

# Indigenous Soldiers in the Brazilian Amazon: a portrait of the Amazon Military Command

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## COLEÇÃO MEIRA MATTOS

ISSN on-line 2316-4891 / ISSN print 2316-4833

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Understanding ethnic-cultural contexts is extremely important to deepen the knowledge on the human dimension in which military operations take place, as well as to understand the human resources available to plan, organize, and execute operations, always taking into account the special care that should be taken with local populations. This is why military sciences and armies around the world are concerned with understanding the human terrain. Along these lines, the Brazilian Army operates in one of the most ethnically and culturally diverse regions in South America: the Amazon. It is well known that the Amazon has been an urbanized forest for decades, with a population made up of people from various regions of the country and a vast history of movements of human groups arriving in the region. Brazilians in towns and cities are joined by foreigners who live near the borders, riverside communities, *quilombolas*, Indigenous people and other groups who occupy the region. Understanding a small part of this human diversity in the region and how it relates to the Army is a necessary exercise. In this article, we sought to shed light on the Indigenous population that is effectively part of the ranks of the Amazon Military Command.

The incorporation of Indigenous troops into the regular Armed Forces (AF) and/or militias is a centuries-old phenomenon that permeates both national and colonial armies. Military institutions recognize the invaluable expertise held by certain native groups, who have crucial knowledge for military operations in specific biomes and for interaction with other Indigenous groups. History is full of examples of this practice: in the period of the conquest

of America, one of them refers to the alliances established by Hernán Cortés and Francisco Pizarro with native tribes who not only guided them, but fought alongside them in the conquest of the Aztec Empire and the Inca Empire (Todorov, 1999). The Armed Forces of the Amazon countries use Indigenous contingents in special groups aimed at combat in the jungle or in regions that Indigenous people are more familiar with. During the Pombaline period in the Amazon, Indigenous officials played an important role in consolidating control over the territory (Rocha, 2009).

For much of the colonial period and up until the 19th century, Brazil and other South American countries employed native troops in various conflicts. Part of the success of the use of these troops was due to the co-optation of native leaders. This was the case of an Indigenous leader from Rio Grande do Norte called Antônio Filipe Camarão, who fought against the Dutch alongside the Portuguese government in the 17th century (Lopes, 2011; Moreira, 2004). He was one of the heroes of the Battle of Guararapes (1648), which is considered a milestone in the construction of the national identity and the Brazilian Army (Castro, 2002; Gondim, 2020). Outside Brazil, another example of this type of collaboration is the Battle of Pichincha in 1822, which marked Ecuador's independence. During the war of independence, an Indigenous man called Lucas Tipán was an important guide for Marshal Sucre and his troops, and provided valuable information about the enemies' strategies.

A contemporary example, in the 20th century, occurred during the Cenepa War (1995) between Ecuador and Peru. Indigenous people from the Shuar and Arutan ethnic groups fought actively during the last interstate war in South America (Iturralde; Franchi, 2022). Historically, Colonel Gonzalo Barragán had already started the first training courses for Indigenous soldiers in the 1980s. In 1992, the *Escuela de Formación y Perfeccionamiento de Nativos del Ejército* (EFYPNE) was created. In later years, it trained the Iwias soldiers—an elite Indigenous military group in the Ecuadorian army—many of whom took part in the Cenepa War in 1995. In the same year, the *Batallón Escuela de Operaciones Especiales Iwias* (Beoes - 23 Iwias), or IWAS School, was created, with three operational companies distributed throughout the Amazonas River (*Comando de Operações Especiais de Selva* [Cia Op Esp Sl no 17, 19 e 21]). Since then, the IWIAS School has trained around 80 Indigenous soldiers a year, all of whom are assigned to units in the Ecuadorian Amazon (Reseña Histórica, 2023).

In Brazil, the Jungle Warfare Training Center (CIGS), created by Presidential Decree No. 53,649 of March 2, 1964, with the aim of conducting the Jungle Operations Course, specializes military personnel for combat in the jungle. By the end of 2022, CIGS had trained 7,099 jungle warriors, 634 of whom were from friendly nations (CIGS, 2022). France and Ecuador are among the countries that have trained the most jungle warriors at CIGS (Souto; Paim; Franchi, 2018). The men from the Amazon, integrated into the environment as farmers, fishermen, rowers, hunters, and woodsmen, have always lived with the nuances of nature, which, in the Amazon, is reported in superlatives (Fraxe, 2004). Castro (1997) described how these men unraveled knowledge about the time of the tides, the streams, the land, the forest, the spawning period of species, the rain and the sun, explaining their social practices, techniques, and productive relations. This native knowledge of the Amazonians has been decoded for decades by the Jungle Warfare Training Center, with the aim of adapting the diverse traditional knowledge of these peoples to the conventional doctrine of the

art of war in order to use it to train the military personnel who take part in the Jungle Operations Course. In this way, jungle warriors add aspects of Amazonian culture to the military training curriculum, which are fundamental to the success of military operations in this jungle environment.

## 1 THE INDIGENOUS POPULATION IN BRAZIL AND IN THE AMAZON MILITARY COMMAND

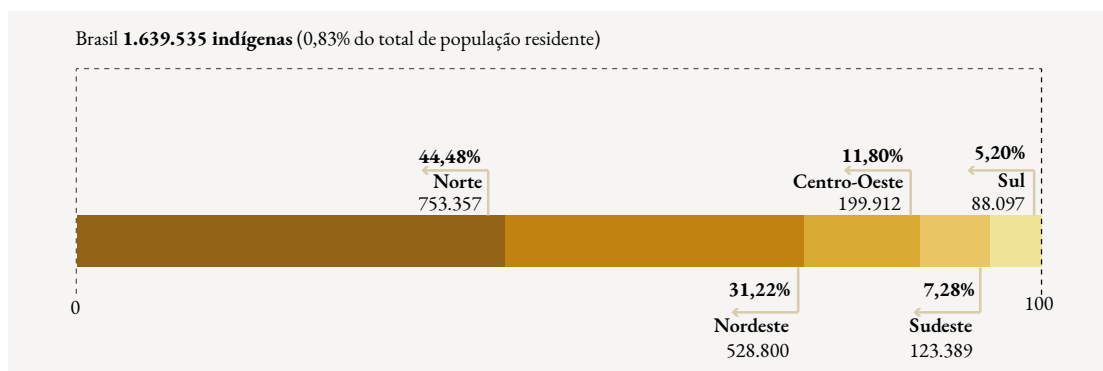
The incorporation of Indigenous people into the Armed Forces continues to the present day, especially in regions where the number of Indigenous people is more representative. According to data from the Demographic Census of the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE), Brazil's Indigenous population represents 0.83% of the country's total population. The total number of people who declared themselves Indigenous was 1,693,535, 88% higher than in the previous census in 2010, when 896,917 people declared themselves Indigenous. Of these, more than half are concentrated in the Legal Amazon region.

The Brazilian Northeast is the second region with the most Indigenous people, with 31.22% of the country's Indigenous population. Followed by the Midwest, with 11.80%. These proportions are in accordance with those of the Military Commands of the Amazon (*Comandos Militares da Amazônia* – CMAs), of the Northeast (*Comandos Militares do Nordeste* – CMNE), and the West (*Comandos Militares do Oeste* – CMO).

Currently, young Indigenous people who reach military age can join the Armed Forces via compulsory military service, by joining the ranks of officers and temporary technical sergeants, or by taking the various entrance exams for different military careers. The Brazilian Army—due to a series of factors, such as the larger number of personnel; its historical presence in the Legal Amazon; and a strategy of presence that, over the centuries, has built up a capillarity with the deployment of military organizations spread out in isolated but strategic locations in the region—is certainly the branch of the armed forces that has the largest number of Indigenous people incorporated into its ranks.

Among the major military area commands, the CMA is responsible for the territories of the states of Acre, Amazonas, Roraima and Rondônia. This territory is home to a population of 641,026 Indigenous people.

Figure 1 – Results of the 2022 indigenous demographic census of the IBGE



Source: IBGE (SIDRA) 2022 Demographic Census: Indigenous Peoples – First Results of the Universe, 2023.

**Chart 1 – Indigenous Populations by Army Military Commands\***

CMA	Amazonas	490.854	CMN	Pará	80.974
	Roraima	97.320		Maranhão	57.214
	Acre	31.699		Amapá	11.334
	Rondônia	21.153		<i>Total 149.522</i>	
<i>Total 641.026</i>					
CMNE	Bahia	229.103	CML	São Paulo	55.295
	Pernambuco	106.634		Minas Gerais	36.699
	Ceará	56.353		Rio de Janeiro	16.964
	Parafba	30.140		Espírito Santo	14.411
	Alagoas	25.725	<i>Total 123.369</i>		
	Rio Grando do Norte	11.725	CMS	Rio Grande do Sul	36.096
	Piauí	7.198		Paraná	30.460
Sergipe	4.708	Santa Catarina		21.541	
<i>Total 174.577</i>		<i>Total 88.097</i>			
CMO	Mato Grosso do Sul	116.346	CMP	Tocantins	20.023
	Mato Grosso	58.231		Goiás	19.522
<i>Total 174.577</i>		Distrito Federal		5.813	
			<i>Total 45.358</i>		

\* The divisions of the CMA are approximate to the state boundaries, which does not apply to the following cases: The Triângulo Mineiro region is subordinate to the CMP and not to the CMSE; Part of the state of Maranhão and the Bico do Papagaio region in Tocantins are subordinate to the CMN and not to the CMP or CMNE.

Source: Prepared by the authors, based on data from the Census (IBGE, 2023).

**Table 1 – Indigenous population by federative unit and place of residence**

Federative Unit	Indigenous Population (People)	State Population	Percentage of the Indigenous population in the total state population (%)	
Amazonas	490.854	3.941.175	12,45	
Roraima	97.320	636.303	15,29	
Acre	31.699	830.026	3,82	
Rondônia	21.153	1.581.016	1,34	
Place of residence	Inside Indigenous lands		Outside Indigenous lands	
UF	População Indígena (Pessoas)	Percentual do total geral (%)	População Indígena (Pessoas)	Percentual do total geral (%)
Amazonas	149.074	30,37	341.780	69,63
Roraima	71.412	73,38	25.908	26,62
Acre	19.588	61,79	12.111	38,21
Rondônia	11.537	54,54	9.616	45,46

Source: Adapted from the IBGE (SIDRA) Demographic Census, 2023.

Within the CMA, the most significant presence of Indigenous soldiers is in military organizations based in regions/municipalities with a higher concentration of these traditional populations. It is no surprise that the 2nd Jungle Infantry Brigade, based in the municipality of São Gabriel da Cachoeira, Amazonas, has the largest number of Indigenous people incorporated from 2019 to 2023 (according to preliminary data collected by the CMA in October 2023).

The region known as *Cabeça do Cachorro*, located in the municipality of São Gabriel da Cachoeira, is home to 23 ethnic groups belonging to the Oriental Tukano, Aruak, Yanomami, and Japurá-Uaupés (Maku) linguistic trunks, who speak around 23 different languages, as well as Nheengatu (General Language) and various dialects. The territorial responsibility for this area and others adjacent to it falls under the 2nd Jungle Infantry Brigade (*Jg Inf Bde*), whose command is based in the city of São Gabriel da Cachoeira, together with the 5th Jungle Infantry Battalion, which is responsible for the seven Special Border Platoons that garrison the border strip in the far northwest of the Amazon. The ethnic diversity of its area of responsibility and the need to aggregate millennia-old traditional knowledge about biodiversity and the various territories that native populations traditionally occupy have led the 2nd Jg Inf Bde to incorporate Indigenous soldiers from 16 different ethnic groups into its ranks, making it the Amazon Military Command Brigade with the greatest ethnic diversity among the soldiers who make up its various subordinate military organizations. In total, there are currently around 1196 Indigenous soldiers from 31 different ethnic groups in the CMA.

**Table 2 – Indigenous people incorporated in the 12th Military Region (from 2019 to 2023)**

Militar org.	CMA			12th MR		2º Gpt E			
	PqR Mnt/12	CIGS	4º C Geo	HGuPV	H Gu SGC	5º BEC	6º BEC	7º BEC	21º CIA C E CNST
	1	2	2	1	64	3	79	3	125
<b>Totals</b>	5			65		210			

Militar org.	1ª Bda Inf SI						16ª Bda Inf SI		
	CFRR / 7º BIS	10º GAC SL	1º B LOG SL	12º ESQD C MEC	CIA C 1º BDA INF SL	1º PEL COM SL	32º PEL PE	8º BIS	17º BIS
	76	17	22	9	13	13	3	73	8
<b>Totals</b>	153							81	

Militar org.	2ª Bda Inf SI							TOTAL
	CMDO 2ª BDA	5º BIS	2º B LOG SL	CIA CMDO 2ª PEL PE	22º PEL PE	2º PEL COM SL	3º BIS	
	51	294	70	106	20	12		
<b>Totals</b>	629							1196

Source: CMA, 2023.

Table 3 – Ethnicities incorporated into the Brazilian Army in the CMA area (2019-2023) (quantity)

Ethnicity	Qty.	Ethnicity	Qty.
BARÉ	440	PIRATAPUYA, KUBEO	13
MACUXI	165	ARAPAÇO	8
TUKANO	139	TUYUKA, YANOMAMI	7
BANIWA	74	PARINTINTIN	6
WAPICHANA	62	POYANAWA, KARITIANA	5
DESSANO	42	KAIXANA, MARUBO	4
TIKUNA	41	MIRANHA, CAICHANO, KAMBEBA, APURINÁ, DESSANO	3
TARIANO	30		
KORIPAKO	23	ARARA, PATAMONA, MIRITI-TAUÁ	2
KOKAMA	22	SHAWÁDAWA, NUKINI, MAYRUNA, SAKURABIAT, MORUMBO, MUDURUKU, TICUNA, PAGO PARU, YTOTO, WAREKENA, BANTO, CARAPANÁ	1
WANANO, ORO NAO	18		
KAXINAUÁ	14		

Source: CMA, 2023

The CMA has historically built and maintained a good relationship with all the Indigenous populations in its area of responsibility. This effort dates back to the *Diálogos de Manaus*, in 2003, when, at the initiative of the CMA, Indigenous people were heard so that the military could learn how to relate to their communities. During the event, a final document was drawn up, later published in Ordinance No. 20-EME, of April 2, 2003, which consolidated the joint deliberations made during the *Diálogo de Manaus* and became a reference for respectful and cooperative relations between the military and Indigenous people throughout the country, as provided for in the 1988 Federal Constitution. Subsequently, this Ordinance was extended to all the armed forces and other Ministry of Defense bodies by Ordinance No. 983/DPE/SPEAI/MD, of October 17, 2003. Then, 20 years later, the Army General Staff issued *ORDINANCE - EME/C Ex No. 946, of January 16, 2023 - Aprova a Diretriz para o relacionamento do Exército Brasileiro com as comunidades indígenas* (EB20-D07.095) (Approves the Guideline for the Brazilian Army's relationship with Indigenous communities), reaffirming the step taken two decades earlier of recognizing Indigenous communities.

Ordinance No. 20-EME, of April 2, 2003, marked the end of a conflictual relationship between the military and Indigenous people, which took place during the 1990s in the CMA area, arising above all from the implementation of differentiated rights granted to Indigenous people in the Federal Constitution of 1998, which generated friction with the post-Cold War military occupation taking place in the Brazilian Amazon during that same period. This ordinance abandoned the indigenist foundations based on the integrationist paradigm, which permeated all the public policies of the Brazilian state from the time of the Empire until 1988, and proposed a relationship under the paradigm of cooperation, as put forward by the Federal Constitution in force. To celebrate the 21st

anniversary of the *1st Diálogo de Manaus* and realign the relationship between the parties, the CMA plans to hold the *2nd Diálogo de Manaus* in 2024.

This article aims to present a profile of the Indigenous personnel incorporated into the ranks of the CMA. Other articles are scheduled to delve into the issue of Indigenous soldiers under different perspectives. The objective is to provide a comprehensive overview of the relationship between soldiers and warriors.

**Figure 2 – CMA Commander – Gen Ex Costa Neves with Yanomami leaders at the CMA anniversary event.**



Source: ConSoc CMA, 2023.

**Figure 3 – CMA Special Advisor for Indigenous Affairs and Yanomami leaders from the Maturacá region at a CMA anniversary event**



Source: ConSoc CMA, 2023.

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