

CONJEFAMER: Where Chiefs Meet

SICOFAA: Where Airmen Work

By

Mr. Patrick E. Murray, Air Division Historian
HQ, USAF Southern Air Division

The highest level of western hemispheric cooperation and communication among the Air Forces of the Americas occurs each year at the Conference of the American Chiefs known by its Spanish acronym CONJEFAMER. This forum of formal exchange and informal conversation is the summit of Air Force activity and mutual support between the American countries. In April 1982, the 22nd meeting of the CONJEFAMER convened in Buenos Aires, Argentina, hosted by General Basilio Auturo Ignacio Lami Dozo, Commander in Chief of the Argentine Air Force. Despite the beginning of the Falkland Islands crisis just a few days before the opening of the conference, the political character and ideals of the system were not strained during the week long meeting. Delegates from 17 member nations, observers from two other American countries, and other special invitees attended. General Lew Allen, Jr., CSAF, and Major General William E. Masterson, Commander USAF Southern Air Division (USAFSO) were the USAF delegates.

CONJEFAMER originated in 1961 when General Thomas D. White was Chief of Staff of the US Air Force. General White suggested that the Chiefs of the American Air Forces meet once a year and express in an informal atmosphere the differing viewpoints, experiences, and philosophies of the respective air forces, as well as discuss common problems that affect all airmen.

The first meetings of the Chiefs provided invaluable opportunities for the commanders to voice their concerns. The openness and mutual acceptance on the part of the Chiefs demonstrated a compatibility of personages that carried itself over into the practical realm of day-to-day operations at the lowest echelon of the Air Force. Several years later, under the initiative of the Peruvian Air Force, an Inter-American organization was born. This organization was called the System of Cooperation Among the American Air Forces, which in the Spanish language resulted in the acronym SICOFAA (Sistema de Cooperacion Entre las Fuerzas Aereas Americanas). SICOFAA was conceived as the organizational framework through which meaningful studies and pragmatic solutions could be suggested and examined as potential items for subsequent discussions at the Chief's level. Its stated official purpose is to "strengthen bonds of friendship and standardize organizations and procedures to enhance the effectiveness of the Air Forces of the Americas should they be called upon to act jointly." The respect and fraternity exemplified by the Chiefs at CONJEFAMER characterizes and permeates the entire SICOFAA system with all its many facets.

The organization of SICOFAA consists of the Permanent Secretariat and ten committees which represent the working level for subjects of mutual interest. The Permanent Secretariat is composed of a Supervisory Council and the Office of Secretary General. The current Supervisory Council has a

membership of six representatives: Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Panama, United States, and Uruguay. Lt Col John W. Frye, Jr., of USAFSO is the USAF member on this council. The Secretary General handles all administrative matters of the System. The current Secretary General is Lieutenant Colonel Matias Farias of USAFSO. The ten SICOFAA Committees, chaired by different countries (Chairmanship varies and is determined each year at PREPLAN) are:

- Protocol and Public Relations
- Training
- Prevention of Air Accidents
- Mutual Logistics Support
- Inter-American Military Airlift
- Mutual Air Assistance in Case of Disaster
- Search and Rescue
- Medicine in the American Air Forces
- Telecommunications
- Meteorology

The principal activity within the System involves the annual cycling of the committee meetings, PREPLAN and CONJEFAMER. Under the direction of the Supervisory Committee, administered and coordinated by the Secretary General, the typical cycle for the System consists of convening the ten committees, usually in the summer and autumn of the year; followed by PREPLAN, in which agenda items are finalized for the CONJEFAMER; and the Conference of the Chiefs themselves, which normally convenes in April or May. The crucial link in this cycle is PREPLAN. At this meeting, all member nations, observer nations, and special invitees assemble to discuss and vote on topics to be presented at CONJEFAMER. This week-long meeting, customarily held in January, is hosted each year by USAFSO at Albrook Air Force Station, Panama at the former location of Headquarters USAF Southern Air Command.

The 20-year-old SICOFAA has survived because of concrete achievements recognized by all the member nations and because it has succeeded in maintaining its non-political nature. Among its many achievements are: overflight and landing clearance agreements; an Inter-American Air Forces telecommunications network; multi-nation air transport exercises; an Inter-American air transport system; Search and Rescue Agreements; and multi-national Search and Rescue exercises. During the extended history of SICOFAA, the Member Air Forces have seen numerous instances of political disputes and diplomatic conflicts, yet the adamant refusal to allow these problems into the SICOFAA forum has served to strengthen the System and further enhance the fraternity of the "Coballeros del Aire."