THE UNITED STATES MILITARY GROUP, COLOMBIA

Returning once more to its rich history, Colombia cities and culture reflect the early Spanish influence. The Spanish were great city builders and their conquest of the Colombian region was marked by the establishment of well organized and planned urban centers. Modern pressures and economic growth have speeded the expansion of the cities but most remain a mixture of old Spanish monuments and the most modern architecture.

Bogota, Colombia's capital city founded in 1538, reflects a true blend of the old and new. It is also known as the "Athens of South America" because of its early establishment as a cultural and educational center. The National University of Colombia was established in the 1570s and the Collegio Nacional de San Bartolome dates back to 1604. Today, several other universities and technical schools have grown up alongside these two venerable institutions. Along with its parks, museums, broad avenues and shops, Bogota has become a cosmopolitan center with many international aspects.

The United States Military Group (USMILGP) Colombia is located in Bogota. Nestled high in the Andes mountains (8500 ft elevation), Bogota enjoys a temperature range of 50-75°F year round. The two seasons are the rainy and the dry season. While there are almost six million inhabitants, Bogota's open spaces and ample parks give one an impression of a far smaller city. As in any large city, however, traffic is heavy and the cost of living is relatively high. To offset these inconveniences, Bogota offers its residents fine shops, excellent restaurants, numerous museums, and other diversions normally found in any large city. Personal security measures in Bogota are no more stringent than in most large cities, but all newly-assigned personnel are required to move into apartments rather than houses due to a recent increase in single dwelling burglaries. The quality of life in Bogota is generally excellent, although political and economic factors require additional awareness of, and adherence to, personal security measures.

Organization

To those of us unfamiliar with the many recent name changes in the Security Assistance area, MILGP replaces the old MAAG (Military Assistance Advisory Group). While other names may be used interchangeably, neither ODC (Office of Defense Cooperation) nor MLO (Military Liaison Office) seemed to apply to the unique situation in Bogota. Consequently, the United States Military Group, Bogota, Colombia was designated as the official title for the Security Assistance Organization (SAO). The following information will give an insight into the functions of the organization, its relationships with the Colombian Armed Forces and the US Embassy, and its interfaces with other US security assistance organizations.

The USMILGP in Colombia is assigned to the US Southern Command (SOUTHCOM), headquartered in Quarry Heights, Panama, and receives formal guidance and direction from USSOUTHCOM. Since the MILGP is an element of

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Editor's Note: DISAM appreciates this contribution to the Journal from the US Military Group Colombia.

the US Mission to Colombia (i.e., the US Embassy) it also receives formal guidance and direction from the US Ambassador. While technically serving two commanders, the MILGP is responsible for ensuring that required coordination and information flow takes place.

The MILGP is organized into three separate offices, each colocated with its sister service headquarters in the Colombian National Administrative Center, Ministry of Defense. Each service's mission in the MILGP is headed by an O-6. The Army mission chief has the additional responsibility of serving as Commander, USMILGP. The Army mission has an O-4 as deputy chief, while the Navy mission has a Marine Corps O-5 and the Air Force an O-5. Each mission is provided a locally-hired bilingual administrative assistant, one embassy-hired driver for the mission chief, two drivers from host-country counterparts, and one secretary from host country counterparts. The MILGP office, collocated with the Army mission, consists of a GS-7 administrative assistant and one embassy-hired chauffeur.

Each mission is responsible for all security assistance rendered its counterpart. While many SAOs have consolidated the requirements from all three services into a single officer designated as training officer or Foreign Military Sales (FMS) case manager, MILGP Colombia has resisted such consolidation. The reasons for the resistance are based on the existing colocation of each mission with its counterpart service and the somewhat parochial view held by each service that its interests are better served by US officers of the same service. The procedures outlined below apply to all three missions; the only changes result from different points of contacts at each service headquarters.

International Military Education and Training (IMET)

Colombia's current IMET program (IMETP) is funded at $600,000 (US). It is distributed among the three services approximately according to strength (50%, Army; 25%, Air Force; and 25%, Navy). While the majority of the funds are spent on professional military education for officers, an increasing percentage of the funds is being spent on technically-oriented on-the-job training (OJT) or on Mobile Training Teams (MTTs). Historically, the Panama Canal Area Military Schools (PACAMs) have trained more Colombian IMET students than all other US training sources. Together, the US Army School of the Americas (USARSA), the US Air Force Inter-American Air Forces Academy (IAAFA) and the US Navy Small Craft Instruction and Technical Training School (SCIATTS), train more than 65% of all IMET trainees from Colombia. In the past year, Colombian students have attended the PACAMS courses designed specifically to meet requirements identified by each of the three missions.

Colombia pays all living expenses and travel costs for IMET trainees. Consequently, all IMET funds are used only for payment of training course costs. Therefore, Colombia trains a maximum number of students per IMET dollar. The importance Colombia places on IMET training is emphasized by the fact that Colombia expends far more money on living expenses and travel for IMET students than it receives in IMET funds.

Besides formal courses, OJT, and MTTs, the IMET program has provided the Colombian Armed Forces various opportunities for Orientation Training

Tours (OTTs) to CONUS. Of special interest to Colombia is the yearly visit made by the Escuela Superior de Guerra, Colombia's Command and General Staff College, to various installations in the United States. In terms of cost ($40,000 used only for CONUS inland transportation), it is the most effective use of IMET funds by the MILGP. Besides providing an opportunity for each student to visit the US and its military institutions, such a trip allows the two MILGP escort officers to form personal and professional ties with the soon-to-be-promoted students. Upon graduation, the students are promoted to O-5 and are given battalion command and/or key staff positions. The friendships formed during such an OTT are invaluable for the MILGP during the following normal work year.

Additionally, excess year end IMET funds have been used by the MILGP to upgrade and replace outdated English Language Training materials. All in all, the IMET program for Colombia has been a most effective portion of the security assistance rendered by the MILGP.

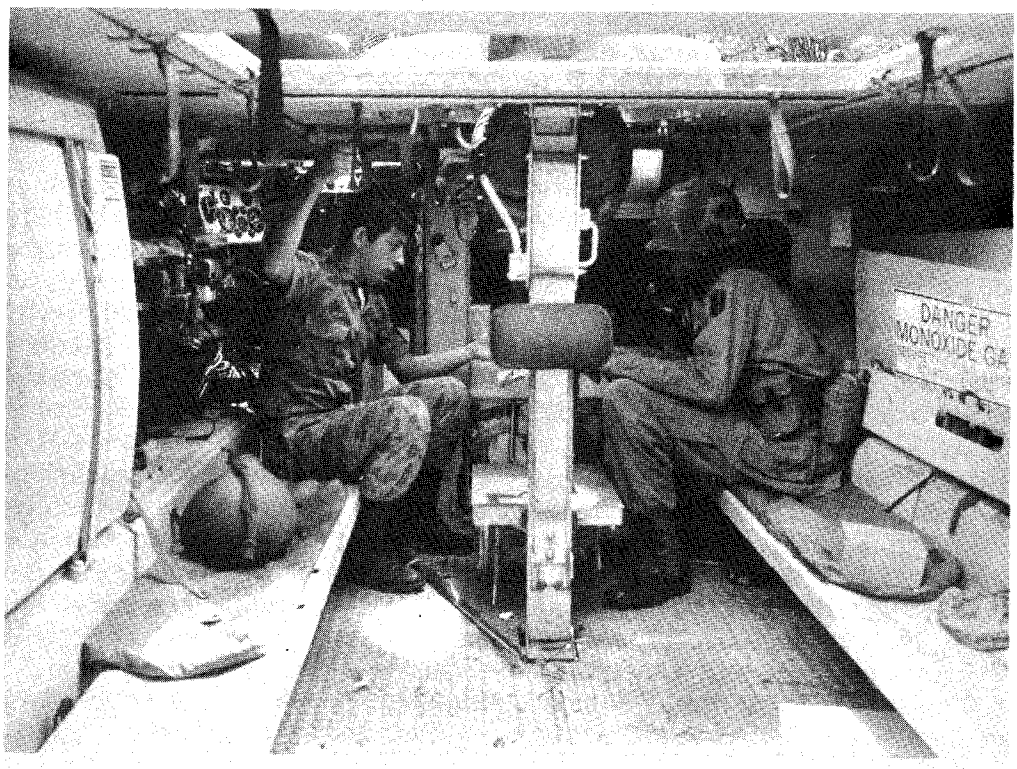
Foreign Military Sales (FMS)

While IMET has been a very positive US influence builder, the FMS program has not been as well received by the Colombian Armed Forces. The FMS process is seen by our counterparts as an overly complicated one and one in which they have little faith. They repeatedly question our inability to provide a rapid response to price and availability inquiries. After arrival, several recent cases were refused because commercial sources were less expensive. Also due to a "Catch 22" in the Colombian budget process, FMS cases are accepted and budgeted as if they were fixed price contracts. Any subsequent increase in price requires a review of the increase at the highest levels of the Defense Ministry and a separate budget appeal for each increase. Compound these shortcomings with our current on-again/off-again FMS guaranteed credit situation and you have counterparts who are not great believers in the US FMS system. Of course, a large part of the problem is due to competition from other governments who subsidize their defense industries, give preferential credit rates, guarantee fixed price contracts, and ensure reduced delivery times. While the final price in many cases is much higher (and the product inferior), the attractiveness of such a package makes the decision to use US FMS a very difficult one.

Despite these many problems, however, Colombian FMS cases have increased dramatically over the past two years. This increase gives testimony not only to the quality of US military equipment but also to the Colombian desire to obtain that equipment. This desire is based on the premise that US equipment better supports US tactics and doctrine (which are almost identical to Colombian tactics and doctrine). Colombia, therefore, will continue to use the US FMS system, despite Colombian-perceived flaws in the system.

MILGP/Colombian Counterpart/Embassy Relationship

Due to collocation, each mission in the MILGP enjoys a spirit of close cooperation and coordination with its Colombian counterparts. The Commanders of each service and the Minister of Defense are located within two minutes walking distance of each other and each mission. The various staff elements of each service are in the same wing as the MILGP mission of that service. Such proximity facilitates coordination and leads to a steady stream



PHOTOS SHOW RECENT M113 MAINTENANCE/OPERATIONS OJT FOR COLOMBIA ARMY STUDENTS HOSTED BY 4/20 MECH INF BN, 193D INFANTRY BRIGADE (PANAMA) UNDER IMET PROGRAM.

of visitors seeking information, technical assistance, or plain comaraderie. From that standpoint, MILGP relationships with Colombian counterparts could not be improved upon. An illustration of the close relationship that exists is the fact that the Colombian Armed Forces Commander directed the installation of a microwave telephone in the MILGP Commander's office. This microwave system is the National command net and gives the MILGP Commander direct access to the commanders of all military and police units in the country, as well as to governors, ministers and the Presidential palace. While this system is used judiciously, its availability has proved invaluable in coordinating Presidential, Vice Presidential, other high level visits, and in conducting disaster relief operations, all of which have occurred within the past year. The only shortcoming seen in the present situation is the lack of time available for liaison visits to outlying brigade areas. In the era of large SAOs, USMILGP Colombia had over 75 US military personnel. With that number of assigned personnel, assistance/liaison visits contributed greatly to improved relations. Obviously, with six US military assigned today, such visits are limited.

MILGP relationships with the US Embassy are based on the common understanding that the MILGP is charged with the responsibility of following the Ambassador's instructions, and keeping him informed of all significant MILGP activities. Rule one for Defense Attache Office (DAO)/MILGP relations is a joint pledge of mutual support. To date, that relationship has been maintained because each office understands the important role that the other plays. Of course, the Ambassador gives added incentive to cooperate. While USMILGP is not located with the Embassy, it is dependent upon the various offices (General Services, Budget and Finance, Security, Nurse) for support. Likewise, the Embassy is dependent upon the MILGP for APO support. The symbiotic relationship that exists among the MILGP, the DAO, and the Embassy is a good example of the type of mutual support required in a Latin American environment, even when job requirements and/or available benefits differ from organization to organization.

MILGP Interface with other Security Assistance Organizations

Being assigned to the US Southern Command, the MILGP has operational contact with all SAOs located in Panama. Besides the PACAMs, the US Army Security Assistance Agency for Latin America (USASAALA), the Defense Mapping Agency/Interamerican Geodetic Survey (DMA/IAGS), and even operational units of the 193d Brigade (4/20th Mech Inf Bn and 3d Bn 7th Special Forces Group) have provided invaluable assistance in supporting training requirements. As an example of that support, the MILGP is currently coordinating an exchange of instructors between the US Army Jungle Operations Training Center (JOTC) and the Colombian Army Lanceros School (CALS). This exchange is in addition to the Personnel Exchange Program (PEP) that provides an exchange of personnel between individual units of US Forces and Colombian Forces. In the PEP program, there are presently six positions (three Air Force, two Army, and one Navy). The MILGP is charged with administering the PEP program, but the US officers are assigned for duty directly to Colombian units. In that sense, it is quite a unique program. Administrative support, commissary, APO, currency exchange, and other services are provided through the MILGP, but the officers are often assigned outside of Bogota in their operational specialties. Colombian exchange officers are similarly assigned to US units.

Because of the many overlapping responsibilities and crossed lines of communications, it is customary for each MILGP mission to deal with the other services as required. While normally directed through SOUTHCOM channels, direct contacts with JCS, individual service headquarters, separate training installations/organizations, are common. The varied and interesting requirements of the job make it one that is most professionally rewarding. While it seems from time to time that we really are "on the other end of the world," most of us would not hesitate in doing it again.