



COSTA RICA



Background: Costa Rica is a success story: since the late 19th century, only two brief periods of violence have marred its democratic development. Although it still maintains a large agricultural sector, Costa Rica has expanded to include technology and tourism industries. The standard of living is relatively high and land ownership widespread.

Geography Costa Rica. Location: Central America, bordering both the Caribbean Sea and the North Pacific Ocean, between Nicaragua and Panama. Area: total: 51,100 sq. km. Area - comparative: slightly smaller than West Virginia. Land boundaries: 639 km. Border countries: Nicaragua 309 km and Panama 330 km. Coastline: 1,290 km. Climate: tropical and subtropical; dry season (December to April); cooler in highlands. Terrain: coastal plains separated by rugged mountains including over 100 volcanic cones. Natural resources: hydropower. Natural hazards: earthquakes, hurricanes along Caribbean coast; frequent flooding of lowlands and landslides; active volcanoes. Environment - current issues: deforestation and land use change, largely a result of the clearing of land for cattle ranching and agriculture; soil erosion; coastal marine pollution; fisheries protection; solid waste manage-

ment; air pollution. Geography - note: four volcanoes, two of them active, rise near the capital of San Jose in the center of the country. (CIA Fact Book 2006)

Military notes. Civil War 1948. The First Civil War. The dominant figure of Costa Rican political life in the 1940s was Jose Figueres Ferrer, better known as "Don Pepe". A moderate socialist, Figueres had spoken against the government fraud and corruption, he was apprehended and sent to exile in Mexico. There, he started plotting the military takeover of Costa Rica. Over the years, Don Pepe and his followers signed a series of agreements with other Latin American countries, according to which he was to receive arms and support in exchange for Costa Rica becoming a platform for destroying dictatorships in the area. Once this agreement was signed, in 1947, Don Pepe started training local and foreign militia. After elections in 1948, President Picado declared the election a fraud and refused to step down. Don Pepe saw this as a perfect opportunity to launch his attack, camouflaging the civil war as a reaction against a violation of a democratic process. Don Pepe's forces launched an invasion, causing a civil war that lasted for five weeks and took the lives of 2,000 people, mostly civilians. A cease-fire was negotiated and Picado and most of Calderon's followers surrendered in exchange for the pardoning of their lives and respect of their properties. Don Pepe, didn't honor his agreement, but persecuted his enemies, closed down the Communist Party, and took over several properties that belonged to Picado, Calderon and their followers. Supported by a military junta, Pepe remained in power for 18 months, establishing important institutions and reforms, including giving women the right to vote and providing full citizenship and rights to the black population of Costa Rica. Don Pepe did stand by his promise to step down, and after 18 months he passed on the office to the new President Otilio Ulate. Ironically, one of Pepe's and the military junta's final decisions was to disband the army and replace it by a 4,000 strong National Guard.

Second Civil War 1955. Don Pepe returned to power in 1953, after being elected President again. By that time, Rafael Calderon Guardia was gathering his remaining followers "Calderonistas" into an armed force based in Nicaragua, where they were supported by dictator Anastasio Somoza. By late 1954 the Calderonistas gathered a relatively well-armed force of some 200 men supported by four surplus WWII aircraft and a number of WWII-vintage "Universal Carriers" probably T18s. On 11 January 1955, Calderon led his force into Costa Rica and seized the northern border town of Villa Quesada, near the Pacific coast. President Figueres appealed to the Organization of American States (OAS) for help. While waiting for the OAS, the Figueres was forced to mobilize the Costa Rican National Guard and purchase arms from abroad. Simultaneously, a single DC-3 was borrowed from an airline and armed with two 0.30in machine guns. This seemed hardly adequate since the rebels had at least four combat aircraft. The decisive battle occurred on 18 January 1955 near Hacienda Santa Rosa, where the rebels suffered a loss of 15 killed and one DC-3 shot down. Subsequently they pulled back into Nicaragua in disarray, leaving their arms and equipment behind ending the civil war.

1943 Veh, Recce. M3A1 Scout Car.

Remarks: Between 1943 and 1946, Costa Rica received two M3A1 Scout Cars from the US through the Lend-Lease program (see US for vehicle details).