
Women Valuable Contribution to the Peruvian Army

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Abstract

Throughout history, women have had a marked presence in the work of the different military organizations that exist in Peru, as well as in the military actions that have taken place at all times. However, important changes took place in 1996 -thanks to the enactment of Law 26628 that expanded access for women to the Armed Forces Officers and Non-commissioned Officers Schools- which have promoted the significant role of Peruvian women in the military field. 25 years after enacting this law, the Peruvian Army currently has more than two thousand women in active service, who are deployed throughout the national territory assuming different functions, standing out in training abroad, or showing a noteworthy participation and performance in United Nations peacekeeping missions, achieving promotions and distinctions like their male colleagues. In this sense, this article shows the important contribution of women in the military history of Peru, as well as the progress and challenges in their process of joining the Army.

Keywords: Military woman, Peruvian Army, incorporation of women into the Army, inclusion.

Introduction

In Peru, the participation of women in the military has shown important advances, achieving their gradual incorporation in a traditionally masculine world. However, the difficulties are still significant, reflected, for example, in the absence of adequate infrastructure, as well as, the lack of building equal opportunities process, as gender restrictions persist as conditions in order to form part of certain Armed Forces and specialties in the Army. In order to understand the progress and difficulties in the incorporation of women into military life, it is therefore necessary to know how it has evolved, how it is perceived and how the presence of women in the Army is projected. It is also necessary to understand the various factors that determine their participation and how these influence the increase in the number of women in military institutions.

United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000) on Women, Peace and Security makes an important contribution by providing a frame of reference for gender integration policies in the armed forces and in the various international military missions. This document recognizes the importance of ensuring respect

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for women's equal rights and confirms the significant role that women play - on an equal footing with men - in the prevention and resolution of conflicts and in peacebuilding at all levels.¹ This important normative contribution also recognizes the boost that should be given to women's leadership as an essential factor in achieving peace.

The presence of women in military history

When speaking of women throughout the martial history of Peru, reference must be made to *Sinchi Chañan Cori Coca* and her involvement - accompanying Prince Cusi Yupanqui (later Inca Pachacútec) - in the defense of her people against the attack of the warlike Chancas.² Another outstanding woman who has left proof of her courage is María Micaela Bastidas Puyucahua, precursor of Spanish-American independence, who, with the military rank of captain-general, was the wife and main advisor of the cacique José Gabriel Condorcanqui Noguera, Túpac Amaru II. This feisty woman was in charge of supplying the troops, which included obtaining and distributing money, food, clothing and weapons, as well as issuing safe-conducts to facilitate the movement of those traveling in the territory.³ In charge of the valuable rearguard of the indigenous forces, Bastidas demonstrated her ability, developing an efficient communication system that included a service of mounted messengers.⁴

Likewise, we should not fail to mention other brave women, such as Brígida Silva de Ochoa, who risked her life by fulfilling the role of informer for the pro-independence insurgents, and María Parado de Bellido, whose work as a spy in the central highlands allowed the patriots to get ahead against the enemy action, being shot when she refused to give information about the actions of the pro-independence forces. Speaking about heroic women is also to refer to Cleofé Ramos and her daughters María and Higinia Toledo, three brave women who, out of the love for their homeland, cut the moorings of the suspension bridge over the mighty Mantaro River in 1821 to prevent the royalist troops from continuing their persecution of the patriots. For their leadership and bravery, they were recognized by General José de San Martín with the Victor Medal. Even today, a district in Concepción city is called "Heroínas Toledo" (Toledo Heroines) in their honor.⁵

These examples are just a sample of the countless acts of leadership, love and dedication to the homeland of countless women, resulting in a legacy and inspiration for the following generations. The sacrifice for their ideals and love for their homeland are samples of the value of Peruvian women throughout history, being indispensable to spread these actions through education to avoid their oblivion.

Important milestones in Peru

In 1955, President Manuel Odría enacted the historic Law 12391, which approved women's voting rights in Peru, granting legal age women and literate women the right to vote. However, in practice, it was not until the 1980 elections that Peruvian women were able to vote and participate in the presidential election,

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thus exercising one of their main rights as citizens.⁶ One aspect to highlight is that the 1955 law excluded illiterate women from exerting their right to vote, showing the strong discriminatory concepts of the time, and it took 24 years to achieve a more inclusive and fairer law.

The participation of women in the military sphere began in 1983 with the enactment of Legislative Decree No. 264 (Compulsory Military Service Law), which made it mandatory for young Peruvian women to serve and perform administrative tasks in parallel to their military training. Subsequently, in 1996, the Women's Non-Barracket Active Service Company (CIA SANAF) was created, a military unit in which women performed their military service by performing support tasks in administration, accounting, secretarial work, and - according to their training - in nursing and health. Three years later, in 1999, when Legislative Decree N° 27178 (Voluntary Military Service Law) was passed, young women were called to voluntary military service.

In this context, it is worth mentioning the approval of Law No. 26628 in 1996, which allows women access to the Officers' and Non-Commissioned Officers' Training Schools of the Armed Forces. That same year, the Peruvian Army took up the challenge and began the admission process for the first class of 12 female officer instructors, who graduated in 1997. After their graduation, the Military School of Chorrillos "Coronel Francisco Bolognesi" started the admission process of the first cadets' promotion, which included 50 women. After five years of training, 37 of them graduated as Communication, War Materiel Service and Quartermaster Service officers. The same was done by the Institute of Higher Technological Education of the Army "Sargento 2do Fernando Lores Tenazoa", where, in 1998, the first promotion of 50 female students, 40 of them graduated in 2000 as sub-officers in the specialties of Staff Assistant, Communications Operator and Computer Assistant. It should also be noted that in 2013, after 115 years of existence of the Chorrillos Military School, Second Lieutenant Vanessa Torres Sulca was the first woman to graduate as an Honorary Sword, holding the first place in the general graduation list of her class out of 262 officers.

There is an increasing presence of female personnel in the Peruvian Army, currently representing 11% of the total military personnel of the institution. At this stage, female officers make up the majority of the institution's existing Divisions and Services; however, they are still not allowed the access to the Infantry, Cavalry or Artillery Divisions. In the case of female technicians and sub-officers, situation is very similar; that is, they are not allowed to access to all the Army's specialties. Nevertheless, women in the Army have been preparing themselves in a permanent and integral way under the same conditions as their male colleagues, applying to specialization courses and participating in different admission processes such as the one carried out to access a Master's Degree in Military Science (Command and General Staff Course) at the Army War College, from which 38 female officers have graduated since 2009.

Women in the Armed Forces

In some countries, legal restrictions on women's access to operational or combat tasks have been eliminated and inclusive policies have been established and

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implemented to allow women access to different positions and to exercise operational functions in areas such as infantry, combat piloting or submarine units. This is the case of Norway which, years ago, enabled the presence of women in submarines and even had a woman as a commander of the mentioned naval unit.

On the one hand, the incorporation of women in the Peruvian Armed Forces brought challenges to be faced and needs to be satisfied. However, significant progress has been made in the modification of infrastructure, progressively overcoming logistical problems, such as the lack of accommodation, toilets and facilities for women. On the other hand, men are adapting more and more normally, carrying out joint tasks in the different military units and dependencies.

Regarding the presence of women in the Peruvian Army, in 2021 the institution had 737 officers, as well as 1475 female technicians and sub-officers. Throughout these years, and thanks to their performance in various fields, Peruvian military women have come to have an international presence, in Antarctic expeditions and peace missions, among other areas. In this regard, since 2004, women have been participating as Military Observers, as well as members of the General Staff and contingents deployed in various United Nation missions, representing 12.2% of the total number of troops that the Army maintains in peace operations.⁷

In the Army, women are constantly preparing and training, just like their male counterparts in all types of specialized training, becoming parachute, jump, and free-fall masters. Likewise, many others have become Unit Commanders, pilots in Army Aviation, or stand out in armor and amphibious courses, as well as in research, science and technology courses.

Conclusion

Peru's history is full of courageous and heroic women who did not hesitate to break through and successfully face contexts that challenged their traditional roles. The military sphere is no stranger to these actions, showing significant progress and outstanding achievements of women in the Armed Forces, even more, 25 years after the enactment of Law No. 26628, which allowed their access to the training schools of the Peruvian Armed Forces. However, there are still strong challenges to be faced in order to achieve the complete and equal onboarding of women in the Peruvian Army, requiring new regulations, changes in infrastructure, equipment and uniforms adapted to women needs, a mindset change of men who make up this Institution, and the application of standards that provide the possibility to women access to traditional combat divisions, among many other aspects.

Within the framework of the recent bicentenary of national independence, Peruvian women have demonstrated and are demonstrating a significant commitment and identification with military life, being mothers, wives, sisters and daughters who serve the nation, putting the welfare of society before their own. Undoubtedly, their presence is not only a source of motivation for many other women, but also a vector of change towards an increasingly professional, modern and inclusive Armed Forces.

About the author

Lourdes Aurelia Barriga Abarca is a Colonel in the Peruvian Army. She also holds a degree in Geological Engineering from the Universidad Nacional de San Agustín and a degree in Social Communication from the Universidad Católica Santa María. She also holds a Master's Degree in Military Sciences from the Escuela Superior de Guerra del Ejército, a Master's Degree in Administration from the Universidad Inca Garcilaso de la Vega, a Master's Degree in Supply Chain Management from the Universidad ESAN, and a Doctorate in Education from the Universidad Nacional de Educación "Enrique Guzmán y Valle". Additionally, she has completed a Master's Degree in Security and Defense from the Centro de Altos Estudios Nacionales, has received the Woman of the Bicentennial Decoration from the Peruvian Army and -currently- works in the Army's Personnel Directorate.

Endnotes:

¹ Carmen Magallón, "Mujer, paz y seguridad: un balance de la Resolución 1325", (Anuario CEIPAZ, ISSN 2174-3665, n.º 2: 2009), 64.

² Enrique Gargurevich, "Peruanos y soldados en la Independencia", *Editorial Artgraphics* (Lima: 2017), 7.

³ Manuel Bados, cited by Enrique Gargurevich, "Peruanos y soldados en la Independencia", *Editorial Artgraphics* (Lima: 2017), 18.

⁴ Schlesinger Arthur, cited by Enrique Gargurevich, "Peruanos y soldados en la Independencia", *Editorial Artgraphics* (Lima: 2017), 23.

⁵ Exposición documental, "Mujeres Heroicas de la Independencia del Perú", Congreso de la República del Perú (2020), <https://www.congreso.gob.pe/mujeresheroicas/historia> (Accessed July 19, 2021)

⁶ Sara Beatriz Guardia, "Historia de las mujeres en América Latina", *Centro de Estudios La Mujer en la Historia de América Latina CEMHAL*, (Second edition, Editum: February 2002), 245.

⁷ Statements by the Deputy Minister of Defense Policies, Hernán Flores Ayala, during the 25th Annual Conference of the International Association of Peacekeeping Training Centers (Lima: 2019).