contributed as a supporter \textit{adicto} of the Republican Party.”\(^{59}\) Would bureaucratic procedures prevail, resulting in the strict enforcement of military law and

\(^{57}\) Sub. Lt. Manuel Heguigarre and Sarg. Miguel Carreon statements, November 17 and 24, 1920; Conclusion of the Magistrate, December 11, 1920, MOT-71-001, AHM-TPJM.

\(^{58}\) All sixteen Campero conscripts who testified in the proceedings were literate. Those eventually indicted held the professions of student, telegraph operator, and carpenter and came from diverse cities and towns in the departments of La Paz, Potosí, and Cochabamba. MOT-71-001, AHM-TPJM.

\(^{59}\) Sarg. Emilio Miranda to Magistrate, December 4, 1920, MOT-71-001, AHM-TPJM.
hierarchy? Or would Saavedra be able to protect his adherents from punishment? The result seems to have been a compromise. Although the military magistrate indicted seven Campero soldiers on charges of sedition, mutiny, and insubordination, he also granted them provisional liberty.\textsuperscript{60} No records exist from post-indictment proceedings, so the case likely did not proceed to the tribunal phase. This resolution may have allowed the military bureaucracy to save face, having imprisoned, taken testimony, and indicted the conscripts; however, it also meant that Saavedra’s stalwart supporters spent less than a month in detention.\textsuperscript{61}

No matter their fate, the actions of these conscripts suggest their confidence in their position as supporters of Saavedra. Emboldened by their connection to him and their role in the July coup, these soldiers freely admitted to spreading rumors about their new commander, making collective demands about the regiment’s leadership, and personally petitioning a member of the ruling junta regarding matters internal to the unit. Their low position in the military hierarchy seemed not to affect their sense of entitlement to make demands. Nor were Campero conscripts alone in publicly voicing preference for particular officers: The next month, for example, conscripts garrisoned in Catavi (Potosí) with the Loa Regiment also wrote to the junta with a similar plea to retain their commander.\textsuperscript{62}

These episodes occurred immediately prior to the election of delegates to the National Convention, which would reform the 1880 Constitution and elect the next president – Daniel Salamanca and junta members José María Escalier and Bautista Saavedra.

\textsuperscript{60} Indictment and Findings of Fact by the Magistrate, December 11, 1920, MOT-71-001, AHM-TPJM.

\textsuperscript{61} See November 7, 1920 order placing them in preventative detention and December 4, 1920 order letting them out on bail.

\textsuperscript{62} Loa soldiers to Junta de Gobierno, November 18, 1920, INS-59-002, AHM-TPJM.
were all vying for the position. Divisions between these leaders were not only personal but also regional, with Saavedra supporters concentrated in La Paz, Salamanca backed by his native Cochabamba, and Escalier strongest in the south. Although Saavedra secured the presidency, this contentious convention led to a permanent split among Republicans, with Salamanca forming the Genuine Republican Party.63

Displaced Liberals and dissident Republicans all looked, in Dunkerley’s words, “to the Army to redress the balance of power.”64 The first attempt to overthrow Saavedra occurred the same month he assumed the presidency – January 1921 – when Lieutenant Colonel Juan José Fernández, who had been a principal supporter of the July 1920 coup, marched a battalion to Plaza Murillo with plans to force Saavedra into exile. Colleagues persuaded him to desist at the last minute, but his actions proved that Saavedra rightly feared conspiracies among the officer corps.65 Seeking to shore up his precarious rule, the new president stripped Oruro’s Prefect Luis Calvo of his post. He also began directly interfering in the military, to the extreme of personally dictating the movement of troops and asking loyal officers to disobey orders from the high command.66

In February 1921, Saavedra moved to gain control of the army and contain dissident officers by appointing General Hans Kundt (see Figure 21) as chief of staff and expediting his application for Bolivian citizenship.67 As leader of the 1911 mission, Kundt was on leave in Germany when the mission was recalled from Bolivia at the outset of the First World War.

64 Dunkerley, Orígenes del poder militar, 111.
65 Dunkerley, Orígenes del poder militar, 111; Díaz Machicao, Saavedra, 74.
66 Dunkerley, Orígenes del poder militar, 110, 226n.4.
67 Díaz Machicao, Saavedra, 83.
He served on the Galician front and then took command of the Twenty-Fourth Infantry Regiment and later the Fortieth Reserve Infantry Brigade. In late May 1920, Kundt retired as major general in the German army and embarked for Bolivia as a private citizen to investigate business schemes. He later professed himself to be “above all disgusted with the

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68 Several scholars assert that Kundt participated in the outlawed Freikorps and the Kapp Putsch, a March 1920 coup attempt in opposition to the Treaty of Versailles. Brockmann, however, finds no evidence to support these claims. The date of Kundt’s return is also of some dispute. Dunkerley has him returning to his post (rather than as a civilian) in April; Díaz Machicano states that he returned to the country on August 9. Brockmann shows that he left Germany in May. Citing primary sources from 1929, Hancock determines that Kundt had returned by June. Bieber, citing primary sources from 1920, confirms that Kundt was already in Bolivia by September. And one US military attaché reported that he returned in July 1920 while another had the date as early as 1919. See: Lt. Col. Guy S. Norvell memo, October 31, 1923 and Jesse S. Cottrell to Secretary of State #1106, September 13, 1926, box 187, f. 6000-6420, RG 165, NM 84-77, NARA; Brockmann, El general y sus presidentes, 45-53, 64-66; Bruce W. Farcau, The Chaco War:
development of internal politics” in his native land. France’s delegation strongly objected to Kundt’s assumption of a military post in Bolivia as a violation of the Treaty of Versailles, but British diplomats encouraged the move, arguing that he would “keep the army out of politics and prevent further disturbances.” On the contrary, Kundt would become essential to keeping Saavedra in power and looked, at least to US military observers, like the “the pillar upon which rests the stability of the government.”

Kundt and Saavedra’s ability to control the army faced an important test two months after Saavedra took office when, during the early hours of March 3, 1921, soldiers in the Loa Regiment mutinied and persuaded many fellows in the Murillo Regiment to join them. The seeds of this mutiny had been sown during the July coup, when Saavedra had promised many of the men an early discharge for their participation. The link between freedom from service and insubordination became stronger in November when a group of soldiers in the Loa Regiment – then stationed in Oruro – had been discharged after petitioning that Major Néstor Asthón remain in command of the unit. With promises of discharge for antiguos [conscripts in their second year of service] left unfulfilled and rumors circulating that soldiers’ wages would soon be cut by twenty cents, conscripts from the Murillo and Loa Regiments apparently planned a display of force for the night of March 5 in order to air their

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69 Interview in the Revista Militar cited in Brockmann, El general y sus presidentes.
70 Haggard telegram, July 29, 1920, quoted in Dunkerley, Orígenes del poder militar, 115.
71 “Bolivia, Estimate of Political-Military Situation,” c. 1930, box 187, f. 3020, RG 165, NM 84-77, NARA.
72 INS-59-002 (November, 1920); Capt. Luis Emilio Aguirre statement, March 12, 1921, MOT-71-002A, AHM-TPJM.
grievances. However, a recently discharged conscript from the Murillo Regiment denounced it as a revolutionary plot, leading to the arrest on March 2 of the conscripts serving as lead NCO [primero] of each company. Hearing rumors that the captive NCOs were being abused and might be summarily executed, some of their fellows in the Loa Regiment went to bed clothed, rising at 12:45 a.m. to cut the barracks’ telephone wires, arrest the officers as they slept, and break open boxes of ammunition with their machetes.\textsuperscript{73}

After at least two hundred Loa soldiers broke out of the barracks, some of rebels made their way to the Murillo barracks (see Figure 22), yelling “Wake up compañeros”. About ninety answered the call. Bands of Murillo and Loa conscripts then wandered the streets, some setting up machine guns at important corners. Awoken in their homes by the shots, other officers made their way to the Loa barracks, freed the captives, and organized the soldiers who had stayed behind to round up the mutineers. The Republican Guard and companies from the Pérez and Reserve Regiments also participated in efforts to contain the uprising, aptly demonstrating why leaders stationed discrete units in the seat of government. Several officers later testified that they had convinced groups of conscripts to surrender peacefully and that said conscripts claimed to be “defending themselves from the police, who had attacked them.” Encamped in Plaza Murillo, where the NCOs were being held, the largest group refused to surrender until the president personally promised to free the NCOs and grant all antiguos a discharge. The officers convinced them to name two representatives to go to Saavedra’s house, where he apparently ceded to their requests.\textsuperscript{74} One corporal later

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\textsuperscript{73} MOT:71-002A (March, 1921), AHM-TPJM.
\textsuperscript{74} MOT:71-002A (March, 1921), quotations from Cabo Domingo Peña and My. Félix R. Tejada statements, April 15 and March 21, 1921, MOT:71-002A, AHM-TPJM.
\end{flushright}
Figure 22: Detail of La Paz Map, 1912
The Loa Regiment was garrisoned in the barracks at the top of the map (#30 and #31). The Murillo Regiment was garrisoned by the Plaza España at the bottom of the map (#39). The NCOs were being held near Plaza Murillo, two blocks below Loa’s barracks, the location of the Presidential and Legislative Palaces. Source: *La Paz, 450 años, 1548-1998* Tomo I, 128.
testified that he and his fellows had laid down their arms and returned to their barracks only after Minister of War General Pastor Baldivieso had promised, “I am the Minister of War and have served the country for forty years, and I give you my word that nothing will happen and that you won’t be accused of any crimes; lead your troops to the barracks.” By 5:00 a.m., all of the rebel soldiers from both regiments had returned to the Loa barracks, relinquished their arms and ammunition, and were eating a breakfast of bread and tea. Various conscripts were wounded, but the mutiny had resulted in at most three fatalities – all civilians. General Kundt arrived and spoke to the troops, followed by President Saavedra and Minister Baldivieso. The soldiers repeated their demands: that the NCOs be released, that wages not be cut, that *antiguos* receive a quick discharge, and that the Loa Regiment return to Oruro with Major Asthón restored to command.\(^{76}\)

In a copious investigation that lasted three months, military courts recorded almost five hundred pages of testimony and asked detailed questions about political ties, civilian interference, and statements made during the mutiny. The results suggest a mixture of political and service-related motivations. More importantly, they show how the July coup and eight months of open struggle for control of the government and the military had thrown these regiments into disarray and encouraged insubordination: These conscripts openly professed partisan allegiances, agitated for discharge, complained about labor conditions, and made personal demands on the president, minister of war, and chief of staff. The length of the investigation and the questions asked reveal a pervasive fear that individual

\(^{75}\) Confession of Corporal Domingo Peña, July 18, 1921; see also confession of Enrique Murillo, July 18, 1921, AHM-TPJM.

\(^{76}\) MOT-71-002A (March, 1921), AHM-TPJM.
conscripts might conspire with officers and politicians to overthrow the government.

After months of imprisonment, two ex-conscripts from the Murillo Regiment testified that a major and two civilian legislators (both of whom belonged to Salamanca’s Genuine Republican Party) had instructed them to incite the troops to mutiny as part of a revolutionary plot; however, they later retracted these statements, claiming to have lied after being “bribed and threatened by personages offering immediate freedom.”

Whether or not these two Murillo conscripts planted mutinous ideas among the Loa and Murillo Regiments as part of a plot to overthrow Saavedra, the roots of the uprising lay in the mutineers’ social background and the many ways that the political upheaval of the past few months had directly touched their lives. Not one of the mutineers who testified in the proceedings lacked the ability to sign his name, which indicates that the leaders probably hailed from the upper strata of Bolivia society. If so, they likely brought a sense of entitlement with them to the barracks and were men accustomed to making demands and participating in politics. In fact, testimony revealed that party loyalties had caused rifts among the ranks: Several soldiers seized the opportunity of the mutiny trial to accuse one of their fellows of threatening to kill the president because he thought that Salamanca should be serving in his place. Others, such as nineteen-year-old conscript Corporal Domingo Peña from Santa Cruz, asserted allegiance to Saavedra’s faction, testifying that he had been shot in the leg on July 12 and

77 Major José Ferrufino and legislators Aurelio Balderrama and José Almaraz were those named. Díaz lists them among the Genuines in July 1921. Ex-Sergeant Tomás Fuentes and ex-soldier Saturnino Quiroga statements, May 18, 1921; confession of Saturnino Quiroga, July 19, 1921, MOT-71-002A, AHM-TPJM. Díaz Machicar, Saavedra, 107.
78 Max Terán and cabo Mariano Parra statements, April 19 and 27, 1921, MOT-71-002A, AHM-TPJM.
professing to be “one of the most fervent supporters of the current cause.”

Yet the effects of the July coup reached beyond conscripts who had strong partisan ties; actions based on political maneuvering had created service-related grievances that made the March mutiny possible. Conscripts in the Loa Regiment had been particularly affected by political upheaval: When the magistrate questioned one of their captains as to the origin of the mutiny, he pointed to the July coup, asserting that it had “shaken the troops’ discipline to its base, to the point of openly disregarding the authority” of Loa’s commander. In February, someone (likely Saavedra) had ordered the unit’s removal from Oruro due to evidence that some of its officers were plotting with Luis Calvo, the department’s recently deposed prefect. When the regiment arrived in La Paz, it was physically separated into two barracks, leading to rumors that the “President didn’t trust the Regiment.” In the months leading up to the mutiny, then, political intrigue had caused the Loa conscripts to have an unfamiliar commander foisted on them, be drawn into a revolutionary plot, be uprooted from their barracks and separated from their fellows, and discover that promises of discharge were going unfulfilled. When rumors of wage cuts and the sudden imprisonment of their ranking NCOs were added to this mix, their mutiny should not have come as a shock. The testimony of nearly every conscript involved in the proceedings suggests an atmosphere of general discontent among the ranks and widespread murmuring for a general discharge of *antiguos.*

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79 Confession of Corporal Domingo Peña, July 18, 1921, MOT-71-002A, AHM-TPJM.
80 Capt. Luis Emilio Aguirre statement, March 12, 1921, MOT-71-002A, AHM-TPJM.
81 Cabos Luis Gallardo, Max Terán, Daniel Cardenas, and Mariano Parra statements, April 25, 27, 1921, AHM-TPJM. See also Dunkerley, Orígenes del poder militar, 110, 226n.4.
82 Capt. Luis Emilio Aguirre statement, March 12, 1921, MOT-71-002A, AHM-TPJM.
Although triggered by service-related grievances, the conscripts’ decision to mutiny and their demand to negotiate directly with the president was informed and shaped by their partisan leanings, privileged backgrounds, and recent experiences of political intrigue. In return for their insubordination, they won audiences with three of the most important men in the country: the president, minister of war, and chief of staff, who apparently ceded to their demands. One sub-lieutenant reported that the mutineers, as they returned to the barracks, gleefully yelled to their comrades, “We’ve gotten all that we wanted.”\textsuperscript{83} The demands the mutineers made – the NCOs’ release, no wage cuts, and the location and commander of the regiment – reflected a profound sense of privilege rather than the ideal of subordination. These men were products of the partisan conflict of the past five years and, more immediately, the political turmoil and plotting that had characterized their time in the barracks.

Like the Campero soldiers four months before, these conscripts made demands about the conditions of service, expressed loyalty to a particular officer, showed little respect for military hierarchy, and established direct contact with political authorities. The two incidents differed in many ways, however. Whereas the Campero conscripts had a personal relationship with Saavedra and therefore likely felt untouchable, the 1921 mutineers were in a more precarious political position; their regiment was suspected of plotting with Calvo and at least one conscript was clearly against Saavedra. Perhaps for that reason they planned to take up arms in order to voice their complaints. Most importantly, the Campero incident lacked a trigger such as the one that had directly precipitated the Loa mutiny – the arrest of

\textsuperscript{83} Sub-Lieutenant Froilán Padilla statement, March 14, 1921, MOT-71-002A, AHM-TPJM.
the ranking conscript in each unit that figured so prominently in mutineers’ slogans and demands on March 3.

Unlike the Campero mutiny, that of the Loa and Murillo Regiments had major repercussions beyond the barracks’ walls. Too public to be concealed, the mutiny and subsequent investigation made headlines for months and was debated in the legislature. It also provoked a standoff between Saavedra and his minister of war. A brigadier general since 1918, Minister of War Pastor Baldivieso presented himself as an institutional actor who would reestablish the military’s nonpartisanship. To affirm that the institution would not support another coup, Baldivieso made public in the days following the March 3 mutiny a confidential document that seventeen commanding officers in key positions had signed after Saavedra became president. In it, they swore loyalty to the non-interventionist principles laid out in the Constitution and promised to “impose all possible compliance with the supreme government, constituted correctly and legally by the honorable National Convention, the genuine expression of the people’s will.” Having come to power through military intervention, however, Saavedra knew how fictitious these assertions could be. He therefore used the mutiny as an opportunity to exile suspect officers, which produced a crisis in his administration as Baldivieso demanded their return and amnesty for all participants.

Saavedra had to capitulate to stay in power and thus granted amnesty on September 1, 1921,

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84 See, for example: “Sobre el motín militar del Loa,” March 11, 1921, La Reforma, 1. “La verdad sobre los suceso de 3 de marzo,” March 27, 1921, El Tiempo, 3; debate on May 18, 1921, El redactor de la H. Convención Nacional, Tomo V (La Paz, 1921), 7-30; Tomo VI (La Paz, 1921), 22-44.
85 Parker, ed., Bolivians of To-Day, 41-42; Dunkerley, Orígenes del poder militar, 115-16.
86 Díaz Machico, Saavedra, 91-94.
to all officers and conscripts involved. He would not be able to purge the army and would have to rely on other means to maintain power.

These means included actively working to weaken the national army while building up the Republican Guard as a force loyal only to the president. Only weeks after the mutiny, one of Saavedra’s key supporters introduced a bill to the National Convention that proposed reducing obligatory military service to one year. Such a law passed at some point prior to 1923, forcing the army to enroll new conscripts twice rather than once a year so as not to be left without trained soldiers each January. Service would not return to two years until in 1927. Saavedra also slashed the military budget, which dropped from twenty-three percent of government expenditures in 1920 to eighteen percent in 1921. These cuts were even more severe than the numbers suggest, given that a crash in the price of tin led to an almost twenty-five percent decrease in government revenues in 1921. Within a year of the mutiny Saavedra had cut the army from seven thousand to three thousand conscripts. By 1923, Saavedra had ensured that the Republican Guard was better armed, better paid, and larger than the regular army.

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87 Dunkerley, Orígenes del poder militar, 116. Supreme Decree, September 1, 1921, MOT-71-002A, AHM-TPJM.
89 Memoria de 1923, 36; Memoria de 1924, 19; Memoria de 1925, 12; Memoria de 1926, 20; Memoria de 1927, 33.
90 Gallo, Taxes and State Power, 124.
92 Report prepared by the Department of State, November 5, 1929, box 187, f. 6000-6420, RG 165, NM 84-77, NARA. Later US military attachés reported that the line army’s numbers had returned to around 7,000 by the end of Saavedra’s term in 1925. “Country: Bolivia,” c. 1934, box 187, f. 6000-6420, RG 165, NM 84-77, NARA.
93 Relying on a report by the US military attaché, Dunkerley notes that members of the Guard were paid between two and four bolivianos a day plus rations and “beer tokens.” The same source reports that, in
Led by relatively privileged conscripts stationed in La Paz-based regiments, the Loa and Campero mutinies reflect an increasingly fragmented institution plagued by internecine battles among officers, NCOs, and conscripts jockeying for power both within the army and through support of partisan factions. The tribunal’s exhaustive investigation of the conscripts’ motives suggests that a political situation marked by amorphous factions, none of which clearly controlled the army, had affected power relations in La Paz-based regiments. The July 1920 coup had opened a space for officers to break institutional order to effect a change in power, cementing the role of the army as an important – if never unitary – political actor and revealing the fiction of discursive pronouncements prohibiting interference. Until Saavedra could establish and strengthen the Republican Guard as a praetorian force, the loyalty of particular officers and conscripts would be critical to retaining power. This atmosphere of conspiracy fostered insubordination and opened a space for literate conscripts stationed in urban centers to act based on a combination of factors that included not only the conditions of barracks life and personal loyalty to comrades or particular officers but also the outcome of partisan conflict.

**Between Coups: Overcoming Divisions to Repress Indians, Workers, and Communists**

During the remainder of Saavedra’s presidency (1921-1925) and that of his successor Hernando Siles (1926-1930), acts of conscript mutiny disappear from military-justice records. Although this subset of literate soldiers likely continued to act in insubordinate

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1923, the force numbered “350 in La Paz, 260 in Cochabamba, and 200 in Sucre and Oruro” and “was expected to be doubled for the May elections.” Dunkerley, *Orígenes del poder militar*, 114.

94 Dunkerley mentions a 1925 mutiny among a battalion of military engineers that a US diplomat reported. If the case was formally investigated and prosecuted, the records have yet to be found.
ways and call on the discourse of citizenship rights in order to express service-related grievances, these leaders had sufficiently consolidated their hold on power so that such incidents were no longer perceived as politically motivated. Yet factiousness among the politicized officer corps continued, even leading to two rebellions by disaffected commanders on the frontier. Despite manifestations of intra-elite disputes, the army successfully deployed throughout the period to subdue strikes and uprisings by mobilized workers in the mines and rural areas, demonstrating that the factions vying for dominance all shared a vision of the nation that did not include independent action from below. They apparently perceived a significant difference between threats from within the military and ruling classes and threats to the social order.

Having gained the support of workers and highland indigenous communities during his rise to power, Saavedra soon revealed his alignment with elements of the liberal project for the nation. Like his predecessors, he would not hesitate to use force to suppress political dissent and internal unrest; army units thus regularly deployed to the countryside and mines. The first major incident occurred just a week after the Loa mutiny disturbed La Paz. Approximately three thousand community Indians in Jesús de Machaca, located about fifty miles from the city, burned villagers’ homes and killed the corregidor and his family along with sixteen others. This particular community had quickly recognized the junta after the July coup and had repeatedly denounced abuse by Liberal administrators and villagers. The

_Dunkerley, Orígenes del poder militar_, 114. I have found records of only three cases for rebellion, sedition, mutiny, or insubordination from this period. One 1922 case prosecuted two subaltern officers for attempted rebellion. A mutiny case in December 1923 briefly investigated two NCOs, and a January 1927 case pursued a colonel for attempted rebellion in a frontier unit. See MOT-71-003 and REB-77-007, AHM-TPJM, and Prefecture-Exped box 251 d. 7, ALP.
junta responded by dismissing the previous corregidor in November 1920. Yet his replacement, Lucio Estrada, was a local landowner with a particularly abusive reputation. Under his leadership, the ayllus’ complaints multiplied, with leaders going so far as to take out advertising space in La Paz’s *El Diario* to expose their mistreatment. Saavedra responded forcefully to the rebellion, however, sending Colonel Vitaliano Ledezma in command of one hundred soldiers from the Abaroa Cavalry Regiment – the same regiment in whose barracks indigenous apoderado Prudencio Callisaya had died. Although estimates of death and destruction vary widely, Choque and Ticona’s measured evaluation has settled on around eighty deaths, the loss of thousands of livestock, and the destruction of hundreds of community members’ homes. Seventy men were arrested as agitators and tried in La Paz.95

Miners had also had high hopes for the Saavedra administration but soon learned that labor’s victories after the July coup would not continue. After management fired twenty-six workers in retaliation for participating in May Day celebrations in Uncía (Potosí), the government responded to workers’ request for mediation by sending 220 soldiers from the Ballivián Cavalry Regiment to the region in late May. As historian Robert Smale shows through telegrams exchanged by company managers, the structure of this military deployment, in which the companies garrisoned officers and troops, allowed management to court their sympathy by providing comfortable facilities and abundant victuals. These efforts were quite successful. In what became known as the “Uncía Massacre,” troops killed at least

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95 The incident that directly precipitated the uprising remains unknown, with different actors and scholars each contending, in turn, that it was the imprisonment of several community members, the theft of a community bull, or the presence of land surveyors. Roberto Choque Canqui and Esteban Ticona Alejo, *Jesús de Machaca: La marka rebelde - Sublevación y masacre de 1921*, 2nd ed. (La Paz: CEDOIN; CIPCA, 1996), 38-63, 68, 74, 77, 94-97.
six miners on June 4 when they opened fire on a crowd demanding the release of union leaders and sympathizers. In Smale’s words, Saavedra’s open support for the mining companies effectively “smother[ed] the Central Labor Federation of Uncia’s remnants.”

The struggle to control dissidence in the armed forces also continued. Accusing them of plotting a coup, Chief of Staff Hans Kundt dismissed the two senior cohorts of military cadets in August 1922 and made the remaining classes swear loyalty to Saavedra.

The president, increasingly reliant on his German advisor, appointed Kundt Minister of War in January 1923. This move set off a firestorm of protest since Kundt had many enemies, especially among Francophile officers who openly opposed his appointment on nationalist grounds. Although Bolivia had had several foreign chiefs of staff, a foreigner had never sat in the cabinet. The objections were so widespread that Kundt resigned the post after only twenty days. Saavedra faced opposition on several other fronts as well. In February 1924, members of the opposition torched the Republican Guard’s barracks and shot in the stomach the unit’s commander, Saavedra’s loyal ally Lieutenant Colonel Andrés Valle. Only a week later, a dissident officer assigned to the frontier also made his opposition known, as Liberal General Óscar Mariaca Pando staged a border rebellion in Yacuiba (Tarija). Then, fanning the flames of separatism in Santa Cruz, Genuine Republicans with the support of five army colonels seized the provincial capital in July 1924. In personal command of a

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86 Smale, “I Sweat the Flavor of Tin”, 110-143. Quotation at 137.
87 Díaz Machicao, Saavedra, 131; Dunkerley, Orígenes del poder militar, 116.
88 Brockmann, El general y sus presidentes, 70-72; Díaz Machicao, Saavedra, 142-49.
89 Díaz Machicao, Saavedra, 166-69. See also Lt. Col. Andrés Valle to Prefect of La Paz, February 20, 1924, Prefecture-Admin box 208, ALP; “El incendio crimin al del cuartel de la Guardia Republicana,” La República, February 19, 1924, 1; “Más sobre el incendio del cuartel de la Guardia Republicana,” La República, February 22, 1924, 1 and 7; “En torno al incendio del cuartel de la Guardia Republicana,” La República, March 7, 1924, 1 and 5.
thousand soldiers, Kundt easily suppressed the first rebellion and was organizing to do the same in Santa Cruz when Saavedra brokered a political solution.100

After Saavedra’s hand-chosen successor revealed plans to include members of the opposition in his cabinet, Saavedra had his election annulled on a technicality and agreed to support Hernando Siles as the Republican Party candidate in late 1925. He insisted, however, that Siles sign a promise to cede to “party discipline” and accept Saavedra’s brother, Abdón, as vice president. Once Siles consolidated his own power, however, he sent the younger Saavedra on an extended foreign tour that quickly became de facto exile. By October 1925, several Genuine Republicans occupied cabinet positions and Siles had reorganized the military high command to put several loyal officers in key positions; the break with Saavedra was complete.101

During the turmoil over succession, a disaffected lieutenant colonel had openly accused General Kundt of having committed atrocities during World War I and of corrupt dealings in his arms purchases for Bolivia. Although acquitted after his accuser’s own shady dealings with a Belgian supplier were revealed, Kundt’s reputation was badly damaged in the court of public opinion. He soon traveled to New York to investigate purchases for the army and then to Germany for a vacation. In his absence, 150 officers signed a petition in September 1926 to block his return. Siles ceded to their wishes but continued to pay Kundt according to his contract, assigning him to purchase arms and travel as a Bolivian emissary.102

When a border skirmish with Paraguay necessitated the mobilization of troops to the Chaco

in December 1928, Siles used the opportunity to recall Kundt and reinstate him as Chief of Staff.\textsuperscript{103}

The Siles administration saw the establishment of reformist youth movements influenced by leftist ideologies and frustrated with the corrupt patronage system.\textsuperscript{104} In many ways, these intellectuals were the more elite counterparts of the urban, literate conscripts who had participated in the 1920 coup and subsequent mutinies. While student groups had initially supported Siles, they abandoned him when he openly campaigned against the left in the 1927 elections.\textsuperscript{105} These elections also revealed strong support for the first of many Marxist-influenced political parties in Bolivia. Siles reacted forcibly, accusing leaders of plotting to overthrow the government and sending several, including Gustavo A. Navarro, into exile.\textsuperscript{106} Born into a well-off family in Sucre, Navarro had been an early supporter of Saavedra, even participating in the July coup, and had been rewarded with consular posts in Europe. In 1926, he published \textit{Justice of the Inca} with a Belgian press under the pseudonym Tristán Marof. Written in the \textit{indigenista} and Marxist traditions, this work argued that indigenous civilizations in the Andes had been socialist and, with the slogan “Land for the Indians,” predicted a Marxist revolution from that quarter.\textsuperscript{107}

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{103} Brockmann, \textit{El general y sus presidentes}, 119-20.
\textsuperscript{105} Aramayo, “The Intellectual Origins...” (diss.), 88-120.
\textsuperscript{107} Guillermo Lora and Robert Smale refer to Marof as coming from humble origins, but Hylton cites Marof’s own accounting of his life that his mother was a poet and his father was a successful \textit{comerciante} and member of Sucre society. Aramayo describes his family as “aristocratic” and argues that he used his wealth to establish the Socialist Party. Smale, \textit{"I Sweat the Flavor of Tin"}, 167; Hylton, "Tierra común”, 180-82; Aramayo, "The Intellectual Origins..." (diss.), 121. For his role in the July 1920 coup, see El International, \textit{Las verdaderas crónicas de la revolución}, 103.
\end{footnotesize}
Marof’s predictions seemed to be coming to fruition on July 25, 1927, when three-hundred community Indians in Chayanta (northern Potosí) occupied several farms, put the landlords on trial for abuse and usurping Indian land, and ritually executed several men. Given the national network of indigenous leaders, the rebellion spread rapidly; by the end of August approximately ten thousand Indians from four of Bolivia’s nine departments had participated in acts of collective resistance. Deploying troops from La Paz, Sucre, and Oruro, the army pacified the uprising by early September, killing more than three hundred rebels in the process. They arrested two hundred Indians deemed to be instigators and took them to Sucre for trial. Although early reports depicted the rebellion as a communist threat, the government chose to de-emphasize these links during the trial, instead blaming the uprisings on centuries of abuse by landlords, corregidores, and priests. Siles, constructing himself as a magnanimous father figure, granted amnesty on October 15, 1927, to all 184 of the Indians accused of leading the rebellion. In the amnesty decree, he denied the capacity of these men to be political actors, arguing that they were only reacting to abuse. Therefore, he concluded, the state should offer them “protection” rather than punishment “due to their inferior social condition.” Despite the government’s silencing of these ties, several of the indigenous leaders of the rebellion had had direct contact with radical artisans and intellectuals, with whom they had discussed the redistribution of wealth, the return of land to the ayllus, and the construction of rural schools. Some ayllu representatives had even attended the Third Workers’ Congress in April, and the socialists had been publishing calls for mass uprisings in the months prior to the incident. Although historians differ over the importance of labor leaders’ influence, they agree that Indian comunarios and colonos were the primary actors in and
leaders of the Chayanta rebellion.\textsuperscript{108}

Unable to control new ties between labor, student, and rural groups, Siles found himself facing mobilized opposition quite different from traditional partisan conflict. As part of plans to reform the Constitution to extend his presidency, he stepped down as president on May 28, 1930, leaving the government in the hands of a Council of Ministers, which included Colonels Carlos Banzer and David Toro. This move laid bare the factions in the army, with opposition officers objecting to Banzer and Toro’s presence on the Council as unconstitutional and General Kundt abandoning all pretense of impartiality to back Siles openly. The main student group declared a permanent strike on June 12 and organized a series of demonstrations in La Paz that culminated on Sunday, June 22, when riot police opened fire in Plaza Murillo, killing several students.\textsuperscript{109} The coup everyone knew was coming started when the Camacho and Aroma Regiments in Oruro declared themselves in revolt on June 25 and their officers issued coordinated demands for a military junta under specific officers, all of whom had ties to the Liberal and Genuine parties.\textsuperscript{110} Releasing a statement steeped in ideas of what Fredrick Nunn calls “professional militarism” that figured the army as the incarnation and the ultimate guardian of the patria,\textsuperscript{111} the officers leading the Oruro rebellion told Kundt, “Our duty guides us to save the patria at the cost of our own blood….

\begin{footnotes}
\item[109] Aramayo, "The Intellectual Origins..." (diss.), 169; Brockmann, El general y sus presidentes, 135-45.
\item[111] Frederick M. Nunn, Yesterday's Soldiers: European Military Professionalism in South America, 1890-1940 (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1983), 288-289.
\end{footnotes}
We very much regret that we are the only ones in the Army who understand our duty to the *patria* at this time. Our cause is completely apolitical, as proven by our appeal for a military government.”

Seeking to retain control over La Paz, Kundt attempted to expel various Military Academy cadets and two officers for seditious acts later that night; in response, the cadets moved to take the city center, meeting with opposition from the NCO School and part of the Pérez Regiment. When ordered by Kundt to take the Military Academy early the next morning (June 26), a group of captains and lieutenants in the Pérez Regiment decided to join the rebellion, turning their weapons on the other officers in the regiment; the unit’s commander, Colonel José Taboada, was killed in the process, apparently by accident. Two-hundred soldiers from Pérez Regiment then left their barracks under the orders of the rebellious subaltern officers and headed to the Aviation School in El Alto to coordinate the coup. Kundt, Siles, and other supporters only held out until early morning on June 27, when they fled for various embassies to head into exile.

Led by General Carlos Blanco Galindo, the new junta consisted of six officers, most of whom had suffered exile or forced retirement at some point in the previous decade. The junta declared an end to military interference in politics, immediately appointed a panel of civilian advisors, began preparing for elections, and encouraged the political parties to produce a unity presidential slate. Announced in late August, the results were unprecedented, bringing together former enemies from the Liberal, Republican, and Genuine Republican

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112 Quoted in Díaz Machicao, Guzmán, Siles, Blanco Galindo, 123.
113 Brockmann, *El general y sus presidentes*, 149-68.
114 Díaz Machicao, Guzmán, Siles, Blanco Galindo, 125.
parties on one ticket: They proposed the presidency of Daniel Salamanca with Ismael Montes and Bautista Saavedra as vice-presidents.\footnote{Díaz Machicao, Guzmán, Siles, Blanco Galindo, 139-46; Dunkerley, Orígenes del poder militar, 132-33; Klein, Parties and Political Change, 114-15.} However, renewed divisions soon emerged, as Liberals used the economic pressures of the Great Depression to advocate for substantial reductions in the military budget. Junior officers vociferously objected to salary reductions, and Major Oscar Moscoso published an open letter threatening strife within the army if the administration followed through with the cuts.\footnote{Dunkerley, Orígenes del poder militar, 135.}

**Standing Up for Their “Rights”: Conscript Mutinies on the Eve of the Chaco War**

Although the events of June 25-27 produced several deaths on both sides and involved multiple acts of rebellion, mutiny, and insubordination, no charges were filed against the officers, cadets, or soldiers involved. Yet the 1930 coup produced an atmosphere of political uncertainty in many ways similar to that of a decade before. As a result, military authorities again intensely scrutinized acts of insubordination by educated conscripts, fearing that they might be signs of a countercoup. These suspicions produced court-martial testimony that helps to delineate the contours of a culture of insubordination, based on demands for rights as citizens, that had emerged among this class of conscript. The actions and words of these soldiers, all of whom were literate men from capital cities, suggest a common sense of entitlement as citizens to dictate who would command them, protest how their superiors exercised authority, and demand their “rights” regarding food, labor, equipment, and wages. They called on the discourse of honorable citizen-soldiers to argue that the *patria* had not fulfilled its side of the bargain.
The first major incident occurred just two months after the coup, at a point when fears still ran high that Siles and Kundt’s supporters among the officers and troops might stage a countercoup. For that reason, military authorities and even a member of the junta thoroughly investigated when ten conscripts stationed as guards at the Aviation School, located on the outskirts of La Paz in El Alto, took up arms against Sub-Lieutenant Juan Antonio Rivera on Sunday, September 7. Although Rivera did not impute any political motives to the mutiny in his initial report, he insisted that the leaders be punished with the death penalty for being “a grave danger to the discipline of the unit.” During the course of the proceedings, the examining magistrate repeatedly asked the accused and witnesses “if anyone outside of the School had influenced the insubordination.” The conscripts and officers, however, coincided in asserting the internal nature of the incident. To a man, they agreed that the roots of the mutiny lay not in political aspirations but rather in a birthday celebration, for which the soldiers had combined their wages to buy a crate of beer, various bottles of wine, and the fixings for sandwiches. The men then spent Saturday night in the dormitory drinking and, as one conscript put it, “enjoying ourselves.” Around ten o’clock, Major Cárdenas approached the dormitory window, so they offered him a glass of wine and asked permission to continue the festivities. The conscripts reported toasting the officer

118 Citing a British diplomat, Dunkerley in fact interprets the Aviation mutiny as “the work of the Silista rump, particularly strong in the Air Force.” Dunkerley, Orígenes del poder militar, 432f.24.
119 Sub-Lieutenant Juan Antonio Rivera to the Director of Aviation School, September 9, 1930, MOT-71-004, AHM-TPJM.
120 Alberto Salazar, Carmelo Menacho, Joaquin Aguirre, Luis Barrientos, Hernán Badani, Hugo Leclere, Saturnino Fuenteelaz, Alfredo Ponce, Julio Lizarazu, Sof. Enrique Toro Gorea, and Major Jordán statements, September 10-13 and 19, 1930, MOT-71-004, AHM-TPJM.
121 Alberto Salazar and Manuel Guzmán statements, September 10 and 18, 1930, MOT-71-004, AHM-TPJM.
122 Hugo Tapia statement, September 12, 1930, MOT-71-004, AHM-TPJM.
after he granted their request even though he urged them to maintain “order and discipline.”

Cárdenas must have reported their activities, though, since around ten o’clock the next morning, three high-ranking officers (including two members of the ruling junta) arrived to inspect the troops. They questioned Carmelo Menacho, a nineteen-year-old student from Santa Cruz who was the unit’s primero [ranking soldier], as to whether the troops had any ammunition, indicating their suspicions that something more than a party might have been afoot. Upon receiving a negative answer, they retired from the Aviation School, leaving in charge Sub-Lieutenant Juan Antonio Rivera, who had accompanied them on the inspection. Later reported that he tried to discipline them after being told “in an insolent tone that they were still drunk.” Although Menacho (in what could be interpreted as insubordinate behavior) immediately informed him that the unit was off duty for the day, the men eventually complied with the hour of plantón [forced standing] that Rivera imposed. The group then headed to the mess hall, where they, according to Rivera, were “muttering against me” and “threw their bread on the ground, yelling insults at the cook.” After lunch, Rivera ordered Sergeant Feliciano Quiroz to supervise another hour of plantón. Upon hearing them refuse to fall in, Rivera entered the dormitory, where he found the soldiers resting. They contested the punishment, saying that this was abusive treatment; since it was a Sunday

124 “Una relación de los hechos ocurridos en la escuela de aviación, hecha por los actuantes,” El Diario, September 26, 1930, 6.
125 Sub-Lieutenant Juan Antonio Rivera to the Director of Aviation School, September 9, 1930, MOT-71-004, AHM-TPJM.
afternoon, “we were off duty” and “wanted to sleep.” When they continued to refuse to comply with his orders, Rivera hit soldier Raimundo Ríos, who was lying in bed, with his saber. When he moved to hit Ríos a second time, the others rallied to defend their fellow, raising their rifles against the officer, taking his saber, and checking his pockets for weapons. 

Rivera reported retreating to the airplane hangar with three rifles and deciding to “defend myself from any advance and wait for reinforcements.” The conscripts presented the situation slightly differently, testifying that Rivera had said that “we could do what we wanted,” so “we returned his saber to him and went to sleep.” However, they soon received a note from the officer threatening to bring forces to “smother them” unless they immediately laid down their arms and submitted to the initial punishment. Later asserting fear that Rivera would again physically abuse them if they complied, they broke into the ammunitions stash, took defensive positions, and shot at Sergeant Quiroz in order “to stop him from bringing forces to attack us.” Soon thereafter, the Aviation School’s Director, Major Jorge Jordán, arrived on the scene, and soldier Carmelo Menacho approached his vehicle. In response to Jordán’s questions, Menacho reported that he and his fellows were “armed against the commander of the guard, who has abused us.” When Jordán ordered

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126 Carmelo Menacho, Hugo Leclere, Antonio Rivera, and Sergeant Feliciano Quiroz statements, September 10-11, MOT-71-004, AHM-TPJM.
127 Sub-Lieutenant Juan Antonio Rivera to the Director of Aviation School, September 9, 1930; Alberto Salazar, Carmelo Menacho, Luis Barrientos, Hugo Leclere, Raimundo Ríos, and Saturnino Fuentealá statements, September 10-11, 1930, MOT-71-004, AHM-TPJM.
128 Sub-Lieutenant Juan Antonio Rivera to the Director of Aviation School, September 9, 1930, MOT-71-004, AHM-TPJM.
them to fall in and turn over their arms and ammunition, the conscripts immediately obeyed. He then drove them to Viacha, about fifteen miles southwest of La Paz, and confined them in holding cells of the Pisagua and Bolívar Regiments. The Chief of Staff later transferred them to the National Penitentiary in La Paz, where they awaited trial for mutiny.\footnote{Major Jorge Jordán to President of Military Tribunal, September 10, 1930, MOT-71-004, AHM-TPJM.}

Although records of the incident exist because of fears that it might be politically motivated, the roots of this mutiny were clearly located in the ideas about social class, friendship, military hierarchy, and the exercise of legitimate authority analyzed in chapter 2. The ten soldiers involved had entered the ranks eight months earlier, completed the initial training period, and been assigned to guard the Aviation School, presumably because they came from relatively privileged backgrounds. Hailing from the cities of La Paz, Oruro, Cochabamba, and Santa Cruz, they were all literate and claimed occupations such as student, clerk, telegraph operator, and mechanic.\footnote{Alberto Salazar, Carmelo Menacho, Joaquín Agüirre, Luis Barrientos, Hernán Badini, Hugo Leclere, Antonio Rivera, Raimundo Ríos, Carlos García, and Saturnino Fuentelás statements, September 10-11, MOT-71-004, AHM-TPJM.} These conscripts apparently enjoyed significant independence in the Aviation School and felt no compunction about bringing alcohol into the barracks and holding a party in the dormitory. They expressed no shame and offered no apology after high-ranking officers discovered their offense. And when Rivera, as an unfamiliar subaltern officer, attempted to impose his authority, they repeatedly displayed defiance, informing him that they were off duty and even lounging in bed as he barked at them to fall in. Combined with their lack of respect for Rivera, their bonds of friendship, forged over alcohol but also during military training, hours of guard duty, and free time in the dormitories, compelled them to defend a fellow soldier against what they saw as abuse of
authority.

The actions and attitudes adopted by these conscripts suggest a weakening of military ideals of discipline and obedience. The mutineers’ testimonies during the proceedings lack contrition and respect for rank; they do not even read as strategically sound statements calculated to appeal for leniency in a mutiny trial. After being indicted on the charges, the soldiers even took the defiant step of writing a letter to the Liberal *El Diario* that emphasized Rivera’s abuse and their own off-duty status. In their letter and testimonies, these men actively claimed rights as soldiers that superseded obedience to military hierarchy. They argued: “We took this position due to the” “bad behavior” and “abuses of Lieutenant Rivera, who prevented us from going down to the city, despite the fact that we should have been off duty,” “was trying to make us do forced standing again,” and “insulted us” and “committed outrages” against Ríos. In their reading of the mutiny, the fault lay with Rivera for imposing a punishment when they were off duty, exceeding his authority by striking Ríos, and escalating the situation by threatening massive repression by other regiments.

Seeking to root out any hint of a potential coup, investigators repeatedly encouraged the accused to name one of their fellows as a ringleader or point to a civilian who had induced them to mutiny, but they maintained unity in claiming that the officer’s abuse had been the only motivating factor. One conscript even pointed out to the magistrate that “the rifles that we pointed at him didn’t have bullets.” Other witnesses confirmed the

133 Carmelo Menacho, Hernán Badini, and Hugo Leclere statements, September 10-11, MOT-71-004, AHM-TPJM.
134 Hugo Leclere statement, September 11, 1930, MOT-71-004, AHM-TPJM.
unplanned and apolitical nature of the incident, testifying that the events occurred because, in the words of aviation cadet Alfredo Ponce, “the soldiers had been drunk and up all night, they wanted to sleep.” Even though the evidence suggests purely internal triggers for the Aviation School mutiny, testimony indicates that some of the conscripts were considering taking advantage of the situation to stage a general mutiny, perhaps with political overtones, among the regiments in La Paz. This lends credence to Major Jordán’s report that, as he transported the offenders to jail, one of the soldiers “threatened me with a large revolution that would break out.” Several soldiers in the NCO School who were visiting the Pando Regiment that Sunday afternoon later testified that one of the mutineers had entered the regiment to ask a Pando conscript for help “with the mutiny because they were treated badly.” The Aviation conscript in question defended his actions, claiming that he had descended to the city in order to plead with those in the Pando Regiment not to fire on the Aviation School because the conscripts there had no plans to resist. Witnesses reported that the Pando soldiers refused, citing the short period of time left before they would be discharged. Had the mutineer found support, however, the incident might have triggered a larger conscript uprising, as had occurred with the Loa Regiment in 1921.

The turbulent political climate so elevated this incident that rumors flew through La Paz that the soldiers had long been coordinating a mutiny with two of the other regiments

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135 Alfredo Ponce statement, September 12, 1930. Mechanic Julio Lizarazu, who did not participate in the incident, agreed, testifying that the events occurred because they had “awoken with hangovers.” Julio Lizarazu statement, September 12, 1930, MOT-71-004, AHM-TPJM.

136 Major Jorge Jordán to President of Military Tribunal, September 10, 1930, MOT-71-004, AHM-TPJM.

137 Daniel Saavedra statement. See also Victorino Guzmán and Senobio Acero statements, September 12, 1930, MOT-71-004, AHM-TPJM.

138 Carlos García statement, September 11, 1930, MOT-71-004, AHM-TPJM.

139 Daniel Saavedra statement. See also Victorino Guzmán and Senobio Acero statements, September 12, 1930, MOT-71-004, AHM-TPJM.
stationed in the administrative capital – the Pando Engineer Regiment and the Ingaví Cavalry Regiment.\textsuperscript{140} Although none of the officers opined that the mutiny might indicate a larger threat, the personnel appointed to the indictment process directed pointed questions to that effect and ferreted out dozens of witnesses who had been in the Aviation School and Pando Regiment that day to independently confirm the sequence and tenor of events. Despite the fact that the accused conscripts had admitted to actions that clearly fell under the legal definition of mutiny, the military tribunal, finding no evidence of political involvement, ultimately determined that their acts of insubordination against Rivera did not constitute a mutiny. The tribunal found them guilty of insubordination and drunkenness during acts of service. Pointing to Rivera’s behavior as a mitigating factor, it sentenced the participants to three months’ confinement, which would be doubled for Carmelo Menacho, who, as the ranking conscript, was determined to be the ringleader.\textsuperscript{141}

This incident at the Aviation School took place as the country’s financial and political situation was deteriorating. By the end of September 1930, Radical Daniel Sánchez Bustamante was clearly dictating the military junta’s actions, having pushed through referenda to amend the constitution and grant the university autonomy – measures that both the Liberals and Genuines opposed. Montes soon left the unity ticket, accusing the junta of protecting Saavedra. This move forced the junta’s hand and led them to reject Saavedra publicly in a Liberal daily: “The Army is dissatisfied with the name of Señor Saavedra… The Army wants men who have already been tried in government not to act anymore.” Thus on election day in January 1931, Salamanca shared the ticket with Liberal José Luis Tejada

\textsuperscript{140} Antonio Bayá statement, September 13, 1930, MOT-71-004, AHM-TPJM.
\textsuperscript{141} Conclusions of the Military Tribunal, October 22, 1930, MOT-71-004, AHM-TPJM.
Sorzano and ran basically unopposed. Relations between the Genuines and the Liberals had broken down, however, ensuring a divided government.\textsuperscript{142}

Characterized by virulent anti-communism, the suppression of strikes, and expensive plans to establish forts in the Chaco, the Salamanca administration brought the increased visibility of divisions within the army as officers joined opposing secret lodges of the type common throughout South American militaries in the period.\textsuperscript{143} In this context, the Colorados Infantry Regiment mutinied the night of September 10, 1931. The inhabitants of the Miraflores neighborhood of La Paz where the regiment was garrisoned (see Figure 23) heard explosions and shots around midnight as the soldiers fled their barracks. When

\begin{figure}[h]
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\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{colorados_barracks_1931}
\caption{Colorados Barracks, 1931}
\label{fig:colorados_barracks}
\end{figure}

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authorities entered, they found Sub-Lieutenant Noel Ríos shot dead; the two sentries on
duty reported that the men had risen up because they had been made to “carry mud bricks
for some new buildings going up in the barracks” and because they had not been “paid the
usual wage [socorro].” By 4:00 a.m., Military Academy cadets and the soldiers in the NCO
School had rounded up all but five of the mutineers. Given its traditional support for
Salamanca’s Genuine Party, *La Razón* cast doubt on the service-related motives proffered by
the mutineers and instead suggested that the mutiny’s roots lay in “the seditious
propaganda” of “communist elements.” Military authorities’ fear of political subversion
among the ranks was so great that they dissolved the prestigious Colorados Regiment on
October 9 for “grave offenses against military honor and discipline” and dispersed its
soldiers throughout the La Paz regiments.

Less is known about this incident than the other three because the indictment
proceedings are not among the archives of the military tribunal. Records do exist, however,
from a related investigation of abuse of authority that was convened at the demand of the
seventeen Colorados conscripts accused of inciting the mutiny. In a petition to the divisional
commander, they vigorously protested that “only the soldiers will be judged and that the trial
will not include certain officers of the regiment” who were the “true perpetrators” of the
mutiny because their abuse “forced us to assume a certain attitude that was nothing more
than a reflexive and instinctive move to defend human dignity.” They then listed myriad
service-related complaints such as forced labor, poor food, the failure to provide sandals,

144 “Anoche se amotinó el Regimento Colorados,” *La Razón*, September 11, 1931, 8.
145 Julio Díaz Arguedas, *Historia del ejército de Bolivia, 1825-1932* (La Paz: n.p., 1940), 263. Dunkerley cites a
British diplomat’s report that radical propaganda was found on some of the soldiers. Dunkerley, *Orígenes
del poder militar*, 137.
and unfairly garnished wages paid with considerable delay. The incident that immediately precipitated the mutiny, they maintained, was the “mistreatment, in a shameful and denigrating manner,” of Corporal Gilberto Camacho by a sub-lieutenant on the day of the mutiny.\textsuperscript{146} The military magistrate investigated their complaints but ultimately determined that their issues with wages, labor, and equipment all stemmed from legitimate orders or financial constraints rather than constituting exploitation or embezzlement by their superiors. He did recommend that the sub-lieutenant in question face a disciplinary hearing for having kicked a soldier but concluded that his actions did not merit indictment for abuse of authority.\textsuperscript{147}

Whether or not the Colorados mutiny had political undertones, testimony during the military-justice proceedings reveals a haphazard and financially troubled institution in which acts of indiscipline were common and even urban troops regularly went without pay and performed extra duties. Professional Sergeant Huberto del Castillo, for example, testified that the breakdown of the unit’s discipline had begun in June when several soldiers complained directly to the General Staff about abusive punishment, leading to a situation in which “each soldier thought that he had the right to make claims directly to the General Staff.”\textsuperscript{148} And the unit’s commander, Colonel Alberto Sotomayor, revealed the army’s administrative and financial problems when he confirmed that the troops’ wages for May, June, and July had not been paid until July and that those for the month of August had not been paid until six days after the mutiny. The conscripts had indeed done nonmartial manual

\textsuperscript{146} Seventeen soldiers to Commander of the Second Division, September 21, 1931, ABA-01-004, AHM-TPJM.
\textsuperscript{147} Conclusions of Examining Magistrate, October 21, 1931, ABA-01-004, AHM-TPJM.
\textsuperscript{148} Sarg. Huberto del Castillo statement, October 8, 1931, ABA-01-004, AHM-TPJM.
labor, such as making and carrying mud bricks, but the commander offered documents proving that these tasks had all been officially ordered by the General Staff. As for sandals, the soldiers had received them only a few days before the mutiny. Sotomayor corroborated the soldiers’ testimony that they had been denied Sundays off, but he asserted that these measures had been necessary due to lack of personnel after the recent discharge of many conscripts for budgetary reasons. Without the remaining Colorado conscripts’ service on Sundays, Plaza Murillo, the powder storehouse, barracks, and stadium would have been left unguarded.\footnote{Col. Alberto Sotomayor statement, October 1, 1931, ABA-01-004, AHM-TPJM.} Such was the state of the national army as President Salamanca moved ever closer to war with Paraguay.

**Conclusions**

All of Bolivia’s major political actors in the early twentieth century shared a discourse of a professional, conscript army that would mold diverse men into productive Bolivians and build a strong nation, capable of defending its borders. They spoke eloquently, especially when in the opposition, about how soldiers should serve the *patria* rather than the exigencies of a particular party or politician. Once in power, however, they all wanted an army that would suppress internal unrest, guarantee that elections would swing their way, and support their coup or shore up their rule. With the reemergence of partisan conflict after 1914, the Republicans used the discourse of abused citizen-soldiers to attack Liberals’ administration of the armed forces. In the process, they fostered insubordinate behavior among conscripts – at least those who had access to the opposition press – by encouraging them to voice complaints outside of prescribed avenues and by converting life inside the barracks
into an issue for public debate in the late 1910s.

The July 1920 coup directly engaged certain La Paz-based conscripts in partisan politics, as they forged personal ties with Bautista Saavedra by first playing an important role in the coup and then serving as his spies. These factors severely undermined military hierarchy and conscripts’ respect for rank, as shown by the Campero soldiers’ ability to directly petition Saavedra regarding the assignment of officers. For that reason, the Campero mutiny in October 1920 – even though it involved the least extreme actions – is the most important for understanding the culture of insubordination that was emerging amongst the ranks of literate conscripts stationed in the conspiratorial confines of La Paz. As with all aspects of barracks life, attitudes towards authority were likely transmitted by *antiguos* to new members of the regiment along with rules about how to wear a uniform, march, and operate a rifle. Thus, when the tinder box created by Saavedra’s cuts to the army’s prestige, size, and budget was lit by the match of the March 1921 arrest of the ranking NCOs, the mutineers refused to stand down until they spoke personally with the president, chief of staff, and minister of war.

The parallel mutinies that followed the 1930 coup had far more tenuous connections to partisan politics. This difference perhaps stemmed from a sense of disillusionment produced by Saavedra’s tenure and a tumultuous decade marked by uprisings and political intrigue. In contrast to 1920, the 1930 coup was officer driven; conscripts followed rather than conspired. The 1930 and 1931 mutineers thus appeared to lack personal relationships with ruling politicians; none of the conscripts who testified in these later proceedings seem to have had connections to or have made demands on high-ranking officers or politicians.
Nor did they openly profess partisan leanings as had their predecessors.

Yet something about these two political moments determined that these groups of conscripts would be prosecuted for their actions. Barring one 1906 frontier mutiny over poor living conditions, none of the extant military-justice cases alleging rebellion, sedition, mutiny, or even insubordination occurred prior to 1920. But records survive from twelve such cases in the year and half after the July 1920 coup and from four following the installation of the military junta in June 1930, with only three in the intervening decade.°

The Loa (1921) and Colorados (1931) mutinies, in which armed conscripts broke out of their barracks and took to the streets in the middle of the night, would have been significant events in La Paz no matter what the political context. The other incidents, however, occurred within the confines of the barracks and likely only became the objects of military-justice investigations because they occurred just months after a coup. When similar incidents occurred outside of these periods, commanders likely opted against formal investigation, instead choosing to deal with such matters through disciplinary councils or informal punishment.

Although military magistrates attempted to ferret out any sign of political motivations, the conscripts involved averred service-related complaints, claiming that the institution had failed in its obligations to them. Years of contentious politics and partisan maneuvering, during which national and institutional politics became completely interwoven, made literate conscripts stationed in La Paz bolder and more willing to press their demands and to evaluate and refuse orders. In all four mutinies, the conscripts rejected military

° See boxes 59, 71, 77-78, and 94, AHM-TPJM; Prefecture-Admin boxes 140 and 147-149; Prefecture-Exped boxes 141, 163, 168, 175, 189, 190, 243-245, and 251, ALP.
procedures, found alternate ways of expressing service-related grievances, and implicitly argued that officers had violated their rights as citizens. Crucially, while many of the mutineers demanded discharge, none rejected the legitimacy of the state’s demand for their labor. They sought to negotiate the terms (rather than the very basis) of obligatory military service.

The focus on these moments of open insubordination by conscripts who were already Bolivian citizens gives the erroneous impression that most conscripts serving in La Paz were from the literate classes of professionals or skilled workers. In fact, the evidence suggests the opposite: The majority of men stationed in the seat of government were non-citizen conscripts, disenfranchised, like the majority of male Bolivians, by their illiteracy and poverty. While one legislator in 1917 estimated that fifty percent of the soldiers in the La Paz-based Campero Infantry Regiment were literate, General Gónzalo Jáuregui drew on data collected in 1926 to conclude that the Loa and Campero Regiments consisted of seventy percent Aymara and Quechua Indians, twenty percent mestizos, and ten percent whites. However, educated conscripts who were already part of the electoral system were far more likely than their illiterate counterparts, many of whom may not have spoken Spanish, to have partisan commitments. They were also more likely to draw on the citizen-soldier discourse in order to express their grievances as conscripts. Although indigenous and illiterate conscripts were likely among the hundreds of soldiers from the Loa, Murillo, and Colorados Regiments who broke out of the barracks in March 1921 and September 1931,

the officers in charge of the military-justice proceedings failed to ask any of them to testify, likely assuming that they had mindlessly followed their more educated fellows. In many ways, this disregard drew on the same logic as President Siles’s decree of amnesty for the Chayanta rebels. Both measures depended on a conviction that men with insufficient linguistic and cultural capital were not actors in their own right and could only react to abuse or inducement. Fears of partisan action motivated these mutiny investigations; in that context, only the actions of those deemed to be political actors mattered.

The energetic investigation of these cases indicates authorities’ awareness that these troops were neither docile nor under the complete control of their officers. Conscripts’ manner of collective action indicates a host of social bonds that differed from case to case: Some brought partisan leanings with them to the barracks while others mutinied for camaraderie, loyalty to a favored officer, or even regimental pride. Conscription was effective in fostering solidarity, at least among literate soldiers, but the institution failed to channel these energies as officers, knee-deep in partisan intrigue, modeled conspiracy rather than institutional respect for hierarchy. These investigations of conscript-led mutinies reveal the indiscipline and political paranoia at the heart of the military’s hierarchical structure.
Chapter 4: *Pisando Fuerte* in the Chaco: The Successes and Failures of the Bolivian Army and Society at War

In June and July of 1932, years of minor diplomatic and military scuffles between Bolivia and Paraguay over their border in the Chaco culminated in clashes at a small lake that put the nations on a path to war. After playing the provocateur in the opposition, Daniel Salamanca of the Genuine Republican Party had finally achieved the presidency but faced fierce opposition in Congress and from a mobilized populace. He was an aggressive supporter of Bolivian expansion in the Chaco, insisting that Bolivia must “*pisar fuerte*” – stand firm and act with determination. As news of Paraguay’s “aggression” spread on July 19, 1932, the president fanned the flames of patriotic outrage amongst the crowd convoked in La Paz’s Plaza Murillo. Addressing the assembled as “Citizens, sons of Bolivia,” he hailed their “magnificent reaction” as evidence of “the vigor and vitality of Bolivian patriotism.” He then declared, “If a nation does not react to the insults inflicted upon it, it does not deserve to be a nation.” Confident that Paraguay could not credibly stand up to its larger, wealthier neighbor and that his German-trained army would swiftly prevail, the president informed his audience that expenditures of blood and capital would have to be made, urging them to swear that “we will sacrifice everything to defend the patria.” He implored his people to demonstrate a patriotic willingness to fight while assuring them that his administration, the state’s bureaucratic structures, and the military’s high command would

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effectively equip, transport, and deploy Bolivia’s troops.

Despite an enthusiastic response by Bolivians from diverse social classes and regions to initial calls for mobilization, military and diplomatic mistakes quickly turned the war into a disaster. A year later, as Bolivia’s troops retreated and the injured returned with horrific tales, mobilization looked more futile, if not suicidal, than patriotic. In this context, the indígenas comunarios of Ichoca (Inquisivi, La Paz) sent the prefect of La Paz a list of the 218 men mobilized “just from our canton” and reminded him that “we have also contributed foodstuffs to National Defense, in addition to our contribution [aporte] of blood.” After invoking these credentials, the petition asked for news from “our sons [who] are fighting in the Southeast… of whom we have heard nothing.”2 This petition asserted the comunarios’ patriotic contributions to the war effort while simultaneously criticizing the state for failing to keep them informed of their loved ones’ fates. As this petition suggests, the Bolivian state and military struggled to field a large army effectively in a remote region while managing frustrations on the home front. The situation would only deteriorate over the coming months.

The Chaco War was the most deadly interstate conflict in twentieth-century Latin American history.3 Fought with the tools of modern warfare, it also represented Bolivia’s most significant armed conflict, dwarfing the armies mustered for the Wars of Independence (1809-1825), the Confederation (1836-1841), the Pacific (1879-1883), and Acre (1903). Lasting thirty-five months, the war took the lives of more than fifty-thousand Bolivians and

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2 Petition of indígenas comunarios transcribed in Prefect of La Paz to Director of Military Mail #161, September 13, 1933, Prefecture-Admin box 208, ALP.

led to the capture of an additional twenty thousand. Along with diplomatic mistakes, blundering and infighting among members of the government and high command, it would leave Bolivia with far less land in the Chaco than it had held before its political and military leaders provoked the war.\(^4\)

The traumatic defeat in the Chaco proved to be a turning point in Bolivian history that is most commonly understood based on the novels, campaign diaries, and essays published in the war’s aftermath. Written by Bolivian intellectuals in exile or prisoner-of-war camps, works such as Augusto Céspedes’s *Sangre de mestizos*, Jesús Lara’s *Repete*, Augusto Guzmán’s *Prisionero de guerra*, and Carlos Montenegro’s *Nacionalismo y coloniaje* are still taught in Bolivian schools. These texts offer a powerful indictment of pre-war Bolivian history and social structure as leading inexorably to the war’s disastrous results. A corrupt oligarchy, they argue, had failed to modernize while selling the nation’s wealth to foreign imperialists and maintaining colonial-style social relations with the abject indigenous masses who were the true victims of the war. Although some focus overwhelmingly on the horrors and suffering of trench warfare in the region, many offer solutions to the nation’s ills through various combinations of nationalism, *indigenismo*, and even variants of socialism, be it reformist or revolutionary. The war, they suggest, would awaken the masses to their oppression and give birth to a purer and therefore more consequential nationalism.\(^5\)

These remarkable works were penned by intellectuals who emerged from the


reformist youth movements that had developed during the Siles administration. Espousing ideologies that ranged from radical leftism to reformist nationalism, these works at best capture the wartime experience of urban, literate men, such as the conscripts who had led the mutinies explored in chapter 3. Written by disillusioned men who already saw themselves as belonging, as citizens, to the Bolivian nation, they focus relentlessly on the non-citizen conscripts who hailed from the rural and illiterate majority. However, in trying to speak for these men, they silence them just as effectively as the magistrates who ignored them during the military-justice proceedings of the 1910s and 1920s. In denouncing elite evasion and the abusive impressment of rural indigenous men, Guzmán, Céspedes, and Lara offer a narrative that emphasizes indigenous soldiers largely as victims. Lacking empirical studies to the contrary, scholars of Bolivian history have reinforced these visions of the war; indeed, one even asserts that “the equation between indigenous and frontline was virtually absolute.”

Turning to more empirical studies of the war, we find the work of military and diplomatic historians focused on Bolivia’s failures of leadership, strategy, and logistics. These works condemn Salamanca for rushing into the war, interfering in military decisions, and repeatedly dismissing diplomatic options. They indict an overly politicized officer corps for poor strategy, infighting, and carousing at command centers. And they show how poor logistics left soldiers to suffer without adequate transportation, ammunition, food, and water.

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Yet these studies have surprising little to say about how the state apparatus implemented a wartime recruitment drive that successfully mobilized approximately 200,000 men. Nor do they examine the ways in which individual Bolivians of all social strata reacted to state demands for their labor, whether on the frontlines as soldiers or on the home front as contributors to the war effort. René Arze Aguirre’s excellent 1987 study of social conflict in rural areas is the only work to engage seriously with these questions. Quoting a wealth of primary sources from the La Paz Prefecture, Arze Aguirre argues that unrest provoked by the arbitrary violence of recruitment patrols combined with long-standing land conflicts to destabilize the countryside. Although he does not draw on them in his narrative, Arze Aguirre also includes valuable oral histories from ten veterans, most of whom are Quechua-speakers from rural Chuquisaca.

Building on Arze Aguirre’s valuable contributions, this chapter primarily draws on internal military and governmental sources while also making use of memoirs and the few oral histories of veterans that have been published. It focuses, above all, on the mechanisms and conflicts associated with the first real test of mass conscription, tracking how the Bolivian state managed to recruit and transport to a remote region more than twenty times the number of conscripts it had been incorporating and training on a yearly basis. Secondly, it offers new perspectives on the mobilization and wartime experiences of Bolivian soldiers on the home front, in the rearguard, and in combat. Along with court-martial records, orders,

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8 Calculated based on an average army size of 7,500 noted by US military attaches between 1926 and 1928. See Combat Estimate, August 25, 1926, and January 10, 1928, box 557, f. Bolivia; Jesse S. Cottrell to Secretary of State, September 13, 1926, box 187, f. 6000-6420, RG 165, NM 84-77, NARA.
correspondence, and lists produced by the Bolivian military portray the agonies suffered by the country’s soldiers and suggest the contours that structured their desertion and even mutiny. Taken together, these sources suggest that the Bolivian army could not retain, care for, or even keep track of the soldiers that the state had expended so much effort to recruit. Drawing on Paraguayan sources, this chapter also depicts the conditions experienced by the thousands who spent years in prisoner-of-war camps after military blunders resulted in the repeated mass surrender of Bolivian troops.

Yet these sources also suggest a vision of the Chaco War that goes beyond strategic errors, indigenous victims, and disillusioned intellectuals. They show that initial patriotic enthusiasm to defend Bolivia crossed regional, ethnic, class, and gender divides, in particular highlighting the importance to mobilization of literate women’s cross-class efforts. While previous accounts have effaced the participation of non-indigenous elements on the frontlines, these sources reveal that, while rural folk surely constituted the majority, frontline troops were far from homogenous. Probing the factors that structured wartime recruitment, this chapter combines a policy-related view with analysis of practical implementation to show how recruitment practices changed over the course of the war as the government made a series of often surprising compromises with various interest groups in order to provide soldiers for the army while ensuring continued production on the home front. Finally, this chapter explains the preexisting and new categories (such as omiso, remiso, deserter, and reservist on assignment) that came to prominence during the war and would become paramount in the post-war period.
War in the Chaco: The Challenges of Large-Scale Mobilization

Bolivia and Paraguay’s dispute over the Chaco Boreal dated back to independence, but a series of conferences and unratified treaties had done little to fix the border. An inhospitable expanse the size of Kentucky, the contested lowland region had few natural resources and was sparsely populated by indigenous groups like the Lengua and Nivaclé. An arid dustbowl covered with tangled underbrush (see Figure 24), the Chaco had few reliable water sources, except when the unpredictable rainy season turned it into a muddy quagmire, impossible to traverse. Mosquitos, scorpions, and snakes plagued those who ventured into this region where temperatures could soar to over one-hundred degrees or drop below freezing, sometimes changing over sixty degrees in the course of a day.9

Figure 24: A Bolivian Patrol in the Chaco
Source: Alejandro de Quesada, The Chaco War, 13.

Nestled in the Andes at over ten-thousand feet above sea level, the highland region

where the majority of Bolivians lived had a geography and climate that were completely alien to those of the Chaco. However, this lowland region became a focus of nationalist aggression for Bolivian leaders still smarting over the cession of the Pacific corridor to Chile and the Acre rubber region to Brazil.\textsuperscript{10} The Chaco also represented the possibility of securing a navigable port on the Paraguay River and thereby obtaining an export route to the Atlantic by way of the Paraná and Rio de la Plata. In contrast to the thousand-mile trek from La Paz to the region, Paraguay’s capital sits directly across the river from the Chaco (see location of Asunción at the confluence of the Paraguay and Pilcomayo Rivers, middle right of Figure 25). Although both countries remember the conflict as a proxy war between Standard Oil and Royal Dutch Shell for export routes and imagined oil deposits in the region, little convincing evidence has emerged to support this narrative.\textsuperscript{11} For its part, Paraguay sought to repair its economy and prevent further territorial losses after a crushing defeat in the War of the Triple Alliance (1867-1870). It staked its claims by selling large swaths of cattle-ranching land in the Chaco to the powerful Argentine Casado family and settling Canadian Mennonites near the disputed territory (see grey area of Figure 25). Minor diplomatic and military clashes occurred throughout the 1920s, as both powers conducted exploratory expeditions and founded fortines in the region.\textsuperscript{12}

When Salamanca assumed the presidency of Bolivia in March 1931, he faced a

\textsuperscript{10} Rout, \textit{Politics of the Chaco Peace Conference}, 24-25.


\textsuperscript{12} David Zook characterizes this term as untranslatable and describes fortines as “more akin to camps than forts, since they were collections of rude huts rather than fortifications.” David H. Zook, Jr., \textit{The Conduct of the Chaco War} (New York: Bookman Associates, 1960), 41n.28. See also Díaz Arguedas, \textit{Fastos Militares de Bolivia}, 425.
Figure 25: Map of Select Chaco Battles and Current Border

Source: Matthew Hughes, “Logistics and the Chaco War,” 427. Prewar border noted reflects the Ichaso-Benitez agreement of 1894, which received little support from either nation and went unratified. Alternate lines were drawn in 1879, 1887, and 1907. Muñoz was Bolivia’s command center from July 1932 until Kundt’s resignation and its abandonment in December 1933. Most of the combat during the first year and a half occurred around Boquerón, Toledo, and Nanawa. By the ceasefire in June 1935, Bolivian troops held a line at Villamontes, north of the current border.
hostile Congress, vocal groups of radicalized students and workers, and an economic crisis so deep that he suspended international debt payments in July 1931.\textsuperscript{13} He had witnessed the nation uniting behind his political rival, Hernando Siles, after a December 1928 Paraguayan attack on a Bolivian outpost and therefore knew that patriotic outrage could distract from partisan contention. So, when Paraguay ousted Bolivian forces from a lake that they had taken from Paraguay the previous month, Salamanca used it as an excuse to order his army to take three more of Paraguay’s outposts.\textsuperscript{14} Early victories for Paraguay (September to November 1932) gave way to an offensive in which Bolivia recaptured its original fortines and took three of Paraguay’s (December 1932 to April 1933). As this point, Bolivian forces were only a hundred miles from Asunción. However, this would mark the apex of the war for Bolivia; the ensuing months brought repeated retreats and several mass captures of its soldiers, equipment, and weapons. These humiliating defeats brought down not only General Hans Kundt, the German officer recalled from Europe to lead Bolivia’s forces, but also President Salamanca, who was ousted by the military high command in December 1934. By that time, Paraguay’s troops had reached populated areas near the Andean foothills, holding far more ground than its diplomats had ever claimed prior to the war. Yet Paraguay had also incurred heavy losses, now had long supply lines, and had exhausted loans from Argentina. Both belligerents were thus ready for peace when they met in Buenos Aires in May 1935. The protocol signed on June 12 provided mechanisms for demobilizing the

\textsuperscript{13} Aramayo, "The Intellectual Origins..." (diss.), 171-72.
armies, exchanging prisoners, and fixing the border. Negotiations over these terms stretched until the July 1938 signing of the final peace treaty, which was later ratified by the Bolivian legislature and a Paraguayan plebiscite. It determined a border south of the 1935 truce line but that still awarded Paraguay three-quarters of the Chaco Boreal (see Figure 25) and left Bolivia with a swamp rather than the desired port in the northwest.\textsuperscript{15}

Estimates of the war’s size and costs vary widely (see Table 4) since poor record-keeping during the conflict has been compounded by a lack of systematic research. In his 1998 monograph on contemporary conscription, sociologist Juan Ramón Quintana cites a 1936 memoir that claimed that official records document the recruitment of 162,083 men; however, he prefers the Zook and Dunkerley estimates of 250,000.\textsuperscript{16} Several other sources offer an alternate estimate of 200,000.\textsuperscript{17} Citations for these numbers, along with figures for those killed, all trace back to works published between 1937 and 1944 by Colonels Aquiles Vergara Vicuña and Julio Díaz Arguedas, neither of whom offer any basis for their estimates.\textsuperscript{18} And few scholars have even bothered to venture a guess as to how many were wounded or disabled.\textsuperscript{19} The equivocal nature of these figures is not the only barrier to quantifying the war’s impact on the population: The absence of census data increases the

\textsuperscript{15} This summary of the war is drawn from: Brockmann, \textit{El general y sus presidentes}; Dunkerley, \textit{Orígenes del poder militar}; Querejazu Calvo, \textit{Masamachay}; Zook, \textit{Conduct of the Chaco War}.


\textsuperscript{19} Farcau estimates that the wounded alone were approximately double those killed – or 100,000. Farcau, \textit{The Chaco War}, 230.
difficulty of this task.\textsuperscript{20} Calculations based on the range of estimates available suggest that Bolivia may have mobilized somewhere between a low of 6.5 and a high of 12.5 percent of its total population during the war and that between 2 and 3 percent of that population died.\textsuperscript{21} These ranges put losses on par with those suffered by European nations in World War I (approximately 3 percent) and indicate a recruitment rate similar to that of the US Civil War (approximately 10 percent).\textsuperscript{22}

Table 4: Estimates for the Chaco War

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Estimated Population</th>
<th>Men Recruited 1932-1935</th>
<th>% Recruited</th>
<th>Deaths</th>
<th>% Dead</th>
<th>Money Spent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bolivia</td>
<td>2,000,000 to 2,500,000</td>
<td>162,083 to 250,000</td>
<td>6.5% to 12.5%</td>
<td>50,000 to 60,000</td>
<td>20% to 37%</td>
<td>$228 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paraguay</td>
<td>900,000</td>
<td>140,000 to 150,000</td>
<td>15.5% to 16.7%</td>
<td>36,000 to 40,000</td>
<td>24% to 29%</td>
<td>$128 million</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Although Bolivia fielded more men over the course of the war, its soldiers in the region never outnumbered those of Paraguay until the final months of the conflict.\textsuperscript{23} The existence of Chaco armies in the plural is therefore a more accurate way of thinking about the war. Of course, estimates of these armies’ sizes and casualty rates suffer from the same deficiencies as those for the war as a whole. According to the best information currently

\textsuperscript{20} Bolivia conducted national censuses in 1900 and 1950. Based on unclear sources, estimates of Bolivia’s population in 1932 range from two to three million inhabitants. However, since the 1950 census reported a population of only 2.7 million, the 3 million figure should be dismissed as inaccurate.

\textsuperscript{21} To calculate these figures, I took the high and low numbers for the recruited and war dead from Table 4 and used estimates of 2 and 2.5 million for the population.


\textsuperscript{23} See, for example, Zook, \textit{Conduct of the Chaco War}, 149.
available, then, approximately 15,000 Bolivians participated in the first phase from June to December 1932. Although only 2,500 died, few remained in the field for the next wave of mobilization; the rest had fallen prisoner or been evacuated due to wounds or illness.\footnote{Brockman cites a New York Times article for the total mobilized. Enumerating particular detachments but offering no citations, Querejazu offers similar numbers. Brockmann, \textit{El general y sus presidentes}, 247; Querejazu Calvo, \textit{Masamaclay}, 63-64. The number of dead is widely cited; see, for example, Dunkerley, \textit{Orígenes del poder militar}, 149; Klein, \textit{Parties and Political Change}, 178.} The second phase of the war comprised General Hans Kundt’s year of command, over the course of which some 77,000 men left for the region, 14,000 died, 10,000 fell prisoner, 6,000 deserted, and 32,000 were evacuated due to wounds or illness. This left an army of 7,000 in the field, since the other 8,000 were dedicated to rearguard services.\footnote{Widely cited, these numbers trace back to uncited material in Díaz Arguedas, \textit{Los elegidos de la gloria}, 454.} Kundt’s successor, General Enrique Peñaranda, fielded an army of 45,000-55,000, and another 30,000-50,000 men participated in the final six months of the war. By this time Bolivia was recruiting sixteen-year-olds, men in their forties, and those who had previously been rejected as unfit for service.\footnote{Zook, \textit{Conduct of the Chaco War}, 232; Querejazu Calvo, \textit{Masamaclay}, 416-25; Klein, \textit{Parties and Political Change}, 182.}

Throughout the war, Salamanca and the high command issued calls for particular cohorts of reservists, both those who had completed their military service and those who had been discharged through the lottery, to present to political or military authorities. The first mobilization order came on July 22, 1932, and applied to the two most recent cohorts of trained reservists.\footnote{Chief of Staff to Prefect of La Paz, #1663-32, July 22, 1932, Prefecture-Admin box 208, ALP.} A second call issued in August mobilized trained and untrained men belonging to the cohorts conscripted between 1928 and 1932 but only applied to those who
lived in departmental capitals.\textsuperscript{28} As shown in Table 5, Bolivia called up additional men during the siege of Boquerón (3), again as Kundt travelled to take command late in 1932 (4-5), then as his army ceded ground in the final months of 1933 (6-8), and again as Peñaranda’s army did the same in May 1934 (9-11). When Vice President José Luis Téjada Sorzano assumed the presidency after Salamanca’s ouster, he declared general mobilization in January 1935 (12). Rather than employing a lottery system, these calls-up mobilized entire cohorts of men, investing all with the duty to present to the nearest civilian or military authority. These authorities were then responsible for transporting the reservists to the nearest mobilization center in cities such as La Paz and Oruro. There, officials would register them and physicians would examine them to ensure that they were fit for service before travelling to the front.

\textbf{Table 5: Bolivian Calls for Mobilization, 1932-1934}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Cohort</th>
<th>Age Range</th>
<th>Category</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 July 22, 1932</td>
<td>1930-1931</td>
<td>20-21</td>
<td>Trained reservists</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 August 5, 1932</td>
<td>1927-1931</td>
<td>20-24</td>
<td>Trained and untrained reservists from department capitals only</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Sept. 23, 1932</td>
<td>1923-1926</td>
<td>25-28</td>
<td>Trained reservists nationwide and untrained reservists from departmental capitals only</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Nov. 18, 1932</td>
<td>1923-1932</td>
<td>19-28</td>
<td>All (trained and untrained reservists plus those who failed to register or present for service)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 February 1933</td>
<td>1933</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>All</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Sept. 12, 1933</td>
<td>1934</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>All</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 October 5, 1933</td>
<td>1921-1922</td>
<td>30-31</td>
<td>All</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 December 12, 1933</td>
<td>1917-1920</td>
<td>32-35</td>
<td>All</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 March 17, 1934</td>
<td>1935, 1916</td>
<td>18, 37</td>
<td>All for 1935; NCOs from 1916</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 Prior to March 28, 1934</td>
<td>1915-1916</td>
<td>19-35</td>
<td>\textit{30% of indígenas}</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 May 3, 1934</td>
<td>1915-1916</td>
<td>37-38</td>
<td>All</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 December 9, 1934</td>
<td>General mobilization of all able-bodied men</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Supreme Decrees accessed at \url{http://www.gacetaoficialdebolivia.gob.bo}; General Staff to Prefect of La Paz, #1663-32, July 22, 1932; #2091-32, August 5, 1932; #3300-32, September 23, 1932; #3542-32, November 22, 1932; Chief of Recruitment to Prefect of La Paz, #972, February 27, 1933; General Staff to Prefects, #2997, October 5, 1933; President of Recruitment Commission to Prefect of La Paz, #275, March 27, 1934; Corregidor of Italaque to Prefect of La Paz, March 28, 1934, Prefecture-Admin box 208, ALP.

\textsuperscript{28} Chief of Staff to Prefect of La Paz, #2030-32, August 5, 1932, Prefecture-Admin box 208, ALP.
Mobilizing a large field army represented an enormous challenge for Bolivia. Reservists throughout the country not only had to be made aware of the calls but also had to choose to present rather than evade. Some, no doubt, made this choice out of patriotism, expressing a sense of duty to defend Bolivia’s territorial claims personally. Others likely sought the romance and adventure of war. Many others, especially as the war turned disastrous, might mobilize only if the state and society, both at the national and local level, produced the right combination of incentives and disincentives. They would need to believe that the army would not needlessly waste their lives and that their families, lands, and businesses would be cared for in their absence. They would also need to believe that the legal, social, and physical sanctions for evasion would be severe enough to affect their daily lives. Much of the responsibility for creating these conditions lay with local representatives of the central government, such as corregidores and subprefects. For mobilization to work, these local authorities had to inform the inhabitants of their regions of each call, ensure that those subsumed within the call presented, and arrange for their transportation.

Although a small number of leftist intellectuals vocally opposed the war, the majority of middle- and upper-class Bolivians responded with ardent nationalism. As occurs in most wars, the onset of conflict galvanized many Bolivians throughout the country to patriotically volunteer, present when mobilized, or provide financial and moral support to the troops. Retrospective memoirs, written by educated soldiers from urban areas, describe this patriotic fever amongst their peers in Oruro, La Paz, and Cochabamba, who clamored to “stand up to

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29 For opposition to the war, see Aramayo, "The Intellectual Origins..." (diss.), 174-229.
defend [Bolivia] until death itself.” These authors portray the changes wrought in cities, where the war became the only topic of discussion and appreciative crowds gathered to cheer on army detachments. Images from the era (see Figure 26) depict throngs of men and women from a range of social classes gathered in front of trains filled with uniformed soldiers, who, according to one memoir, “created a dreadful cacophony, launching cheers for Bolivia and screaming down with Paraguay.” Archival sources support these narratives of patriotic fervor: Even prisoners begged the prefect to allow them to “lend their services to the patria.” They also document the eagerness of educated youths to leave their homes, schools, and jobs to volunteer for service. For

![Figure 26: Reservists Departing La Paz, 1932](https://example.com/figure26.jpg)

Source: Salustio Selaya P. Documentos y memorias de la Guerra del Chaco, 48.

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31 Herbas Cabrera, El cristo de Tarairí, 25; Pozo Trigo, Relatos y anécdotas, 19.

32 Granier Chirveches, Diario de campaña, 35; Böhrt Gastelú, Deber cumplido, 29.

33 Prefect of La Paz to Chief of Staff, #222, July 26, 1932. See also letters from August 5, 1932, and August 10, 1932, Prefecture-Admin box 208, ALP.
example, two cousins from Cochabamba were so determined to go to war that they gave up their studies in July 1932. Being too young to enlist, they volunteered as paramedics with the Red Cross but soon found a way to take up arms and join the frontline troops in order to “fulfill our duty to the patria despite our young age.”34

The volunteers and reservists described in these sources hailed from the literate classes of elites, professionals, and urban workers – the same types of men that had demonstrated rank insubordination during the 1920s and early 1930s. In fact, they probably responded to calls for mobilization for the same reason that they had been insubordinate: because they saw themselves as citizen-soldiers with both rights and duties. The service-related complaints that had sparked their insubordinate behavior stemmed from a belief that they deserved better treatment as honorable servants of the patria. This self-image is the same one that inspired many of them to assume the duty of fighting to defend Bolivia’s claims in the Chaco and that would radicalize them after they witnessed their civilian and military leaders’ botched conduct of the war.

The lack of comprehensive recruitment records stymies attempts to determine the social composition of the men who responded to early calls for mobilization. The available records contain only names and, occasionally, residence and next of kin, so we lack data on the origin and social status of those who presented for service.35 However, more information is available for the men court martialed for desertion during the first months of the war. Although certainly not a random sample of all who mobilized, the data gathered during

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34 Petition of Julio Ríos and Eduardo Canedo to military tribunal, January 31, 1933, DES-16-021, AHM-TPJM.
35 See fifty-plus volumes with lists and related correspondence, Archivo Central del Ministerio de Defensa Nacional, La Paz, Bolivia (hereafter cited as AC-MDN).
ninety-eight hearings from September 1932 to January 1933 shows a remarkable diversity among those accused of deserting from the frontlines and rearguard. These soldiers hailed from over fifty cities and rural communities in all of Bolivia’s departments except Beni. As shown in Table 6, although the majority was at least semi-literate, almost forty percent told the military magistrate that they could not read or write. Farmworker was by far the most prevalent profession (forty-six percent), but bricklayers, traders, cobblers, carpenters, smiths, miners, mechanics, electricians, typographers, and students also numbered among these deserters. At least sixty-five percent of these deserters had already completed obligatory military service; eight men had been discharged through the lottery, one had received an exemption, and none admitted to failing to register for service.\(^{36}\) Five soldiers testified that they volunteered as soon as the war broke out, but the vast majority declared that they had patriotically presented to local authorities when their category was called, and only one said that his corregidor had forced him to present.\(^{37}\) While claims of patriotism were certainly structured by the context of defending themselves against desertion charges, soldiers likely did not lie outright about prior service and wartime mobilization because these facts were so easily verifiable.

### Table 6: Literacy of Deserters, September 1932 - January 1933

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Professed Level of Literacy</th>
<th>Illiterate</th>
<th>Able to read “a little”</th>
<th>Not asked, at least able to sign name</th>
<th>Fully literate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Deserters</strong></td>
<td>38.7%</td>
<td>16.1%</td>
<td>24.7%</td>
<td>20.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


\(^{36}\) Two additional men were too young to have previously served, and the other twenty-two were not asked about their prior service.

\(^{37}\) Data drawn from DES-15-016, DES-15-018, DES-15-021, DES-16-001, DES-16-003, DES-16-006, DES-16-007, DES-16-008, DES-16-009, DES-16-010, DES-16-011, DES-16-013, DES-16-014, DES-16-015, DES-16-017, DES-16-020, DES-16-021, DES-16-023, DES-16-026, AHM-TPJM.
Thus, even if students and urban professionals were overrepresented in early contingents, archival sources show that they were not the only Bolivians to respond to calls to defend the nation. In fact, the oral histories of at least some rural indigenous men reflect a retrospective narrative of patriotic mobilization in many ways similar to that of the educated soldiers who later penned memoirs. Anthropologists working among Aymara speakers in southern La Paz in the 1960s report that this particular community claimed to have voluntarily sent fifty-four of its young men to fulfill early calls for wartime mobilization. And, despite Arze Aguirre’s interest in the violence of rural impressment, six of the ten veterans from rural Chuquisaca and Potosí whose oral histories he includes assert that they presented, whereas only one admits to being impressed. For example, Victoriano Nava, who worked in agriculture in Ravelo (Potosí, but near Sucre) prior to the war, remembers presenting in 1934 at the age of seventeen, even though his cohort had not yet been called. When pressed as to his motives, he responded “because of my friends… of course I went early.” Similarly, Luis Michel, who self-identified as a campesino and lamented his inability to read, claims to have presented when called up at eighteen. Although he acknowledges that many of his fellow farmworkers in the Zudáñez province of Chuquisaca “had taken to the hills,” he distinguishes himself from them: “We, through our choice [nuestro gusto], went to present.” These men attribute their decision to enlist to ties of friendship and personal pride. Their narratives, however, are certainly influenced by a postwar atmosphere that

40 Arze Aguirre, *Guerra y conflictos sociales*, 153, 163.
diminished the likelihood that they would report that a local authority had persuaded or even forced them to present.

Yet the archival sources that document mobilization efface the negotiations, mechanisms, and individual choices that produced rural reservists. Although correspondence in the La Paz Prefecture archives indicates that corregidores and subprefects regularly sent reservists to the La Paz recruitment center throughout the war, they remain silent on these men’s circumstances, motivations, and even identities.\textsuperscript{42} Similarly, the Ministry of Defense Archive’s fifty-plus volumes related to mobilization simply list the name and sometimes the residence of men presenting from in the highlands and valleys. Knowing that Benedicto Flores came from Morococala (Oruro) and travelled to the front in August 1932 with five hundred other soldiers as part of the Fifteenth Infantry Regiment reveals little about how or why he mobilized for war.\textsuperscript{43} Service documents are also silent as to these matters. For example, Severino Veizaga’s military-service booklet identified him as an illiterate trader from Arque (Cochabamba), showed his completion of military service from January 1929 until November 1930, and proved that he had presented at the Aroma Cavalry barracks on July 20, 1932.\textsuperscript{44} What looks like orderly mobilization in these records likely obscures a wide range of circumstances, including patriotic volunteers, reluctant or coerced reservists, and men not eligible or fit for service.

\textsuperscript{42} See, for example, telegram of Suprefect of Achacachi transcribed in Prefect of La Paz to Chief of Staff, #237, July 29, 1932, Prefecture-Admin box 208; letter from Subprefect of Luribay transcribed in Prefect of La Paz to Commander of Second Division, #108, March 25, 1933, Prefecture-Admin box 208; letter from Subprefect of Nor Yungas transcribed in Prefect of La Paz to Auxiliary Chief of Staff, #16, February 4, 1935, Prefecture-Admin box 209, ALP.

\textsuperscript{43} List of soldiers attached to General Federico Velsaco to Commander of the First Division, #3131-32, September 5, 1932, Regimientos de Infantería 1 al 23, tomo 1, AC-MDN.

\textsuperscript{44} See document attesting to his presentation, bearing the stamp of the Aroma Cavalry Regiment, dated July 20, 1932, DES-16-013, AHM-TPJM.
Testimony from wartime military tribunals in fact suggests that, even during the first months of the war, the mobilization system by no means functioned perfectly in rural areas. The state’s fragile bureaucracy faced many obstacles in its task of disseminating information about mobilization to every farm and village throughout the territory. Those captured as evaders could thus credibly claim ignorance. For example, after being taken on the road between Tupiza and Atocha in December 1932, Ambrosio Chambi, a monolingual Aymara speaker from Acha Chilcani (Corque, Carangas, Oruro), claimed that he had completed military service but was unaware that his category had already been mobilized: “I have my service booklet in order, and I didn't think that they had called up those who had already served but rather only omisos.” He further testified that, when he was captured, he had been en route to his distant home with the express purpose of recovering his booklet and “presenting in Oruro if it was necessary.” While Chambi may have feigned ignorance of mobilization calls in order to avoid punishment, his audience treated this claim as far from implausible. Testimony that patrones had prevented reservists from presenting was apparently also quite credible. Invoking the system of pongueaje in which colonos had to perform unpaid domestic labor for their patrones, Ramón Julio Choque, an illiterate farmworker from a canton in southern Potosí, told the magistrate, “I knew of the call, but my patrón made me work in his store in Atocha, telling me that I could present later.”

Some of the men who did present seem to have done so with the impression that they would not be sent to the Chaco because of physical ailments that they assumed would make them unfit for frontline service. These soldiers later complained bitterly that the

45 Ambrosio Chambi statement, December 19, 1932, DES-16-009, AHM-TPJM.
46 Ramón Julio Choque statement, December 23, 1932, DES-16-009, AHM-TPJM.
doctors responsible for examining them in mobilization centers had sent them to the front
despite old wounds, venereal disease, and disorders that would make wartime service either
impossible or extremely painful. For example, Teodocio Aberanga, a tailor from Carabuco
(La Paz) who had recently completed fourteen months of obligatory military service,
complained that even though he had broken his clavicle in June and still could not bear the
weight of a pack, the doctor “had not even examined me well and just by glancing at me said
that I [was] good [and] that I could march off.” Mariano Mamani told a similar tale. This
semiliterate farmworker had presented for service in January 1930 but had been discharged
six months later due to an illness that affected his lungs. He testified to having resisted calls
for mobilization because of his illness but that the corregidor of Locotal (Cochabamba) had
used brutal force to make him present by “punishing me with a whip.” Mamani further
claimed that the corregidor had assured him that he would soon be released on medical
grounds, which suggests that some local authorities may have at times sent unfit men in
order to give the impression that they were energetically enforcing mobilization orders.
However, Mamani said that the doctor had ignored his symptoms, just asking him to stick
out his tongue before declaring him perfectly healthy. Aberanga, Mamani, and others who
voiced similar complaints may not have presented in good faith, but if their assertions were
true, then they ventured into the Chaco believing that the state had failed in its obligation to
ensure they were healthy before sending them to war.

47 See Felipe Arias, Teodocio Aberanga, Juan Ticona, Mariano Mamani, and Felix Rivero statements
September 19-20, 1932, DES-16-023; Froilan Navarro statement December 16, 1932, DES-16-008; Justo
Castro statement, January 5, 1933, DES-16-015, AHM-TPJM.
48 Teodocio Aberanga statement, September 20, 1935, DES-16-023, AHM-TPJM.
49 Mariano Mamani statement, September 20, 1932, DES-16-023, AHM-TPJM.
These testimonies also suggest that the army had few mechanisms for keeping track of its soldiers’ identities after they enrolled at mobilization centers. Two soldiers even claimed that they had entered the army as “replacements” because their own cohort had not yet been called for service. This was not legally sanctioned, and neither man explained how it worked. Did they adopt the names of the men whom they were replacing? Did money or other favors facilitate the transaction? Pablo Meneces, an illiterate cook from Cochabamba, said that he replaced a friend “who didn’t want to go to the front” simply by exchanging his clothing for his friend’s uniform. And a semi-literate barber from Oruro named Juan Yugar testified, “I entered out of patriotism as a replacement for an indio cito since it wasn’t yet my turn to present.” These claims were, of course, structured by the adversarial situation of desertion proceedings, in which it behooved the accused to present himself as an eager soldier who had patriotically replaced a less willing one. More surprisingly, neither case indicates that a person of lower social status served for one of a higher status. On the contrary, Yugar explicitly distinguishes himself (and his patriotism) from the “little Indian” whom he replaced.

The first army that Bolivia fielded in the Chaco thus consisted of reservists from diverse regions and social classes, who, at least in retrospect, represented themselves as eager to fulfill a duty to defend the patria. But the difficulties of mobilization suggested by these testimonies foreshadowed the enormity of the challenges that would lie ahead, especially once it became clear that far from attaining quick victory, Bolivia would suffer many punishing defeats. Even during the first months of the war, newly mobilized reservists were

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50 Pablo Meneces statement, November 27, 1932, DES-16-011, AHM-TPJM.
51 Juan Yugar statement, December 27, 1932, DES-16-011, AHM-TPJM.
accusing local authorities of using physical coercion, *patrones* of preventing them from presenting, and the army itself of failing to properly examine and keep track of them. These processes would only intensify in the latter stages of the conflict.

*Madrinas de Guerra*: Facilitating and Incentivizing Mobilization

As did their male counterparts, elite and middle-class women saw an opportunity to enhance their visibility in society through the war. Some became nurses, but many more served as the *madrinas de guerra* [godmothers or sponsors of war] who provided financial, practical, social, and moral incentives for men to present for service. Describing women who wrote to often unfamiliar soldiers in order to boost their morale, the term *madrina de guerra* has been used throughout the Spanish-speaking world, most prominently in the Spanish Civil War. 52 However, scholars have yet to fully explore *madrinas*’ roles or look for differences across wars and nations. Historian Bridget Chesterton has shown that upper-class Paraguayan women serving as *madrinas* during the Chaco War garnered respect for their role in boosting soldiers’ morale and providing them with supplies such as toothpaste, cigarettes, and yerba mate [Paraguayan tea]. Analyzing a set of letters between a *madrina* and several of her *ahijados* [godsons], she argues that although the wartime situation facilitated cross-class relationships, *madrinas* employed a tone of formality to maintain social distance from their *ahijados*. 53 Scholars looking at the Bolivian side of the war have yet to investigate the topic, so the only available portrayals of *madrinas* come from educated soldiers’ memoirs, which depict the young *madrinas* who saw them off to war as potential romantic partners.

53 Bridget Maria Chesterton, "Guaraní Nationalism: The Paraguayan Chaco Frontier between Liberalism and Febrerismo, 1904-1936" (Ph.D. diss., Stony Brook University, 2007), 194-205.
Archival sources, however, demonstrate that women of varied age and marital status served as *madrinas*, forming both horizontal and vertical ties with their *ahijados*. As noted in chapter 2, women may have served as *madrinas* of a particular company or regiment during the 1920s. But this social institution came to flourish during the Chaco War, with some *madrinas* sponsoring entire units and others forming relationships with individual soldiers.

In Bolivia, the concept of *madrinas de guerra* drew on the country’s system of ritual kinship [*compadrazgo*]. Although derived from the Catholic model, *compadrazgo* in Bolivia goes far beyond the spiritual sponsorship of children by godparents. As anthropologists have shown, it is an “essential component” of the social structure that creates inter- and intra-class ties of mutual obligation. Through *compadrazgo* relationships, individuals sponsor not only children but also weddings, festivals, sports teams, and even the purchase of consumer goods.  

The memoirs of educated soldiers describe horizontal *madrina* relationships in which the soldiers and *madrinas* are both unmarried, young, and from a similar social class. Drawing on particular ideas about femininity, these texts depict *madrinas* within the constraints of familiar narratives of women and war. They construct these *madrinas* as potential romantic partners who were excited by the prospect of forging relationships with valiant young men as they set off for battle. Roberto Böhrt, for example, writes of meeting local *madrinas* while training in the Viacha barracks. They gave him gifts of cigars and other goods; one even

granted him a “passionate kiss.” As his unit made its way to the front, Böhrt acquired another “beautiful” madrina in Tarija and remembers stimulating conversations over wine with her and other madrinas at a local social club.\textsuperscript{55} Similarly, Carlos Pozo depicts madrinas as flocking to his unit, which was filled with professional men and students. After hard days of training, these soldiers apparently spent hours in the madrinas’ homes, only returning to the barracks in time for curfew.\textsuperscript{56} And the early pages of Carlos Herbas’s memoir mention little but his madrina Elena and the other young women who greeted his unit in Uyuni, promising to write and send them gifts on the front line.\textsuperscript{57} An image of one of the first units to depart for the front depicts these madrinas as young women in fashionable dress, posing with soldiers in pristine uniforms (see Figure 27).

![Figure 27: Mobilized Reservists with Madrinas de Guerra, 1932](image)

Three madrinas de guerra at center top with flag.

Yet archival evidence also reveals the importance of non-romantic vertical and

\textsuperscript{55} Böhrt Gastelú, Deber cumplido, 33, 44.
\textsuperscript{56} Pozo Trigo, Relatos y anécdotas, 17-20.
\textsuperscript{57} Herbas Cabrera, El cristo de Tarairí, 25-31.
horizontal relationships between madrinas and their ahijados that more closely resembled the traditional tie between godmother and godson than a flirtation between social equals. Although gifts were also a part of horizontal madrina relationships, the financial aspect of madrinas’ role was most important when women chose to sponsor poorer and less educated men from a lower social class than their own. For example, rather than sponsoring individual soldiers, the women of Apolo, an Amazonian town far north of La Paz, formed a madrinas de guerra defense committee in June 1933 to collect donations for the transportation costs of all area reservists and their socorros [wages] during the long trip. This support was apparently ephemeral and did not create personal ties. On the other hand, many madrinas who sponsored individual soldiers offered continued moral and financial support on the front lines and even after their ahijados had fallen prisoner. Señora Esther B. Pereira, for one, sent twenty bolivianos to the Archbishop of Asunción for him to pass on to her ahijado Quintín Cuba in the Posta Ybyravo POW camp. Soldiers were perhaps not the only beneficiaries of madrinas’ munificence. In at least one case, the wife of a mobilized soldier expressed hope that his madrinas would help support her in his absence: Osdulia de Mercado, whose husband Luis had been a cobbler in Santa Cruz before the war, sent a letter in November 1932 that pleaded with him to “recommend me to your madrinas de guerra” so that they would attend to

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58 Subprefect of Apolo quoted in Prefect of La Paz to Second Division Commander, #231 and 254, June 12 and 21, 1933, Prefecture-Admin box 208, ALP.

59 Letter from Quintín Cuba in Acantonamiento Posta Ybyravo to Archbishop of Asunción, November 7, 1935, Asuntos relativos a la Guerra del Chaco. See also: Letter from Bishop Rodríguez in Villarrica to Archbishop of Asuncion, January 14, 1936, Prisoneros de Guerra II, Guerra del Chaco 901.9, Archivo del Arzobispado de la Santísima Asunción, Asunción, Paraguay (hereafter cited as AAA).
her needs.  

Madrinas also served as intermediaries, keeping families apprised of how their loved ones were doing and using their social status to learn whether their abijados numbered among the prisoners, dead, or wounded. For example, José Castedo, who was himself illiterate, must have found someone else to write in December 1932 to Señorita Yolanda Landibar, his madrina in Santa Cruz. In a letter laced with misspellings and grammatical errors, he carefully gave her the names of his parents in Lorito (Chuquisaca) and begged her to reassure them that he was well. How he expected her to accomplish this task is unclear, given that his family lived nearly four hundred kilometers from his madrina. Perhaps he was personally unable to send them a letter, knew she had contacts in the area, or simply hoped to show off his connection to this woman. Raquel Villavicencio in La Paz performed a similar role, acting as an intermediary for the presumably illiterate mother of her abijado. In December 1934, she wrote to the Archbishop of Asunción, asking him to “reduce the suffering of a mother who unites her pleas with my own” by informing them whether Pastor Conteras was among the prisoners taken in Cañada el Carmen.

In contrast to men who came from a lower social class than their madrinas and respectfully asked them for favors, René Calderón de la Barca wrote to his madrina in La Paz as a social equal. Addressing her as “my fondly remembered Carol,” Calderón informed her of his experience on the front and capture by Paraguay. Rather than asking her to fulfill his

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60 Unsigned letter to “my dear husband,” written in Santa Cruz and addressed to Luis Mercado, November 26, 1932, DES-16-010, AHM-TPJM.
61 José Castedo in Charagua to Srita. Yolanda Landibar in Santa Cruz, December 13, 1932, DES-16-010, AHM-TPJM.
62 Letter from Raquel Villavicencio in La Paz to Archbishop of Asunción, December 13, 1934, Guerra del Chaco 901.9, Asuntos relativos a la Guerra del Chaco, AAA.
or his family’s needs, he requested only that she pass his greetings to her own husband and
dughter.63 This madrina de guerra appears to have been neither a financial sponsor nor a
girlfriend like the madrinas described in memoirs.

The discovery of letters to soldiers or personal diaries would help shed light on
Bolivian women’s diverse roles and motivations for serving as madrinas. Some clearly did so
out of a romantic idea of connecting to brave men facing immediate peril or in order to
express their own patriotism and claim a public space for their participation in the Bolivian
nation. At least one married, wealthy woman, Alicia Aramayo de Cariaga of Tupiza,
presented being a madrina as a duty of her social class, a sort of noblesse oblige. She also
deployed this charitable work as a demonstration of her social prestige in order to exchange
it for personal favors. In the process of asking the Archbishop in Paraguay to ensure that her
own son was included on the list of injured prisoners being repatriated in early 1934, she
reminded him that “I always accept or write to ahijados de guerra – almost always the poorest
and most defenseless.”64

Although Bolivian madrinas likely all came from the literate classes, their relationships
with their ahijados varied widely, depending on whether they had prior personal ties and on
differences between their ages, social classes, and even their regions. Some, like Raquel
Villavicencio, had ties to soldiers’ families while others, like Yolanda Landibar, lived far from
their ahijados’ homes. Some were almost girlfriends while others could be sponsors,

63 René Calderón de la Barca in Cambio Grande to Sra. Carolina de Ponce de Leon in La Paz, September
11, 1934, box 79 Guerra del Chaco, Prisonero, photo 162, Instituto Histórico y Museo Militar del
Ministerio de Defensa Nacional, Asunción, Paraguay (hereafter cited as IHM).
64 Alicia Aramayo de Cariaga in Tupiza to Archbishop of Asunción, December 8, 1933, Guerra del Chaco
901.9, Prisoneros de Guerra III, AAA.
confidantes, or go-betweens. All of these madrinas, however, incentivized and facilitated men’s participation in the war. They also aided in the construction of soldiering as not only patriotic but, at least for educated soldiers, sexually attractive and essential to masculine honor. Not associated with the military or the state, this social institution grew up around wartime mobilization, overlaying the relationship between the soldier and his patria with a gendered relationship to a woman who could potentially serve as his patron and personal ally.

**The Hierarchies of Evasion: Omisos, Remisos, Emboscados, and Reservists on Assignment**

Patriotic enthusiasm to join the ranks quickly waned as potential soldiers realized that victory would be neither easy nor swift. Starting in October 1933, calls for mobilization applied to men in their thirties who had not donned a uniform in more than a decade and who would be leaving established families and professional lives. In contrast to those who had presented during the first waves, these men were surely aware that many of their fellow Bolivians had already been killed or captured. Many may have even heard horrific tales told by soldiers evacuated from the front due to wounds or illness. These would be powerful disincentives to mobilize. Although some continued to present when called, the increase in evasion caused the balance between willing and coerced soldiers to shift decidedly over the course of the war. If the Salamanca administration wanted to win, it would need to use the state apparatus to override resistance and coerce more men into supplying labor on the front lines and on the home front to support the war effort. Those recruited into the second army (1933) under Kundt and then into the third (1934) and fourth (1935) armies under Peñaranda thus represented a spectrum that included those who had presented voluntarily, those impressed by patrols, and those who responded to a set of coercive structures.
instituted at the local level. However, even as the army pressured the administration for more men, other sectors, such as mining companies, banks, railroad companies, rural landowners, and even indigenous communities, insisted that the state protect their livelihoods by providing exemptions for their sons and employees. This resulted in new, legal forms of evasion as the president and Congress made a series of concessions, striking bargains with these interest groups that limited certain men’s vulnerability to recruitment.

The 1907 conscription law provided the legal framework for both the mobilization of reservists and the impressment of evaders by recruitment patrols: If men captured by patrols belonged to the cohorts already called and could not produce military documents exempting them from wartime service, then they were categorized as omisos, who had failed to register, or remisos, who had failed to present. Both were legally vulnerable to immediate capture and enrollment.⁶⁵ Although both mobilization and impressment are coercive mechanisms, the former involves an active choice, albeit one structured by social and legal sanctions. Instead of presenting, those aware that they had been called up for service could seek legal forms of evasion, bribe an official, or hide in the countryside. Whether or not they were aware of the obligation, those impressed as evaders had no such choice.

Although primarily associated with nineteenth-century recruitment, forcible enrollment had never entirely disappeared from the Bolivian army. As shown in chapter 1, the 1907 conscription law provided for the capture of anyone who failed to register or present for service, inspiring diverse actors to report their enemies as omisos so they would be forced to serve long terms in the ranks. Local authorities may have set up checkpoints to

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⁶⁵ Ley de servicio militar, January 16, 1907; Reglamento del servicio militar, April 6, 1907, Boletín militar del Ministro de Guerra, vol. 3, (La Paz: Intendencia de Guerra, 1907): 121-48.
inspect military documents and asked for armed detachments to capture particular omisos prior to the war, but no evidence suggests that anyone patrolled the countryside or inspected homes to pursue omisos. However, the Bolivian state at war needed far more men than did the standing army. Impressment, legally justified by the 1907 law for anyone within the age cohorts already called up, thus emerged as an organized practice during the war.

Sources have not yet emerged that document precisely when recruitment commissions began pursuing evaders in rural communities and patrolling the main thoroughfares to inspect travelers’ military documents. The need for such an institution became clear, however, by the early months of 1933 when Kundt, in command of Bolivia’s second army, sought not only to replace fallen and evacuated soldiers but also to increase its size for an offensive on Nanawa (see Figure 25). In March of that year, several local authorities in rural areas of La Paz reported marked resistance to the recent call-up of the 1933 cohort.66 The first reference to armed recruitment commissions among the records of the La Paz prefecture dates from early April 1933, when the subprefect of Chuma reported that the commission sent to the Camata canton had captured many evaders there.67 Less than a year into the war, these commissions and the local authorities responsible for mobilization began seeking out men who had resisted initial calls and those who, living on remote properties, were quite disconnected from the central state. Like Quilco, the fictional indigenous soldier whose impressment Colonel Nuñez del Prado so vividly described in

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66 See series of ten letters from March 1933 between the Prefect of La Paz and the Commander of the Second Division regarding reports by various subprefects and corregidores that men are resisting calls for mobilization. Prefecture-Admin box 208, ALP.
67 Prefect of La Paz to Commander of Second Division, #131, April 10, 1933, Prefecture-Admin box 208, ALP.
1905, men throughout the national territory were taken by these commissions all through the war, dressed in uniform, and forced to fight for a *patria* with which they likely did not identify.

The use of impressment produced powerful memories of wartime recruitment as profoundly violent, arbitrary, and forceful incursions into the daily lives of rural Bolivians. During Carter and Mamani’s fieldwork in the 1960s, community members told tales of widespread panic when patrols came to “capture conscripts by force” after they stopped presenting voluntarily because they feared suffering and dying at the front.  

One of Arze Aguirre’s interviewees, who, at the time of the war, was a fifteen-year-old *pongo* [colono obligated to perform domestic service] in the province of Juana Azurduy de Padilla (Chuquisaca), tells of being “grabbed, carried off” by a patrol as he was walking on the road to Monteagudo. And THOA’s oral history work shows that many indigenous women remember their husbands, sons, and fathers’ “being rounded up like llamas” by recruitment patrols during the war. Military-justice records lend credence to these memories of arbitrary violence, showing the frequent capture of young men who appeared to be within the age range already mobilized. Nicolás Castro, for example, testified that he was returning after several months of working in Argentina when four uniformed men grabbed him at the Arenales station, searched him, and arrested him for desertion upon discovering that his

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69 Cristobal Arancibia from Segura in Juana Azurduy de Padilla (Chuquisaca), quoted in Arze Aguirre, *Guerra y conflictos sociales*, 139.
70 Doña Matilde Qulqui quoted in Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui et al., eds., *La mujer andina en la historia* (Chukiyawu: Ediciones del THOA, 1990), 43.
underwear was of army issue. Several others pointed to their use of soldiers’ undershirts or underwear as leading to their arrest as deserters. These claims suggest an invasive process wherein patrols violently and humiliatingly inspected men travelling on thoroughfares or passing through train stations.

Despite much anecdotal evidence, we know little about who controlled or staffed such recruitment commissions. One man’s testimony even suggests that joining a recruitment commission could be a form of evasion: As a 22-year-old farmworker, Rodolfo Bustamante should have mobilized long before November 1932, but he claimed to be part of a recruitment commission under one Lieutenant Inchauste in Tarija. Evidence indicates that commissions, at least in the La Paz department, were initially groups of policemen sent to fulfill requests by local authorities for armed support in rounding up evaders; however, in the absence of police effectives, military personnel also formed such patrols. Several other sources mention the Civic Legion as a paramilitary force formed to maintain internal order during the war, pursue evaders, and repress rural unrest. Were recruitment patrols also staffed by members of this group? Documents refer to officers in charge of bands of men

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71 Nicolás Castro Mansilla statement, December 16, 1932. See also statements of Ramón Julio Choque Gutierrez and Mariano Chambi Perez, December 16, 1932, DES-16-009, AHM-TPJM.
72 See Manuel Ramirez, Ramón Julio Choque, and Mariano Chambi statements, December 23, 1932, DES-16-009; Emilio Tapia statement, January 12, 1933, DES-16-016, AHM-TPJM.
73 Rodolfo Bustamante statement, November 23, 1932, DES-15-021, AHM-TPJM.
74 See transcribed report from subprefect of Luribay in Commander of the Second Division to the Prefect of La Paz, July 8, 1933, #3751; transcribed report from subprefect of Viacha in Prefect of La Paz to Interim Chief of Staff, October 11, 1933, #95; transcribed report from subprefect of Corocoro in Prefect of La Paz to Commander of the Second Division, #57, November 17, 1933, Prefecture-Admin box 208, ALP.
75 Juan Ramón Quintana Taborga, *Policía y democracia en Bolivia: Una política institucional pendiente* (La Paz: PIEB, 2005), 38. See also Moisés Montenegro statement, January 23, 1933, DES-16-020, AHM-TPJM.
but fail to mention whether they were soldiers, policemen, or civilian volunteers. And references to rank do little to clarify, given that the military, the police, and sometimes even paramilitary groups used similar rank systems.

An image that Arze Aguirre includes from the La Paz Prefecture archive depicts three Indians captured near Guaqui by a patrol of five armed men and a lieutenant (see Figure 28). The armed men wear various uniforms that do not seem to match. None appear to be particularly young or old, which again suggests that participating in patrols may have been a way to avoid the front lines. The image lays bare, however, the danger of generalizing about the social status of perpetrators and victims: At least one of the armed men – the one with the least uniform and most tattered uniform (front left) – appears to be an

![Figure 28: Patrol with Three Captured Indians](image)

Source: René Arze Aguirre, *Guerra y conflictos sociales*, 97.

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76 Prefect of La Paz to Minister of War, #389, September 4, 1934, Prefecture-Admin box 149, ALP.
impoverished Indian. Unfortunately, the image fades at the bottom, obscuring whether he wore shoes, like the standing soldiers, or was barefoot, like the captured men.

Local authorities reported that the arrival of recruitment commissions caused rural indigenous men to flee en masse, abandoning their labors in the fields and on the roads. In fact, the government cited this disruption to food supplies and transportation when it resolved to modify mobilization procedures for indigenous men living on haciendas and in independent communities. In April 1933, just as Bolivian forces appeared to making progress in the Nanawa sector, prefects circulated orders that represented a dramatic shift in the logic behind mobilization. Up to that point, calls had, at least officially, applied to all Bolivian men of a particular age, regardless of race or social status. This new order, however, exempted both comunarios and colonos from future mobilization orders: “The indigenous farmworkers included in the call for reservists should not present to recruitment centers but instead intensify their agricultural work in order to supply the army and civilian population.” However, this concession certainly did not mean that indigenous men would no longer fight in Chaco. At this point in the war, all men between the age of nineteen and twenty-nine (cohorts of 1923 to 1933) had already been called up. This order explicitly did not provide for the discharge of those previously incorporated into the ranks; nor did it exempt from capture men who had failed to respond to earlier calls. Of course, many rural men lacked documents that proved their age, which gave the recruitment patrols considerably more

77 See, for example, Prefect of La Paz to Minister of War, #464 and 389, September 15, 1933 and September 4, 1934, Prefecture-Admin box 149, ALP.
78 Prefect of La Paz to Commander of the Second Division, #125, April 10, 1933, Prefecture-Admin box 208, ALP. See also Arze Aguirre, Guerra y conflictos sociales, 40. I have not been able to find any supreme decrees related to indigenous mobilization. See http://www.gacetaoficialdebolivia.gob.bo
leeway than suggested by the April 1933 orders.

The motives and bargains and that resulted in this order remain obscure. We know little about whether a lack of rural workers had actually caused food shortages serious enough to inspire this change in mobilization or whether profiteering was to blame. The intensity and persistence of rural resistance likely contributed to the decision, as well as pressure from wealthy landlords and indigenous communities. Another factor might have been a prevailing suspicion that rural indigenous men did not make the most dependable frontline soldiers. Arze Aguirre in fact cites a 1934 report by the Bolivian high command that explicitly stated that mobilized comunarios, colonos, and day laborers would be preferentially used in rearguard labors, such as road work, because their “participation was questionable” in the zone of operations.79 Several of his interviewees confirm such assignments: Florencio Vazquez distinguished his labors from the martial ones of other soldiers, remembering having worked “with tools” on roads to get “foodstuffs to those who were fighting.”80 And Teófilo Miranda did similar work, bringing livestock to the regiments and opening roads in the region.81

Several disastrous months at the front, including the mass capture of thousands of Bolivian soldiers in September and December, led to Kundt’s resignation on December 14, 1933. These reversals caused the government to again revise plans for rural mobilization. At some point during the first three months of 1934, Bolivia instituted a quota system under which only thirty percent of all eligible indígenas from each community or hacienda would be

79 Arze Aguirre, Guerra y conflictos sociales, 42-43.
80 Arze Aguirre, Guerra y conflictos sociales, 251.
81 Arze Aguirre, Guerra y conflictos sociales, 229-30.
obliged to enlist.\textsuperscript{82} The quota was raised to fifty percent in 1935 for the final defense of Villamontes.\textsuperscript{83} We still know little about how the quota system was received, how it functioned, or even whether it was used widely across the country. Did it apply to men of all ages, even those who had successfully evaded previous calls? Or did it apply only to the older men included in the more recent calls? Evidence from a limited number of cases demonstrates that it certainly functioned in some communities.\textsuperscript{84} On at least one hacienda – Poma Amaya, located four and half leagues from the city of La Paz – the quota system was apparently administered by the \textit{bilacata} [indigenous authority], who distributed official papers to those exempted by the lottery so that they could prove their status to recruitment patrols.\textsuperscript{85} The testimony of an illiterate member of the Yamacachi community in Santiago de Huata (La Paz) asserted that the \textit{corregidor} and \textit{bilacata} had jointly administered the lottery in his community.\textsuperscript{86} The quota system represented a major shift in wartime recruitment, as the administration apparently concluded that patriotism and brute force could not effectively sustain the war effort. The quota system provided a mechanism for local administration of mobilization and local control over the paperwork that could protect men from impressment. The government must have hoped that ceding this power to corregidores, hacienda administrators, and \textit{bilacatas} would be more effective for the overall war effort than violent impressment. Ideally, the quota system would not only produce soldiers for the front lines

\textsuperscript{82} Arze Aguirre, \textit{Guerra y conflictos sociales}, 41. Although Arze dates this disposition to April, a March 28 letter makes reference to it. See Corregidor of Italaque to Prefect of La Paz, March 28, 1934. Another letter refers to a mobilization of indígenas in June of 1933. See Prefect of La Paz to Minister of War, \#207, April 19, 1934, Prefecture-Admin box 208, ALP.

\textsuperscript{83} Commander of Second Division to Prefect of La Paz, \#1405, April 27, 1935, Prefecture-Admin box 209, ALP.

\textsuperscript{84} See INC-60-007 (1934), INC-60-008 (1934), INC-60-021 (1936), and DES-21-018 (1942), AHM-TPJM.

\textsuperscript{85} Conclusions of the auditor de guerra, December 15, 1934, INC-60-008, AHM-TPJM.

\textsuperscript{86} Ramón Nao statement, August 9, 1939, DEL-14-001, AHM-TPJM.
but also ensure that men remained in the countryside to work the fields, transport produce, and repair roads.

Coupled with the existence of recruitment commissions, the quota system demonstrates that the government responded actively to evasion and draft resistance through a combination of energetic pursuit and accommodation. However, in acting through these commissions and the local authorities responsible for mobilization, the central state increasingly depended on often untrustworthy agents. The La Paz prefecture records are filled with accusations of corruption and abuse, suggesting that these agents were very much out of the state’s control. The petitions of indigenous communities, corregidores, subprefects, and military officers denounce horrific acts of violence and expose individuals for taking advantage of the war to line their pockets. Finger-pointing and denunciations abound. Comunarios report their neighbors as omisos, denounce violence by recruitment commissions, and accuse patrols and local authorities of fraudulently charging for military documents and extracting goods in the name of national defense. Corregidores and subprefects in turn blame the “defeatist campaign” of soldiers evacuated from the front for convincing their fellow reservists to flee rather than mobilize. Their frantic missives claim

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87 Reservists from Inquisivi referenced in Commander of Second Division to Prefect of La Paz, #3291-31, December 14, 1932; Comunarios from Callapa transcribed in Prefect of La Paz to Auxiliary Chief of Staff, #141, July 30, 1934; Nicolás Kapa from Callapa quoted in Director General of Military Police to Prefect of La Paz, #305, October 10, 1934, Prefecture-Admin box 208, ALP. Comunarios of Charazani referenced in PO of Minister of War to Prefect of La Paz, #9, April 27, 1933; Charaña indigenous authorities paraphrased in message from Police quoted in Prefect of La Paz to Minister of War, #389, September 4, 1934, Prefecture-Admin box 149, ALP. Reservist from Calacoto paraphrased in Chief of Military Police to Prefect of La Paz, #421, March 26, 1935, Prefecture-Admin box 209, ALP. See also Arze Aguirre, Guerra y conflictos sociales, 44-49, 65, 69-70.

88 Subprefects of Inquisivi and Pelechuco quoted in Prefect of La Paz to Commander of Second Division, #341 and 344, October 30, 1933; Sub. Lt. J. Soria of Recruitment transcribed in Auxiliary Chief of Staff to Prefect of La Paz, #6104, August 21, 1934, Prefecture-Admin box 208, ALP.
that communities are on the verge of revolt, demand armed men to recruit among the 
communarios, report that powerful landowners are “maliciously impeding” the enlistment of 
their colonos, and denounce the patrols for violence and abuse. And the leaders of the 
patrols insist that local authorities are refusing to cooperate and using the “pretext of abuse” 
to interfere with the commissions’ work and protect men from recruitment. Many of these 
disputes spilled over into military courts, where these actors continued to accuse one another 
of falsifying documents and exacting bribes to release captives or erase men’s names from 
recruitment lists. The fact that the prefect and military courts viewed most charges of abuse 
and corruption as credible enough to merit investigation indicates that the government had 
little faith in its agents.

Rural men were certainly not the only ones to evade wartime service and to bargain 
with the government for exemptions. In fact, the prevalence of educated men who avoided 
mobilizing produced the stock figure of the wealthy embosca [evader]. These men took 
refuge in country estates, bribed officials to be declared unfit for service, purchased falsified 
documents, or fled abroad. For example, Augusto Cuadros, a soldier from Cochabamba who

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89 Prefect of La Paz to Commander of Second Division, #339, October 13, 1933; Subprefect of Larecaja 
quoted in Prefect of La Paz to Commander of Second Division, November 16, 1933; Prefect of La Paz to 
Commander of Second Division, #57, November 17, 1933, Prefecture-Admin box 208, ALP. Corregidor 
of Mocomoco paraphrased in Prefect of La Paz to Minister of War, #502, November 7, 1934, Prefecture- 
Admin box 149, ALP. Prefect of La Paz to Commander of Second Division, #19, March 11, 1935, 
Prefecture-Admin box 209, ALP. See also Arze Aguirre, Guerra y conflictos sociales, 66.

90 Commander of the Second Division to Prefect of La Paz, #4499, October 7, 1933; General Staff to 
Prefect of La Paz, #7136, October 10, 1934, Prefecture-Admin box 208, ALP. General Staff to Prefect of 
La Paz, February 9, 1935; Director General of Military Police to Prefect of La Paz, #289, March 2, 1935; 
Commander of Second Division to Prefect of La Paz, #1346, April 23, 1935, Prefecture-Admin box 209, 
ALP. Arze Aguirre, Guerra y conflictos sociales, 68.

91 For falsification of military documents, see: FAD-35-004 (1932), FAD-35-005 (1933), FAD-35-007A 
(1933), FAD-35-013 (134), FAD 35-014 (1934), FAD-35-017 (1934), FAD-35-018 (1935). For accusations 
against and prosecutions of exaction and bribes by recruitment commissions and local authorities, see: 
ABA-01-009 (1933), DESA-14-002 (1933), INT-61-007 (1934), INT-61-008 (1934).
later wrote a memoir of the war, remembers that few of his classmates from high school were willing to serve when their cohort was called up into the third army in early 1934 as Bolivia rapidly retreated after Kundt’s resignation. In many ways, his claims to patriotism in the face of massive evasion are surprisingly similar to those of Luis Michel, the illiterate campesino who set up a contrast between himself and his peers who took to the hills: Of the twenty-one men in Cuadros’s graduating class, only nine presented, and six of those finagled assignments in the rearguard rather than heading to the front lines. Two were declared unfit, and one did roadwork in Cochabamba, but the others took refuge in Chile, paid for new birth certificates that shaved years off their lives, or found other means to elude service.92

As early as February 1933, the subprefect of Los Andes (La Paz) complained of “the bad Bolivians who saunter around here rather than being at the front; I have reports that respectable [decentes] young men from La Paz are hiding in various rural properties.”93 Others deduced that particular men had benefitted from “sponsorship [padrinazgos] or favors [condescendencias]” because they had returned from recruitment centers with exemption documents despite being in perfect health.94 Just as the madrinas de guerras had used personal relationships to incentivize wartime service, these methods of evasion relied on similar relationships to help men avoid it. This was, in fact, the same patron-client logic that had structured the favoritism and “odious privileges” that ministers of war had railed against in

93 Quoted in Commander of the Second Division to Prefect of La Paz, #1182, February 20, 1933, Prefecture-Admin box 208, ALP.
94 Subprefect of Larecaja quoted in Prefect of La Paz to Commander of Second Division, November 16, 1933, Prefecture-Admin box 208, ALP.
the 1910s and 1920s.\textsuperscript{95}

Especially in the latter phases of the war, the Salamanca administration and Congress spoke vigorously against these forms of avoidance. For example, after the surrender and capture of nearly a thousand soldiers at Campo Grande in September 1933, the government mobilized the cohorts of 1933 and 1920-1921. Congress also passed a law specifically aimed at the elite and professional Bolivians who had moved abroad in order to evade service: The law ordered all those who had left the country since July 1932 to return within forty days.\textsuperscript{96} Yet this decree had no mechanisms for enforcement beyond social sanctions and a likely empty threat to block remittances aboard. Similarly toothless was a decree issued in October 1934 (after Paraguay took Ingavi, near the edges of Bolivia’s inhabited territory) that ordered men previously determined unfit for service to be reexamined by a new medical commission.\textsuperscript{97} White-collar professionals did have to present documentation proving that they had legitimate exemptions or were not subsumed by mobilization calls, but no evidence suggests that recruitment patrols invaded elites’ rural estates, frisked them as they travelled, or even investigated the provenance of their birth certificates and exemption paperwork.

In fact, the president and Congress repeatedly facilitated elite evasion despite their public condemnation of \textit{emboscados}. Elected officials, such as deputies and senators, were exempted, as were certain government functionaries.\textsuperscript{98} And, in December 1933, Salamanca decreed that men who had already lost a brother in the war could be taken off the front lines

\textsuperscript{95} See chapter 1. Quotation from \textit{Memoria que presenta el Ministro de Guerra de Bolivia Doctor Andrés S. Muñoz ante el Honoranle Congreso Ordinario de 1910} (La Paz: Intendencia de Guerra, 1910), 8.
\textsuperscript{96} Law of October 23, 1933.
\textsuperscript{97} Supreme decree of October 10, 1934.
\textsuperscript{98} See Prefect of La Paz to Minister of War, #438, 439, 441, 443, 450, 479, 484, 486, 488, and 491, October 13 to November 7, 1934, Prefecture-Admin box 149, ALP.
to serve in the rearguard. The provision that petitioners had to prove that the brothers were legitimate (or, if illegitimate, had been legally recognized) betrayed the class bias of this exemption.\textsuperscript{99} Gossip in La Paz and at the front presented this measure as a maneuver by Salamanca to save one of his sons from the front lines after the October 1933 death of his son Alberto in service.\textsuperscript{100} However, as Bolivia’s position grew direr a month later, the decree was modified to spare only those with two dead brothers.\textsuperscript{101}

The newly created category of “reservists on assignment” provided a mechanism for men in particular industries to serve as reservists in their current positions rather than by deploying to the front. This was a form of legally sanctioned evasion that, like the concessions granted to rural indigenous communities, resulted from bargains struck between the government and powerful interest groups. The creation of this category of service had its roots in demands from the mining industry. At the start of the war, the tin companies had had a superabundance of workers due to depression-era reduced demand, but, as prices started to recover in mid-1933, the industry began pressuring the administration to protect its workers. Given that the financing of the war depended on direct loans from mining companies and emergency taxes on tin exports,\textsuperscript{102} Salamanca’s administration soon obliged by issuing a decree in September 1933 that provided for miners with special skills to be

\textsuperscript{99} Supreme decree of December 14, 1933.
\textsuperscript{100} Brockmann, \textit{El general y sus presidentes}, 294-95; Granier Chirveches, \textit{Diario de campaña}, 166.
\textsuperscript{101} Supreme decree of January 27, 1934.
\textsuperscript{102} Exemption for their workers was not the only thing that the mining companies received in return for financing the war. The government also made concessions on its distribution of tin quotas and laws governing the proportion of foreign exchange that had to be sold to the government. Carmenza Gallo, \textit{Taxes and State Power: Political Instability in Bolivia, 1900-1950} (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991), 42-44, 149.
declared reservists on assignment. According to the logic of this category, the state was trading these reservists’ labor on the front lines for their strategic labor in benefit of the larger war effort. Later decrees granted the same status to men with “technical knowledge” working in banking, business, railroads, and other industries. In many ways, these concessions to “strategic” industries were reminiscent of laws passed under the Liberals in 1910 and 1911 that granted exemptions from obligatory military service to telegraph, telephone, steamship, and railroad employees, ostensibly in order to promote the modernization of the nation’s transportation and communications networks.

However, as Bolivia’s fortunes worsened, the administration tightened the rules, ordering that all reservists on assignment pay twenty percent of their salary to support the war effort, that the companies sponsoring them submit monthly lists of workers, and that special commissions verify the legality of every transaction. I have yet to find paperwork granting reservist-on-assignment status in 1933 and early 1934, but the Ministry of Defense Archive has hundreds of lists attesting to salary deductions in late 1934 and 1935 from reservists on assignment working for entities such as the Bolivian National Bank, the Berenguela Tin Mines, and the Bolivian Power Company. These documents show, for example, that the Empresa Minera Negro Pabellón paid 237.13 bolivianos in February 1935 for the services of four reservists on assignment and that the Antofagasta Chile & Bolivian

103 I have not found this decree, but a May 10, 1934, decree refers to the previous decree as being issued on September 25, 1933. Despite these measures, many miners fought on the front lines, and the companies still had to import laborers from Peru and Chile. Dunkerley, Orígenes del poder militar, 168. 
105 See supreme decrees issued February 15, April 12, May 10, May 11, October 5, and November 19, 1934.
106 Reservistas en Comisión bound volumes 6-7, Archivo Central del Ministerio de Defensa Nacional, La Paz, Bolivia (hereafter cited as AC-MDN).
Railway Company had 105 of their employees, who belonged to cohorts ranging from 1897 to 1934, declared reservists on assignment just before the war’s end in June.\(^{107}\)

While reservist-on-assignment status was certainly a powerful mechanism for middle-class evasion, these sources also show that many rural workers, especially in the departments of Tarija and Santa Cruz, benefitted from this status as the military decided that the labor they could provide on the home front would benefit the war effort more than their soldiering.\(^{108}\) Military authorities thus also issued thousands of reservists-on-assignment passports to laborers to certify that they were supporting the war effort by providing foodstuffs, working on road brigades, transporting essential materials, and building military hospitals.\(^{109}\) For example, on March 13, 1934, the Office of Military Rations [Etapas] issued twenty-one-year-old Román Machuca of the Turobo farm in Montero (Warnes, Santa Cruz) paperwork that granted him permission to “devote himself to agricultural work” rather than mobilize.\(^{110}\) Reservist-on-assignment status thus was not a method of evasion exclusive to elites.

As the war ground on, the Salamanca administration faced a series of political and administrative problems related to mobilization. Many Bolivians voluntarily supported the war effort, but many others sought ways for themselves, their sons, and their workers to

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\(^{107}\) Receipt of Empresa Minera Negro Pabellón, February 12, 1935, Reservistas en Comisión bound volume 7; List of employees and workers of the Oruro Mining Company, June 17, 1935, Reservistas en Comisión bound volume 6, AC-MDN.

\(^{108}\) Reservistas en Comisión bound volume 5, AC-MDN. As early as September 1933, prefectural correspondence refers to indigenous laborers on roads as having the status of reservists on assignments and being exempt from impressment. Prefect of La Paz to Minister of War, #464, September 15, 1933, Prefecture-Admin box 149, ALP.

\(^{109}\) See passports collected in Reservistas en Comisión bound volume 5, 1934-1935, AC-MDN.

\(^{110}\) Román Machuca, boleto de licencia, March 3,1934, Reservistas en Comisión bound volume 5, 1934-1935, AC-MDN.
avoid the front lines. Although the government responded with recruitment commissions to patrol rural areas and laws that sought to curb elite evasion, it also made significant concessions to several interest groups, ceding ground regarding the extent to which it would mobilize their clients. The contrast between the treatment of wealthy and middle-class emboscados versus rural omisos and remisos was indeed stark, but the hierarchies of evasion were not always so predictable. Reservist-on-assignment status protected not only professionals but also many illiterate agriculturalists. And the decrees issued in 1933 and 1934 expressly set out to limit the participation of uniformed indígenas. Ultimately, mobilization exceeded bureaucratic structures because it hinged on the host of local actors who checked military-service documents, staffed patrols, and administered the quota system. Rather than precisely fulfilling the orders emanating from La Paz, many of these men acted based on personal relationships and opportunities for enrichment when deciding which evaders to pursue and which to ignore. Wartime mobilization thus opened a space for contention, creating new rifts among and within sectors of Bolivian society.

Walking, Thirst, and Combat: Soldiering in and Deserting from Bolivia’s Chaco Army

Whether mobilized as reservists or impressed as evaders, soldiers incorporated into the army eventually embarked on a long journey to the Chaco. Soldiers from the highlands travelled thousands of kilometers by rail through Oruro to Villazón, on the border with Argentina. From there, they took the road to Tarija and then finally to Bolivia’s staging

111 The extent of mobilization in particular regions and communities (and among particular social classes) remains a question for future research, especially for departments other than La Paz
ground in the Chaco, Villamontes. Poor logistics meant that trucks were seldom available, so many made the journey from Villazón or Tarija on foot. Archival sources, memoirs and oral histories recount long and arduous trips marked by thirst and blisters as men lugged their equipment hundreds of kilometers. Carlos Escobar, for example, presented in Oruro in mid-September 1932. After a month of training, this literate farmworker from Jayguayco (Cochabamba) departed for the Chaco on October 12. He would not reach Villamontes for another three weeks. His detachment walked four days to Tarija, where they were issued rifles, another four days to Entre Ríos, and then finally advanced, yet again on foot, to Villamontes. Carlos Pozo tells a similar tale in his memoirs, reporting that his unit carried all their equipment during an almost two-hundred-kilometer walk from Mojo to Tarija. Sleeping on the wet ground each night, they arrived, according to Pozo, “with our bodies exhausted and our morale at rock bottom.” And they were not yet even close to the warzone. Another veteran describes soldiers almost doubled over from carrying their ammunition, rifle, canteen, blanket, tent, mosquito net, and personal belongings. “The soldier,” Augusto Cuadros wrote in his memoirs, “became a beast of burden.” Yet traveling by truck could be just as grueling, especially when the rainy season converted dirt

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112 Dunkerley, Orígenes del poder militar, 139-40.
113 Felipe Arias, Hipolito Lismet, Juan Ticona, and Saul Chavez statements, September 19-20, 1932, DES-16-023 José Cerna statement, November 25, 1932, DES-16-001; Carlos Escobar and Francisco Rocha statements, January 10, 1933, DES-16-015; Julio Ríos statement, January 30, 1933, DES-16-021, AHM-TPJM. See also Arze Aguirre, Guerra y conflictos sociales, 175, 213, 234; Cuadros Sánchez, Los orígenes de la Revolución Nacional, 30-31; Díaz Arguedas, Fastos Militares de Bolivia, 357; Granier Chirveches, Diario de campaña, 194-97, 223-24, 233; Herbas Cabrera, El cristo de Tarairí, 43; Pozo Trigo, Relatos y anecdotas, 22, 31; Taborga T., Boquerón, 156.
114 Carlos Escobar statement, January 10, 1933, DES-16-015, DES-16-015. AHM-TPJM.
115 Pozo Trigo, Relatos y anecdotas, 22.
116 Cuadros Sánchez, Los orígenes de la Revolución Nacional, 30-31.
117 Cuadros Sánchez, Los orígenes de la Revolución Nacional, 31.
roads to mud pits, forcing soldiers to continually disembark and push the vehicle out of the muck.\textsuperscript{118}

Soldiers on this slog not infrequently seized opportunities to desert. A small sample of reports by the officers in charge of these detachments indicate desertion rates of between one and six percent during the journey.\textsuperscript{119} One such soldier who abandoned his unit at El Palmar explained his desertion by alleging extreme violence and coercion on the march to the rearguard. Hipólito Lismet, a literate hatter from La Paz, claimed that his lieutenant had ignored his complaints about foot pain, punished him with two lashes, made him stand for hours with all of his equipment, and then told him that if he continued to lag behind, he would be “left in the road wrapped in a blanket for the vultures to eat.”\textsuperscript{120} Described in military records as an illiterate twenty-three-year-old farmworker from Tupiza (Potosí), Manuel Farfán summed up the complaints of many deserters: “it was better to desert than to endure the lack of food and other privations on the journey…. Captain Contalvo treated us clumsily. As for the food, I say that it was of bad quality, and our allowance [\textit{socorros}] was not paid to us punctually.”\textsuperscript{121} Mentioning specific officers in their complaints about the army’s failures, Lismet and Farfán’s statements became accusations.

Other soldiers apparently enjoyed considerable liberty during this journey and were able to abandon their campsites or makeshift barracks in order to take advantage of local

\textsuperscript{118} Pozo Trigo, \textit{Relatos y anécdotas}, 31.
\textsuperscript{119} Sample drawn from reports on detachments dating from June 1933 to March 1934, Controlaría General de la República, Cajas Blancas 69, doc. 254, 255, 279, ALP.
\textsuperscript{120} Hipólito Lismet statement, September 19, 1932, DES-16-023, AHM-TPJM.
\textsuperscript{121} Manuel Farfán statement, December 16, 1932, DES-16-007, AHM-TPJM. Given the fractious nature of the Bolivian officer corps, it is possible the prosecutor, judge, or secretary may have included these names due to personal rivalries.
establishments providing food, alcohol, and likely sex that had popped up in intermediate
towns and rearguard staging areas such as Villazón, Charagua, Entre Ríos, San Antonio,
Villamontes, and Ballivián. Dozens of soldiers testified to drinking themselves into oblivion
after long days of marching or as they prepared to depart for the front.\textsuperscript{122} When accused of
desertion, they claimed that the fault had been involuntary: They had drunk too much,
returned to the campsite the next morning, and found their regiments gone. When asked his
reason for deserting, Pablo Meneces purportedly replied: “We did not continue on with my
company because we passed out with all that we had drunk that night…. I want to be
incorporated in any Regiment to receive a little more training and then march to the
front.”\textsuperscript{123} Subtly implying that the army had failed to provide him with adequate training, this
statement attributed to Meneces explained his desertion as a result of bad luck and a lapse in
judgment. The professed desire to rejoin the army gave credence to the statement that he
had not purposefully abandoned the ranks.

By the time most soldiers completed their journey to the region, they were certainly
exhausted and likely doubtful about the army’s ability to care for them. What faith they had
was further shaken by rumors circulating throughout rearguard staging grounds such as
Villamontes and Ballivián. Nine deserters cited these rumors as their primary motive for
fleeing the ranks. They testified that chauffeurs and evacuated soldiers had broken their
resolve to fight through tales of “the suffering that awaited us ahead,” where their “fellow

\textsuperscript{122} Santiago Vaca and Eugenio Mariscal statements, September 20, 1932, DES-16-023; Pastor Vargas
statement, November 25, 1932, DES-15-021; Martín Vargas, José Villoca, Juan Chaña, Juan Chuquimia,
Francisco Aguirre, Delfín Armijo, and Antonio Llanos statements, November 25, 1932, DES-16-001;
Juan Yugar and Pablo Meneces statements, December 27, 1932, DES-16-011; Santiago Vaca and Eugenio
Mariscal statements, September 20, 1932, DES-16-023, AHM-TPJM.

\textsuperscript{123} Pablo Meneces López statement, November 27, 1932, DES-16-011, AHM-TPJM.
soldiers were dying of hunger and thirst.”  

For example, an illiterate member of the Abaroa Cavalry unit from Murguia (Oruro) told the investigating officer that he had decided to hide rather than go to the front with his unit after hearing that “our compañeros ahead spent ten days without eating or drinking and with all types of suffering.” Soldiers had no reason to doubt the veracity of these rumors: They could see for themselves the agony of the men who populated rearguard hospitals. Juan Cusi Mamani, described as a twenty-nine-year-old farmworker from Sorata (La Paz), testified to having witnessed this suffering at the Tarija Hospital: “We were horrified to see so many gravely wounded, including mutilated. In light of this, we resolved not to continue traveling with the Regiment for fear that the same would happen to us.”

War in this lowland region was particularly difficult for men from the highlands who were not accustomed to heat and humidity and had no immunity to tropical diseases. In addition to treating the wounded, military hospitals thus filled with soldiers suffering from dehydration, malnutrition, malaria, tuberculosis, and infections caused by impure water. Quickly overwhelmed by the influx of patients, these facilities could not even keep track of hospitalized soldiers, never mind provide them with adequate care. In fact, more than a

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124 Quotation from Gerónimo Panoso statement, November 25, 1932, DES-15-021 and Eliseo Cuculi statement, November 25, 1932, DES-16-001. See also Santiago Condori statement, September 20, 1932, DES-16-023; Dionisio Herrera, Martín Ventura, and Martín Herrera statements, November 25, 1932, DES-16-001; Manuel Farfán statement, December 16, 1932, DES-16-007; Juan Cusi statement, January 5, 1933, DES-16-012; Julio Carrillo statement, January 5, 1933, DES-16-015, AHM-TPJM.

125 Martín Ventura statement, November 25, 1932, DES-16-001, AHM-TPJM.

126 Juan Cusi Mamani statement, January 5, 1933, DES-16-012, AHM-TPJM.

thousand men simply walked out of military hospitals over the course of the war. Several of those captured blamed the army’s mismanagement for their desertion, claiming that the hospitals were so full that a doctor had told them to seek beds elsewhere. Others professed to have been medically discharged but that hospital administrators had failed to give them the proper paperwork. Noting that fifty-three men had deserted from the Villamontes Hospital during one month in 1934, General Peñaranda complained of the “alarming index of desertion,” which indicated that there was “little vigilance in the hospitals,” and asked for “more care to this aspect” and “more rigorous control of the roads.” In fact, desertion in the rearguard and on the front lines reached such proportions during the retreats of early 1934 that the army began hiding this information, using a secret code to transmit reports of desertions in order to prevent other units, the enemy, or the Bolivian public from learning of this epidemic.

The statements of several deserters drew on a contractual logic in order to ameliorate the fault committed, citing the army or state’s failure to care for them or their families as the motivating factor in decisions to desert. Benedicto Calisaya, for example, claimed that he hid in the forest as his unit marched out of Ballivián because on the trip there, “we were without rations for four days.” Many others complained of inadequate medical attention, accusing officers and doctors of ignoring their infirmities: José Manuel Cordova claimed to be

128 List of 1073 deserters attached to Inspector General de Sanidad Militar to General Comandante de Jefe del Ejército, Februrar 28, 1937, Pris330001-Pris330022, Prisioneros de Guerra #33, 1936, AC-MDN.
129 Policarpio Mariscal statement, December 13, 1932, DES-16-006; Francisco Castro statement, January 4, 1933, DES-16-013; Moisés Montenegro statement, January 23, 1933, DES-16-020, AHM-TPJM.
130 General en Jefe del Ejército en Campaña to Director General de Etapas in Villamontes, September 19, 1934, Fall0288, I.C.E Y II C.E. Fallecidos Heridos Desertores e Izquierdistas #28, 1933-1934, AC-MDN.
131 Telegram from Commander of the 9th Division to Campaign Commander, March 19, 1934, Fall0334, I.C.E Y II C.E. Fallecidos Heridos Desertores e Izquierdistas #28, 1933-1934, AC-MDN.
132 Benedicto Calisaya statement, December 3, 1932, DES-16-003, AHM-TPJM.
“gravely ill with measles,” Julio Carrillo of tachycardia, Ponciano Cerdo of gonorrhea, and Valentin Ferrufino of “my right eye being punctured by a thorn.”133 Saúl Chávez expressed a widespread sense of frustration when explaining why he had deserted: “We were sick and they did not attend to us in any way; moreover [we] also had to sleep out in the open, which made my illness worse.”134 Other testimony invoked the bonds of family, suggesting that some soldiers had little faith in the state’s ability to care for their loved ones in their absence.135 Several statements, like that of Rosendo Cuentas, a thirty-year-old farmworker from Caripuyo (Potosí), emphasized the “lamentable state in which I had left my wife and my three children” as the principal motive for desertion.136

Histories and memoirs of the war suggest that this inability to adequately provision and care for soldiers was widespread. Vivid portrayals of the horrors of combat and the desperation of Bolivian soldiers abound in histories of the war. For example, General Ovidio Quiroga’s memoirs describe his soldiers as tormented by insects, tired, demoralized, and resigned to death. The hunger of one group, he notes, was so desperate that they ate a putrid mule that had died on the path.137 Augusto Cuadros similarly writes of “the macabre

133 Valentin Ferrufino statement, December 26, 1932, DES-16-011; Ponciano Cerdo statement, December 28, 1932, DES-16-001; Julio Carrillo statement, January 10, 1933, DES-16-015; José Manuel Córdova statement, January 12, 1933, DES-16-016, AHM-TPJM.
134 Saúl Chávez statement, September 19, 1932, DES-16-023, AHM-TPJM.
135 Joshua Sanborn’s work indicates that the Soviet military was able to stem desertion only through an effective family policy. In that case, soldiers who deserted because their families were not being cared for were treated with more compassion since the state was seen to have violated its contract with its defenders. Joshua A. Sanborn, Drafting the Russian Nation: Military Conscription, Total War, and Mass Politics, 1905-1925 (DeKalb: Northern Illinois Press, 2003), 150.
136 Rosendo Cuentas statement, November 27, 1932, DES-15-021, DES-16-001, AHM-TPJM.
spectacle of dried up men who died in anguish in the Green Hell.” And historian Roberto Querejazu describes one of the most horrible spectacles of the war that occurred after Paraguay conquered the water wells at Irendague in December 1935: Dressed in tattered uniforms, some Bolivian soldiers, he claims, resorted to suicide as their tongues swelled and turned black from dehydration. Bloated bodies lined their path as they retreated in the searing heat. As part of their wartime propaganda, Paraguay shot and published numerous photographs of rotting corpses on Chaco trails to attest to the abandonment suffered by Bolivian soldiers (see Figure 29).

Figure 29: Corpse of Bolivian Soldier, undated
Source: Box 89, Guerra del Chaco, Muertos, IHM.

Soldiers testifying in desertion proceedings invoked similar hardships as proof of what they had already suffered for their country. They recounted marching for days in heavy rains, finding their fellows face down in the scrub from thirst, and feeling “overwhelmed with fatigue” after fighting “both day and night for more than a month, often without

138 Cuadros Sánchez, Las orígenes de la Revolución Nacional, 57.
139 Querejazu Calvo, Masamuchoy, 395-405.
sustenance.” These conditions, combined with a growing lack of faith in commanders’ strategic decisions, produced minor mutinies throughout the war. Soldiers refused to advance, turned weapons on their officers, and abandoned their positions. On several occasions, commanders played the national anthem and gave stirring speeches before asking their men to take a step forward to show their willingness to continue fighting for the glory of the patria. Time and again, the vast majority remained behind as commanders inveighed against their cowardice and spit in their faces. One soldier who did take a step forward, José Manuel Córdova, a miner from Potosí, described fighting for five days at fortín Castillo and then attacking a small group of Paraguayans on the road in September 1932. After two days’ rest, his unit returned to the front, first following orders to join the right flank and then receiving new orders to double back to the left flank. This last order, according to Córdova, prompted the soldiers to sit down “in the road and start to mutter that they were not dolls, that they wanted to fight not wander around tired all night.” Ironically, Córdova narrated this mutiny several months later while defending himself against charges of desertion, mobilizing it in order to show his willingness to fight.

In the popular imagination and most scholarly accounts, frontline soldiers such as

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140 Manuel Fernandez statement, December 28, 1932, DES-16-011; Arturo Jurrico and Julio Palacio statements, January 18-19, 1933, DES-16-017, AHM-TPJM.
142 See Edumundo Checa statement, December 23, 1932, DES-16-009; Juan de Dios López, Federico Paniagua, Eugenio Apaza, and Manuel Fernández statements, December 27-28, 1932, DES-16-011; Salvador Aiza statement, January 4, 1933, DES-16-013; José Manuel Córdova statement January 12, 1933, DES-16-016; Juan Taboada, Julio Palacio, and Arturo Jurrico statements, January 18-19, 1933, DES-16-017; Eduardo Canedo, Julio Ríos, and Aparicio Alánes statements, January 30, 1933, DES-16-021, AHM-TPJM.
143 José Manuel Cordova statements January 12, 1933, DES-16-016, AHM-TPJM.
Córdova were almost exclusively rural indigenous men. Emphasizing their own difference, educated soldiers used the nickname *repete* to describe their indigenous fellows, who, speaking little Spanish, supposedly said “*yo repete*” [I repeats] to plea for second helpings of *rancho* [communal meals]. Drawing on typical tropes of indigeneity, this nickname characterized indigenous soldiers as motivated by primal needs rather than by nationalism, service, and patriotism. These ideas led to a vision of the war that blamed indigenous soldiers for Bolivia’s defeat. David Zook, for example, argues that Paraguay owed its victory to the “individual initiative” taken by “the soldier of a free country,” who vanquished Bolivia’s “politically, socially, and racially submerged” conscripts.

However, archival sources and oral histories paint a different picture of the troops. The evidence I have amassed related to reservists, prisoners of war, deserters, demobilized soldiers, and veterans shows the frontline service, capture, and desertion of not only agriculturalists but also many miners, tailors, mechanics, typographers, and students from all parts of the country. Of course, literate soldiers are certainly overrepresented in these records because they were more likely to register as veterans and be the subjects of...
correspondence. But the thousands of letters and telegrams sent by upper- and middle-class Bolivian families throughout the war to inquire if their sons and husbands were among the prisoners in Paraguay indicate that these men had not been spared en masse from the front lines.

Nor does the evidence support Herbert Klein’s assertion that “Indians were segregated from the whites and mestizos” and that the caste system was “rigidly maintained” during the war. The oral histories of veterans that René Arze Aguirre recorded in the early 1980s in fact actively work to assert the opposite – to prove that they had served alongside men very different from themselves. For example, Desiderio Poquechoque, a rural laborer from Tarabuco (Chuquisaca) who presented in 1932, remembered his squad as containing “…some Quechuas netos [humble, authentic] from Monteagudo, from Muyupampa, we came from all over, then, mixed; there were some students [with the last name] Ortuño, from Sucre, rich; another was a priest.” Another interviewee who presented in August 1934 also used the word “mixed,” clarifying that he had served alongside “civilized men, llama herders, mozada [young men of humble origins]… everyone, such mixture [when] we were in the Chaco.” While there were no doubt hierarchies based on language, literacy, and social class among soldiers, these veterans chose to emphasize mixture rather than discrimination. Rural folk were undoubtedly in the majority on the frontlines, as they were in the country as a whole, they were neither alone nor segregated from urban workers and educated men.

147 Klein, Parties and Political Change, 187-88.
148 Arze Aguirre, Guerra y conflictos sociales, 235.
149 Ricardo Padilla, a rural laborer born in Antora (Potosí), quoted in Arze Aguirre, Guerra y conflictos sociales, 168. Luis Michel, a self-identified campesino from Zudañes (Chuquisaca) also uses the word “mixed,” asserting that the frontline soldiers “were not all campesinos.” Arze Aguirre, Guerra y conflictos sociales, 175.
After the Surrender: Bolivian Prisoners of War in Paraguay

Expending significant funds and political capital, the Bolivian state successfully mobilized and transported large numbers of men to the front. Yet poor strategy by the army high command allowed over twenty-thousand officers and troops to be taken by Paraguay over the course of the war. Since the Chaco War was fought on neutral territory, the imbalance of prisoners taken (at least eight to one) is quite striking (see Table 7). This difference stemmed from the mass scale of repeated surrenders by Bolivian forces, a fact that served as powerful evidence of not only the ineptitude of the Bolivian high command but also a lack of leadership by its officer corps. The proliferation of prisoners became emblematic of Bolivia’s failures and humiliation in the war, especially for members of the reformist ideological and political movements that emerged among officers and intellectuals in prisoner-of-war camps. Given the importance of the prisoner-of-war experience, this section offers a unique perspective on the war by drawing on sources produced by the Paraguayan army, government, and church. These sources, while blind to the inner lives of prisoners, indicate the range of living situations and labors to which they were subject. They show how the Paraguayan state registered, inspected, and transported prisoners before assigning them to POW camps or individual homes, where they would provide much-

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Men Recruited</th>
<th>POWs Taken</th>
<th>% POWs</th>
<th>POWs returned Jan 1936</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Bolivia</strong></td>
<td>162,083 to 250,000</td>
<td>20,000 to 25,000</td>
<td>8% to 15%</td>
<td>16,825 to 17,143</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Paraguay</strong></td>
<td>140,000 to 150,000</td>
<td>2,500 to 3,000</td>
<td>1.8% to 2%</td>
<td>2,478 to 2,562</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

needed labor. Given that Paraguay mobilized approximately fifteen percent of its total population over the course of the war, the labor of prisoners was essential to maintaining infrastructure, keeping up agricultural and industrial production, and even staffing storefronts in Asunción.\textsuperscript{150}

Throughout the war, both sides captured soldiers on reconnaissance missions or who had been separated from their fellows during a retreat. These men provided vital pieces of intelligence (and misinformation) regarding the position, strength, and morale of their forces. Other Bolivians deserted over enemy lines, seeking relief from combat and dehydration. The majority of prisoners, however, resulted from the mass capture of armed units that, having been surrounded by Paraguay, ran out of provisions and surrendered before sufficient reinforcements could arrive to break the siege. Histories of the war seem to repeat the same story as they recount Bolivian defeats at Boquerón (September 1932), Campo Grande (September 1933), Campo Vía (December 1933), El Carmen (November 1934), and Pozo el Tigre (June 1935). Time and again, the high command missed signs or dismissed reports of Paraguayan activity, leaving substantial forces vulnerable to encirclement. After days (or, in the case of Boquerón, a month) of attempts to break the siege, Bolivian forces in the hundreds, or even thousands, surrendered, dehydrated, tired, hungry, and demoralized. Leading directly to General Hans Kundt’s resignation, the most significant surrender occurred at Campo Vía on December 11, 1933. Although estimates vary, Paraguay apparently captured somewhere between 6,000 and 8,000 soldiers, several

\textsuperscript{150} Figure calculated based on an estimated total population of 900,000, given 1924 census data showing a population of 828,968. Paraguay. Dirección General de Estadística y Censos, \textit{Censo nacional de población y viviendas, 1982: Cifras provisionales} (Asunción: La Dirección, 1982), 30.
high-ranking officers, 20 spiked guns, 25 mortars, over 100 heavy machine guns, around 400 light machine guns, and between 4,000 and 8,000 rifles, plus equipment and ammunition.151 Such mass surrenders were not only demoralizing to Bolivia, but they also supplied a cash-strapped Paraguay with much-needed weapons, ammunition, and equipment to continue the war effort.

The experience of often long imprisonments in Paraguay was thus a common one to many Bolivian soldiers. Yet the social differentiation was stark. Career officers, educated civilians who had been appointed reserve officers, and even some intellectuals among the troops were segregated from the rank-and-file, living in relatively luxury at the Military Academy, Cambio Grande, and Cambio Guazú, all of which were located in the capital. A Paraguayan priest assigned to say mass at one of these camps complained that these prisoners lived in luxury, did no work at all, and had the leisure to “organize math and language classes.”152 Many received gifts of money and goods sent by their families in Bolivia. A lawyer in Cochabamba, for example, imposed on the Archbishop of Asunción, Monsignor Juan Sinforiano Bogarín, to provide his son Julio Beltrán with letters of recommendation, clothing, textbooks, and substantial sums of money.153 And Bogarín lent Mario Cariaga books and attempted to get him included on the list of prisoners to be repatriated after hearing from his mother, father (Uruguay’s vice-consul in Tupiza), and

151 Brockmann, El general y sus presidentes, 314; Zook, Conduct of the Chaco War, 167. A list compiled by Paraguay of prisoners taken at Campo Via contains 6,473 names. See General Staff to Minister of Defense, #788, February 5, 1934, f. Prisioneros bolivianos- Remitidos a Asunción, d. 287-417, IHM.
152 Juan Ayala Solís, Parroquía de las Mercedes, to Archbishop of Asunción, July 19, 1934, Guerra del Chaco 901.9, Asuntos relativos a la Guerra del Chaco, AAA.
153 See series of thirty-six letters and telegrams exchanged between Bogarín, Daniel Beltrán, and Julio Beltrán from February 1934 to March 1938, Guerra del Chaco 901.9, Prisioneros de Guerra I-III and Asuntos relativos a la Guerra del Chaco, AAA.
uncle (a high-ranking member of the Uruguayan government).  

Officers and intellectuals at the Cambio Grande camp built up a large library and whiled away their imprisonment fervently debating Bolivia’s ills, resulting in the formation of a secret military society known as Radepa. Intellectual historian Carlos Aramayo describes the members of Radepa as attempting to work though their “double experience of capture as both salvation and personal humiliation, combined with anger at the collective defeat of the Bolivian army.” The group’s full name, Razón de Patria (meaning “because of the patria”) encapsulated its fascist-influenced remedy for Bolivia’s ills: putting the patria above all else. Aramayo includes the following quotation from the group’s statutes: “Personal desire has to be eliminated and society reshaped through rigid discipline. We must educate hearts that love the Patria, minds that serve it, and bodies that defend it.” After the war, these ideas would sweep through the junior ranks of the Bolivian officer corps and play an important role in several ideological and political movements. These prisoner-of-war camps also forged ties between reformist officers and young intellectuals that would become important in the military-run governments of the post-war period.

While immensely important to Bolivia’s subsequent trajectory, these discussions in elite POW camps characterized the captivity of a very select few. Sources produced by the Paraguayan state, on the other hand, depict conditions more characteristic of the rank-and-file troops’ experiences. These documents indicate that the Paraguayan state attempted to

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154 See series of sixteen letters exchanged between Alicia Aramayo de Cariaga, J. Enrique Cariaga, and Bogarín from October 1933 to October 1935, Guerra del Chaco 901.9, Prisioneros de Guerra II-III and Asuntos relativos a la Guerra del Chaco, AAA.
156 Quoted in Aramayo, "The Intellectual Origins..." (diss.), 269-70. For original, see Francisco Barrero, Radepa y la Revolución Nacional (La Paz: Editorial Urquigo, 1976).
register and inspect all prisoners in rearguard staging areas in order to assess their health, social status, and skills. For example, one of the surviving conscription sheets on which Paraguayan officials noted soldiers’ vital data registers the existence of Antonio Mamani among the prisoners. The sheet identifies him as a nineteen-year-old illiterate bricklayer who entered service in October 1932 and fell prisoner seven months later. Whoever registered Mamani described him as having brown skin, black hair, a round face, brown eyes, and a snub nose.  

During in-processing, prisoners like Mamani were to be “disinfected” (likely through bathing them and shaving their heads), vaccinated against typhus and smallpox, and given medical exams to ensure that they would not infect the Paraguayan population. Some examinations were documented through photographs such as Figure 30, which shows lines of naked prisoners holding a piece of paper that likely recorded their vital data. The vulnerability of the Bolivian prisoners stands in stark contrast to the physicians’ power. Clothed in white coats, one feels a prisoners glands and inspects his throat as another looks on. Although these examinations likely resembled those that conscripts and reservists had undergone when first performing obligatory military service or when joining the wartime army, the context of men serving their patria and those in the hands of the enemy were diametrically opposed. It was likely their status as enemy combatants that made the photographing of these examinations possible; certainly no similar photographs have

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157 Director of Etapas in Puerto Casado to Minister of War, #170, f. Prisioneros bolivianos, d. 408-426, IHM.
158 Department of War and Navy to Director of Military Health, #72, October 3, 1933, f. Prisioneros bolivianos, d. 506; Minister of Defense to Director of Military Health, #184, December 15, 1933, f. Prisioneros bolivianos, d. 487; Commander of Etapas in Campo Col. Estigarribia in Puerto Casado to Minister of Defense, #443 and 444, December 22, 1933, f. Prisioneros bolivianos – Remitidos a Asunción, d. 444-445; Telegram from Dr. Rodríguez in Puerto Casado to Minister of Defense, #451 and 622, April 20 and 27, 1934, [loose folder on shelves], IHM.
emerged of medical examinations of Bolivian or Paraguayan soldiers by their own armies.

![Figure 30: Medical Examination of Bolivian Prisoners, undated](source)

Some prisoners seem to have spent weeks in rearguard camps before travelling to Asunción, whereas others made the journey soon after capture. Photographs like Figure 31 and Figure 32 depict hundreds of Bolivian prisoners, still in uniform, crammed on the railcars and river boats that transported them out of the war zone. The influx of prisoners led to the establishment of POW camps throughout the capital and interior. Many spaces in Asunción were repurposed to house prisoners. Barracks, schools, prisons, the botanic garden, and even the Encarnación Cathedral housed newly shaved and uniformed prisoners, like those depicted in Figure 33. Others were sent to camps in the interior, such as Itá, Emboscada, Piquete-Cué, and Isla Peña Hermosa.
Figure 31: Bolivian Prisoners atop Train, undated
Source: Box 79, Guerra del Chaco, Prisionero, #188, IHM.

Figure 32: Bolivian Prisoners on River Boat, undated
Source: Box 79, Guerra del Chaco, Prisionero, #178, IHM.
Most prisoners worked in agriculture, industry, and on roads. Just as the Bolivian state was facing a production crisis so profound that it motivated the Salamanca administration to curtail rural recruitment, thousands of Bolivian prisoners were staffing the Paraguayan state farms that provisioned their enemy’s home front and troops. Working in storefronts, factories, and on infrastructure, they also replaced at least some of the Paraguayan men who were fighting in the Chaco. The use of prisoners’ labor by private individuals or companies was so common that one Asunción-based clothier repeatedly bought space in a major newspaper to advertise its stock of “REGULATION dress and underwear” for Bolivian prisoners.  

159 The Ministry of Defense archives are filled with letters requisitioning prisoners for particular tasks as if they were pieces of equipment. Manuel

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Ignacio Torres, for example, wrote to the Minister of War asking for fifty prisoners “to work on the military farm that has been installed across from Villa del Rosario.”160 Others individuals and private companies requested prisoners for work binding books, laying bricks, repairing roads, and manning factories.161 Quite a few Bolivians, like those depicted smiling alongside their Paraguayan counterparts in Figure 34, worked on small farms throughout the country.

![Figure 34: Bolivian Prisoners and Paraguayan Peons, June 1935](image)

Source: Box 71, Guerra del Chaco, Retaguardia, #5, IHM.

Soldiers, especially those working on farms in the interior, often lived in very different conditions from those in the model camps found in the capital. For example, in July 1935 (after the war’s end), the Minister of War requested 250 uniforms for the prisoners tending the fields in El Peñón, writing that, in their current state, “said prisoners cannot be

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160 Manuel I. Torres to Minister of War, undated, f. Prisioneros bolivianos, d. 633, IHM.
161 See, for example, Minister of Defense to Minister of Education and Justice, #426, May 9, 1935, f. Prisioneros bolivianos- Remitidos a Asuncion, d. 40; General Staff to Minister of Defense, no 507, June 14, 1934; Minister of Defense to General Staff, #448, December 5, 1934, f. Prisioneros bolivianos, d. 267 and 407, IHM.
brought to the capital because the great majority of them are completely nude.”

Yet the Paraguayan state, perhaps only to appease international monitors, appears to have taken complaints about abuse seriously, investigating several incidents over the course of the war. For example, a Paraguayan priest reported that the population surrounding one POW camp had denounced “rough punishments” sometimes dealt by guards, foremen, and Bolivian NCOs. And the chief of a POW camp on the outskirts of Asunción provoked a detailed investigation after he reported Public Works employee Ernesto Kolzón for drunkenness and mistreating the work gang of ninety prisoners laboring in a quarry. He relayed the accusations of prisoner Patricio Chambi, who claimed Kolzón “had thrown a rock at him, producing bruises on his right leg,” and those of Leonardo Flores, who had wounds on his face that he said “were caused by lashes applied by said Señor.”

Prisoners often escaped, perhaps taking off for the border or finding Paraguayans to hide them. For example, the director of the local economic committee responsible for Loma Claval (Yala Umbú) reported that three of the seven prisoners whom he had assigned to help Sixto Ríos on his farm had taken off the night of January 19. He surmised that they had taken the road to Pilar and then crossed the river to freedom in Argentina. This was not an isolated incident. Paraguayan consuls in Argentina’s border cities repeatedly called for more

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162 Minister of War to President of National Provisions Committee, #542, July 6, 1935, f. Junta de Aprovisionamiento Guerra del Chaco, IHM.

163 For examples, see: Office of Military Censorship to Chief of Staff and Minister of War, #70, June 3, 1933; Information Office for POWs of the Minister of Foreign Relations to Minister of War, #159, September 8, 1933; Minister of War to Minister of Foreign Relations, #666, September 9, 1933; Report to Chief of I Department, September 15, 1933; Departmental Police to Minister of Defense, #648, September 20, 1933, f. Prisioneros bolivianos, d. 491-94, 509, 512, 519, 526-45, 627-31; M. Elguera to Peruvian Consul in Asunción, September 15, 1934, f. Consulado, Guerra del Chaco; Military Administration to Minister of Defense, #233, March 2, 1935, f. notas al MinDef, IHM.

164 Chief of Staff to Minister of Defense, #3745, June 7, 1935, f. Prisioneros bolivianos, d. 78-79, IHM.

“energetic measures” to guard prisoners, reporting that many had escaped. However, given the substantial liberty enjoyed by many prisoners in their jobs and camps, the number that escaped is perhaps less surprising than the number that did not. For many soldiers, imprisonment was likely preferable to returning to the front.

Thousands of Bolivians died during their imprisonment; some from wounds incurred during the war and others from disease or accidents. For example, Andrés Quispe, a forty-two-year-old farmworker from the department of Potosí, fell prisoner at Piciuba in December 1934 and died of “physical exhaustion” in Paraguay’s Central Military Hospital five months later. Others among the dead would remain anonymous, like the drowned prisoner who, according to the boat’s captain, could not be identified, “even by his own compañeros.” Some prisoners died by their own hand, as apparently occurred with Félix Miranda, a mechanic from Oruro captured at Cañada el Carmen in November 1934. His fellows testified that he had drowned himself in the Paraguayan River while working at the army’s foundry in September 1935. They described his final days as marked by depression as he stopped speaking to his friends and became “locked in a certain silence.”

Most prisoners resided in camps, but a substantial number appear to have been quartered in private homes. For example, Archbishop Bogarín reported that soldier Andrés

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166 See, for example, telegram transcribed in Minister of Defense to Chief of Staff, #295, September 4, 1934, f. Prisioneros bolivianos, d. 315, IHM.
168 Chief of Staff to Minister of Defense, #226, April 12, 1935, f. Prisioneros bolivianos, d. 10-14, IHM.
169 Department of Naval Transport to Minister of Defense, VII.11, f. Prisioneros bolivianos- Remitidos a Asuncion, d. 436, IHM.
170 Director of Military Arsenal in Puerto Sajonia to Minister of Defense, #314, September 5, 1935, f. documentos varios, d. 1-3, IHM.
Urquista was “perfectly healthy in the home of one Señor Juan S. Quintana in Puerto Sajonia.” Others apparently had opportunities to develop close relationships with their captors: At the war’s end, Fortunato Sanchez, a twenty-three-year-old soldier from Tarija, wrote to the minister of war, asking for permission to stay in Paraguay rather than be repatriated. He wrote of the “good relations” he had formed in the town of Altos, where he had been assigned to work for the justice of the peace: “My desire is to stay in Paraguay, in this town, to dedicate myself to my profession of carpentry.” Another begged permission to marry a Paraguayan woman.

An important source of information about prisoners of war comes from the Catholic Church, which, as a neutral, transnational organization, could facilitate the exchange of information between families separated by war. In fact, Monsignor Bogarín, the Archbishop of Asunción, played a vital role for many prisoners and their families. In addition to sending priests to circumspectly inspect camps while saying mass for the prisoners, Bogarín fielded thousands of requests from Bolivian families desperate for contact with the men they had sent to war. Many letters and telegrams came to Bogarín via bishops and priests in Bolivia; others came directly from families. Some begged Bogarín to ascertain whether their sons and husbands were among the prisoners; others sent gifts and money orders through him or implored him to use his position to do favors for their loved ones. For example, the widow Flora Criales sent a letter in November 1935 that informed Bogarín of her imminent death.

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171 Letter from Archbishop of Asunción to Monsignor Fray Tomás Apse in Cochabamba, May 29, 1935, Guerra del Chaco 901.9, Prisioneros de Guerra I, AAA.
172 Fortunato Sanchez to Minister of Defense, July 23, 1935, f. notas varias Guerra del Chaco, IHM.
173 Próspero Cárdenas to Minister of Defense, November 18, 1935, f. notas varias Guerra del Chaco, IHM.

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and asked him to facilitate her son’s release: “Have mercy on a wretched mother, dealt the
greatest pain by the separation from her only loved one, her son, who has been absent from
home for three years.” Families of at least modest income are significantly overrepresented
amongst Bogarín’s correspondents, but a series of fifteen letters from late 1935 came from
women in the Oruro department with names like Quispe, Condori, and Mamani. All employ
similar language and appear to be written in the same hand, suggesting that some literate
entrepreneur facilitated these requests.\textsuperscript{175}

\textbf{Conclusions}

Far from portraying themselves as abject victims on the front lines, some indigenous
veterans assert their willingness to participate in the war and emphasize having served
alongside men with different professional, economic, regional, and ethnic backgrounds. And,
although archival sources cannot reveal individual motives for mobilization, they do show
that men from all regions and walks of life presented in the first waves of mobilization and
served throughout the war. Likewise, they indicate that evaders hailed from diverse social
classes and, most surprisingly, that the state’s compromises and accommodations regarding
recruitment did not always correlate to social status. Yet court-martial and other military
records support widespread ideas about the army’s failures and the chaos and suffering of
the frontlines. While Paraguayan sources on prisoners confirm hard labor and instances of

\textsuperscript{174} Floras Criales v. de Montes to Archbishop of Asunción, November 9, 1935, Guerra del Chaco 901.9,
Asuntos relativos a la Guerra del Chaco 1932-1936, AAA.

\textsuperscript{175} See letters from Manuela A. de Fernández, Juana R. de Flores Bartolomé Quispe U., Bonifacia v. de
Mamani, Lorenza C. de Condori, Rosa Saravia, María Calli de Lozano, Paulina Adrián de Mollo, Marcelina
R. de Lu___, Gregoria Ticona Calle, María P. de Rueda, Tomasa v. de Claire, Berna Aguilar, Segundino
Poveda, and Ignacia Tapia between August 1935 and January 1936, Guerra del Chaco 901.9, Asuntos
relativos a la Guerra del Chaco 1932-1936, AAA.
abuse, they also suggest that some prisoners enjoyed considerable liberty and even forged new lives during their captivity.

The archival sources on which this chapter is based indicate that the Chaco War brought conscription to an unprecedented proportion of the population, touching all levels of Bolivian society. While many of these soldiers were reservists, who had already served as conscripts over the past twenty years, many others had been excused through the lottery or exemptions or had never registered or presented for service. A significant number of the men who served in the Chaco had likely been unaware of their obligations under the 1907 conscription law prior to the conflict. The Chaco War undoubtedly represented the largest single undertaking by the Bolivian state up to that point, as the central government and its agents used patriotism, accommodation, coercive structures, and brute force to incorporate a massive number of men into the army. Because this process was negotiated at the local level, it affected individual communities and families in unpredictable ways. But, in touching a large swath of society, the war caused far more people to not only feel the weight of state imposition but also, as we will see in the next chapter, gain access to new avenue for claims-making.
Chapter 5: Reckoning with the Good and Bad Sons of the *Patria*: Hierarchies and Claims-Making in Postwar Bolivia

Eight years after the cessation of hostilities, Donato Gonzáles wrote to the military tribunal in La Paz to denounce a neighbor as a Chaco-War evader. Identifying himself as an indigenous *ex-comunario* from Luribay (La Paz) who had not only served in the war but also escaped from a Paraguayan prisoner-of-war camp, Gonzáles proclaimed it his duty to report such “bad sons of the country.”

In composing this petition, Gonzáles (or his anonymous notary) claimed authority based on his service during the war, employing the metaphor of sons to express a sense of belonging to the Bolivian nation and to contrast his own status as a “good son” with evaders’ failures as “bad” ones. Bolivian politicians and military officers had long relied on this same metaphor of sons to structure the idealized relationship between the nation, themselves, and the young men subject to the 1907 obligatory-military-service law. Even Lieutenant Colonel Carlos Nuñez del Prado, the author of the 1905 Quilco story that so forcefully condemned nineteenth-century practices of impressment and abuse, professed the goal of recovering the memory of rank-and-file soldiers who had been “ever-loyal sons to the *patria*.”

This familial metaphor placed Bolivia in the role of the mother who nurtured her sons, making them, in turn, fiercely loyal and willing to lay down their lives to protect her. The less explicitly stated piece of the metaphor was the father figure, understood to be the civilian politicians who made decisions about the fate of the nation and the military officers.

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1 Donato Gónzales to Permanent Tribunal of Military Justice, October 11, 1943, DEL-14-009, Tribunal Permanente de Justicia Militar, Archivo Histórico Militar, La Paz, Bolivia (hereafter cited as AHM-TPJM).
who educated these sons in their duties to their mother and in the skills needed to defend her. Both during and after the Chaco War, these civilian and military “fathers” had to decide how to handle not only the “bad sons” who had fled over the borders, hid in the countryside, or bought their way out of military service but also those who, after donning the uniform of Bolivia’s defenders, had abandoned their units during the long trek south, deserted from the front, or even taken refuge in the arms of the enemy. These sons’ shirking of duty and cowardice in the face of peril could perhaps be forgiven but might, to push the metaphor, merit disownment. Would political and military authorities forgive these errors and welcome them back into the Bolivian family? Or would they expend significant bureaucratic and policing resources to track them all down? And what would be done with those identified and captured? Would each be tried for their crimes and then spend years in prison?

As shown in chapter 4, the civilian administrations of Salamanca and Tejada Sorzano dealt with the evaders during the war through a combination of energetic pursuit and concessions negotiated with various interests groups. This chapter shows that military leaders in the zone of operations and those who would dominate the postwar political scene for the next decade adopted a surprisingly similar decision-making process in which practicality trumped formal punishment through the military-justice system. In exploring the nexus of social interactions that coincided with the legal and extralegal handling of wartime evaders and deserters, this chapter reveals the erratic implementation of institutional procedures, the state’s increased ability to enforce a document-based regime, and the popularization of a patriotic discourse that even Bolivia’s “bad sons” could use to perform
their membership in the nation.

After a brief examination of the treatment of deserters in the field, this chapter turns to the various forms of reckoning that characterized the postwar process of national reconstruction. Discredited and divided, postwar military and political leaders passed a sequence of laws that added a new hierarchy to existing ones based on social class, education, ethnicity, and culture: that of wartime service. Instituting, at least in principle, a strict documentary regime that would force all men to regularize their military status, they proposed to reorganize society, reconstructing Bolivia along the lines of patriotic service. This hierarchy differentiated not only between those who served and those who had broken the law by evading and deserting but also between soldiers and men who had received exemptions during the war or who had benefitted from reservist-on-assignment status. Veterans’ groups even extended this differentiation to distinguish those who had served on the front lines from those who had remained in rearguard staging areas by allowing only the former to join. However, Bolivia’s leaders, both civilian and military, were ultimately unable to break from colonial notions of hierarchy. They did not even debate extending formal citizenship to all veterans after the war and instead explicitly chose to retain literacy provisions that barred the vast majority from voting. Despite the constantly reiterated principle that all Bolivian men were sons, either good or bad, they maintained a marked distinction between those with linguistic and social capital and those without. Rural, illiterate, and indigenous men could shed their blood in the Chaco but were not “ready” for the responsibility of citizenship. A disastrous war during which many non-citizen conscripts

gave their lives was not enough to immediately overturn these long-held beliefs.

Tellingly, the proposals of these “fathers” for reckoning with Bolivia’s “bad sons” still created a tiered system that treated men differently depending on their level of education and social status. In law and practice, authorities often acted based on the idea that literate men from urban areas who already belonged, as full citizens, to the Bolivian nation should have felt a greater sense of duty than non-citizen conscripts, usually categorized as indigenous, who were less educated and perhaps even unaware of their status as sons and the accompanying duties. In creating two sets of standards, military leaders in the field and later in the presidential palace replicated Salamanca’s decision to create separate mobilization rules for indigenous men. These measures even echoed the decrees of the Liberal politicians who, in 1908, 1912, and 1916, had determined that indigenous men would not be considered omisos “due to ignorance of the laws.”⁴ In so doing, these civilian and military actors across the decades drew on dominant ideas about indigenous ignorance. Although they insisted that all men, both indigenous and non, be included in the familial metaphor as sons of Bolivia, all sons were clearly not equal, as old prejudices continued to dominate decision-making.

However, by looking at military-justice proceedings against deserters and evaders in the early 1940s and at the first state-sponsored indigenous congress, which was held in 1945, this chapter also shows that indigenous veterans assumed a new authority based on their wartime service. Analyzing the petitions of several indigenous veterans and speeches by the indigenous president of the 1945 congress, it argues that although most of these men were

⁴ Supreme Decree, December 16, 1908; Ministerial resolution, December 28, 1912, Anexos de la memoria de guerra y colonización (La Paz: Intendencia de Guerra, 1913), 20; Memoria de Guerra y Colonización (La Paz: n.p., 1916), 21.
not legally citizens, they began acting as if they were. They invoked their wartime service in order to make individual and collective demands on the state and expressed a rhetorically powerful sense of belonging to the Bolivian nation. And the political upheaval set into motion by the disastrous war created the conditions in which the state might actually listen to their demands.

**Coping with Wartime Desertion: Between Mass Reincorporation and Exemplary Execution**

At ten o’clock in the morning on March 31, 1933, all the troops in fortín Tezen, including those occupying beds in the makeshift military hospital, followed orders to take up their weapons, form two lines, and shoot at the five of their fellows that had been accused of inciting the desertion of over forty soldiers at fortín Platanillos two weeks before. During this and other similar scenes that occurred over the course of the war, military commanders used such exemplary punishments to reassert authority over their errant sons, demonstrating their power to administer the ultimate punishment. However, this rigorous exercise of authority was not at all representative of how officers handled deserters during the Chaco War.

Despite the use of powerfully stigmatizing rhetoric to discuss desertion, the army could not afford to lose frontline soldiers to mass execution or imprisonment due to the difficulty of mobilizing men for the war. Nor would it be practical to stage thousands of military-justice proceedings, no matter how summary. Informal procedures thus predominated. This informality, along with a general inability of commanders to keep track of their men, has produced military records so incomplete that scholars have no grasp of the actual scale of wartime desertion and have instead relied upon an unexamined estimate of ten thousand

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5 Report, March 31, 1931, DES-16-027, AHM-TPJM.
deserters.\textsuperscript{6}

As with evaders, the vast majority of deserters lay beyond the reach of the military during the war. They had hidden in the countryside, fled over the border to neighboring countries, or even presented at recruitment stations under different names. Moreover, no consistent practice emerged to sanction even the deserters who turned themselves in or were apprehended by military units. Driven by a need for soldiers on the front lines, the vast majority of officers appear to have simply reincorporated these men into the ranks. On the other hand, some chose to convene military tribunals, even sending a few deserters back to La Paz for trial. Analysis of the cases that were tried formally reveals the varied strategies employed by the army to handle its “bad sons” and suggests the ways that these men maneuvered within the dominant discourse of patriotism, deploying it with varying degrees of fluency in order to influence the decisions of the military “fathers” who would determine their fate.

The Military Penal Code provided that all desertion by the rank-and-file during wartime would be referred to military tribunals and be punished with three years’ imprisonment; those deserting while on campaign would suffer an additional year, and those who deserted in view of the enemy would be sentenced to two additional years.\textsuperscript{7} Despite this legal clarity, anecdotal evidence (which will have to suffice in the absence of systematic data on desertion) suggests a range of possible treatments. Reincorporation into the ranks


\textsuperscript{7} Art. 222, Bolivia. Ministerio de Guerra, \textit{Códigos militares de la República de Bolivia} (La Paz: El Comercio de Bolivia, 1905), 246.
appears to have been the most common method of handling deserters who turned themselves in or were captured, but at least 257 faced military tribunals, and (together with self-mutilators) at least 23 were summarily executed by firing squads. An arbitrary combination of lenience, humiliation, and exemplary punishment thus awaited the “cowardly” sons deemed to have failed their patria by choosing to flee or injure themselves rather than fight.

The events that led to the March 1933 execution at Tezen coincided with another mass desertion by soldiers from the twenty-third and thirtieth regiments at the nearby fortín Corrales. Buoyed by his forces’ recent success in the Alihuatá sector, General Hans Kundt, upon learning of these desertions, instructed his officers to arrest the leaders [cabecillas], who should be “shot without any more formalities.” However, he advised that repentant troops “who were seduced” should be reincorporated into their units. This solution allowed the army to retain the vast majority of captured deserters while still demonstrating the severity of their crime. In the case of the Corrales desertion, one Gonzálo Zambrana, described in the records as an illiterate farmworker from Santa Cruz, unwillingly provided the sacrifice that expiated the crimes of his fellows. The records of Zambrana’s testimony depicts him as flatly denying that he incited others and instead claiming that his only sin was having been the one to inform the captain of a general sentiment that he and his fellows were “completely

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8 Number of military-justice proceedings compiled based on boxes 15-18, AHM-TPJ/M. Number of executions compiled based on DES-16-026 and DES-16-027, AHM-TPJ/M; lists compiled on August 31, 1933, April 18, 1934, May 10, 1934, July 1, 1934, and June 25, 1935, Fall0200-Fall0232; Telegram from 2nd Corps Commander to Campaign Commander, March 8 and 13, 1934, Fall0240, Fall0241; Commander of 9th Division to Campaign Commander, #82-34, 126-34, and 139-34, March 1, March 29, and April 4, 1934, Fall0335, Fall0338, Fall0342, I.C.E Y II C.E. Fallecidos Heridos Desertores e Izquierdistas, tomo 28, 1933-1934, Archivo Central del Ministerio de Defensa Nacional, La Paz, Bolivia (hereafter cited as AC-MDN).
exhausted, without the courage or strength to continue fighting.”

Despite supporting
testimony, Zambrana faced a firing squad of nine soldiers only hours after giving his
statement. Twenty-one other deserters attended his execution, thus converting his
punishment into an instructive spectacle and ensuring that news of it would spread. When an
official tribunal reviewed the case several months later, it used forceful rhetoric to affirm the
decision to swiftly execute Zambrana, arguing that it had been necessary in order to
“energetically cut off the spread of an evil that threatened to disturb… the successful final
outcome of our armed forces in this war.”

Officers took similar measures to staunch the spate of izquierdistas. These soldiers
were called “leftists” because they shot themselves in the left hand in order to escape the
front line. Lists compiled by the army named 720 izquierdistas over the course of the war
and reported that firing squads had executed at least seven of them during a forty-five-day
period in early 1934. This change in policy towards izquierdistas was quite effective: Army
records report a ninety-three percent decrease in this phenomenon after the executions.

Without access to the bodies of soldiers who deserted over enemy lines, military
leaders resorted to a different sort of exemplary punishment: deploying patriotic discourse to
humiliate these men by portraying them publicly as cowards and traitors. Accusing Santiago
García of abandoning his guard post, deserting to Paraguayan forces, and giving them

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9 Gonzalo Zambrana statement, March 20, 1933, DES-16-026, AHM-TPJM.
10 Report of the Consejo de Revisión en Campaña, May 8, 1933, DES-16-026, AHM-TPJM.
11 Gral. Ovidio Quiroga Ochoa, En la paz y en la guerra al servicio de la patria, 1916-1971 (La Paz: Librería y
12 See lists compiled on August 31, 1933, April 18, 1934, May 10, 1934, July 1, 1934, and June 25, 1935,
Fall0200-Fall0232, I.C.E Y II C.E. Fallecidos Heridos Desertores e Izquierdistas, tomo 28, 1933-1934,
AC-MDN.
information about his unit’s position, General Kundt wrote to the head of military forces in Aguirre’s home of Cochabamba, insisting that he “spread as much as possible, the name of this deserter, reporting the grave crime that he has committed.”

On another occasion, Kundt attached a list of deserters and ordered that their names be printed in local newspapers under the heading “Soldiers who, forgetting the glorious tradition of the Bolivian Army, passed to the enemy.” He insisted that this publicity would prevent “the repetition of events so prejudicial and disgraceful for the entire nation.”

However, execution and public humiliation appear to have been the exception rather than the rule. Much more common was the simple reincorporation of deserters back into the ranks. For example, in July 1933, the commander of the 124th Oruro Detachment’s 1st Company reported that Genaro Condorí, Miguel Cuevas, and Carlos Flores, all of whom had been listed among the ten soldiers who had deserted in May, had been reincorporated. In fact, reports sent by officers to the comptroller often listed deserters who had recently joined the unit among the soldiers needing to be paid and fed, as did the lists of soldiers that they sent to the high command. Moreover, entire detachments of men departing for the front

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13 General Hans Kundt to Departmental Chief of Staff in Cochabamba, September 29, 1933, Fall0104, I.C.E Y II C.E. Fallecidos Heridos Desertores e Izquierdistas, tomo 28, 1933-1934, AC-MDN.
14 General Hans Kundt to Interim Chief of Staff, March 9, 1933, Fall0108-Fall0110. See similar correspondence regarding traitors: General Hans Kundt to Departmental Chief of Staff of Cochabamba, #108-33, September 29, 1933, Fall0104; Lt. Col. David Toro to Interim Chief of Staff, #416-33, October 9, 1933, Fall0101; General Hans Kundt to Interim Chief of Staff, #535-33, November 13, 1933, Fall0097, I.C.E Y II C.E. Fallecidos Heridos Desertores e Izquierdistas, tomo 28, 1933-1934, AC-MDN.
15 Report on 1st Company expenses, 124th Oruro Detachment, June 10 and July ?, 1933, Controlaría General de la República, Cajas Blancas 69, doc. 254, Archivo de La Paz, La Paz, Bolivia (hereafter cited as ALP).
16 See reports on detachments dating from June 1933 to February 1934, Controlaría General de la República, Cajas Blancas 69, doc. 254, 279, 280, ALP, and bound volumes listing mobilized soldiers, Regimientos de Infantería 1 al 23 tomo 1, Reclutamientos de La Paz-Cochabamba-Sucre-Oruro, tomo 11, AC-MDN.
between February 1933 and the end of the war consisted solely of deserters, captured evaders, and men who had been previously evacuated due to injury or illness.\textsuperscript{17}

The lists and reports indicating the reincorporation of deserters offer no rationale for these decisions; nor do they explain what, if anything, distinguished these men from those who faced ad-hoc military tribunals in rearguard staging areas or were sent back to La Paz to be tried for desertion. Yet even those soldiers whose cases entered the military-justice system received far from uniform treatment. In fact, the officers charged with convening disciplinary procedures often disagreed as to the proper course of action. They cited multiple (and often conflicting) articles from the Manual of Military Procedure and the Military Penal Code and often reached wildly different conclusions regarding sentences and judgment. These inconsistencies betrayed not only a lack of legal professionalism but also mutually conflicting goals: Officers participating in tribunals likely faced pressure from their superiors to issue exemplary punishments, but they also knew that Bolivia needed every soldier on the front lines. While most of the judicial records are incomplete, internal evidence in fact indicates that many of the men officially tried for desertion were eventually reincorporated into the ranks, sometimes even after a military magistrate had recommended jail time or service in correctional companies. For example, in October 1934, General Enrique Peñaranda closed a case that had been pending against fifteen deserters since September 1932. In explaining this action, he noted that he had not received any complaints or reports of bad behavior in the months since “the accused had been reincorporated into various units

\textsuperscript{17} Bound volume Destacamentos del 353-358, Evacuados, Omisos, Desertores, tomo 52, AC-MDN.
of the National Army.” Many of these “bad sons” thus apparently went on to accumulate records of honorable service during the remainder of the war and, at its close, received discharge papers untainted by their earlier fault.

Yet these judicial records reveal far more than just the arbitrary nature of wartime military justice. They also offer a glimpse, albeit a highly mediated one, into how these “bad sons” spoke to the state, as represented by military officers. Unlike military-justice records from the previous decades, these statements came from soldiers across the social spectrum rather than just literate, urban men. The accused presented desertions that ranged from the involuntary to the premeditated and calculated. Some declared their desire to return to their units and fight for Bolivia while others may have preferred imprisonment to the suffering of war. Some faced the possibility of execution while others may have hoped that cunning statements might secure their release. And some were probably angry or even resigned to their fate, broken by war and disheartened by their capture. As shown in chapter 4, when asked why they deserted, many soldiers cited fear of the suffering that awaited them on the front lines, invoked the bonds of family, claimed that they had been left behind by their regiments, or drew on contractual logic to blame the army for failing to protect or provision them. These testimonies were unlikely to curry favor with those passing judgment: Article 141 of the Military Penal Code declared that “cowardice will be considered an aggravating circumstance” rather than an attenuating one, and at least one military magistrate censured a soldier left behind by his unit, ordering that he suffer “strict arrest” for “not having been

18 General Peñaranda report, October 2, 1934, DES-16-023, AHM-TPJM.
there for the departure of his regiment.”19 If these statements accurately reflected the desertsers’ answers, they had not yet learned how to speak to this arm of the Bolivian state or had failed to be strategic in their statements out of resignation, anger, or ignorance.

On the other hand, many statements apologized for the offense committed and professed a patriotic willingness to return to the front lines. In so doing, these testimonies drew on a predominant discourse of sacrificing all on the altar of the patria that was used widely during the war by government officials, military officers, and many educated men and women. For example, Froilan Navarro, identified as a twenty-five-year-old farmworker from Irupana (La Paz), claimed to have deserted due to illness and then presented again under another name. His testimony closes with a profession of his supposed desire to fight for Bolivia: “After everything, my deepest wish is to march to the front again, this time not to avoid but rather to face the enemy and fight on the front line to erase the affront that I have committed.”20 During certain proceedings, these patriotic declarations were so common that I suspect that prisoners were coaching each other in this discourse as they awaited trial or that the transcribing secretary began adding pro forma declarations after hearing them from so many deserters. When the prosecutor asked at the end of their statements if they had anything to add, many soldiers added variations on what became a standard refrain: “I want

20 Froilan Navarro statement, December 29, 1932, DES-16-008, AHM-TPJM. Writing about the Soviet military, Joshua Sanborn notes that many deserters promised to use violence against the nation’s enemies in order to avoid punishment for desertion. He reports that the Soviet military officially accepted these promises, allowing soldiers sentenced to death to expiate their sins by performing well on the front line. He argues that violence thus became a central facet of citizenship through which men could recover their lost belonging in the nation. Joshua A. Sanborn, Drafting the Russian Nation: Military Conscription, Total War, and Mass Politics, 1905-1925 (DeKALB: Northern Illinois Press, 2003), 182.
to be incorporated in any regiment to return to the Chaco and comply with my duty to defend my patria.”

Some soldiers jailed in La Paz for desertion submitted impassioned pleas, perhaps written by lawyers, to return to the front. For example, a petition signed by Julio Rivas Arteche, who was described as a twenty-three-year-old farmworker from Charapaya (Cochabamba), displayed a remarkable fluency in the patriotic discourse that identified wartime self-sacrifice as the ultimate marker of national belonging: “As a good Bolivian, I beg to fulfill my duty, and I do not believe that I will be deprived [from participating] in this situation of pure Bolivianism.” The petition further promised that he, “like a good soldier,” was ready to “die, face to face [with the enemy], for the patria defending our territorial integrity in the Chaco.” On the other hand, others soldiers, like Juan Cusi Mamani, had not yet become so proficient in the use of this patriotic language, stating: “rather than suffering in the brig, I want to be sent to the front to defend the country.” Far from professing that serving Bolivia was his fondest desire, Cusi presented it as preferable to incarceration.

Many officers serving on tribunals also employed this patriotic discourse to buttress their arguments for stiff punishments. Acting as a prosecutor in a set of fifteen desertion cases in mid-1933, Lieutenant Colonel Zacariás Inchausti urged the military magistrate to reject recommendations for leniency and to “apply exemplary punishments that will curb all antipatriotic outbreaks.” He insisted that “justice” was necessary “to raise the moral standard

21 See twenty-four similar statements in DES-16-011, DES-16-012, DES-16-013, DES-16-015, DES-16-021, AHM-TPJM.

22 Julio Rivas petition, January 18, 1933, DES-16-013, AHM-TPJM.

23 Juan Cusi statement, January 5, 1933, DES-16-012, AHM-TPJM.
Another officer-prosecutor advocated “energetic and rapid sanctions” to protect “military honor and discipline and the nation’s interests.” Desertion, they argued, threatened both the military as an institution and Bolivia as a nation. The punishment of errant soldiers would thus serve a moral purpose by instructing all conscripts and reservists in their duties to the nation.

Yet one military magistrate called on very different tropes in explaining his decision to excuse the desertion of two soldiers, indicating the continuation of racialized ideas of Indians as children not fully responsible for their actions. Major Alcibiades Antelo recommended leniency because the accused had not received military training; he then clarified, “that is to say that they are not soldiers, and anyways they are pure Indians, ignorant.” The transcribed version of testimony in this case in fact reported that one of the accused deserters, a monolingual Quechua speaker named Valentín Mamani, had employed this very argument: He claimed to have thought that he was being released from military service when an officer took away his rifle and bayonet, saying that he did not need them due to his lack of military training. While this might have been Mamani’s interpretation of the situation, it could also have been an apparently quite effective strategy that called on stereotypes to present his desertion as the result of misunderstanding rather than a willful abandonment of duty.

The statements of another rural man combined claims of ignorance with patriotic declarations, perhaps hoping that one might help him escape punishment. Picked up as a

24 Recommendation of the military prosecutor, March 6, 1933, DES-16-023, AHM-TPJM.
25 Recommendation of the military prosecutor, October 2, 1932, DES-15-016, AHM-TPJM.
26 Recommendation of My. Alcibiades Antelo, November 25, 1932, DES-16-023, AHM-TPJM.
27 Valentín Mamani statement, September 20, 1932, DES-16-023, AMH-TPJM.
deserter because he was wearing a shirt issued by the army, Manuel Ramírez claimed that, far from being a deserter, he had never reported for military service “because I believed that it wasn’t a crime and because of ignorance of my duties since I am a poor farmworker who doesn’t even know how to write, only how to sign my name…. Recently discovering that I am obligated to defend my patria…, I want to be taught how to use a rifle in order to go to the Chaco.”28 Ramírez’s statement combined the tropes of patriotic duty with those of rural ignorance, blaming his failure in the former on the latter and implying that fault ultimately lay with the state for neglecting to educate him in his duties. Especially when combined with patriotic professions, these claims may have found a receptive audience because they were legible within dominant narratives of race and social class.

During a war in which the predominant method for dealing with captured deserters was reincorporation, soldiers tried for this crime had reason to believe that patriotic professions of their willingness to fight for a beloved patria might have an effect on their sentence. Yet this discourse of patriotic service was shared not only by officers and the urban, literate minority of soldiers who had testified in military-justice proceedings prior to the war. In fact, evidence suggests that ad-hoc holding facilities in the rearguard and prisons in La Paz may have served as classrooms where deserters, perhaps with help from attorneys and notaries, tutored each other in using patriotic discourse to speak to the state. By the time they faced a military tribunal, many soldiers had learned to structure their speech according to norms considered valid by the institution and thus contributed to the popularization of this language among new groups. Deserters could use this language to mark themselves as

28 Manuel Ramírez statement, December 16, 1932 DES-16-009, AHM-TPJM.
loyal or even to condemn the state for its negligence. However, unlike those who invoked parochial concerns of personal or familial suffering, these statements called on the larger idea of the nation and thus also contributed to its construction. Boosted by these actors’ interactions with state institutions during the war, this discourse served to teach the idea of patriotic duty. More importantly, its use by diverse actors signaled how wartime service could become an avenue for claiming belonging and rights in the Bolivian nation.

Compensating the State: The “Redemption and Rehabilitation” of Bolivia’s “Bad Sons”

Peace in June 1935 brought a new set of problems to the Liberal administration of José Luis Tejada Sorzano, who, as vice-president, had constitutionally succeeded to the presidency after Salamanca’s ouster in December 1934. Families all over the country were in mourning after learning that their husbands, fathers, sons, or brothers were among the fifty-thousand men lost in the sands of the Chaco. Many of the men who had returned home did so with mutilated bodies or chronic illnesses contracted during the war. Moreover, wartime spending had left Bolivia with crushing debt and hyperinflation; the exchange rate for dollars increased sevenfold between 1935 and 1939. And widespread unemployment for unskilled workers threatened the livelihood of many veterans and their families.

On the ideological front, the disastrous war had immeasurably strengthened the
power and reach of the labor leaders and intellectuals who been active in the late 1920s. While some had gone into exile after actively opposing the war, others had served on the front lines and been held in prisoner-of-war camps. Whether reformists or radicals, all returned with renewed understandings of Bolivia’s failures as a modern nation; they were outraged with the political system and determined to enact change. The labor movement thus found new traction, revitalizing a national-level party and advocating for salary increases and price controls. When Tejada Sorzano ignored their demands, they called for a general strike in mid-May 1936, which soon brought down the administration after the military refused to end the strike by force. Military officers espousing both reformist and conservative programs would dominate the political scene and occupy the presidential palace for the next ten years.

This was context in which both Tejada Sorzano and the reformist junior officers who succeeded him faced significant questions about what to do with the large number of “bad sons” who had abandoned their patria during the war. The prospect of a police state that would track down, try, and imprison the tens of thousands of men who had evaded or deserted was impractical, as well as expensive. On the other hand, blanket forgiveness would diminish the contributions of the “good sons” who had in fact defended Bolivia’s claims. Moreover, this option would fundamentally violate the discursive structure on which obligatory military service relied, thus threatening future efforts to impose this duty.

The initial stance was strict: Immediately after the war’s end in June 1935, the high command deployed military and police units to patrol Bolivia’s borders with orders to

capture all evaders or deserters returning from neighboring countries. Yet, only six months later, the same administration reversed course and created a parallel process that gave these “bad sons” another path to recoup their rights and be accepted back into the Bolivian family. Under a December 1935 decree, deserters and any omisos, remisos, or emboscados (whom I will collectively call “evaders”) would have to surrender to military authorities within six months in order to be assigned to “socially useful” labors on national infrastructure or for mining companies. Deserters, considered to have committed the greater fault, would owe a term of three years whereas evaders would serve only two. According to the decree, this process would allow those who failed to serve honorably during the war to “redeem” their place in the nation by “rehabilitating themselves” through labor that benefitted the patria. Those assigned to road brigades would be fed, housed, and clothed by the state but would earn no wages for their work. On the other hand, those employed by mining companies would, as had the reservists on assignment, have twenty-five percent of their salary garnished and deposited in the state’s infrastructure account. The decree further provided that deserters and evaders unfit for such labors could pay a fine to “redeem their offense.”

Although it lacked armed patrols, this decree was a coercive mechanism that set out to blacklist those “bad sons” who failed to comply. Its penalties were primarily aimed at literate men – the famed emboscados who had evaded service. The decree explicitly denied them citizenship rights until they had rehabilitated their military status, mandating that anyone attempting to enroll in the Civic Registry would have to present demobilization booklets. It also denied them access to government jobs and set forth fines for anyone

35 General Quintanilla to Prefect of La Paz, June 18, 1935, Prefecture-Admin box 209, ALP.
36 Supreme decree of December 9, 1935.
employing a man, as either a professional or day laborer, who lacked official military documents. In theory, this would aid unemployed veterans by removing deserters and evaders from the general labor force. Evidently practical, this decree marked an implicit admission that the state did not have the records, the funds, or the manpower to identify, capture, and judicially process all of Bolivia’s “bad sons.” This compromise would allow the state to collect information about its residents, refill its coffers, build up its infrastructure, and contribute to strategic industries while still insisting that all Bolivians owed service to the nation.

The regulations implementing the December 1935 decree set up a hierarchy even among “bad sons” that reflected the same racialized ideas that had structured Major Antelo’s decision to forgive two deserters in 1932. Like Antelo, the administrators who crafted these regulations chose to assume that, far from willfully neglecting their duties, Indians were ignorant children needing benevolent guidance. Depicting indigenous peons as subject to the whims of their patrones rather than as independent actors, these regulations provided that their term of labor would be only one-and-a-half years. Differentiation based on these assumptions continued throughout the period. Even a 1940 decree instituting a census to inspect all military-service documents created a tiered system (expressed in racialized class terms) to fine violators: All “indigenous elements” would pay fifty bolivianos, whereas this fine would be doubled for “non-indigenous manual laborers, artisans, and workers” and tripled for professionals and highly educated individuals. These provisions reflected the

37 Supreme decree of December 9, 1935.
38 Campaign Commander to Prefects, December 24, 1935, Prefecture-Admin box 209, ALP.
39 Supreme decree of April 8, 1940.
continuation of a conviction widespread among military and civilian leaders that indigenous men did not, in fact, fully belong to the Bolivian nation and therefore could not be held equally responsible for failures in patriotic duty.

However, before the six months provided for these “bad sons” to present could expire, President Tejada Sorzano had been overthrown and a military junta had been installed in his place. Would the new leaders emulate his strategy for postwar reckoning? Or would they insist upon strict adherence to the Military Penal Code? The officer most closely identified with the coup was war hero Germán Busch, who had been promoted through the ranks from lieutenant to lieutenant colonel over the course of the war for his fearless leadership in the field, especially at Gondra in March 1933.40 During the May 1936 strike that brought down Tejada Sorzano, Busch aligned himself publicly with the labor movement and argued that reformist junior officers, such as himself, were the only ones capable of leading the country out of its postwar crisis. After he, along with other officers, demanded and received Tejada Sorzano’s resignation, they recalled Colonel David Toro from his post in the Chaco and installed him as president of a military junta. Toro, a supporter of Siles in 1930 and right-hand man to both Kundt and Peñaranda during the war, thus reinvented himself through alignment with the prevailing winds of reform. These military officers developed an amorphous ideology called “military socialism” that emphasized corporatism and the redemptive power of work, putting nationalism above class struggle.41

In reckoning with Bolivia’s “bad sons,” the administrations of Toro (1936-1937) and

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Busch (1937-1939) chose to continue in the same vein as the December 1935 decree. However, rather than letting the decree stand as written, Toro reissued it only two weeks after Tejada Sorzano’s overthrow. Although the Toro decree tinkered with some of the details, such as the length of service required, the overall thrust of compensating the state through labor or monetary payment remained. The main difference between the decrees was discursive, as the latter was imbued with the language of military socialism. The preamble set forth a dual impetus for these measures. Above all, it cited the state’s needs: “The Socialist State requires the participation of all Bolivians to bring about postwar national reconstruction,” defined as building infrastructure and increasing tin production to repair Bolivia’s finances. The second justification, however, departed from Tejada Sorzano’s emphasis on literate actors and, without explicitly stating as much, referred to the many non-citizens who had deserted and evaded during the war: “It is humane and just to facilitate the rehabilitation of citizenship rights for those who, lacking civic and moral education, neglected their patriotic duty.”

This, of course, echoed a common trope that ultimately blamed the sons’ ignorance on the father (conceived of as civilian political elites) who had failed to educate them in their duties. Unsurprisingly, the decree was willfully blind to the fact that the vast majority of men who lacked said “civic and moral education” were not, in fact, citizens under the constitution.

The military socialists portrayed themselves as rescuing the Bolivian people from the corrupt and self-interested civilian politicians, whom they blamed for the catastrophe of the Chaco War. As part of this project, they called a convention to rewrite the Bolivian

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42 Supreme decrees of May 30, 1936, and August 26, 1936.
constitution for the first time since 1880. Although some men from the traditional parties were elected, the convention was dominated by representatives of labor and the reformist left. Embracing the social constitutionalism spreading throughout Latin America, the resulting Constitution of 1938 stressed the state’s responsibilities to its people, limited the rights of foreign companies, guaranteed the right to unionize, and recognized the corporate rights of indigenous communities. This final gesture moved toward resolving a historic grievance by reversing the basis for the 1874 Disentailment Law that had facilitated the purchase of communal lands; however, it did not provide a mechanism for the return of such lands.43

Nor did the 1938 Constitution vastly expand formal citizenship. The convention spent days discussing changes to the citizenship clause, with some delegates proposing language that would further restrict it and others formulas that would expand it. While they long debated the prospect of giving educated women formal citizenship, no one seriously proposed eliminating the literacy requirement.44 Although the final version removed the property and income requirements that had been in the 1880 text, it still barred most men, including veterans, from formal citizenship by requiring that all citizens had to be male, over twenty-one, have Bolivian nationality, be enrolled in the Civic Register, and be able to read and write.45 Given that the 1950 census reported that sixty-nine percent of the population was illiterate, this severely limited formal citizenship, ensuring the continued ability of those

44 Gotkowitz, A Revolution for Our Rights, 117-20.
in power to remain in power.\(^{46}\)

The 1938 Constitution did, however, reformulate the military’s mission in a way that was intimately related to the idea of redemption through labor expressed in the 1936 decree: it officially expanded the military’s mission to include cooperation “in work on roads, communications, and colonization.”\(^{47}\) During debate over this clause, legislators declared the value of this work to be “indisputable” and agreed these labors could be done “without compromising in any way” the mission of preparing for war. They apparently hoped that emphasizing these tasks would repair the institution’s image. “It is necessary to change,” stated one representative, “the impression of the people that the Army only consumes and does not produce.”\(^{48}\) This new mission was premised on the conviction that the military, like the deserters and evaders, could redeem itself through nonmartial tasks that would literally build Bolivia. Soldiers’ nonmartial labor thus gained prominence under the military socialists, both in official discourse and in practice. For example, the conservative La Paz daily El Diario emphasized the promise of using military labor in infrastructure projects, publishing photographs of soldiers moving earth with their shovels and arguing that their sweat and toil would “surely bring economic expansion to the country.”\(^{49}\)

Thus, both Liberal President Tejada Sorzano and the military socialists Toro and Busch opted for an approach for reckoning with Bolivia’s “bad sons” whereby the state would benefit from their labor or funds and they would be able to regain their place of

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\(^{47}\) Art. 169 (b), Constitución política de la República de Bolivia, October 30, 1938. This clause remained unchanged until 1961.

\(^{48}\) 128a sesión, October 24, 1938, Redactor de la Convención Nacional, Tomo V (La Paz, 1939): 325.

\(^{49}\) “El camino de Padcaya a Fortín Campero,” El Diario, June 12, 1936, 8.

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belonging in the nation along with the right to work, travel, and, if they were literate, vote. On a discursive level, the decrees signaled the religious nature of nationalism by employing the metaphor of redemption and rehabilitation to describe this process, likening deserters and evaders to men being saved by God or restored to communion with the church.

On a pragmatic level, however, these decrees represented an enormous challenge to the state’s bureaucratic and repressive apparatus. Employers and local authorities would have to be convinced to check documents rigorously. Armed patrols of police and soldiers would have to stop men on thoroughfares and comb the countryside, arresting all those without valid military papers. To make this policing possible, authorities of the central state would first have to inspect the host of papers and passports issued by various government officials and military officers during the war and reissue them in uniform formats that could easily be inspected and verified by patrols or employers. These documents included demobilization papers issued at the close of the war and after the release of prisoners, discharge papers given to those evacuated for wounds or illness, reservist-on-assignment papers drawn up for men working in strategic industries, papers issued to indigenous farmworkers exempted through the quota system, and papers issued by recruitment commissions when they determined that a reservist was physically unfit for service. The state would also have to develop a mechanism for investigating the many cases in which men claimed to have lost their papers.

Bound volumes located in the Ministry of Defense archive reveal the slow, grinding bureaucratic labor that went into issuing these documents. For years after the cessation of hostilities, ministry workers processed petitions and collected documents in order to provide
official booklets that proved men’s military status. Although hidden by these bureaucratic sources, favoritism and corruption likely marked the process as local authorities and employers ignored the law and the officials responsible for issuing documents accepted bribes and did favors for friends. While all of these papers protected the bearer from military patrols, permitted him to work, and allowed him to vote if literate, they were labeled and color-coded according to a hierarchy of service (see Table 8). For example, combat veterans were to receive orange demobilization booklets while the booklets of those who had served in the interior would be pink (see Figure 35). Blue booklets were issued to those designated reservists on assignment for their work in industries of strategic importance such as the mines, railways, airline, or oil production. Those judged physically unable to fight received green booklets. Officials issued white demobilization papers to agricultural laborers. And men who later compensated the state for their failure to serve received yellow or white booklets (see Figure 36).

Table 8: Types of Postwar Military Documents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service</th>
<th>Booklet Issued</th>
<th>Color</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wartime mobilization</td>
<td>Demobilization – Operations Zone</td>
<td>Orange</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wartime infrastructure work</td>
<td>Demobilization – Interior Zone</td>
<td>Pink</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wartime work in strategic industries</td>
<td>Reservist on Assignment</td>
<td>Blue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wartime work in agriculture</td>
<td>Reservist on Assignment</td>
<td>White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unfit for wartime service</td>
<td>Unfit for Service</td>
<td>Green</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Postwar labor in infrastructure or mines</td>
<td>Compensation of Services</td>
<td>Yellow</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Postwar payment of fine</td>
<td>Redemption and Rehabilitation</td>
<td>White</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Campaign Commander to Prefects, December 24, 1935, Prefecture-Admin box 209, ALP. See also examples of the booklets in AHM-TPJM and AC-MDN records.

50 Reservistas en Comisión tomo 5 through tomo 29, AC-MDN; Desmovilización, tomo 1 through tomo 11, RT-MDN.
The state also took active measures to increase policing. For example, in January 1938, a commission of nine soldiers and one local policeman under a professional NCO set out for the Quillacollo region of Cochabamba to inspect documents in the countryside and arrest any evaders or deserters. Over the course of their two-day expedition, they captured
over eighty men.51 Juan Condori, one of the farmworkers they inspected, later described the encounter in the following manner: “Near my house, I was questioned by a soldier who asked me about my military status, pointing his rifle at me…. I, having taken part in the Chaco Campaign, had no objection to proving my military status.”52 Condori’s testimony and that of others in this particular case indicate that many rural laborers kept their military documents close at hand and that such patrols were not a rarity in rural areas.

During this process of reckoning, thousands of men regularized their military status with the Bolivian state. Some did so after being caught by military patrols. Others needed the proper papers in order to work or hold public office. Many were returning from abroad and had to regularize their status before entering Bolivia. And some, like Gaspar Caihuara, claimed that they needed paperwork so as “not to be bothered by cantonal authorities, agents of the law, etc.”53 These men took advantage of the 1935 and 1936 decrees to compensate the state by working in the mines, on road brigades, or on other public-works projects. For example, Damaso Salazar Choque, a merchant from Catavi (Potosí), received a “Compensation of Services” booklet for working in the mines from July 1936 until 1940.54 While the literature has portrayed the state as donating the labor of draft evaders and deserters to the mining elite,55 at least four-hundred men received booklets for constructing or working in schools for indigenous youth, and many more received them for building

52 Juan Condori statement, February 14, 1938, MUE-69-008, AHM-TPJM.
54 Ministerial Resolution and supporting documents, Ministry of Defense, November 26, 1940, Rescom28_0363-Rescom28_0365, Reservistas en Comisión, tomo 28, AC-MDN.
55 Quintana Taborga, Soldados y ciudadanos, 58.
Bolivia’s roads. For example, Gerónimo Saavedra Esquibel, an omiso who should have done his military service in 1930, obtained military documents by working on the road from Santa Cruz to Cochabamba from April 1937 until September 1938. Also listed as omisos, Julio Viviani Cartagena and Lino Hurtado Jimenez received booklets for working at the garrison in Riberalta and then on the indigenous school in Casarabe (both in Beni) for one year and five days.

Others paid a fine to receive a “Redemption and Rehabilitation” booklet. Under the decrees, they had to pay three bolivianos for each day of labor owed – that is, 2,160 for evaders and 3,240 for deserters. This represented a significant expenditure, even given levels of inflation, equal to almost three-hundred dollars for evaders and over four hundred for deserters. In contrast, anyone requesting a duplicate of any type of booklet paid only one-hundred bolivianos. In addition to monetary compensation, these evaders and deserters had to offer a reason for their failure to serve. Many of these “bad sons” used this opportunity to profess patriotism, perhaps assuming that this discursive tribute to the nation would aid in


57 Ministerial Resolution and supporting documents, Ministry of Defense, October 18, 1940, Rescom28_0383-Rescom28_0386, Reservistas en Comisión, tomo 28, AC-MDN.

58 Ministerial Resolution and supporting documents, Ministry of Defense, November 11, 1940, Rescom28_0512-Rescom28_0514, Reservistas en Comisión, tomo 28, AC-MDN.

59 Exchange rate of 0.133 from Gómez D’Angelo, “Mining in the Economic Development of Bolivia” (diss.), 211.

60 See Ministerial Resolution and supporting documents regarding petition of Juan Condori Lopez for duplicate copy of his Indigenous Quota Card, June 7, 1941, Rescom28_0125- Rescom28_0126, Reservistas en Comisión, tomo 28, AC-MDN.
the favorable resolution of their petitions. Although written in the first person and signed by the petitioner, these petitions are a particular genre of legal documents that follow a specific form and almost certainly were constructed by professionals. The petition of Julio Barrera Acuña, who is described as a property owner from Achilia (Potosí), displayed mastery of the language of patriotism. It read: “The war… has sacrificed the lives and blood of the best sons of Bolivia. Conscious of their duty, they have given to the defense of the immanent rights of the nationality.” Citing Barrera’s malaria and duty to care for his elderly mother while his four brothers fought against Paraguay, the petition lamented, “I was deprived of the honor of giving personal service.”

Unsurprisingly, middle-class and elite men, many of whom had been attending universities outside of the country, predominated in the seventy-five successful petitions for this type of booklet that I examined. While this process was primarily a privilege for the wealthy, at least five men categorized as indigenous also took advantage of this option. For example, Benigno Ticona, who identified himself as an indígena from the ex-community of Senani (Sud Yungas), claimed that he was physically unable to serve [inhabil] and deposited 2,160 bolivianos in the government’s account to receive his booklet. And when Cirilio Vargas

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61 Petition of Julio Barrera Acuña, August 15, 1940, Rescom28_0104-Rescom28_111, Reservistas en Comisión, tomo 28, AC-MDN.
62 See the petitions of Percy Boland Rodríguez, May 10, 1941, Rescom28_0090-Rescom28_103, Reservistas en Comisión, tomo 28; Adalberto Parada Suárez, May 25, 1940, Rescom29_0237-Rescom29_0244, Reservistas en Comisión, tomo 29; Eduardo Cironás Tufiño, January 16, 1940, Rescom30_0486-Rescom30_0488, Reservistas en Comisión, tomo 30, AC-MDN.
Gutierrez, identified as an indigenous deserter, was captured in Totora (Cochabamba), he was sent to serve in Chimoré for five months and then paid a fee of 3,240 bolivianos to receive a booklet and discontinue his service. In his petition for a booklet, Alejandro Apaza paid the required fee but also mobilized his indigenous status to indicate ignorance. He claimed not to have understood the wartime decrees since he thought that “one of them seemed to mean that indígenas on properties in the Yungas were exempt from participating in the campaign, which is why I continued to work on the tasks of coca production.” Gaspar Caihua ra also invoked indigeneity to explain his failure to serve, stating that he had left the country prior to the war to seek work in Argentina “in my condition as an indígena in order to provide for my family.” Like the indigenous deserters during the war and the postwar officials who created tiered sanctions based on social status, either these men or their notaries played on tropes of indigenous ignorance to explain their failures to the state.

Strengthening Bolivia’s infrastructure and finances, the regularization of military status depended on Bolivians’ need for these documents and on a state strong enough to enforce the policy, even if not entirely effectively. The process also provided the state with information about its residents. Submitting their photographs, demographic and family information, physical description, military-training status, and signature or fingerprint, these men joined the thousands of soldiers initiated into the state’s documentary regime during the war. This process substantially furthered government efforts to “make society legible” by

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64 Ministerial Resolution and supporting documents, Ministry of Defense, November 12, 1940, Rescom28_0507-Rescom28_0511, Reservistas en Comisión, tomo 28, AC-MDN.
65 Ministerial Resolution and supporting documents, Ministry of Defense, March 1, 1940, Rescom30_0070-Rescom30_0072, Reservistas en Comisión, tomo 30, AC-MDN.
bringing more of the population onto the grid.\textsuperscript{67} Although the state still lacked the will and the resources to impose its decrees universally on the population or even capitalize on the information it collected, its agents were significantly more aggressive in their efforts to demand documents. And thousands complied, regularizing their military status through labor or payment, thus “compensating” the state and “redeeming” themselves in its eyes.

**Patriotic Discourse as Weapon: Advancing the Interests of Bolivia’s “Good Sons”**

More dramatic than the strengthening of the state’s ability to enforce its laws and track its population were the ways in which the war created new opportunities for the “good sons” who had served on the front lines to invoke their sacrifices in order to make demands on the state. However, we still know very little about the pension system set up for the disabled, the preferential hiring of veterans for government jobs, and the entitlements provided to veterans and the families of those killed during the war.\textsuperscript{68} Nor do we have any real understanding of the membership, the internal dynamics, or even the political positions of the associations of veterans and prisoners of war that developed in the postwar period.\textsuperscript{69} Research on these questions will provide a fuller understanding of the demands made by veterans from different regional and social backgrounds and the arguments and discursive strategies that they employed. In the absence of more comprehensive research, military-justice records from the late 1930s and early 1940s provide samples of veteran-authored petitions that reported their enemies as deserters and evaders. Most of these denunciations had their roots in intra-family squabbles or disputes over land and political office, showing


\textsuperscript{68} Gotkowitz, *A Revolution for Our Rights*, 111-12.

\textsuperscript{69} Klein, *Parties and Political Change*, 208-9, 246-49.
how some veterans attempted to use their loyal service during the war to convince the central state to become a weapon in their local battles.

Postwar military-justice investigations of Chaco evaders and deserters look quite different from the records of the 1920s, which had focused almost exclusively on officers and literate soldiers from urban areas. Tribunals in the postwar period, on the other hand, regularly gathered and even heeded testimony from illiterate actors. Moreover, men and women from across the social spectrum provided the spark that initiated these investigations. The five cases analyzed in this section began with petitions submitted by an elite woman, a patrón, and three indigenous men with varying degrees of (il)literacy. Forming a particular style of petition, these actors all deployed the dominant discourse of patriotism to convince the state to punish their personal enemies and rivals. The indigenous actors, in particular, invoked their own loyal service during the war and attacked the selfishness and cowardice of the “bad sons” they denounced. These cases also demonstrate the popularization of military-justice proceedings, as magistrates took an active interest in actors whom they had ignored prior to the war.

The end of the Busch administration in August 1939 heralded a shift in policy towards Chaco evaders and deserters that prompted a spate of petitions denouncing Bolivia’s “bad sons.” As president, Germán Busch, who is generally described as “erratic” by historians, had as his closest advisers not only the young, reform-minded nationalists who had been prominent in the Toro regime but also conservative generals and bankers with close ties to the traditional political parties. These parties had banded together in March 1939 to form the Concordancia, which advocated for an end to military rule, the return to liberal
policies, and the rejection of the 1938 peace treaty with Paraguay as an affront to the nation’s honor. In April 1939, Busch, frustrated with his inability to implement his vision for Bolivia, suspended his own constitution, cancelled scheduled elections, and proclaimed himself dictator. Four months later, in the early morning hours of August 23, 1939, the thirty-five-year-old president committed suicide. His conservative chief of staff, General Carlos Quintanilla, quickly moved to prevent the civilian vice-president from assuming office and declared military rule with himself as president. Elections held in March 1940 brought to power the Concordancia’s candidate, General Enrique Peñaranda.  

In keeping with their orientation towards the pre-war political system, the Quintanilla and Peñaranda administrations abrogated the decrees providing a path to amnesty for deserters and evaders, mandating that anyone who had not yet taken advantage of these provisions would be subject to the Military Penal Code. Despite the 1935 and 1936 decrees, military-justice proceedings against deserters and evaders had occurred throughout the postwar period, especially for those accused of having false documents or being in possession of the state’s weapons. However, with the 1940 decrees affirming the state’s willingness to pursue such “bad sons,” the number of denunciations appears to have increased, as actors took advantage of this opportunity to report their personal enemies. In many cases, the military tribunal expended significant effort to investigate these claims, having the accused arrested, taking the testimony of multiple witnesses, and even engaging experts to inspect documents.

71 Supreme decrees of March 25 and May 25, 1940.  
72 See box 13-14 and 19-21, AHM-TPJM.
For example, when Abel Armando Ruiz, a businessman and rural property owner from Sorata (La Paz), tried to divorce his wife in 1941, his mother-in-law, Antonia de Bonila, denounced him for possessing an unearned demobilization booklet. Her petition to the subprefect set up a contrast between men who “deserve our respect and that of future generations” for having “fought in the sands of the Chaco” and those, such as her son-in-law, who have false documents and therefore “deserve nothing more than contempt.”

Rather than serving three years on the front as his demobilization booklet reported, she alleged, Ruiz had deserted from Villamontes after only four months and then had hidden on the family’s rural property, “dressed as a peasant,” until he could pay a friend to provide him with a demobilization booklet.73 Over the next twelve months, the military tribunal inspected Ruiz’s documents, took his testimony, that of his accuser, and even those of five witnesses identified as illiterate colonos working on Bonila’s property.74

As had occurred in the prewar period, patrones and local authorities sometimes reported as evaders and deserters people they considered to be rabble-rousers in the hopes of engaging the state’s repressive force to secure their long-term removal. In at least one case in the postwar period, however, this strategy backfired after the tribunal actually listened to the accused and even followed up on the counteraccusations he hurled at his former patrón.

This particular case began in June 1940 when Pacífico Burgoa, the patrón of the Jaupani hacienda in Puerto Acosta (La Paz), reported one of his colonos to be a Chaco War deserter. The indígena Ramón Sossa, he alleged, was “using the weapon with which he deserted” to “sow panic and anxiety” in the region. Sossa, however, used his interrogation as a forum to

73 Antonia B. de Bonilla to Subprefect of Larecaja, October 31, 1941, DES-21-015, AHM-TPJM.
74 DES-21-015, AHM-TPJM.
denounce Burgoa for lying, abusing his colonos, and hoarding state property. He first claimed that Burgoa’s accusation was knowingly false because Burgoa himself was in possession of Sossa’s discharge papers. He then accused Burgoa of denouncing him “in retaliation” for leaving work on his farm. “I would like to note,” his statement read, “that four years have passed since the day that I returned from Viacha and presented myself to Sr. Burgoa, giving him my discharge papers; and that only because I abandoned the intense work to which said señor has subjugated his colonos, has he devised the denunciation that motivated my detention.” Sossa then accused Burgoa of keeping “in his room, generally under his bed, FIFTEEN RIFLES of the kind that the Army uses, plus a box of bullets for the same rifles; also a MACHINE GUN that, from what I have heard is called a light machine gun; he also has two sacks full of military uniforms and capes.” Surprisingly, the magistrate followed up on this aspect of Sossa’s accusation, sending the local military authority to search Burgoa’s house and question his colonos.75 Described as an indigenous peasant that could not speak Spanish, sign his name, or even identify his precise age, Sossa was forced to interact with the state by Burgoa. However, he responded in kind, mobilizing his own compliance with mobilization procedures and calling on the state to discipline his former patrón.

Unlike Sossa, many indigenous veterans actively sought out such engagements, attempting, much as Burgoa had, to use the state opportunistically in intercommunity and even intra-family struggles. In June of 1939, for example, Antonio Choque-Vara signed a letter directed to the chief of staff that eventually initiated a military-justice proceeding. In it,

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75 Pacífico Burgoa to Chief of Military District in Puerto Acosta (La Paz), June 14, 1940; Ramón Sossa statement, November 25, 1940; Military Tribunal President to the Chief of Military District, November 25, 1940, DES-21-008, AHM-TPJM.
he identified himself as an *originario* from the ex-community of Taracollo-Codoroco (Pacajes, La Paz) who had fought in the Chaco and even been held as a prisoner of war in Paraguay. In addition to accusing his enemies of evasion and desertion, he depicted his community as having been devastated by its members’ willingness to sacrifice for the *patria* during the war. “The *indígenas* from the Ancochualla *estancia,*” his petition stated, “have become our enemies, stripping us of our lands.” He claimed that his community could not defend itself from these incursions because “almost all of [the residents] have died in the Chaco campaign” and those that were left “are almost all sick or mutilated.” He also accused the Ancochuallans of mocking his community for its patriotic service, reporting that they accused veterans of fighting only to obtain food and clothing rather than out of a sense of duty to defend the Chaco. To remedy this situation, he called on the state to protect those who defended Bolivia during the war from those who had not by arresting Lorenzo Mamani, Pablo Mamani, and Manuel Condori as evaders and Bacilio Mamani, Feliciano Mamani, Ingancio Canqui, and Modesto Mamani as deserters.76

Similarly, Rufino Chipana of the Ongora *estancia,* paid a notary (since he was illiterate) in February 1944 to compose and send a letter denouncing six of his indigenous neighbors for desertion. Calling on his authority as “an ex-combatant who fought in the burning sand of the Chaco,” he accused them of being “cowardly subjects who, in moments of danger for our *patria,* refused [to serve].”77 While neither Chipana nor Choque-Vara’s petitions led to the arrest of the accused, the tribunal made at least a modest effort to investigate, writing (in one case three and the other four) increasingly strongly worded letters that ordered local

76 Antonio Choque-Vara to Chief of Staff, June 28, 1939, DES-21-004, AHM-TPJM.
77 Rufino Chipana letter, February 5, 1944, DES-21-022, AHM-TPJM.
military authorities to track down and arrest the men named.\textsuperscript{78}

Mateo Torrez Mamani was far more successful in his parallel efforts to draw the state into his dispute with his cousins in May 1945. Like Choque-Vara and Chipana, Torrez Mamani attempted to prove his trustworthiness by invoking his veteran status. In this case, he even attached his demobilization booklet to a letter denouncing the \textit{indígenas} Alejandro, Ezequiel, and Carlos Mamani as deserters. Identifying himself as a semi-literate indigenous rural laborer from the Lluxt’ari community in Calamarca (La Paz), he too engaged a notary to write a petition to the local military commander. It opened: “As an ex-combatant in the Chaco (I served in the Twentieth Cavalry Regiment from Cochabamba) who was wounded in the war, I denounce before your authority the crimes of desertion during wartime and the robbery of the army’s rifles by [these] indigenous reservists.”\textsuperscript{79} Unlike in the other two cases, the tribunal acted decisively based on these accusations, sending agents to interview a dozen witnesses and eventually detaining two of the three brothers, who claimed that Torrez Mamani was acting out of spite because of a dispute over the hosting of a religious festival.\textsuperscript{80} Torrez Mamani likely regretted attaching his demobilization booklet, however, since the tribunal never bothered to return it, despite his pleas that he needed it “to prove my condition as having been discharged from the ranks to the patrols that now demand military documents.”\textsuperscript{81} In fact, his booklet remains in the archive along with the records of the case he initiated (see Figure 37).

\textsuperscript{78} See letters dated July 25, 1939, December 22, 1939, July 4, 1940, and September 16, 1940, DES-21-000; and telegrams and letters dated March 6, 1944, December 18, 1944, and April 4, 1945, DES-21-022, AHM-TPJM.

\textsuperscript{79} Mateo Torrez Mamani to Commander of 1st Military Zone, May 29, 1945, DES-22-003, AHM-TPJM.

\textsuperscript{80} Carlos Mamani statement, June 26, 1945, DES-22-003, AMH-TPJM.

\textsuperscript{81} Mateo Torrez Mamani to Military Tribunal, October 5, 1945, AHM-TPJM.
Indigenous communities and individuals of course had a long history of petitioning the Bolivian state. As shown in chapter 1, petitioners identified as indigenous were even reporting their fellows as *omisos* as early as 1914. What changed in the postwar period, however, was the entitlement that is palpable in these petitions. Rather than adopting a purely denunciatory tone, the petitions authorized Chipana, Torrez Mamani, and Choque-Vara based on their wartime service. Whatever the process of composite or co-authorship that produced these documents, the writers clearly assumed that these indigenous veterans had some sort of leverage with the state because of their sacrifice to *patria* during the war. These men were not, for the most part, citizens under the constitution, but they certainly acted as if they were, asserting their belonging and using their veteran status as a weapon to advance their personal or communal interests. Their petitions thus insisted on a process of postwar reckoning that would recognize their contributions and penalize their enemies for their failures. In so doing, the petitions draw on the discursive project of the nation as
expressed by the political and military leaders who passed the 1907 conscription law and mobilized these soldiers to war as “sons of Bolivia.” Most importantly, the postwar state responded to their hails, in each case making at least an effort to investigate their claims.

“Citizen of this *Patria* by Birth and Because He Defended it in the Chaco”: Francisco Chipana Ramos and the 1945 Indigenous Congress

In contrast to the individually based demands made by these petitioners, the more-than-one-thousand indigenous delegates who attended Bolivia’s first-ever state-sponsored indigenous congress affirmed collective demands as if they were rights-bearing citizens. This congress and the authority with which its delegates spoke was possible because of two intertwined factors: 1) the mass participation of indigenous men on the front lines, which authorized them to speak as “good sons” of the *patria*, and 2) the reformist ideologies that had been radicalized and reached a large audience because of the war, leaving the traditional political elite in disarray and opening a space for reformist junior officers to seize control of the state. The words of Francisco Chipana Ramos (see Figure 38) during the closing ceremony of the 1945 Indigenous Congress reflected both of these factors: “At last… we have been listened to and attended to; President Villarroel has extended his protecting hand: [this] man of the Chaco has understood how to interpret our tribulations and also how to share the sufferings of our race and those of men, sons of the same soil.” Chipana Ramos emphasized the importance of this particular administration and invested Villarroel with unique empathy for the indigenous population by referring to him as a “man of the Chaco,” implying that he had gained this perspective on their “tribulations” and “suffering” through

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82 C.R.L. “Fruto del congreso ha sido humanizar el trabajo campesino y levantar la dignidad humana, nos dice el Ministro Monroy,” La Noche, May 16, 1945, 5.
his command of indigenous soldiers during the war. Yet Chipana Ramos’s words also figured all indigenous men, not just those who had fought in the Chaco, as “sons of the same soil” who therefore deserved a prominent place of belonging in the Bolivian nation. At the same time, however, Chipana Ramos continued to employ the familial metaphor, placing Indians in the role of tutees dependent on the guidance and protection of a sympathetic administration.

The unprecedented state sponsorship of the 1945 Indigenous Congress had its origin
in the radicalization of junior officers during the war and their association with reformist civilian groups. The Villarroel government primarily consisted of officers from the previously clandestine military lodge known as Radepa (Razón de Patria or “because of the patria”) that had been founded in the Paraguayan prisoner-of-war camps. Radepa’s members had supported the military socialist project when they returned to Bolivia just after Toro took power. They spent the ensuing years spreading their ideas among young officers and strengthening their ties to civilian reformist organizations such as the Revolutionary Nationalist Movement (MNR). On December 20, 1943, Radepa’s members staged a self-proclaimed revolution, overthrowing the government of conservative General Enrique Peñaranda, who had commanded Bolivia’s forces in the Chaco during the second half of the war. The timing of this coup reflected their reformist and worker-focused orientation: They took power on the day before the first anniversary of the 1942 Catavi massacre, in which troops sent by the Peñaranda administration had opened fire on striking miners, killing at least thirty five.

Allying with the MNR as a junior partner, Radepa formed a government under Colonel Gualberto Villarroel. Throughout its tenure (December 1943 – July 1946), the Villarroel administration had a tenuous hold on power, lacking the support of any traditional political party and denied recognition by most of the hemisphere because of its ties to extreme nationalist, fascist, and anti-Semitic ideologies. Deeply isolated, the administration hosted the First National Indigenous Congress from May 10-15, 1945, as part of efforts to

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84 Klein, Parties and Political Change, 355-56, 366-68.
build a base of popular support by establishing direct patron-client relationships with indigenous representatives. Delegates, many of whom were veterans, filled Luna Park, the newly constructed open-air amphitheater located two blocks from the Presidential Palace. Decorated with indigenous weavings and national flags, Luna Park echoed with speeches, denunciations, and resolutions translated into Quechua, Aymara, and Spanish. Every morning, four committees consisting of government officials and two delegates from each department met. Organizers assigned each committee a topic: indigenous education, the regulation of agrarian labor, the abolition of unpaid labor, and the organization of a rural police force.\textsuperscript{85} In the afternoons, committees presented their work to the plenary session, which eventually approved twenty-nine resolutions, covering topics ranging from education in indigenous languages to the abolition of exploitative labor practices.\textsuperscript{86}

After four days of speeches, committee meetings, and much pomp and circumstance, President Villarroel issued four official decrees (see Figure 39). The first two outlawed all compulsory non-agricultural labor, called \textit{pongueaje} and \textit{mitanaje}, and set forth fines for violators. Henceforth, landowners would have to pay \textit{colonos} (indigenous laborers living and working on hacienda land) for non-agricultural services and also pay the travel expenses of \textit{colonos} who were currently performing those services. The third decree mandated that landowners, at their own expense, establish schools for indigenous workers on their properties; the government pledged to provide teachers. The final decree called for the

\textsuperscript{86} P. “Las recomendaciones aprobadas por el Congreso Indigenal.” \textit{Última Hora}, May 18, 1945, 4.
formulation of a code to formally regulate rural labor relations and grievance procedures.\textsuperscript{87} These decrees in many ways represented a continuation and radicalization of the 1938 Constitution and even of Bautista Saavedra’s political efforts in the 1910s to win the support of the cacique apoderado movement. All gestured towards rectifying the injustices of liberal land reforms without actually moving to redistribute land or upend the racialized social order of the Bolivian countryside. In the same vein, the Villarroel decrees promised education as a path to formal citizenship rather than simply granting full citizenship rights to Indians.

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{figure39.png}
\caption{President Gualberto Villarroel Speaking at 1945 Indigenous Congress}
\end{figure}

Source: “Fue clausurado el primer congreso indigenal nacional,” \textit{La Razón}, May 16, 1945, 8.

Appointed president of the congress by the Villarroel administration, Francisco Chipana Ramos became a minor celebrity and the iconic image associated with the event, to

\textsuperscript{87} For the full text of the decrees see: “Cuatro decretos supremos dictados por el Ejecutivo como emergencia del último Congreso Indigenal.” \textit{El Diario}, May 20, 1945, 5.
the point where the press was using him as a metonym for all indigenous Bolivians. In giving his personal history, one paper described him as a twenty-nine-year-old Aymara speaker from the Escoma canton (Camacho Province, La Paz) who, orphaned at a young age, had begun working at seven and had entered into domestic service with the Michel family in La Paz at twelve. The article further reported that he had lived with this family, who had taught him to read and put him in school, until, at the age of seventeen, he had mobilized for the Chaco War, during which he had fought valiantly before being wounded and falling prisoner.

For these journalists (and the Villarroel administration), Chipana Ramos thus offered a shining example of the result of treating Indians with respect and bestowing upon them an education. The Michels had played the role of generous and benevolent patrons, making this orphaned Indian part of their family and thus bringing him into the national family. The result was an articulate and patriotic Indian, devoted to the betterment of the patria. Francisco Chipana Ramos was, in the words of one journalist from the conservative El Diario, “a testament to what his race can be when given the opportunity to escape from its servile monotony.”

Journalists described Chipana Ramos as a natural leader, a gifted orator, and a patriotic veteran who was committed to progress and modernization but also addressed his fellow delegates in Aymara and was never seen out of indigenous dress. Articles from organs

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88 Chipana Ramos appeared in twenty-two percent (13 out of 58) of the newspapers’ photographic depictions of the congress. Other images of the congress included pictures of masses of delegates, photographs of government officials, and images of unidentified delegates described as “typical.” The only other named delegates pictured in the newspapers were the other officers, Dionisio Miranda and Desiderio Cholima, who appeared (or were mentioned) only alongside Chipana Ramos.
89 “Chipana Ramos el presidente indígena,” La Razón, May 12, 1945, 5.
that represented the traditional elite and those controlled by more reformist parties universally invoked his service in the Chaco War to authorize his ability to represent his fellow Indians. Printed images also emphasized this service, depicting him, as in Figure 38, with a medal from the Chaco War pinned to his poncho.91 One journalist from La Calle, the newspaper associated with the MNR and the Villarroel government, defined Chipana Ramos as “a representative example of his race. Pure Aymara, citizen of this patria by birth and because he defended it in the Chaco...”92 In contrast to the 1938 Constitution, which had implicitly denied formal citizenship to illiterate veterans, this statement associated wartime service with the earning of citizenship rights, averring that men such as Chipana Ramos could be both “pure” Indians and citizens.

The glosses and translations printed in the press of the speeches given by Chipana Ramos during the congress portray him as constantly returning to theme of Chaco War and Indians’ wartime service. El Diario summarized his opening speech as follows:

In other lines of his moving speech he spoke about the Chaco War. “They have taken from us,” he said, “valuable territory. With the help of the Government we will undertake our agricultural labors with garantía [surety],” Chipana Ramos expressed, “We will learn to read, to write.” Ending with deep patriotic fervor, he declared that it would be the indigenous class that would make Bolivia one of the top countries of Latin America.93

These sources offered a similar summary of Chipana Ramos’s closing speech: “Finally, he referred to the defense of national sovereignty, calling on indigenous ex-combatants to

93 “Con la concurrencia de 1,200 delegados se inauguró el Congreso Indigenal Boliviano,” El Diario, May 11, 1945, 4.
always keep the patria’s soil intact.” And La Calle printed the following line from his opening speech that has been much quoted in subsequent years: “The Revolution has much to teach us. We have chests of bronze, but we know nothing. This is also why, in the Chaco, many of you went from here to there like idiots and died like dogs. Now the president with the new officials will teach us to work the land with machines to live better.”

Adopting certain tropes from indigenista discourse, the published excerpts of Chipana Ramos’s speeches assert a place for Indians at the center of the nation, depicting them as proud of having fought for the patria. Yet they also suggest a rejection of the war that had brought death and suffering to so many indigenous soldiers and communities. As such, his words explicitly figured the Villarroel administration as a “revolution” that was measurably different from the state that had led so many to die “like dogs” and that incessantly pursued evaders and deserters. His speeches therefore postulate an alliance forged in the Chaco between reformist officers and frontline indigenous soldiers that had the potential to reconstitute Bolivia, perhaps creating a true conscript nation for which indigenous soldiers would be proud to fight in the future in order to keep the “soil intact.”

Despite its radical touches, the prevailing message in the published versions of Chipana Ramos’s speeches was that his fellow delegates should trust this government. Indians, he said, should follow Villarroel because he would work “for the good of us all.”

95 Tenemos pechos de bronce—pero no sabemos nada: Revoluciones del siglo XX: Homenaje a los cincuenta años de la Revolución Boliviana, (La Paz: PNUD / FES-ILDIS / Plural Editores, 2003).
97 “Con grandiosa sencillez se inauguró ayer el Primer Congreso de Indígenas,” La Calle, May 11, 1945, 5. While the excerpted portions of Chipana Ramos’s inaugural speech differed between newspapers, they all
The indigenous president thus emphasized loyalty to the government, figured labor as a patriotic duty, and invested the state with a tutelary role vis-à-vis Indians. Yet his words also insisted on the contractual nature of the event, emphasizing the government’s obligation to provide the protection, education, and tools that would allow Indians to prosper. In fact, at the end of his final speech, Chipana Ramos apparently removed his red lluchu [hat] and gave it to President Villarroel, thereby sealing a contract formulated during the course of the congress for Indians to work for the good of the patria in exchange for protection from abuse, education, increased sanitation, and the tools necessary to implement new agricultural techniques.98

Chipana Ramos’s tutelary vision of indigenous-state relations demonstrates that neither the 1945 Indigenous Congress nor the Villarroel administration should be understood as egalitarian or radically pro-Indian. On the contrary, the administration clearly feared uncontrolled indigenous activism: Its agents had in fact branded as agitators and arrested the activists from whom they had initially co-opted the idea for a congress.99 The Villarroel administration instead espoused a paternalistic model of authority in which the state had the active role of protecting and raising its indigenous children. In planning the congress, administration officials had promised to “completely dominate the indígena but through peaceful means, getting close to him, speaking to him in his own language, attending

emphasized trust in Villarroel, hope for the end of abuse, the promise of education, and the necessity of labor. See “Ayer inauguró sus labores el Primer Congreso Nl. Indígenal,” La Razón, May 11, 1945, 4; “Con la concurrencia de 1,200 delegados se inauguró el Congreso Indígenal Boliviano,” El Diario, May 11, 1945, 4; Julio César Prudencio, “Exitosamente se inauguró ayer el Congreso Indígenal Boliviano,” Ultima Hora, May 11, 1945, 5.
98 “Fue clausurado el Primer Congreso Indígenal Nacional.” La Razón, May 16, 1945, 8. See also “Este Congreso Indígenal tendrá eco vibrante en todo el continente,” La Calle, May 16, 1945, 5.
99 For more on the process that led to the 1945 Indigenous Congress, see Gotkowitz, A Revolution for Our Rights, 192-232.
to his needs, and awakening him so that he can communicate his just needs.” Benevolent paternalism and authoritarian tutelage, this administration argued, would serve to control and guide Indians far more effectively than violence. The May 1945 congress sought to create these paternalistic bonds, with the government paying for delegates’ transportation, food, and housing. As Villarroel stated at the opening ceremony, “Today begins the work of the government, which will watch over you like a father over his sons.” Again employing a familial metaphor, Villarroel promised that the state under his reformist guidance would defend Indians from abusive landowners and would ensure that they receive the education that would prepare them to become formal citizens in the Bolivian nation. Indians would need to modify their way of life in order to join the nation as citizens.

Conclusions

Francisco Chipana Ramos’s reference to dying “like dogs” in the Chaco likely signaled a widespread rejection among Indians of the war and the continued pursuit of deserters and evaders in the countryside. Indigenous veterans like Chipana Ramos, Choque-Vara, and Torrez Mamani could claim new authority based on their wartime service without necessarily embracing the war itself. This rejection of the state’s continued reckoning with its “bad sons” was in fact mentioned explicitly by the indigenous activists who met in February 1945 to plan the indigenous congress. Along with demands for schools and to end “slavery”

100 “Cómo se encara el Gobierno el problema indígena.” La Calle, April 7, 1945. On Nogales’s linguistic skills, see also “Exitosamente se inauguró ayer el Congreso Indígena Boliviano.” Última Hora, May 11, 1945, 5; “Con la concurrencia de 1,200 delegados se inauguró el Congreso Indígenal Boliviano.” El Diario, May 11, 1945, 4.
101 “Hoy comienza la obra del Gobierno que vela por ustedes como un padre por sus hijos.” La Calle, May 11, 1945, 4.
and abuse by *patrones*, they included a demand that the government grant a general amnesty to “all those processed since the Chaco Campaign.”\(^{102}\)

Soon after this meeting, the Villarroel administration rejected the leadership of these organizers and arrested them as agitators. Although this particular item was absent from the official agenda for the May 1945 congress, the National Convention passed a law just two months later that granted blanket amnesty to three groups: all those who had participated in a coup attempt against Villarroel in November 1944; all those accused of “indigenous agitation” in the countryside; and all the “*omisos, remisos*, and deserters from the Chaco Campaign.”\(^{103}\)

Stemming from the administration’s attempt to win allies to maintain its precarious hold on power, this law represented a major policy reversal from the Quintanilla and Peñaranda administrations, which had not only encouraged the prosecution of these “bad sons” but also had to suppress growing unrest in rural areas. It also ended ten years of postwar investment by the Bolivian state in regularizing the status of evaders and deserters though labor, payment, and imprisonment.

Comparing the postwar process of reckoning with Liberals’ efforts to establish obligatory military service three decades before reveals both continuity and change. In both eras, the government compromised by issuing decrees that attenuated the strict measures of the law. And both cited the failures of the population in general and indigenous ignorance in particular to explain these changes. Yet the 1945 amnesty law responded directly to demands made by indigenous activists whereas the earlier decrees had stemmed from petitions

\(^{102}\) “El el histórico pueblo de Laja donde se reunió la Asamblea Indígena,” *La Noche*, March 5, 1945, 3; “Fué solemne la reunión de representantes a la Asamblea Indígena-Departmental,” *El Diario*, March 6, 1945, 8.

\(^{103}\) Supreme decree of July 30, 1945.
professing Indians’ ignorance of the laws. The creators of the 1907 law had dreamed that it would transform the male population into “loyal sons” willing to “die for the patria.”104 By 1945, this dream had not only survived but had spread so widely that actors from across the social spectrum invoked it when speaking of and to the state. Although rhetorically similar to the 1905 invocation of Quilco by Lieutenant Colonel Carlos Nuñez del Prado, Francisco Chipana Ramos’s promise that “indigenous ex-combatants” would “always keep the patria’s soil intact” represented a substantive shift because of the contrast between their subject positions. Bolivia was still a hierarchical society dependent on racialized differences, but new hierarchies of wartime service had been added to the old ones of education, ethnicity, and social class. The 1945 amnesty would by no means erase the continued rhetorical power of soldiers’ sacrificing themselves on the front lines for the patria; patriotic discourse had escaped the control of officers and legislators and had been widely appropriated by veterans of all stripes.

Conclusion

Bolivia’s path to becoming a conscript nation across forty years of obligatory military service can perhaps be approached by comparing Quilco and Francisco Chipana Ramos. Although one was a fictional character and the other a historical figure, neither is accessible except through the writings of the well-born and literate Bolivians who crafted these indigenous soldiers on paper for an audience of their peers. In Lieutenant Colonel Carlos Nuñez del Prado’s 1905 story, the Bolivian army maintained authority through the whip while Quilco was presented as having no sense of patria, belonging to little more than “his sheep and llamas.”\(^1\) His function in this story was to demonstrate the need to transform the population through obligatory military service. This dream was also explicitly ethnocidal: The army would kill the Indian to save the man, using the barracks to create disciplined soldiers who obeyed authority figures, were patriotic, and shed signs of indigeneity as they came to participate in a unified, homogenous, and modern nation.

Although the 1945 portrayal of Francisco Chipana Ramos in the newspapers of La Paz closely resembled the domesticated Indian of whom Liberals like Nuñez del Prado had dreamed, his relationship with the state was nonetheless different from that imagined in 1905. The press was willing to depict him as speaking with authority and making claims for Indians’ place in the nation as “sons of the same soil.”\(^2\) Although Chipana Ramos’s words are accessible only through the ventriloquism of journalists, they still gave him voice in a way denied to the imagined Quilco. Nor did this indigenous veteran attempt to invoke pathos or

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2 C.R.L. “Fruto del congreso ha sido humanizar el trabajo campesino y levantar la dignidad humana, nos dice el Ministro Monroy,” La Noche, May 16, 1945, 5.
a tributary logic as had Celestino Coico, a real-life indigenous conscript, as he maneuvered in
1924 to avoid military service. Instead, Chipana Ramos’s credibility and authority were
derived from the war – not only his own participation but that of the tens of thousands of
non-citizens, mostly indigenous, who had fought in the hot sands of the Chaco.

This dissertation has explored conscription as a terrain on which Bolivians from
across divides of social class, ethnicity, and education converged and negotiated their
relationships with each other and with the state. Conscription is an ideal fulcrum for
understanding the changing balance between state and society because it was central to their
relationship during this period. The lens of military service thus alters our understandings of
methods of rule, practices of authority, and ideas about citizenship in and belonging to the
Bolivian nation. While continuities can be found, the nature of this relationship was quite
different in 1945 because the Chaco War and its aftermath had set Bolivia on a path towards
becoming what I have termed a conscript nation. This term is not a numerical assessment;
on the contrary, significant proportions of Bolivian men have always found ways to avoid
the barracks. Nor is it meant to suggest a unified nation devoid of hierarchy. Instead, it
identifies Bolivian specificities in terms of the relationship between conscription and
belonging that developed as obligatory military service was constructed dialectically from
above and below and at the center and the periphery.

The legal basis for a conscript nation can be found in abortive nineteenth-century
attempts to institute obligatory military service. However, only after they betrayed the
Aymara allies who had fought on their side in the 1898-1899 Federalist War did a new
Liberal administration set out with renewed energy to operationalize conscription. Their
efforts culminated in the 1907 Obligatory Military-Service Law, which eliminated exemptions for tribute-paying Indians and prohibited the use of replacements. With minor changes, this law remained in force until rewritten in 1966; that version still stands today.\(^3\)

The study of the conscription process shows that the Bolivian state during this period was weakly integrated and heavily dependent on local agents and brokers. In many ways, those who controlled the central state from Sucre or, after the Liberal triumph, La Paz, ruled only indirectly through these local actors. This situation led to the uneven implementation of the 1907 law. In this, my research on the early twentieth century supports the argument of political scientist George Gray Molina that an enduring characteristic of the Bolivian state is an “indirect form of rule that involves multiple local agents or partners” and that developed as a “structural feature of political accommodation under weak elites.”\(^4\)

Given that the state lacked the financial or administrative capacity to sustain high levels of conscription, the army remained quite small during the first decades of obligatory military service. Even limited compliance with the law thus filled the ranks, provided labor for infrastructure and colonization projects, furnished the state with income from exemptions, and strengthened the state’s bureaucratic apparatus. Although conscription during the 1910s and 1920s affected a limited number of communities, it still produced an army that, while socially and ethnically skewed, contained men from across lines of social

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\(^3\) Military-Service Law, January 16, 1907; National Defense Law, August 1, 1966.
class, education, and profession. The literate men who owned property and were therefore already citizens had the greatest capacity to evade through exemptions, patron-client ties, or outright bribery. Yet this minority also had the greatest need for the documents obtained through the completion of military service, and not all could escape. As for the illiterate non-citizens who made up most of the population, a few participated because of pressure exercised by local authorities or because they, their families, or their communities had decided that entering the barracks might be beneficial in some way. The conscription law barely touched the lives of the rest. The central state’s weakness and willingness to negotiate was aptly demonstrated by a series of decrees that attempted to tamp down on “odious privileges” and offered windows of exception for men to register and present for service. Those who served as conscripts during this era were thus the product of a complex set of negotiations between citizens and the state, local authorities and the state, and local authorities and landlords, mining companies, communities, and families.

The institution of obligatory military service affected more than just those who served as conscripts. Each year the 1907 law produced tens of thousands of omisos, who had failed to register for service or who had registered but failed to present. These legal categories related to military service contributed to the creation of new hierarchies that could lie atop existing power relationships. Since educated men had a greater capacity to obtain military documents without serving, those who fell into these new categories disproportionately tended to be non-citizens who were unaware of their responsibilities under the law or who were slow to respond without prompting, especially since attempts to police or detain violators were inconsistent at best. The new legal categories created by
conscription thus had the effect of reproducing old hierarchies based on social, cultural, and linguistic capital and expressing them in terms of duty, honor, and morality.

Although the 1907 law provided the legal basis for conscription, the foundations of a conscript nation emerged out of the experiences of the men who entered the barracks. This dissertation’s most distinctive contribution therefore lies in its examination of the quotidian details of barracks’ life. The adoption of a labor-history approach, for example, led to a focus on conscripts’ labor, both martial and nonmartial, that illuminated the relations of authority established in the barracks. It shows how officers’ refusal to relinquish older forms of power thwarted the ideal whereby the whip would become extraneous as soldiers self-regulated. And looking at gendered insults and punishments revealed the barracks to be a site of tutelage in normative ideas of masculinity. Through an understanding of everyday life in the barracks, we can also grasp why many conscripts became invested in military service after devoting up to two years of their time and energy to marching, following orders, forging friendships, and risking bodily harm. In the process, they built ties that transcended local power structures by linking individual conscripts to each other, to NCOs, to officers, and to the central state. Many men thus left the barracks with not only a sense of pride but also a new sense of belonging to a cohort of conscripts and perhaps to a particular officer or regiment. For some, this might translate into a sense of belonging, as Bolivians, to a national-level patria.

My depictions of the routines and dynamics of barracks’ life primarily come from military-justice records that feature the experiences of literate conscripts stationed in La Paz. These records reveal that a culture of insubordination had developed among many of these
conscripts after the emergence in 1914 of dissident politicians who challenged Liberal hegemony. In the context of partisan upheaval, this minority of conscripts, many of whom were already citizens, was able to negotiate with NCOs, officers, and even civilian politicians regarding barracks living conditions, practices of authority, and the terms of military service. Despite harsh conditions and brutal punishments, these conscripts did not depict conscription as a punishment. Nor did they ever question the duty to serve. They did, however, challenge the behavior and methods of particular officers, leading to disputes over authority and even mutinies based on grievances that grew out of the gap between the vision and reality of service.

In the tradition of Corrigan and Sayer’s *The Great Arch*, the first three chapters of this dissertation show how much work by a variety of actors went into state formation. Conscription was not only the state's attempt to impose a documentary regime but also the decisions made by local authorities about how to implement the 1907 law, the punishments and encouragements that conscripts received from officers, the multilingual interactions that occurred in the barracks, and the subtle teasing and exclusions perpetuated by conscripts on their fellows. It was also the patriotic tunes played by the regimental band, the feeling of marching and wearing a uniform, the food eaten during communal meals, and the stories that conscripts told about their experiences when they returned to their homes. The exploitative labor hierarchies, extreme physical and epistemic violence, and racial and gendered domination of military service had served, at least in part, to incorporate conscripts into the nation in a way that reinforced social hierarchies. Yet soldiers were also agents in

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this process. They forged friendships in the barracks, took pride in their ability to endure the
erigors of conscript life, and even used military service to achieve their own ends, which could
range from gaining independence from familial demands to leading their communities in
armed rebellion.

After developing an effective mechanism for conscription and investing in foreign
missions to reorganize and train the army, military and civilian elites grew confident in the
ability of these forces to colonize the frontier and pursue expansion, especially in the Chaco
region. War, however, would transform the nature and terms of conscription as it tested
society's willingness to sacrifice for the nation and the state's capacity to mobilize and
administer far more men than had hitherto entered into service under the 1907 law. In order
to recruit soldiers, the administration in La Paz had to bring greater force to bear on its local
agents and partners. Yet even at a time of national emergency, the central state did not have
the power to impose its will unilaterally. As it mobilized and impressed men for four
successive armies, the government faced a conflict between the need for men on the front
and continued production in the mines, industry, and agriculture. As result, it negotiated
with various interest groups, leading to sometimes surprising compromises. Moreover, the
state lacked the funds, leadership, and administrative capacity to train, transport, and care for
all the men it recruited. This led to a wartime situation in which soldiers walked long
distances, lacked provisions, and repeatedly surrendered en masse after being surrounded by
enemy forces. On the home front, their families experienced sorrow, suffered privations, and
received little news of whether their loved ones had died or been captured.

   Costing over fifty thousand lives and far more territory than even Paraguay had
claimed prior to the war, Bolivia’s defeat in the Chaco profoundly impacted the credibility of the government while raising questions about authority, duty, and belonging. In the aftermath of a disastrous war, the central state set out to enforce a documentary regime that would reward those who had served and punish those who had deserted or evaded. Ironically, the increased strength of the state reflected the discrediting of many forms of established authority, especially the civilian political class, as well as the reformist and radical ideologies that came to prominence among a new generation of military officers, labor leaders, and middle-class professionals. The advent of these radicalized and contestatory ideas enhanced the potential for popular investment in the idea of the nation. Yet reform from above did not itself produce investment from below. In fact, it was the government and army’s many failures during the war, which had led to the death, mutilation, suffering, and capture of its soldiers, that encouraged many veterans and their families to engage with rather than reject the state. Beyond demanding recompense for their wartime sacrifices, these actors had a stake in assuring that those who had evaded service would not escape without penalty. A series of postwar administrations thus devoted significant resources to issuing military-service and exemption documents and enforcing their use. They also created paths for some of Bolivia’s “bad sons” to “redeem” themselves in the eyes of the state. Those who did so had to devote significant time, labor, or money to the endeavor and thus were more invested in ensuring that others would do the same.

New hierarchies of service to the nation emerged in the postwar period as veterans found themselves garnering respect, access to jobs, and a new sense of entitlement to make individual and collective demands on the state. Unlike the prewar legal terms *omiso* and *remiso,*
these new categories did not necessarily correlate as closely with older hierarchies of ethnicity, class, and education. This did not, of course, mean the end of racialization or paternalistic views of Indians as children; in fact, many of the laws and even the 1945 Indigenous Congress were premised on these very ideas. But it did create the possibility for the hierarchy of service to overlie and perhaps even trump other hierarchies. Patriotic service thus authorized new actors to speak more confidently based on an assumption that the central state would listen; in so far as the state fulfilled these expectations, this interaction contributed to a sense of belonging to the nation. The inclusion of testimony from illiterate and indigenous actors in military-justice proceedings from the 1940s signals this change as do the many petitions from non-citizen veterans that suggest a sense of entitlement to make demands.

In a postwar period marked by political instability and ideological ferment, the military-service booklets obtained through peacetime service or legal exemption came to play a similar role to those documenting compliance with wartime mobilization. Yet the spread of conscription after the war did not occur solely because of individuals’ pragmatic decision to avoid state sanctions and obtain the documents needed to work in the formal sector. As Basilia suggested when speaking with anthropologist June Nash in 1970, conscription was becoming strongly associated with claiming rights in the Bolivian nation. Similarly, in recalling his adolescence, indigenous activist Luciano Tapia reported that “such a quantity of young men” had queued up in 1940 to present to the recruitment commissions in La Paz that he used what “little money” he had to travel almost one hundred kilometers to present at the barracks in the mining region of Corocoro. Even there, so many men had presented,
Tapia noted, that the officers had their choice of conscripts, selecting only the “most robust and best educated.” The pride taken in military service is also evident in the 1947 court-martial testimony of Juan Prudencio Aczara. Having deserted to return home, he reported that his mother had rejected him for abandoning the barracks. Unable to convince him to return, she reported him to local military authorities, who sent to soldiers to arrest him and take him back to his regiment in Guaqui.

These changes occurred in the context of a series of military-dominated regimes of various political colorations that took power after the war. Not surprisingly, these administrations invested in the armed forces, which grew from the five-thousand troops permitted under the peace treaty to a high of perhaps twenty thousand by 1952. The increased size of the army meant that at least three times as many conscripts entered the barracks each year than had in the 1910s and 1920s. That so many more men were registering and presenting for service stemmed from a combination of social pressure (including from Chaco-War veterans), the enhanced importance of military-service documents, and the state’s capacity to devote more resources to the conscription process.

However, the shape and orientation of the nation-state that called conscripts to service had yet to be determined. The postwar period had brought to the fore parties and leaders espousing various combinations of socialist, communist, Trotskyist, fascist, and nationalist ideas. Combined with the discrediting of the traditional political system during the

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7 Juan Prudencio Aczara statement, April 18, 1947, DES-22-013, AHM-TPJM.
war, these ideologies created a political situation in which the government in La Paz swung from left to right, including the corporate reformism of the military socialists (1936-1939), conservative efforts to maintain the status quo under Generals Quintanilla and Peñaranda (1939-1943), and the pairing of Radepa and the Revolutionary Nationalist Movement (MNR) from 1943 to 1946. After President Villarroel’s overthrow and lynching in July 1946, a series of conservative civilian and military leaders took control of the government, which began persecuting and exiling reformist thinkers. Also prominent was their use of the armed forces to suppress widespread instances of rural unrest in 1947 and mining strikes at Ayopaya (1947) and Siglo XX (1949).

A 1949 coup attempt by the MNR was unsuccessful, but its exiled candidate, Victor Paz Estenssoro, emerged victorious in the 1951 election. The attempt to prevent him from taking office by installing a military government eventually led to an armed insurrection on April 9, 1952, in which the MNR, supported by the police, seized control of government installations. After three days of combat, army units defending the previous administration collapsed in the face of the popular mobilization of workers, miners, and townspeople. One of the most radical social revolutions in Latin America, the Bolivian Revolution of 1952 would quickly lead to the nationalization of the largest tin mines, the elimination of gender and literacy barriers to suffrage, and the enactment of large-scale agrarian reform. Traditional understandings of 1952 emphasize the role of miners and the radicalized middle class while a recent contribution by Laura Gotkowitz has argued that the roots of the revolution lie in
indigenous struggles for land. This dissertation points to the need for a broad rethinking of 1952 that includes the role of Chaco-War veterans and the spread of new ideas about authority and belonging.

Widely viewed as a tool of the oligarchy and oppressor of the people, the army’s position was threatened by the 1952 Revolution, and it faced significant rivals in newly-formed peasant and worker militias. The MNR considered disbanding the army (in fact many sources report that it did precisely that), but, in the end, it opted to dismiss at least a hundred officers and cut troop levels to five thousand. Although it renounced the past history of the military, the new government still put faith in the potential of obligatory military service to create a new version of a conscript nation from above. To quote the words of President Víctor Paz Estenssoro, the MNR chose to “configure an Army in its image,” drawing a contrast between the “old oligarchic army” and the “new productive army.” In revising the constitution and laws governing the armed forces, the MNR thus highlighted the military’s mission to “cooperate in the country’s economic promotion” through a combination of military training and the “productive labor” of agriculture, ranching, industry, construction, and colonization. And, in 1953, its minister of defense

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9 Often called “reluctant revolutionaries,” the MNR was internally divided between factions that advocated limited reform and those that wanted to dismantle the old system in favor of more radical social change. The ideology of MNR administrations and whether the revolution’s leaders were radicals or moderates pushed by the masses has been a subject of intense historiographical debate. See a summary in Laura Gotkowitz, A Revolution for Our Rights: Indigenous Struggles for Land and Justice in Bolivia, 1880-1952 (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 268-90.


12 Arts. 1, 23, 54-62, Ley orgánica de las fuerzas armadas de la nación, Law # 280 of December 20, 1963. See also Art. 201, Constitución política de la República de Bolivia, August 6, 1961.
rewrote the 1924 text of conscripts’ oath to the flag, which was printed in each military-service booklet (see Table 9). Although the new oath retained elements of obedience and defense, it emphasized revolution, nationalism, and labor. Work and defense were balanced in this version, the nationalism invoked was sacred, and the previous weight given to following orders had been reduced to the single word: “subordination.” Hierarchy and authority had not disappeared, but the emphasis had profoundly changed.

Table 9: Oaths to the Flag

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<tr>
<th>1924 Oath</th>
<th>1953 Oath</th>
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<tr>
<td>Swear before God and the <em>Patria</em> to defend your flag even to the sacrifice of your life, never to abandon those who command you during war, and to apply yourself to superiors' orders</td>
<td>Swear before the <em>Patria</em> and the National Revolution, with the idea that from now on our ranks are devoted to the sacred feeling of nationalism, as much to work for the material and spiritual prosperity of Bolivia as to defend her from internal enemies and from those beyond her borders. Soldiers: SUBORDINATION AND PERSEVERANCE!</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Internally divided and having made many enemies with its expropriation of mining interests and redistribution of rural property, the MNR increasingly relied on US aid and advisors. Growing steadily in size and prestige after its very existence had been threatened in 1952, the military regained a prominent role in the mid- to late 1950s. Military assistance to combat potential counterinsurgency then flooded in after the Cuban Revolution, and a new term for nonmartial productive labor was introduced: Civic Action. US leaders conceived of Civic Action as fighting communism by both contributing to “economic and social
development” and improving “the standing of military forces with the population.”\textsuperscript{13} Higher standards of living would increase resistance to communist propaganda, and the military's involvement in these activities would guarantee local support against internal and external subversion. As César Soto argues, the material results of this program, which brought roads, schools, and potable water to the countryside, led, in part, to the acceptance of the military as a benefactor, mediator, and peacekeeper in rural areas.\textsuperscript{14}

Like its predecessors, however, the MNR failed to recognize that the meanings and effects of conscription cannot be controlled by either the government or the institution because it so heavily depends on investment from below. Obligatory military service would exceed its mission and long outlive the MNR, just as it had every party that had come before. In fact, the prominent face of the military in development projects, combined with the widespread participation of rural men in conscription and the changes wrought by the agrarian reform led to the forging of a peasant-military pact only months before the vice president, General René Barrientos, overthrew Paz Estenssoro in November 1964. Signed in Ucureña (Cochabamba) at a monument to the 1953 agrarian reform, this pact, which lasted until 1974, pledged that the peasantry and the military would work together to guarantee social peace, combat extreme doctrines, ensure economic diversification, and defend the social, political, and economic interests of the signees.\textsuperscript{15}

In studying conscription, this dissertation moves beyond the overwhelming emphasis on popular struggles against an oppressive ruling class, whether driven by labor, land, or

\textsuperscript{14} César Soto S., \textit{Historia del Pacto Militar Campesino} (Cochabamba: Ediciones CERES, 1994).
\textsuperscript{15} Soto S., \textit{Historia del Pacto Militar Campesino}, 15.
indigenous rights. It is, however, in dialogue with a Bolivian and Bolivianist literature fraught with often dichotomous debates about the merits and effects of adopting class versus ethnic discourse, emphasizing strategies of resistance or integration, and striving for exclusion versus inclusion.\textsuperscript{16} The challenge today lies in how to view military service within the new narratives of indigeneity that developed in the 1970s and rose to particular prominence with the election of Bolivia’s first indigenous president in 2005. Was conscription oppressive, discriminatory, and assimilationist? Yes. But an exclusive emphasis on these elements leads to the erroneous impression that the Bolivian state could impose its will on the population or that indigenous conscripts, whether victims, dupes, or traitors, had fallen prey to a citizenship trap by succumbing to, in the words of one scholar, a “criollo and mestizo hegemony” that has attempted to “erase ethnic differences.”\textsuperscript{17} The emphasis of recent literature has served as an important corrective to a historiography that had predominantly focused on political parties or class struggle. This new, indigenous-focused literature has produced valuable histories that privilege stories of autonomy, alterity, and resistance to internal colonialism. However, although the nation-state has certainly bequeathed indigenous people dispossession, forced conversion, and mass killings, these narratives mask the dialectical nature of nationalism. As shown by historians such as Florencia Mallon and Greg Grandin, indigenous people in Latin America have participated in and affected the social,

\textsuperscript{16} In this, I am echoing points made by historian Gabrielle Kuenzli and, more implicitly, Laura Gotkowitz. E. Gabrielle Kuenzli, “Acting Inca: Race, Ethnic Identity, and Constructions of Citizenship in Early Twentieth-Century Bolivia” (Ph.D. diss., University of Wisconsin, 2005), 25-27; Gotkowitz, A Revolution for Our Rights, 87-91, 236, 273-74.

political, and economic evolution of both national identity and the state. Rejecting a false dichotomy between proud defiance and complicit submission, this dissertation thus argues that conscription, even though it occurred under profoundly unequal conditions, was successful precisely because its unfolding was by no means controlled by the state or elite actors. Conscription understood as terrain for negotiating the relationship between the state and society shows that conscripts helped produce Bolivia rather than being simply overrun by it.

This dissertation has shown that the conscript nation looks one way if we examine the goals of the politicians and officers who sought to use the military institution to mold a population that, in the words of the Soldier’s Catechism, would “share the same language, the same customs, and the same affinities of race,” as conscripts learned to “honor, respect, and glorify” the nation. The conscript nation looks rather different, however, when we begin to understand that the central state, even as it gained effectiveness, operated through individual officers and local authorities who were never completely subject to state control. And documents that suggest how conscripts and veterans expressed a sense of entitlement and negotiated, both individually and collectively, the terms and meanings of military service also change the idea of a conscript nation as a top-down project. Conscription spread and was embraced from below precisely because it provided a space for ongoing negotiations.

The events surrounding the Manchego Assault Regiment in 1967 offer a particularly striking example of this process. After intense training with US Green Berets, soldiers from

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this unit captured Che Guevara. President Barrientos descended upon La Higuera to personally congratulate the troops, promising them an early discharge in reward for their efforts. Yet, after spending months pursuing the remaining guerrillas, the Manchego unit returned to their barracks in Guabirá (Santa Cruz). As retired general Gary Prado Salmón writes: “After having been covered with glory for their performance at ‘La Higuera,’ the soldiers suddenly realized that the presidential promise of discharge would not be fulfilled, and that, on the contrary, they were destined to cut sugarcane on private property for the benefit of their superiors.” So they captured the garrison’s armaments, made prisoners out of their officers, and shot at the warplanes sent to scare them into surrender. The authorities quickly capitulated, promising to honorably discharge the mutineers within sixty days.20 Far from facing punishment as mutineers, these soldiers achieved their goal of discharge, negotiating based on their well-publicized martial accomplishments to avoid reprisals.

By the 1990s, obligatory military service was deeply rooted in the experience of the popular classes, constituting a necessary step towards marriage, manhood, and communal positions. Leslie Gill reports that Aymara communities call men recently returned from the barracks “new citizens” and that her informants invoked the barracks to question the patriotism and manliness of elite men, calling them “unpatriotic sissies.”21 Bolivia’s current president, Evo Morales, a union leader of Aymara descent, made a similar argument during the 2005 campaign. Defending himself against accusations of being an indigenous separatist, Morales invoked his military service as proof of his patriotism (see Figure 40) and reminded

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voters that his US-educated opponent had never worn a uniform. Just like the Liberal, Republican, military, and MNR governments that came before, the Morales administration, after a brief debate, came out in favor of continuing obligatory military service and then mobilized troops in a highly visible expression of a nationalist agenda when it used them to secure the gas fields nationalized on May 1, 2006. Indeed, even as the 2009 Constitution redefined Bolivia as a plurinational state, four of its articles reiterated the duty of all males to serve in the military. Conscription has endured because governments of all stripes continue to dream of a conscript nation and conscripts of all stripes have appropriated it and invested it with their own meanings.

Perhaps the ubiquity of brass bands in Bolivia might be used to encapsulate the

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unintended and unexpected effects of obligatory military service. Anyone who been in Bolivia for Oruro’s Carnaval, La Paz’s Gran Poder, or any number of local festivals in neighborhoods and villages throughout the country knows the central role of the brass bands (see Figure 41) that accompany the costumed men and women dancing the morenada, tink’u, or caporales. Several anthropologists have commented on the importance of these entradas to affirming a “sense of common belonging” and expressing a Bolivianness “composed of multiple regional and ethnic identities.” Individuals identifying as indigenous

participate in and indigenous communities host such festivals, but they are expressly Bolivian rather than indigenous; however, as Robert Albro argues, urban people often use such festivals to maintain an “active connection to their indigenous heritage.” Of course, the brass bands that provide the beat for these dancers have their origin in the military bands that played at festivals and ceremonies, raised soldiers’ spirits during long marches, and convoked men to war. Former conscripts, many of whom may have learned to play these instruments in the barracks, appropriated this and other aspects of military service and invested them with new meanings. In the process, they created a conscript nation that, while still hierarchical and divided by profound differences, had not been imposed by an assimilatory state but rather constructed in a dialectical process from both above and below.


26 Robert Albro, Roosters at Midnight: Indigenous Signs and Stigma in Local Bolivian Politics (Santa Fe: School for Advanced Research, 2010), 102.

27 Bigenho, Sounding Indigenous, 45-46.
Appendix 1: Contemporary Political Map of Bolivia

Source: [http://www.nationsonline.org/oneworld/map/bolivia_map2.htm](http://www.nationsonline.org/oneworld/map/bolivia_map2.htm)
## Appendix 2: Approximate Size of Bolivian Army, 1906-1953

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* Until 1915, laws passed by the legislature determined the size of the army that would be funded by the national budget. As shown in chapter 1, excess conscripts were discharged via a lottery.
Appendix 3: List of Army Units, 1900-1932

Table compiled based on Julio Díaz Arguedas’s 1943 *Fastos militares*, which offers a history of each regiment. I have confirmed some of these data based on the names of the regiments mentioned in prefectural correspondence (ALP) and military-justice records (AHM-TPJM).

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- Ballivián 2nd Cavalry Regiment
- Aroma 3rd Cavalry Regiment
- Ingavi 4th Cavalry Regiment
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ABC Color

Chaco-ré: Órgano defensor del ex-combatiente de la guerra del Chaco

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Biography

Elizabeth Mary Shesko was born to Marilyn Ruth Markovich and Gregory John Shesko on April 11, 1980, in Boston, Massachusetts. She attended Needham High School and received a bachelor’s degree in Spanish and English summa cum laude from Bowdoin College in 2002. After teaching first grade in Guatemala, she entered the graduate program in history at Duke University in 2005. She is the author of “Constructing Roads, Washing Feet, and Cutting Cane for the Patria: Building Bolivia with Military Labor, 1900-1975,” published by International Labor and Working-Class History in Fall 2011. Shesko has received funding from the Foreign Language and Area Studies Program (FLAS), Tinker Foundation, Duke Foundation, Duke History Department, Duke Graduate School, and the Franklin Humanities Institute. She lives in Durham, North Carolina.