

The Role of the Army Air Arm in Latin America, 1922-1931

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In the early twentieth century the United States became increasingly concerned about the nature and degree of extra-hemispheric attention to Latin America. With the opening of the Panama Canal in 1914, the United States had added reason for concern about such outside interest. It sometimes implied a threat to the Canal, besides being a part of the economic and, beginning in the 1920s, ideological competition among the major powers. Following World War I the threat appeared to grow because of the progressive development of the airplane. The airplane also provided a stimulant to the economic aspect of the competition.¹ It is not surprising, then, that the United States Army Air Service* played an important role in the government's reaction to the threat and competition.

General defense of an interocean canal was a concern of the United States government before, during, and after the actual acquisition of the Panama Canal Zone in 1903. But defense of the Canal against a threat from the sky was not an immediate cause for anxiety, for aviation as a military weapon or transportation boon was slow to develop after the first manned heavier-than-air flight in 1903. In April 1913, however, a U.S. civilian aviator, Robert Fowler, made the first flight over the Panama Canal. His flight generated enough alarm in governmental circles to bring about the initial regulatory measure pertaining to aviation and the Canal, an executive order of 7 August 1913 prohibiting unauthorized flights over the Canal Zone. During World War I various other Presidential orders broadened the original one. After the war the government allotted an Air Service observation group and a small number of Navy planes to the Canal Zone.² These and antiaircraft batteries were to provide an air defense that probably was sufficient for any practical assault that could have been mounted at the time.

By 1922 a few Army airmen as well as a few diplomats and politicians saw the need for additional defense for the Canal because of certain European commercial endeavors in Latin America, mainly originating after World War I: the sale of civil and military aircraft and the establishment of flying schools and rudimentary airlines in an area that needed air transportation but had little aviation of its own. In the first few years after the war the United States had been little interested in this competition for aviation sales and service. In December 1922, however, the United States Minister to Guatemala, Arthur H. Geissler, sounded an alarm to the State Department about European aviation activities in Central America. He coupled his warning with suggestions that the United States establish its own airline services in Central America and that military and naval planes from the Canal Zone be sent on missions of courtesy to Central America.³

Motivated by the warning, Secretary of War John W. Weeks soon wrote Secretary of State Charles Evans Hughes that there was a genuine threat to the Canal from commercial planes potentially convertible to bombers. He stated his opposition to any but United States

control of airline service in Central America. The Chief of the Army Air Service, Major General Mason M. Patrick, had assured him, Weeks informed Hughes, of the availability of private U.S. capital and personnel if such an airline proved feasible. Concerning Geissler's suggestion that planes be used in diplomacy, Weeks reported to the State Department that five Air Service planes were available in the Canal Zone for missions of courtesy to Central America. He pointed out that the logical time for such flights would be between November 1923 and April 1924, when the weather would tend to be favorable.⁴

Washington had thus decided to use the Air Service as a diplomatic instrument to counteract the alleged threat to the Canal. It did not take an entirely new orientation for the Air Service to assume this duty. Since the war various individuals in that service had been interested in Latin America as a logical area for the expansion of United States aviation. They had advocated official air missions or displays of U.S. aviation products at expositions attended by Latin Americans. On the other hand the Air Service had at times failed to take advantage of such opportunities to promote U.S. aviation.⁵

What kind of environment were foreigners to encounter in Latin America following World War I? The influence of the industrial revolution, given impetus by World War I, was at work in parts of Latin America. The area had over a century's history of attracting foreign investments, necessary for its development. A dubious effect of foreign investment was that it sometimes served as one prop for ruling oligarchies and *caudillos*. Many countries in the 1920s continued to welcome foreign loans, private and governmental, and various other forms of investment, while a few, like Mexico, were taking steps to limit investment. The Mexican attitude had contributed to a time of tension with the United States.

Certain past U.S. policies, like the Roosevelt corollary to the Monroe Doctrine and Dollar Diplomacy, had provoked increasing Latin American ill will toward the northern neighbor. The continued occupation of Haiti and broadened involvement in Nicaragua beginning late in 1926 were other examples. During the 1920s these policies underwent change, however, as evidenced by the Central American Flight in 1924, the Pan American Flight in 1926-27 (about which more later), and as climaxed by the Good-Neighbor Policy of the 1930s.

It was in a milieu of some tension, then, that the Air Service prepared to involve itself in a Latin American diplomatic mission. Flights of planes from the Canal Zone to surrounding Latin American areas for official purposes were not new in 1923. Navy planes from the air station at Coco Solo, C.Z., had previously flown to points in South America on courtesy visits. These flights had aroused enthusiasm among South American businessmen for aviation. The proposed Army venture, however, had wider implications. In a letter of 17 July 1923, Weeks outlined to Hughes the purposes of the projected flight to Central America: (1) sowing of good will, (2) charting of air routes and gathering of data on available airfields, (3) serving as forerunner of a United States airmail service from New Orleans to Central America, and (4) aiding the United States aviation industry to establish a market in Central America. Samuel S. Bradley, post-World War I figure in the United States aviation industry, recognized early in the era that "only through the development of commercial aviation will we be able to maintain a sufficient aeronautical establishment to meet the needs of national security."⁶ In seeking to promote overseas sales of American

aviation products by the Central American Flight, the Air Service gave evidence that it had come to appreciate fully the relationship of a healthy industry to preparedness.

In August 1923 the Adjutant General of the United States Army authorized the Commanding General of the Panama Canal Department to send three planes to Central America for visits of courtesy and for charting “such airways in the Central American Republics as would be of value to the respective governments as well as to the Army Air Service in the event of an emergency....”The flyers also were to collect photographic data in support of airways reports. The air route to be surveyed was to run no farther north than “the southern Mexican border.”⁷ Although not previously cited as a motive for the flight, the existence of airways for “emergency” use was to become of prime interest to the Army. This motive will be apparent in the subsequent account of Pan American Airways in Central America. Such an airway naturally related to the general theme of protection of the Canal.

As a companion project to the Central American Flight, Secretary Weeks suggested that treaties be sought with Central American countries for the exchange of aviation privileges and for mutual regulations pertaining to airplanes. The Air Service influenced this suggestion. General Patrick had been one of the U.S. delegates to a meeting in Paris in 1919 at which the first major international aviation agreement, the Paris Convention, was written. It was the basis for exchange of aviation privileges between contracting countries but at the same time asserted that a nation had sovereignty over its airspace. The United States had signed but for various reasons had never ratified the convention. The Air Service believed that expansion of U.S. aviation was limited by the failure to ratify. Individual treaties with Central American countries were to serve in lieu of ratification of the Paris Convention by these countries and the United States. Post-master General Harry S. New and Commerce Secretary Herbert Hoover favored these treaties, but Secretary of the Navy Edwin Denby presented the objections of the influential Navy General Board to the effect that reciprocal agreements might boomerang against the United States in the long run. Whether or not the Navy attitude was decisive, the treaties never developed. When it was evident they were a dead issue, General Patrick expressed his disappointment. They would, he believed, “afford to our Nationals the requisite assurance of their right to the continuing operation of such aerial transportation lines as they may see fit to establish in these Republics...”⁸

Thus the flight remained the central focus of the project. Hearing of the plans for a flight, the aviation industry’s Aeronautical Chamber of Commerce wrote to the Information Division, Army Air Service, requesting that the flight commander disseminate accurate facts about the United States aviation industry and gather data on the market potential in Central America. In reply the Information Division stated that one mission of the flight was to gather information that would aid the United States aviation industry but that it could not go beyond this, for the main objective of the flight was to disseminate good will, and Central American countries would resent an “advertising campaign” carried on by a “purely mercenary expedition...”⁹

Certain events in 1923 and 1924 made the flight seem urgent. In 1923 the Republic of Panama initiated negotiations with the United States for a recognized voice in matters

pertaining to aerial navigation in Panama. United States officials in the Canal Zone, including Department Air Officer Major Raycroft Walsh, were cautious in the beginning talks, desiring control of aviation in all of Panama to protect the Canal. These talks soon became part of general United States—Panamanian negotiations toward revising treaty arrangements with respect to the Canal Zone. At some point in 1923 an airline company in Colombia, *La Sociedad Colombo-Alemana de Transportes Aéreos* (Scadta), commenced to apply pressure on the United States government for landing privileges in the Canal Zone. The Canal Zone was a requisite stopover for a survey flight preliminary to an extension of Scadta's services to the United States via Central America and the Caribbean. Domination of Scadta by German and Austrian interests made its overtures especially unwelcome to United States officialdom. These events were perhaps capped early in 1924 when the chief umpires of the recently completed joint Army-Navy maneuvers in the area stated that air attacks against the Panama Canal would have an excellent chance of success.¹⁰

On 4 February 1924 Major Raycroft Walsh led the Central American Flight of one Martin bomber and two de Havillands on a journey that was in many respects a considerable undertaking. The flyers were not the first in Central America, but they were the first to attempt an elaborate diplomatic flight on a rigid time schedule. The lumbering Martin set an uneven pace that made it difficult to estimate the time of arrival at stops, where expectant crowds and tense officials waited. An ironic contrast existed: the flight carried radio equipment with which it performed plane-to-plane and air-to-ground experiments, but the maps of the navigation officer were not aerial maps, and landing fields were often primitive. In a sense the flyers were hostages to wild terrain, jungle, swamp, volcanoes (the latter "fat and majestic" in the words of the navigation officer), and on one occasion to some of the roughest air many of them had ever encountered.¹¹ Like the *conquistadores* of old, they were explorers with political motives.

In spite of the impediments, the flight proceeded up Panama to Costa Rica, Nicaragua, El Salvador, and Guatemala, avoiding Honduras, where there was revolutionary turmoil. At each stop cordiality and enthusiasm were evident. Through a misunderstanding, the Nicaraguan chief executive was not on hand on the outward journey, but he gave a banquet for the flyers on their return trip and went up for a joy ride. In Guatemala, President José María Orellana led the crowd in three cheers for the United States, a compliment the aviators did their best to return. Although wearied by flying and the demands of formal and informal receptions, the flyers, according to observers, performed with finesse. Central Americans were particularly impressed by the fact that the visitors managed to arrive at scheduled stops on time. They were undoubtedly impressed by another statistic: the flight returned to the Canal Zone on 24 February 1924 without serious accident or loss of life.¹²

In his official report Walsh pronounced the goodwill and route-chartering phases of the mission accomplished. To expedite the successful conclusion of the other two phases—a United States airmail service to Central America and aid to the American aviation industry—he recommended that the United States send official air missions to Central America to offset the influence of Europeans, whose aviation activities in Central America the flight had affirmed, and that the United States government promote an airline, either official or private, in the area. Such a line would have to connect with both the United States and the Canal Zone to be profitable. To boost its aviation industry, the United States needed to

establish service and supply facilities in Central America and choose with care a plane for the airmail service.¹³

The Central American Flight was the pioneer effort of major good-will endeavors in Latin America by the Air Service and its successors. It had another and broader importance for the future: the flight was a harbinger of the Good-Neighbor Policy and its subsequent variations, whereby the United States recognized the value of demonstrated good-will.¹⁴ It cannot be denied that the flight was also in certain respects a continuation of Dollar Diplomacy, in that it sought to promote American economic investment in Latin America for the advancement of diplomatic aims. But an avowed and sincere objective of Walsh and his men was to spread good will. The success of that objective is revealed in the Central American response to the flight.

The aftermath of the flight, however, was for those who desired a successful outcome a story of apathy, frustration, and delay. Secretary Weeks' reaction to Walsh's report did not contain the urgency he had expressed earlier. While Weeks advocated some type of action, he stated that no authority existed for air missions to Latin America. It was not until six months after the flight that an interdepartmental conference met in Washington to discuss the matter. Meeting on 20 August 1924, with Walsh representing the War Department, the conference recommended that the Post Office Department investigate the practicality of an airmail route to Central America.¹⁵

Accordingly, the Post Office Department selected postal specialists Vincent C. Burke and Joseph V. Magee to conduct an investigation. They were supplied such pertinent information as the high degree of interest in Central America for an airline and airmail service. The Mexican ambassador indicated that his country might cooperate in the establishment of a route. United States diplomats repeated Walsh's point that a successful airline must connect the United States and Panama. Even then, they warned, the line might not pay at first, but military and economic reasons made the route imperative.¹⁶

In November 1924, after arriving in the Canal Zone, Burke and Magee consulted with various officials, among them Major General William Lassiter, commanding the Panama Canal Department. Lassiter pointed out several benefits to be derived from a Panama—United States airline. He suggested that its facilities would be especially beneficial to the Air Service in wartime. After a short stay in the Canal Zone and a quick visit to Costa Rica, Burke and Magee returned to the United States. In their report they stated that they found from statistics in the Canal Zone, from talks with officials, and from the trip to Costa Rica that an airmail service was not economically feasible and so, from a postal standpoint, not justifiable. They offered the view, however, that the service was probably justified from a strategic standpoint. Thus they did not reject an airline out of hand, but the report set off a chain reaction that brought a halt to progress. Postmaster General New felt that further action was not "desirable.....at this time." On the basis of this decision by the Post Office Department, both the State and War Departments decided to terminate their efforts. But it was not without protest from the Air Service. General Patrick felt the investigation was not a true test, for the inspectors had not gone to Guatemala, where sentiment for airline service was the strongest. Defense of the Canal, Patrick warned, made such service urgent. He tried

to reopen the matter twice, in January and February 1925, but each time the War Department disapproved.¹⁷

While it was the end of action for a time, it did not end various repercussions. Mr. Geissler in Guatemala continued to warn of the consequences of failure to establish a service to Central America. General William (“Billy”) Mitchell, who had advocated an airline to Latin America, accused the War Department of almost criminal negligence in not heeding Patrick’s importuning. The matter became an issue at his famous court-martial late in 1925. At one point the defense called on Raycroft Walsh, who reviewed the Central American Flight, his report, General Patrick’s concurrence, and the lack of concrete action. Meanwhile, Walsh testified, foreign interests had gained a foothold in Central America, threatening the Panama Canal.¹⁸

Walsh was apparently referring to moves in 1925 by Scadta, the German-and-Austrian-controlled airline company, to extend its operations northward from Colombia into the Caribbean and to the United States. Early in 1925 the company’s suave managing director, Dr. Peter Paul von Bauer, visited the United States and wheedled permission for company planes to stop over in the Canal Zone on a flight to survey the proposed extension. A member of the survey flight, he apparently impressed both Air Service personnel and diplomats in Panama when the flight visited the Canal Zone in August 1925. In Central America, Von Bauer and other flight members obtained contracts for service from several governments. After the flight ended in Cuba, Von Bauer continued on to Washington. There in the fall of 1925 he consulted with postal authorities, other executive branch members, and military and naval officials and also paid a courtesy call on President Calvin Coolidge. The Air Service played a kibitzer’s role in the diplomatic game between Washington and Von Bauer, who sought official backing for his plan to extend Scadta’s service to the United States and desired an airmail contract.¹⁹

Von Bauer had chartered a company in Delaware to conduct the proposed new service, hoping that the United States government would allow the new company to use Scadta resources and personnel, thus stamping it with a Scadta imprint. At a series of interdepartmental meetings to consider approval of Von Bauer’s proposal, the Air Service’s influence was a major factor against acceptance. The War Department representative reported on the meetings as they developed to Major Walsh, Patrick’s liaison. During the meetings both the Post Office and Commerce Departments’ representatives leaned toward Von Bauer. The War Department representative sought to have the conferees advance ways by which the United States, rather than Scadta or some subsidiary in disguise, would have control of air routes in Central America and the Caribbean. In reply to the War Department’s request for specific recommendations as to achieving control, Patrick suggested passage of pending legislation authorizing air missions to be sent to Latin America and administrative action to promote an airline to Central America. For the most part the conferees evaded Patrick’s suggestions, but neither did they approve Von Bauer’s plan. Major Henry H. (“Hap”) Arnold also had a part in the Air Service effort against Scadta. Alarmed at the company’s proximity to the Canal, he proposed that a purely American company be organized immediately as a counterweight. He and Major Carl Spaatz drew up a prospectus for such a company, which became a government weapon to

counter Von Bauer's plan. In addition to War Department and Air Service resistance, opposition by United States business elements helped to thwart Scadta.²⁰

The Air Service was not content to let conferences and interdepartmental decisions determine the fate of an airline to Latin America. During 1925 and on into 1926, it planned and shaped a new flight, soon known as the Pan American Good Will Flight. Major Herbert A. Dargue was to command it. Early in the planning Dargue listed the objectives for Patrick; the flight's strategic, economic, and diplomatic objectives were to counteract foreign influence potentially harmful to the Canal by showing Latin Americans the superiority of United States equipment over foreign, to demonstrate the feasibility of commercial air service along the airways of Latin America, and to convey good will. Assistant Secretary of War for Aeronautics F. Trubee Davison, in a letter of July 1926 to Secretary of State Frank B. Kellogg, expressed some of the same objectives but placed a slightly different emphasis. Davison stressed the need for "American-controlled airlines throughout Central and South American countries . . . [necessary] from both a commercial and national defense standpoint. . . ." Such airlines would boost the U.S. aviation industry, whose expansion was vital to meet any future "national emergency." These airlines would also "counteract the creation of alien activities in Central and South America. . . ." The Pan American Flight, Davison felt, would supply the necessary data for the establishment of a United States airline. After extensive preparation, the flight started on 22 December 1926, when five Loening amphibians took off from Texas and flew to Mexico.²¹

From the outset the Pan American Flight bucked psychological currents, with which the Central American Flight had not had to contend. Late in 1926 the United States government committed itself intensively in Nicaraguan revolutionary strife. The timing was unfortunate: the flight progressed in a period when Latin Americans voiced their disapproval at what many of them considered unwarranted U.S. interference in Nicaraguan affairs. The flight was a natural target for that disapproval. In the generally unfavorable atmosphere, old antagonisms sharpened, as in Mexico, where the flight's reception was in the main cold. In Colombia, where there were still memories of the loss of Panama, the flyers avoided certain places where violence threatened. But in other countries, like Peru and Brazil, the reception was friendly, for there relations with the United States were above average for Latin America.²²

In Argentina the flight experienced a climax of bad luck. It had previously suffered delays and damages to planes, but no loss of life. Over Buenos Aires, two of the planes suddenly collided, and, locked together, they spun in. The parachutes of one two-man crew billowed, but the other two flyers, having neglected to wear parachutes, perished. Argentina had been officially friendly, privately unfriendly; but Latin hostility and indifference quickly turned to sympathy. It was sympathy for the dead and their comrades, however, not for the flight itself. The survivors regrouped and finished the tour.²³

In some respects, the flight was a failure bordering on disaster. Dargue's own report belies the flight's success in encouraging good will in much of Latin America. Its delays, accidents, and loss of life did not contribute to a positive image of a United States airline. Yet it did contribute something toward such an enterprise. Some of the airplanes were the

first to cover the principal airways of Latin America in one journey, evincing further the airplane's potential for transportation and commerce. Dargue's official report contained a wealth of data relating to the Latin American scene. The flight itself was an accurate gauge of Latin American feelings toward the United States. American officials seem to have had its experiences in mind when planning certain future moves concerning good will.²⁴ Despite the partial failure of the good-will mission, largely through circumstances beyond control of the flight, it was significant of future United States' change of attitude toward Latin America that official references to the flight included both "Pan American" and "Good Will."²⁵

In an address before the Inter-American Conference on Commercial Aviation at Washington in May 1927, Assistant Secretary of Commerce for Aeronautics William P. MacCracken, Jr., predicted that with the cooperation of business and industry a United States airline soon would be established over a "large portion" of the Pan American Good Will Flight's 20,000-mile route.²⁶ He was not indulging in idle speculation. MacCracken was to be one of the select group who, a little over six months after the flight, made a very vital policy decision with respect to a United States-controlled airline in Latin America.

This decision did not come as an immediate result of the Pan American Flight. Between May and December 1927 other events transpired to influence decisive United States action. The Air Corps did not play a major role in the shaping of these May-to-December events, but on the other hand it cannot be denied that its action was part of a chain of events extending back to 1922. The first of these 1927 events was the great transatlantic flight of Charles A. Lindbergh in May of that year.²⁷ This flight brought new life to United States aviation, reviving and exciting public and official interest. In October 1927 a small new United States airline company, Pan American Airways, Incorporated (PAA), began to fly mail between Key West and Havana. Realizing that PAA was a genuine competitor, Scadta, through the Colombian government, began to apply pressure on the United States government for permission to use the Canal Zone as a necessary berth in any northward extension. Off came the velvet gloves as Scadta mounted a strident propaganda attack in Colombia and Panama, meant to force the United States to give in. This pressure led to a meeting in Washington, in November 1927, of representatives of executive departments, including MacCracken, at which it was decided the government should give strong encouragement to a United States airline to extend through all of Latin America, PAA was to be that line. President Calvin Coolidge quickly approved the decision.²⁸

By early 1928, Pan American Airways, Incorporated, with the assistance of the interdepartmental conferees and Postmaster General New, was planning its extension into Latin America. The company was the beneficiary of the past as well as the "chosen instrument" of current governmental policy. The routes it surveyed in the Caribbean, Central America, and South America had already been largely charted or tested by the Marine Corps, the Central American Flight, and the Pan American Flight. In the Foreign Air Mail Acts of 1928 and 1929, PAA was given an indirect subsidy; and by virtue of a provision in these acts that the Post Office Department could award a contract to a low bidder best suited to advance the interests of the United States, PAA could be and was favored in the awarding of contracts. The Department of State gave PAA extraordinary

support. PAA also hired key personnel with experience in various branches of the government, including the military.²⁹

The Air Corps gave needed assistance to PAA in its efforts to span Latin American air routes. Early in 1929, for example, the United States Legation in Costa Rica sent an urgent telegram to Washington; unless Lieutenant John Jones of the Air Corps was given leave to pilot the PAA plane in Costa Rica, the company's service there might have to be discontinued. Such a breakdown, the Legation warned, would adversely affect delicate PAA contract negotiations with the Costa Rican government. That same day the State Department wired back that the Air Corps approved. A short time later Costa Rican authorities signed a contract with PAA. Also in 1929 Washington forwarded the discharge papers of Lieutenant Robert Williams to its ambassador in Chile, to keep the lieutenant from having to go to the Canal Zone for discharge. Williams, who became Pan American—Grace Airways (Panagra) manager in Chile, and other key Panagra personnel were involved in negotiations with Chile.³⁰

The Air Service's effort toward an airline to Latin America was not its only activity in the post-World War I competition for pre-eminence in Latin American skies. As mentioned, the Air Service early in the postwar era recognized the need for preserving a vigorous aviation industry in time of peace so that wartime demands might be met. The Air Service's interest in synergy with the aviation industry has continued to the present, but in the 1920s Air Service policies and industry's wishes were not always synonymous. Whereas the British, French, and Italians after World War I sent to Latin America military air missions whose demonstrations and allocations of surplus planes aided the sale of their respective national products, the United States government resisted sending military air missions of any kind. Major General Charles T. Menoher, Chief of the Air Service from 1918 to 1921, opposed missions and the sale of military aviation equipment on the grounds that there were no surplus planes or engines to spare for missions or for foreign countries generally, that countries like Mexico might use military planes against the United States, and that private industry ought to make sales abroad directly. Also, doubt existed in some government circles that the Air Service had sufficient authority to send air missions. From time to time private industry importuned the Air Service to aid it in establishing more of a foothold in underdeveloped areas by easing restrictions on sales and giving direct assistance in the form of air missions.³¹

Under General Patrick, the Air Service did modify its position on missions and sales of government aviation equipment abroad, advocating increasingly a pragmatic approach in the matter of sales. At certain times it accepted the lead of the State Department. In 1924, following a request from the State Department, the Air Service released, without opposition, military planes to the Mexican government which used them to help in quelling a revolt. Patrick urged passage of legislation that would clearly permit the sending of military air missions to advise Latin American governments. In 1926, when the Air Service became the Air Corps, Congress passed an act that allowed the sending of such advisers to Latin America. This was pioneer legislation, marking the first real step in a process that, while slow in developing, has seen air personnel influence Latin American military training. Today Air Force resources assist underdeveloped areas, like some in Latin America, to progress.³³

Another legislative act of 1926 affected the Air Corps role in Latin American affairs. This act gave the President authority to detail Air Corps officers to work with the Commerce Department in its promotion of commercial aviation. Even before passage of the act, the War Department, at Patrick's prompting, gave Lieutenant James H. Doolittle leave to make a sales tour of several South American countries for the Curtiss company. His salesmanship, which included demonstrating a plane in Chile despite the handicap of two broken legs, helped persuade the Chileans to purchase nine Curtiss aircraft. Doolittle was also part of a quickened sales effort by the United States in 1928, when he was given leave to accompany a Curtiss sales team to South America. At the same time Lieutenant Leigh Wade of the Air Corps was in South America with a team representing Consolidated Aircraft Corporation. The two teams, both under the aegis of the Commerce Department, faced heavy foreign competition. The Curtiss force was successful in selling Chile a sizable order of planes.³⁴

Pan American Airways, Incorporated, also successful in 1928 in "selling" its services to a number of Latin American governments, inaugurated in 1929 its new lines connecting the United States with the Caribbean, Mexico, and Central America. Lines spanning and joining the coasts of South America and much of the interior soon followed. Air Corps personnel played roles in the process, and the dream of an airline for the sake of the Canal was nearer reality.

A related Air Corps expectation moved toward fruition in the years 1928-31. When Air Corps First Lieutenants James E. Parker and Robert W. Douglass flew from the Canal Zone to Washington, D.C., and back in the summer of 1926, they tested the two most plausible routes for flying between the United States and the Canal Zone. On the way north, traveling through Central America and Mexico, they found good facilities only at the Marine Corps base at Managua, Nicaragua, and at one Mexican field. They found the return trip by way of Cuba and Central America a better one but only because it was shorter. They noted that PAA used a field at Havana but had nothing beyond that. In 1928 the Air Corps was not flying many of its planes back and forth between the United States and Latin America because of the lack of adequate facilities.³⁵

In the summer of 1929, First Lieutenants Westside T. Larson and Lawrence J. Carr, flying a Curtiss A-3, made a trip testing the Caribbean—Central American route to the Canal Zone, then flew the Central American-Mexican route back. They reported PAA installations or leased fields at Havana, Belize, and several places in Mexico. They had praise for PAA services and personnel "from Managua to Miami." When they bent a propeller at Belize, a PAA plane soon brought them a spare from the Canal Zone. Larson and Carr recommended that Air Corps flights between the United States and the Canal Zone should be "allowed and encouraged."³⁶

By the spring of 1930, PAA had a string of stations from Miami and Brownsville, Texas, to the Canal Zone. The company was supplying an increasing number of Air Corps flights with fuel, rest, and storage facilities, where available, and communications services at its landing fields along the two main Air Corps ferrying routes to and from the Canal Zone. These flights had to obtain clearance from the government of each country visited. In September 1930 Juan T. Trippe, President of PAA, wrote Major General James E. Fechet,

Chief of the Air Corps, that his company was more than glad to assist the Air Corps and hoped to provide increased service in the future. Concerning use of PAA's communications service, however, Trippe reported that in several countries restrictions limited the use of that facility to company business, but PAA hoped to make arrangements that would terminate this inconvenience. General Fechet replied that he understood PAA's delicate position; the Air Corps did not wish to jeopardize the company's status in Latin America, and he would be content with those services PAA could extend. By December 1930 Trippe was able to tell Fechet that his company was in a position to offer its communications service without restrictions.³⁷

One of the most valuable communications services offered by PAA to the Air Corps was that of position reports to Washington and the Canal Zone on Air Corps planes flying between the Canal Zone and the United States. Flying in often turbulent skies over inhospitable stretches of land and water, Air Corps pilots were undoubtedly comforted to be able to check frequently with one or the other of PAA's radio stations. This safety network PAA had perfected with its own planes. Other special PAA assistance to the Air Corps included cooperation in securing clearance at ports of entry. In Mexico, for example, local Mexican officials were alerted by PAA personnel at Brownsville in time to check with Mexico City about clearance for a scheduled Air Corps flight. The Mexican government usually granted permission for such flights but was often slow in notifying check points.³⁶

In 1931 General Fechet made a flight from the United States to the Canal Zone over the Brownsville-Panama route, touching down at the various PAA fields along the way. After his return he wrote Trippe that he found PAA's airway to Panama to be excellent and its services carried out with the greatest efficiency.³⁹ Fechet's praise for PAA was not a shallow formality: the company offered in some respects a substitute for a military airway connecting the United States and the Canal Zone.

By 1931 PAA had bested, pulled abreast of, or struck a bargain with its more important rivals in Latin America,⁴⁰ with the firm support of the United States government. It was fitting that by 1931 PAA was rendering the Air Corps assistance, for in part it was through persistent Air Corps efforts that such a giant as PAA had risen astride the air routes of Latin America. The future would reveal one indisputable value of PAA's existence in Latin America: during World War II the company helped to mitigate a threat to hemispheric security. Among its contributions were assistance in "de-Germanizing" Scadta, airport development at several strategic points in Latin America, and services for the Air Corps such as radio broadcasts for the safety of military planes.⁴¹

The Good-Neighbor Policy, hinted at in the 1920s and fully developed in the 1930s, proved essential to Latin American cooperation with the United States against a common threat. A manifestation of that policy was the good-will visit of U.S. Flying Fortresses to Brazil in 1939. The visit was "the meansfor publicizing Brazilian-American friendship"⁴² during one of those crisis times when solidarity is a shield.

Today, more than forty years after the young Army Air Service sent its Central American Flight winging from the Canal Zone, the United States Air Force has one of its major commands, the USAF Southern Command, stationed in the Canal Zone. USAFSO backs up

the U.S. hemispheric policies embodied in the Rio Pact, the Military Assistance Program, and the Alliance for Progress, thus continuing a vital role of U.S. military aviation.

Auburn, Alabama

*The Air Service was renamed Air Corps in 1926, but the title appropriate to the time will be used in this study.

Notes

1. It was not until the rise of Hitler in the 1930s that aviation and ideology became inseparable components of the international competition in Latin America. Recent situations in which airborne objects figured in ideological rivalry in Latin America were the Bay of Pigs episode and the Cuban missile crisis.

2. Dispatch with enclosures of Alban G. Snyder to William J. Bryan, 29 April 1913, file 811f,796/-, Record Group 59, Diplomatic Branch, National Archives (Record groups in the National Archives hereinafter cited as R/G; Diplomatic Branch, as DB-NA); "Panama Canal 'Forbidden' to Aeronauts," *Flying*, II (September 1913), 28; Presidential Executive Order #1810, 7 August 1913. *Annual Report of the Isthmian Canal Commission and the Panama Canal for the Fiscal Year Ended June 30, 1914* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1914), p. 560; 38 Stat. 2041; 40 Stat. 1668; 40 Stat. 1753-1754; Manufacturers Aircraft Association (comp.), *Aircraft Year Book, 1921* (Boston: Small, Maynard & Company, 1921), p. 204; *Year Book, 1920*, p. 299; *Annual Reports of the Navy Department for the Fiscal Year 1921* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1921), p. 60 (hereinafter cited as Navy Annual Reports, 1921).

3. Wesley Phillips Newton, "International Aviation Rivalry in Latin America, 1919-1927," *Journal of Inter-American Studies*, VII (July 1965), 346-50; telegram of Arthur H. Geissler to Charles E. Hughes, 16 December 1922, file 813.796; dispatch of Geissler to Hughes, 5 January 1923, file 813.796/4, R/G 59, DB-NA.

4. Letter of John W. Weeks to Hughes, 12 January 1923, file 813.796/5 weeks to Hughes, 2 March 1923, file 813.796/ 17, R/G 59, DB-NA.

5. Newton, pp. 347-49.

6. "Naval Aviation in South America," *Aviation and Aircraft Journal*. X (10 January 1921), 54 (Naval aviators also made some of the early postwar flights between the United States and the Canal Zone. See Navy Annual Reports, 1921, p. 55.); Major Raycroft Walsh, Official Report of the Central American Flight, n.d. Correspondence and Report re Central American Flight, file 373, R/G-18, Army and Navy Section, War Records Branch. National Archives. Official Report hereinafter cited as Walsh Report. Correspondence hereinafter cited as Central American Flight Documents. Section hereinafter cited as ANS-WRB-NA;

letter of S. S. Bradley to Mason M. Patrick, 9 November 1921, file 360.01, Commercial Aviation to Policy-Civil Aeronautics, R/G 18, ANS-WRB-NA.

7. Letter of Adjutant General to Commanding General, Panama Canal Department, 31 August 1923, Central American Flight Documents. Because of tension between Mexico and the United States, it was decided to exclude that Latin American country from the charting for the time being. See letter of J. E. Fechet to Chief, Training and War Plans Division, 11 September 1923, reports (by country) Central America to Germany, file 360.02, R/G 18, ANS-WRB-NA (hereinafter referred to as Reports, Central America to Germany).

8. Letter of Harry S. New to Hughes, 6 September 1923, file 813,796/35; Herbert Hoover to Hughes, 13 September 1923, file 813.796/36; Edwin Denby to Hughes, 27 September 1923, file 813.796/37, R/G 59, DB-NA; first indorsement of Patrick, 25 January 1924 to a letter of Weeks to Hughes, 5 December 1923, Reports, Central America to Germany.

9. Letter of Luther K. Bell to Information Division, U.S. Air Service, 29 October 1923; Ira A. Rader to Aeronautical Chamber of Commerce, 5 November 1923, Reports, Central America to Germany.

10. Note of R. J. Alfaro to Hughes, 26 February 1923, file 819.796/2; Alfaro to Hughes. 15 March 1923, file 819,796/ 3; letter of weeks to Hughes, 30 March 1923, file 819.796/4; Weeks to Hughes, 6 June 1923, file 819.796/7; dispatch of J. G. South to Hughes, 5 December 1923, file 819.796/12. R/G 59, DB-NA; William D. McCain, *The United States and the Republic of Panama* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1937), pp. 230-33; letter of Carlton Jackson to Director, Bureau of Foreign and Domestic Commerce, Department of Commerce, 21 November 1923, Aviation Reports (by country) Italy to South America, file 360,02, R/G 18, ANS-WRB-NA; "Panama Vulnerable to Air Attack," *Aviation*, XVI (4 February 1924), 131. In 1926 the United States and Panama signed a treaty, several provisions of which gave the United States tight control of aviation in the whole Panamanian area in peace or war. The Panamanian government, however, ultimately rejected the treaty, and the United States government had to resort to a web of regulations to limit, but not prohibit, flying in the area of the Canal from 1929 on.

11. Report of First Lieutenant Leland W. Miller on the Central American Flight, 16 April 1924, Central American Flight Documents; Walsh Report; report of First Lieutenant L.L. Berry on the Central American Flight, 6 March 1924, Central American Flight Documents (the latter report herein-after cited as Berry Report).

12. Walsh Report; Berry Report: dispatch of John E. Ramer to Hughes, 5 April 1924. Central American Flight Documents; report of Captain H. M. Gwynn to Assistant Chief of Staff, G-2, War Department, 22 February 1924; dispatch of Geissler to Hughes, 14 February 1924, Central American Flight Documents: report of First Lieutenant B. T. Burt to Major Herbert A. Dargue, 24 November 1926, file 373-Aerial Operations-Pan American Flight, January 1927—October 1926, R/G 18, ANS-WRB-NA (hereinafter cited as Pan American Flight Documents).

13. Walsh Report.

14. In an early expression of one of the ideas implicit in the Alliance for Progress. Walsh advocated in his report the fullest participation possible by Central Americans in any airmail service. It was necessary, he felt, for their national pride. Added evidence of the “harbinger” role of the Central American Flight is the fact that the War Department had authorized a flight of Air Service planes to participate, in December 1923, in Costa Rican municipal fiestas, after previous such requests by Costa Rica had been turned down. Ostensibly the reversal was to open the way for training experience in future flights of this nature, but the December flight undoubtedly was also a good-will gesture to pave the way for the Central American Flight. By 1923 the United States was beginning to see that demonstrations of good will might accomplish much. See letter of Commanding General, Panama Canal Department, to Adjutant General, 27 November 1923, Central American Flight Documents, and “France Field Pilots Fly to Costa Rica,” *Aviation*, XVI (18 February 1924), 183. Shortly before the Central American Flight departed, General Patrick stated that he understood the Administration was attempting “to foster the goodwill of the Central American countries by all means within its power.” See memorandum of Patrick to Secretary of War, 23 January 1924, file 452.1-3295-Sales of Planes Abroad, February 1930—July 1919, R/G 18, ANS-WRB-NA (file hereinafter cited as Sales of Planes Abroad).

15. Letter of Weeks to Hughes, 14 May 1924, Pan American Flight Documents; memorandum of D. G. M. (Dana G. Munro), 20 August 1924, file 811.71213/15, R/G 59, DB-NA.

16. Letter of Colonel Paul Henderson to Joseph V. Magee, 26 September 1924, Records Relating to Central American Air Mail Service 1924-26, Division of International Postal Service, Bureau of the Second Assistant Postmaster General, R/G 28, Social and Economic Branch, National Archives (hereinafter cited as Central American Air Mail Records, R/G 28, SEB-NA); memorandum of E. D. K. to Francis White, 21 October 1924, file 811.71213/8, R/G 59, DB-NA; report of Roy T. Davis to Hughes, 23 October 1924, Central American Air Mail Records, R/G 28, SEB-NA; letter of Acting Secretary of War to Hughes, 31 November 1924, file 811.71213/11. R/G 59, DB-NA.

17. Letter of Beery to Walsh, 12 November 1924, Central American Flight Documents; Dispatch of Davis to Hughes, 13 November 1924, file 811.71213/14, R/G 59, DB-NA; radio-gram of Magee and Vincent C. Burke to Henderson, 11 November 1924. Immediate Office Correspondence Relating to the Air Mail Service, 1921-1927, Bureau of the Second Assistant Postmaster General, R/G 28, SEB-NA; letter of Major General William Lassiter to Adjutant General, 11 November 1924; Preliminary Report of Magee and Burke to Henderson, 19 November 1924, Reports, Central America to Germany; memorandum of New to Henderson; 8 December 1924, Central American Air Mail Records, R/G 28, SEB-NA; letter of Patrick to Adjutant General, 19 January 1925; first indorsement of Adjutant General, 2 February 1925, to Patrick letter of 19 January 1925; second indorsement of Patrick [7 or 10 (?) February 1925] to Patrick letter of 19 January; 3d indorsement of Adjutant General, 20 February 1925, to Patrick letter of 19 January, Reports, Central America to Germany.

18. "The Mitchell Trial," *Aviation*, XIX (23 November 1925). 747; *New York Times*, 13 November 1925.
19. Release of Post Office Department Information Office, 14 October 1925; *Panama Star & Herald*, 14 August 1925, Central American Air Mail Records, R/G 28, SEB-NA; letter with enclosures of Dwight F. Davis to Secretary of State Frank B. Kellogg, 9 September 1925, file 821,796Sca 2/34, R/G 59, DB-NA; Newton, "Aviation in the Relations of the United States and Latin America, 1916-1929," unpublished Ph. D dissertation, University of Alabama, 1964, pp.208-9, 149-54.
20. Report of Major Follett Bradley to Commanding General, Panama Canal Department, 17 August 1925, file 821. 796 Sca 2/34, R/G 59, DB-NA; *New York Times*, 11-12 December 1925; memorandum of Major W. G. Kilner to Executive, War Plans Division, War Department, 10 November 1925; Major A. W. Lane to Assistant Chief of Staff, War Plans Division, War Department, 9 January 1926; note with inclosure of Kenneth Macpherson to Major George V. Strong, 9 January 1926; memorandum of Strong to Walsh, 12 January 1926; Walsh to Strong, 14 January 1926; Lane to Assistant Chief of Staff, War Plans Division, War Department, 15 January 1926, Central American Flight Documents; General H. H. Arnold, *Global Mission* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1949), pp. 114-16; report of conversation between L. H. (Leland Harrison) and Viktor von Bauer, 7, December 1926, file 821.796 Sca 2/106, R/G 59, DB-NA.
21. Memorandum of Dargue to Patrick, 22 July 1925, Pan American Flight Documents; letter of F. Trubee Davison to Kellogg, 26 July 1926, Reports (by country) Italy to South America, file 360.02, R/G 18, ANS-WRB-NA; Official Report of the Pan American Flight, n.d., pp.4-25, 21 December 1926—2 May 1927, file C71.6, R/G 18, ANS-WRB-NA (hereinafter cited as Pan American Flight Report).
22. Letter of Major Ira C. Eaker to Patrick, 22 January 1927, Pan American Flight Documents; Pan American Flight Report, pp. 291-99; reports of Lieutenant Colonel Edward Davis to Assistant Chief of Staff, G-2, War Department, 28 December 1926, and Charles Forman to State Department, 10 February 1927, Pan American Flight Documents; Pan American Flight Report, pp.299-301.
23. Pan American Flight Report, pp. 87-89; Samuel Guy Inman, "Results of the Pan-American Congress." *Current History*, XXVIII (April 1928), 97-98; telegram of Philander L. Cable to Kellogg, 2 March 1927, file 811.2310/246; dispatch of Cable to Kellogg, 7 March 1927, file 2310/284. R/G 59, DB-NA; *New York Times*, 3 May 1927.
24. The State Department withheld approval temporarily of Charles A. Lindbergh's good-will flight to parts of Latin America in late 1927 and early 1928, probably because of the Pan American Flight's experiences earlier in 1927. See telegram of Robert E. Olds to Dwight Morrow, 3 December 1927, file 811.79612L64/1, R/G 59, DB-NA.
25. In his report Dargue stated that his good-will mission ("men of war carrying a message of peace and good will") was a success in Latin America, but this mission was not understood in the United States.

26. *New York Times*, 4 May 1927. MacCracken was not the Commerce Department representative who had favored Von Bauer at the interdepartmental meetings in 1926.

27. Although a reserve officer in the Air Corps, Lindbergh's efforts toward furthering a United States airline in Latin America cannot be credited to the Air Corps. His efforts were individual or, as in his 1927-28 flight to Latin America that indirectly helped pave the way for such an airplane, were in conjunction with the State Department.

28. Newton, "International Aviation Rivalry in Latin America," pp. 355-56; memorandum of F. B. K. (Frank B. Kellogg) to White, 29 November 1927, file 813.796/127, R/G 59, DB-NA.

29. *New York Times*, 10 and 13 January 1928; memorandum of Roger Willock to Wesley Phillips Newton, 8 November 1962; letter of Vernon F. Megee to Wilbert Brown, 28 June 1965; 45 Stat. 248 (as amended by 45 Stat. 1449-1450); memorandum of Joseph W. Stinson to Secretary of State Henry L. Stimson, 7 March 1931, file 810.796/35-1/2. R/G 59, DB-NA. PAA employed, for example, a former career diplomat with experience in Latin America, Evan E. Young, and a former Commerce Department transportation expert, P. E. D. Nagel, both men with invaluable experience and potential contacts.

30. Telegram of Roy T. Davis to Kellogg, 13 March 1929, file 810.79611 Pan American Airways, Inc./321 (this file hereinafter cited as 810.79611PAA); Kellogg to Davis, 13 March 1929, file 810.79611PAA/327; Davis to Stimson, 17 July 1929, file 810.79611PAA/541; Stimson to American Embassy, Santiago de Chile, 10 July 1929, file 810.79611PAA/535; dispatch of Ellis D. Briggs to Stimson, 13 July 1929, file 810.79611PAA/ 576, R/G 59, DB-NA.

31. Newton, "International Aviation Rivalry in Latin America," pp. 347-49; memorandum of Major General Charles T. Menoher to Chief of Staff, 9 July 1919, Foreign and International Affairs and Relations, file 336-December 1919—April 1917 (hereinafter cited at Foreign and International Affairs); Menoher to Chief of Staff, 14 July 1919; letter of Colonel Oscar Westover to Chief, Engineering Division, McCook Field, Ohio, 6 December 1919. Foreign and International Affairs; S. S. Bradley to Menoher, 16 December 1919, file 452.8-Liberty Motors-Sales and Transfer, March 1920 to September 1918; Bell to Rader, 5 November 1923, Foreign Aviation Reports, August 1934—January 1919, file 360.02, R/G 18, ANS-WRB-NA.

32. Memorandum of [joint Air Corps-Navy] Aeronautical Board to Secretary of War, 7 October 1926; Adjutant General to Chief of Air Corps, 14 January 1930, Sales of Planes Abroad; note of Manuel C. Téllez to Hughes, 4 January 1924, file 812.24/202, R/G 59, DB-NA; memorandum of Jacob E. Fickel to Chief, Property Requisition Section, 18 February 1924, Sales of Planes Abroad; 44 Stat. 565.

33. See three articles by Colonel Frank R. Pancake, Dr. A. Glenn Morton, and Majors Mathew T. Dunn and James B. Jones, *Air University Review*, XVIII, 1 (November-December 1966) for current Air Force programs affecting Latin America.

34. 44 Stat. 915; memorandum of Patrick to Chief of Staff, 9 April 1926, Sales of Planes Abroad; Harry Bruno, *Wings Over America* (New York; Robert M. McBride & Company, 1942), p. 230; dispatch of U. Grant-Smith to Kellogg, 9 September 1926, file 833.24/16; telegram of Kellogg to Rudolf E. Schoenfeld, 7 January 1928, file 820.7961 Dept. of Commerce Flight/7, R/G 59, DB-NA; *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, 1928*. I (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1942), p. 813; dispatch of Edwin V. Morgan to Kellogg, 17 July 1928, file 820.7961 Dept. of Commerce Flight/27, R/G 59, DB-NA; *New York Times*, 26 October 1928.

35. Reports of First Lieutenants James E. Parker and Robert W. Douglass, 25 July 1928, file 373-Aerial Operations-Flights to and from Panama, R/G 18, ANS-WRB-NA; memorandum of Eaker to Chief of Air Corps, 25 October 1928, file 373-Aerial Operations.

36. Report of First Lieutenants Westside T. Larson and Lawrence J. Carr, 5 August 1929, file 373-Aerial Operations.

37. Memorandum of Major Willis H. Hale to Major Frank Andrews, 22 January 1930; report of First Lieutenant John M. Davies, 17 September 1930; report of First Lieutenant Donald F. Fritch, 1 November 1930; Directive of Chief of Air Corps to Commanding Officer, 28 December 1931; letter of Juan T. Trippe to Fechet, 29 September 1930; Fechet to Trippe, 18 October 1930; Trippe to Fechet, 3 December 1930, file 373-Aerial Operations.

38. Memorandum of Kilner to Chief, Materiel Division, 11 December 1930; telegram of Communications Department of PAA to Army Message Center, 20 February 1930; Communications PAA Miami to Chief of Air Corps, 30 November 1930; PAA to Chief of Air Corps, 3 and 5 December 1930; memorandum of Colonel R. C. Foy to Air Liaison Officer. Air Section, G-2, 20 August 1931; letter of Trippe to Lieutenant Colonel Ira Longanecker, 24 September 1931, file 373-Aerial Operations.

39. Letter of Fechet to Trippe, 13 June 1931, file 373-Aerial Operations.

40. Letter of Trippe to Stimson, 21 August 1930, file 810.79611PAA/865 (this letter informs the State Department that PAA had bought out its principal United States rival in Latin America); dispatch of R. Henry Norweb to Stimson, 22 May 1931, file 810.79611PAA/1006, R/G 59, DB-NA (this dispatch tells that the French Aéropostale Company, one of PAA's main foreign rivals in South America, was feeling the effects of the depression and that its desire for "route dominance" had abated "for the time...."); Albert E. Carter, *The Battle of South America* (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1941), pp 262-63. (This book records how PAA bought a controlling interests in Scadta in 1931. Scadta was not finished, however, as a thorn in the United States' flesh. It merely did not give PAA too much competition thereafter.)

41. For the story of the United States and Latin America in hemispheric defense, including the roles of the Air Corps and PAA, see Chapters VIII through XII by Stetson Conn and Byron Fairchild, *The Framework of Hemispheric Defense* ("United States Army in World

War II"; Washington: Office of the Chief of Military History, Department of the Army, 1960).

42. *Ibid.*, pp.269-70.

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