



The United States Air Forces Southern Command

THE US Air Forces Southern Command (USAFSO), with headquarters at Albrook AFB in the Canal Zone, is the representative of the USAF for operations throughout Latin America and the air component of the unified US Southern Command (USSOUTHCOM).

The command's area of responsibility is approximately two and a half times the size of the continental US—extending from the southern border of Mexico to include the land masses of Central and South America. For a comparison of distances involved, Albrook AFB is about 1,000 miles nearer Chicago than it is to Buenos Aires, or about the same distance from Goose Bay.

The over-all mission of USAFSO, under command of Maj. Gen. Robert A. Breitweiser, centers on conducting planning and operations as directed by the unified commander and assisting in developing Latin American air forces.

In providing assistance to Latin American air forces through USAF Missions, the goal is for these forces to achieve that degree of proficiency and self-sufficiency necessary for them to fulfill missions assigned by their national governments and to assist in over-all Western Hemisphere defense, if required, within the framework of the Rio Pact.

Within the command's manifold responsibilities as the air component of USSOUTHCOM, specific missions include:

A Southern Command physician on a preventive medicine field trip in Panama provides treatment to a seven-month-old child suffering from advanced pneumonia. He is aided by a bilingual staff sergeant.



Maj. Gen. Robert A. Breitweiser assumed command of USAFSO Sept. 30, 1963.

A native of Missouri and a 1938 graduate of West Point, he won his wings in 1939.

He saw combat in China-Burma-India theater during World War II, served in staff and operational posts, and became Assistant Chief of Staff, Intelligence, at Hq. USAF in 1961.



- Exercising command over US Military Groups in Argentina, Chile, Colombia, Paraguay, Peru, and Uruguay.
- Providing special air operations training for Latin American air forces.
- Carrying out contingency and operational planning.
- Advising and assisting in development of military assistance plans and programs (MAP) in Latin America.
- Providing for air defense of the Canal Zone.
- Coordinating and conducting search and rescue operations in the USSOUTHCOM area.

In addition to providing logistic and administrative support to USAF Missions and commanding all USAF resources located throughout Latin America, the command conducts the USAF School for Latin America and the USAF Tropic Survival School.

USAF Missions in Latin America, some established as far back as 1940, are located in Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay, and Venezuela. In Brazil, USAF is represented by a section of the Joint Brazil-US Military Commission. The mission in Dominican Republic was reduced last year to an Air Force Section. Another Air Force Section recently was established in Costa Rica.

A most important program undertaken by the command is that of Special Air Operations planning and



Class picture: Fourteen NASA astronauts pose for their graduation photo after completing three grueling weeks at Southern Command's Tropic Survival School at Albrook AFB. Course includes a survival stint in Panamanian jungle, where lessons include learning to catch and eat lizards.

training. Training is not limited to the counter-guerrilla phase, but also includes civic-action activities. For the most part training is conducted by the 605th Air Commando Squadron located at Howard AFB. Most of its flying personnel are veterans of combat support action in South Vietnam.

Mobile Training Teams from Commando resources are sent into Central and South American countries which have requested training assistance. The training provided includes the full spectrum of special warfare tactics ranging from counter-guerrilla air operations to civic actions. Much of the training is conducted jointly with Canal Zone-based US Army 8th Special Action Forces. Thus far, fourteen Latin American countries have received training.

USAFSO has placed considerable emphasis on a strong civic-action program, which would identify Latin American military forces with projects designed for social and economic improvement. Although the Air Commandos have been assigned the civic-action mission within the context of Special Air Operations, they are supported by all resources of the command.

One of the most effective ways of introducing USAF standards of technical competence to Latin American air forces is through the USAF School for Latin America, run by USAFSO at Albrook AFB. The school currently provides training in twenty-one subjects to approximately 500 Latin American students a year, both officers and airmen. Courses are taught in Spanish by bilingual Air Force instructors. Since its inception in 1943, more than 6,000 students from twenty Latin American countries have been graduated from the school.

Another training program conducted for Latin American air forces at the school is the highly successful USAFSO Preventive Medicine Training Program. This is also the initial program for the USAF. Basically, the program is to train five-man teams for six months. Upon completion of training, teams are provided medical equipment, supplies, and an aircraft for transportation and are returned to their respective countries. With the addition of a host country physician, each team can function as a small dispensary to provide basic medical care (including air evacuation, if necessary) and instruction in preventive-medicine techniques.

Tropic Survival Training is conducted at the USAF Tropic Survival School located at Albrook AFB. All USAF flying personnel receive this training. The school also trains pilots of the Army, Navy, Marine Corps, Latin American air forces, and other federal agencies. The unique value of the training offered by this facility has been recognized by NASA—all thirty Mercury and Gemini astronauts were required to undergo the week-long course.

As a result of the impetus given to survival training in the area, similar schools have been established in Argentina, Colombia, and Peru under the guidance of school personnel. A fourth school is programmed for Chile.

USAFSO also is responsible, through its Rescue Coordination Center, for providing search and rescue services—both sea and air—in the SOUTHCOM area. Air and surface craft assigned to all components are employed in SAR operations. More than 120 SAR missions were conducted in Panama alone since the first of last year. Most of these were provided on a humanitarian basis.

During the past year USAFSO continued expanding to meet its increasing responsibilities in turbulent Latin America. A major feature of this expansion was the buildup of the Air Commandos both in personnel and aircraft and transfer of the unit from TAC to the command in July of this year.

A significant step was the return of Howard AFB from the Army and subsequent modernization of facilities, still under way. Howard, hub of USAF flying operations in Latin America, is now capable of handling the latest and most sophisticated jet aircraft.

The future holds the prospect of an increased planning and operational role for the command. This is obvious if the US and Latin America are to respond to the tangible and readily perceptible threat of communism in the Western Hemisphere.

In the operational role, USAFSO can be expected to be called upon to provide more direct assistance to Latin American air forces in the form of in-field training and improved equipment.

USAFSO has an imposing job ahead—a unique challenge and a job which will require the support of all available USAF resources.—END



Uruguayan Air Force personnel at USAF School for Latin America train as flight-line radio repairmen on both piston-engine and jet-aircraft radio systems. Here bilingual instructor demonstrates use of multimeter to check out T-33 communication system. After graduation, Uruguayans will become electronic specialists for units back home.