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U.S. ARMY SCHOOL OF THE AMERICAS (USARSA)  
PROFILE OF A TRAINING INSTITUTION

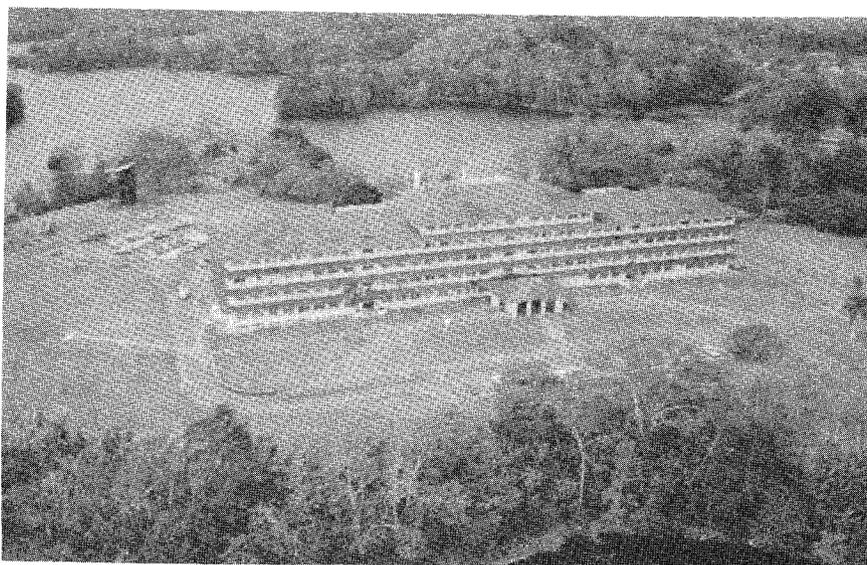
By

WILLIAM H. ORMSBEE, JR.

Introduction

One of the principal U.S. security assistance training and education institutions recently was relocated from its long-standing home in Panama to Fort Benning, Georgia, as a fallout of the Panama Canal Treaty.

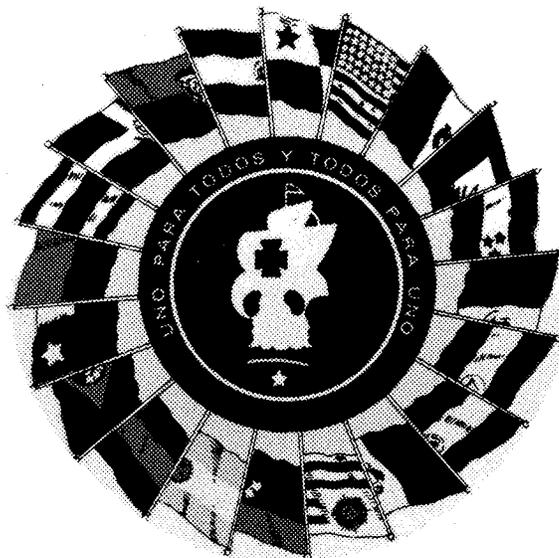
For the past 38 years, the U.S. Army School of the Americas (USARSA) -- while undergoing several changes in name and organization as well as shifts in curricula emphasis -- has trained Latin American military personnel in military skills and professional development designed to contribute to their countries' internal defense and national development. A unique service school in many respects, it has since 1946 provided instruction and training, based on U.S. Army doctrine and taught completely in Spanish, to 45,331 senior and junior officers, academy cadets and enlisted personnel from 22 countries south of the Rio Grande. USARSA has provided a wide variety of courses ranging from individual and small unit combat techniques to high-level command and general staff, service joint operations, and resource management. USARSA provides such instruction and training in the form of military scholarships funded primarily by the International Military Education and Training (IMET) Program, one of the major elements of the U.S. Security Assistance Program.



USARSA's Former Headquarters Building, Ft. Culick, Panama

Also committed to fostering and strengthening relationships between the United States and the countries of the Western Hemisphere and among those countries (the second part of the school's mission), the school has proved to be an important meeting ground for the exchange of ideas while contributing to inter-American friendship and understanding.

The school evolved from the development of a hemisphere defense program during World War II.[1] Prior to that war, European countries -- notably Germany, Italy, and France -- provided air, ground, and naval missions throughout the Americas.



The USARSA Emblem[2]

With the advent of the war and the introduction of the U.S. lend-lease program, however, and in the interest of inter-American solidarity (as enunciated by the Declaration of Inter-American Solidarity and Cooperation, adopted in 1936 at the Inter-American Conference for the Maintenance of Peace, held in Buenos Aires, Argentina), the Latin American nations cancelled their contracts with European countries and replaced them with like missions from the United States. By 1941, as a direct result of Nazi-Fascist activity in the hemisphere, U.S. Army missions had been established in every capital in Latin America.

Once established, these missions noted the lack of an effective military training capability in various Latin American countries and the need for instructing the armed forces of the various republics in the operation and maintenance of the U.S. weapons and equipment they obtained under the lend-lease program. A number of the missions requested that Latin American military personnel be allowed to attend Canal Zone service schools which had been functioning to train U.S. personnel stationed in the Canal Zone. Subsequently, between 1943 and 1945, a total of 423 Latin Americans from 11 nations acquired skills as motor vehicle mechanics, radio operators, field artillery and other armament, engineers, and food service specialists among others. These schools, operating at first unofficially and without War Department recognition, had come to perform a recognized and highly important function by 1944.

In December 1946, the Latin American Training Center, Ground Division (Centro de Entrenamiento Latino Americano, Division Terrestre), was formally established, with its headquarters in one of the barracks at Fort Amador on the Pacific side of the isthmus of Panama; the building now houses the 5th Rifle Company of the Panama Defense Forces. The center (which was later renamed the Latin American Ground School or Escuela Latino American Terrestre) centralized the administrative tasks involved in training the increasing number of Latin Americans attending U.S. service schools in the Canal Zone. The affiliated schools were the Motor Mechanics School at Fort Randolph (an Atlantic-side post which was deactivated after World War II and

transferred to the government of Panama on October 1, 1979), the Food Service School at Fort Clayton, and the Medical School which was part of the former General Hospital at Fort Clayton. In addition, the Latin American Ground School was organized into departments of communications, weapons and tactics, and engineering.[3]

This arrangement continued until February 1, 1949, at which time all Army service schools in the Canal Zone were consolidated and moved to the former hospital at Fort Gulick under the name U.S. Army Caribbean (USACARIB) School. The institution continued to operate primarily for the training of U.S. troops, with some courses being taught only in Spanish at the request of the Latin American countries. The graduates of 1949 consisted of 743 U.S. military members and 251 Latin Americans from 10 countries.

A reduction of U.S. troop strength in the Canal Zone beginning in 1949, coupled with an increased demand by Latin American governments, led to the majority of the school's students being Latin American by 1954. In 1956, all instruction in English was eliminated, and Spanish became the official academic language of the school. By that time, approximately 8,000 U.S. soldiers had graduated from the school. The majority of the 2,000 U.S. soldiers in attendance during the following eight years was Puerto Rican. By 1967, the number of U.S. graduates climbed to 22,265. The sharp increase was due to the five-year period when the present day U.S. Army Jungle Operations Training Center was a part of the school as its Jungle Operations Committee. (These numbers are not included in the 45,331 graduates of the school.) Today, the only U.S. military personnel attending USARSA are those attending the Command and General Staff course prior to being assigned to USARSA's faculty or staff or elsewhere in Latin America.

On July 1, 1963, the school's name was changed to the U.S. Army School of the Americas to better reflect its hemispheric orientation.

#### Complementing Alliance for Progress

In the early 1960s, the pace of training greatly increased and the school began to teach counterinsurgency related courses. During this period, its curriculum was complementary to the efforts undertaken by other U.S. Government agencies in the Alliance for Progress.

In 1961, in recognition of the increasing Communist threat in Latin America, those school courses which were most directly related to national internal defense were grouped into one department,



Latin American Army officers working out a wargame scenario at USARSA.

and the Counterinsurgency Committee was established to teach counterinsurgency operation to U.S. and Latin American military personnel. That Department of Internal Defense provided instruction in every aspect of counterinsurgency operations, as well as military subjects designed to contribute to national development.[4]

At the same time, the school stressed the stimulation of nation building and economic growth through military civic action by emphasizing training in technical skills applicable to civic action programs. (In various Latin American nations, the military had been one of the few institutions adequately trained, equipped, and disciplined to provide skilled technicians for the civilian economy.) Such emphasis is illustrated by the fact that 23 of the school's 42 courses in the 1960's, or slightly more than half the curriculum, fell into this category. Such courses provided training for heavy construction operators, well-drilling specialists, radio repairmen, bridge builders, basic medical technicians, and water purification specialists. The school's civic action instruction stressed the pragmatic approach, opposed "give-away" programs, and emphasized civic action activities. This included the recipient's participation in the planning, as well as the actual practical work involved in the projects, most of which were conducted in rural Panamanian villages on the Atlantic side of the isthmus.

Over the years, the School of the Americas has been the target of considerable denunciation from communists, leftists, and nationalists who see it as an imperialistic "Yankee beachhead" in Latin America. Moscow's TASS news agency, as recently as 1979, claimed Latin Americans characterized the USARSA as the "the Academy of Torture." TASS went on to claim:

Latin American dictators apply through repression and terror the knowledge received from American "specialists" in the suppression of national liberation movements, trade unions, peasant, and youth activities . . . . The oppressive center holds back the progressive development of Latin American people and hampers their efforts to achieve complete national liberation and independence.

A Panamanian newspaper editor recently stated that some public sectors, particularly leftist groups, believe that military personnel who receive training at USARSA subsequently become forgers of strong dictatorships, while other sectors prefer to ignore the center whose existence has been a real "taboo" to Panamanians.[5] Many Panamanians have complained over the years that the school had nothing to do with the defense of the Panama Canal, one of the activities authorized by the 1903 treaty between the United States and Panama.

Another particular source of criticism beginning in the early 1960s, according to some scholars, was a course in the tactics and techniques of counterinsurgency operations, including civic action, which was developed in response to the communist Latin American insurgency program launched by Fidel Castro from Cuba. Designed to build internal stability and counteract communist inspired or supported insurrections, the benefits of the course had been disseminated throughout the armed forces of Latin America, notwithstanding it having been a prime target of some civilians who objected to the

teaching of counterinsurgency. The reaction to the school's teaching counterinsurgency courses, and some of the sources of such reaction, may be indicative of its effectiveness. Veteran newsman Jules Dubois noted in 1964 that:

Much more than the Alliance for Progress, the impact of the USSOUTHCOM [U.S. Southern Command in Panama] on [the] Latin American military both frightened and angered the Communists and their fellow travellers and useful chauvinists. The successful training which the Latin American [military] men were receiving at the counterinsurgency school in the Canal Zone [USARSA] . . . erected a most impenetrable roadblock in the forward march of the Communists' plans to quickly take over Latin America. They feared more than anything else a solidified and unified military that was confident of its own ability to combat them [Communists] and that could not be cowed by smear and invective, much less by the subversive, terrorist and guerrilla tactics which they were taught in Communist Cuba.[6]

Despite the negative campaign against it by some sectors, the school has enjoyed an excellent reputation in military circles throughout the hemisphere.

The 1970s saw many changes occurring at USARSA, both in the school's curricula and its organization. Several long-standing courses dating back to the 1950s were discontinued, due mostly to a decline in student attendance and budgetary constraints. Medical technician courses were dropped in 1975, followed by engineering courses in 1977. Many of the counterinsurgency courses were discontinued, while others were incorporated into other course. Several military police and military intelligence courses or subject matter were eliminated from the school's curricula in 1975 and 1977 respectively, primarily due to the Harrington Amendment. This involved the addition of Section 660 to the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961 which prohibits law enforcement instruction for those personnel who have an on-going civilian law enforcement function, thereby restricting such training to only those military police personnel who have no civilian law enforcement responsibilities.

In 1976, USARSA was combined with the U.S. Security Assistance Office in Panama, then under the 193d Infantry Brigade, to form the U.S. Security Assistance Agency Latin American (USASAALA). USASAALA was then placed directly under the control of the Department of the Army's Office of Deputy Chief of Staff for Operations, but commanded by the Commanding General of the 193d Infantry Brigade.

#### Attendance Decline and Resurgence

Fiscal Year 1980 marked the low point of a three-year downward trend in enrollment at the school, with only 704 students from 10 Latin American countries. Due to political, military, or economic considerations, only about half of the nations which might have participated in USARSA programs were actually doing so. At this low point, several initiatives were undertaken to increase the number of participating nations, including significant reductions in the cost of most courses which resulted from an innovative cost analysis done by USARSA in January 1980.

This situation began to turn around in 1981 as U.S. policy changed, prompted by: an increased threat in the region; the easing of some U.S. legislative restrictions that had previously precluded the participation of some countries in the International Military Training and Education Program (and hence in USARSA) since 1977; and an increase in IMET funds allocated by the U.S. Government to recipient countries. The uptrend in enrollment began with a doubling of students in 1981 (1,494) over the previous years, followed by 1,532 students in 1982, and an all-time high of 2,625 students (from 12 Latin American countries) in 1983. In 1984, a total of 1,797 students from 13 countries graduated from 32 classes representing 19 different courses.

The vast majority of Latin American army personnel receiving training and education in U.S. military schools have attended USARSA; for example, slightly more than 95 percent in 1982 and 1983, with the remainder attending CONUS-based service schools. The six largest users of USARSA in terms of a total number of graduates have been Nicaragua (until 1978), Colombia, Panama, El Salvador, Peru, and Ecuador, as can be seen in Chart 1.

Also influencing the increase in enrollment was the development by USARSA of three new courses to meet the training demand of the school's clients: the Officer Candidate School course initially developed for Honduras; the Noncommissioned Officer Developmental course, which evolved from the Special Squad Leader course designed for El Salvador; and the Military Intelligence course. Chart 2 lists all the courses taught at USARSA, with several being taught more than once each year.

The resurgence during the last four years was most notable with respect to El Salvador's participation since having been readmitted to the IMET Program (and thus to USARSA in April 1980) after having been excluded in 1978-79. Of the 3,967 Salvadorans who have graduated from the school since 1946, 3,075 (or almost 80 percent of that country's total graduates) have completed training since 1980. Principal courses attended by Salvadorans include noncommissioned officer leadership and development, patrolling operations, long range reconnaissance patrolling, commando (Ranger) operations, small unit training management, cadet basic orientation, and reconnaissance training. Other countries which increased their participation during the same period were Honduras, Dominican Republic, Colombia, Ecuador, and Peru. In 1981 for the first time since 1968, Costa Rica began sending students from its Rural Guard (which has a public security function, including border patrol forces) for certain courses (such as Patrolling Operations, Faculty Development, and Noncommissioned Officer Leadership) and has since had 189 graduates from USARSA.

## CHART 1

### TOTAL GRADUATES OF THE U.S ARMY SCHOOL OF THE AMERICAS (By Fiscal Year -- As of 21 September 1984)

	FY	FY	YF	FY	FY	FY	FY	GRADUATES	
	1977	1978	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983	FY	SINCE
								1984	1946
<u>Mexico</u> (376)ε	6	0	26	19	53	5	0	2	376
<u>Caribbean</u> (2,119)ε									
Dominican Republic	35	37	56	38	129	142	146	135	1,777
Haiti	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	50
Cuba# (1961)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	291
Barbados	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
<u>Central America</u> (15,333)ε									
El Salvador	24	0	0	169	301	522	1,041	1,042	3,967
Honduras	40	69	145	108	84	124	314	144	2,985
Costa Rica	0	0	0	0	20	32	73	64	2,108
Belize	0	0	0	0	0	4	2	0	6
Guatemala# (1977)	30	0	0	0	0	0	1	2	1,574
Nicaragua# (1978)	103	266	0	0	0	0	0	0	4,693
<u>Panama</u> (4,202)ε	144	52	113	93	183	138	166	84	4,202
<u>South America</u> (23,301)ε									
Venezuela	4	20	1	2	32	31	0	11	3,140
Colombia	128	96	185	117	395	239	414	227	4,593
Ecuador	33	72	53	100	105	108	153	19	3,155
Peru	543	69	23	30	187	171	304	8	3,777
Bolivia	97	164	156	17	0	0	0	4	3,577
Paraguay	15	30	0	0	0	1	3	5	1,047
Chile# (1975)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2,130
Argentina# (1978)	4	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	613
Uruguay	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	920
Brazil# (1977)	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	349
Suriname#							0	0	0
<u>U.S.A. (C&amp;GS Course)</u>	<u>8</u>	<u>8</u>	<u>8</u>	<u>11</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>7</u>	<u>7</u>	<u>--</u>
<b>TOTAL STUDENTS</b>	<b>1,217</b>	<b>884</b>	<b>766</b>	<b>704</b>	<b>1,494</b>	<b>1,532</b>	<b>2,625</b>	<b>1,797</b>	<b>45,331</b>

**LEGEND:**

ε Regional total (1946-1984).

# Non-participating countries in the International Military Education and Training (IMET) Program -- some because of U.S. congressional exclusion from the IMET Program because of human rights situations; other, unilateral withdrawal; Cuba, non-recognition by the United States. (Brazil renounced Security Assistance because of U.S. restrictions on the nuclear nonproliferation treaty). The year in parentheses indicates the last date students from those countries were at USARSA or the date of exclusion from the IMET Program. (Suriname is also excluded from the IMET Program.) (All training of Uruguayan military personnel under IMET is accomplished in the continental United States.)

## Funded by country under Foreign Military Sales (FMS) Program.

\* The sharp increase in enrollment was due to several factors -- initially, reduced cost of most courses (resulting from a course cost analysis conducted by USARSA in January 1980 in view of the decline in IMET funds available to the Latin American region), an increased threat in the region, and then an increase in IMET funds allocated to recipient countries.

\*\* All attended the school in the 1950s and early 1960s.

Note: Six courses scheduled to be started and completed during the period August-December 1984 were cancelled (while some other courses were compressed) in order that all courses be completed before September 30, 1984.

CHART 2  
COURSES TAUGHT AT THE U.S. SCHOOL OF THE AMERICAS

COURSE (by category) DURATION

OFFICER PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

*Command and General Staff	45
*Combat Arms Officer Advanced	24
*Combat Officer Refresher	11
*Infantry Officer Basic	22
*Officer Candidate School (OCS) -- for Honduras	24

NONCOMMISSIONED OFFICER PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

*Noncommissioned Officer Leadership	14
Noncommissioned Officer Developmental (emphasis on developing squad leaders)	14

CADET COURSES

Cadet Branch Orientation (for Colombia)	2
Cadet Combat Operations (for Peru)	4
Cadet Combat Arms Orientation (for Ecuador)	9
Cadet Basic Orientation (for El Salvador)	24
Cadet Basic Orientation (for Honduras)	14
*Infantry Officer Qualification (for Dominican Republic)	20

FUNCTIONAL COURSES

*Training Management (officers)	4
*Small Unit Training Management (officers)	6
Military Intelligence (officers)	9
Joint Operations Course-Latin America (officers)	4
*Resource Management (officers)	8
*Faculty Development Program (officers/enlisted)	2
Commando Operations (Ranger) (officer/enlisted)	6
*Patrolling Operations (officer/enlisted)	5
Tactical Weapons (for Colombia)	8
Reconnaissance (for El Salvador)	11

\* Courses which USARSA plans to teach in 1985 at Fort Benning plus the following courses being developed: Preventive Medicine (for officers/enlisted), Officer Engineering, Psychological Operations (officers), Medical course (enlisted), and Infantry Mortar course for Platoon Officers.

## Staff and Faculty

It is not only the student body that is multinational in scope, but the staff and faculty as well. The school's deputy commandant has been a Latin American colonel since 1977 -- respectively from Colombia, Peru, Ecuador, Honduras, Brazil, and Panama. Those from Colombia and Ecuador have since been promoted to general officer rank in their countries.

Approximately 40 percent of the school's instructors are Latin American, reflecting a long-standing practice dating back to the 1950's. In 1984, 41 Latin American officer and enlisted instructors represented 12 countries. The other Spanish-speaking instructors are members of the U.S. Army, plus one U.S. Air Force Officer, and one U.S. Marine Corps Officer who is temporarily assigned during blocks of instruction involving amphibious warfare and joint operations.

## Treaty Impact on USARSA

Despite the resurgence in the participation of Latin American countries at the school over the past four years, the future of USARSA had been in question during the same period. One of the agreements associated with the Panama Canal Treaty of 1977 (which was implemented October 1, 1979) granted authority for the U.S. training of Latin American military personnel at USARSA for five years from the date of treaty implementation unless the governments of the United States and the Republic of Panama agreed otherwise.[7] That date [September 30, 1984] coincided with the treaty-scheduled transfer of Fort Gulick (except for family housing, community services areas, and the ammunition storage facility, all of which will remain under U.S. control) to the government of the Republic of Panama, including the several buildings housing USARSA.

The two other military schools in the Panama Canal Area [the Inter-American Air Forces Academy (IAAFA) at Albrook Air Force Station, and the U.S. Navy Small Craft Instruction and Technical Training School (SCIATTS) at Rodman Naval Station] are authorized by the same treaty-related document to provide training to Latin American military personnel for the life of the treaty, which expires on December 31, 1999.

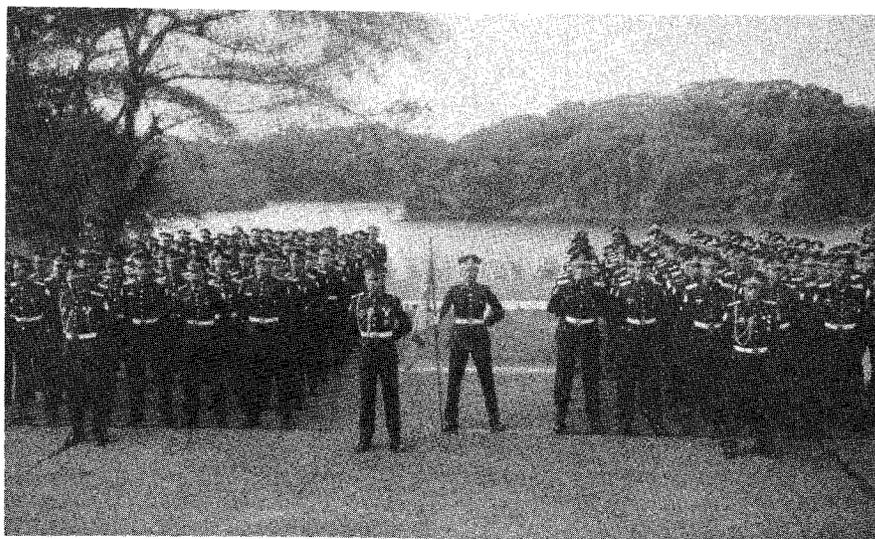
In 1982, the U.S. and Panama began negotiating a new agreement which would permit continued training of Latin American military personnel under a successor institution to USARSA in Panama. Following more than a year of negotiation, a draft agreement in principle, concluded on the military level, was initialed in September, 1983. The agreement called for the creation of a Pan-American Institute of Military Science and National Development to replace USARSA and to be housed in facilities to be made available by Panama at Fort Gulick following the turnover of portions of Fort Gulick to Panama on October 1, 1984. This agreement in principle -- which was briefed to the Conference of American Armies by representatives of the U.S. Army and the Panama Defense Forces in Caracas, Venezuela, in early 1983 -- called for two schools under the Pan-American Institute: the School of Military Science (in essence, USARSA), and a new School of National Development which would emphasize nation building and civic action instruction.

While negotiations were underway, site surveys for the possible relocation of the school were being conducted in various parts of the continental United States and Puerto Rico as a contingency in the event negotiations would prove unfruitful. In the meantime, the decision to relocate USARSA in the event the negotiations would fail had been delayed as long as possible.

### USARSA Closing in Panama

Panama and the United States were unable to conclude a mutually satisfactory final agreement for a successor institution to continue in Panama. Hence, to assure compliance with treaty provisions requiring the school's closure by September 30, 1984, in the absence of such an agreement, and to provide for the turnover of the school buildings to the government of Panama on October 1, numerous close-down actions were undertaken, including: the compression of some courses and the cancellation of six other programmed courses; packaging and removal of equipment and furnishings; and a phased withdrawal of students, faculty, and staff.

During USARSA's final week of operations in Panama in September, several graduation ceremonies were held, with diplomas presented to 500 officers, cadets, and enlisted personnel representing 12 Latin American countries. The ceremonies were literally held amidst intense furniture and equipment packing activities. The last three of those graduations, involving 300 students, were held on September 21, the same day as the formal ceremony held at Fort Gulick marking the school's closing in Panama.



El Salvadoran military cadet participation at USARSA closing ceremony, Ft. Gulick, Panama, 21 September 1984

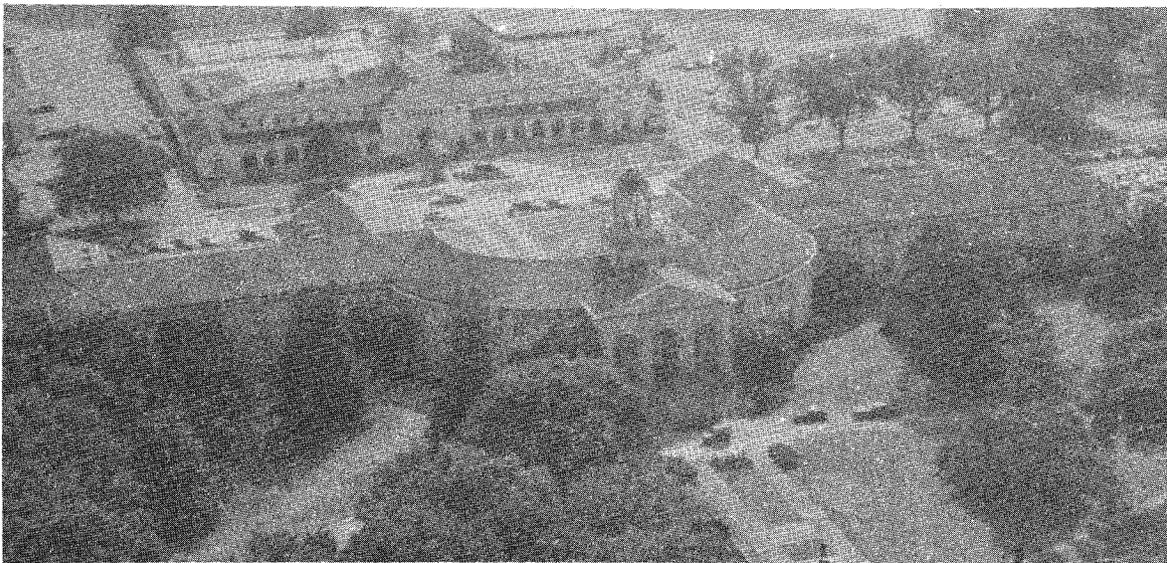
Highlights of the closing ceremony were the retiring of the USARSA guidon by the school's commandant Colonel Michael J. Sierra, and the lowering of the 20 country flags of the region which had long flown in front of

USARSA's headquarters. During the flag-lowering salute, the flag of each represented country was announced and honored with a howitzer salute as it was lowered by officials representing their respective countries. As each country was announced, the total number of graduates from that country was also cited.

### Transition to Fort Benning

On October 24, 1984, the Department of the Army announced that Fort Benning, Georgia, had been selected as the transitional training site for USARSA. Approximately 130 faculty and staff members began arriving at Fort Benning in November; the school officially reopened on December 18, 1984, and classes are to begin in late January 1985.

"USARSA's role as an organization for providing professional education and development to the armies of Latin America will continue," said Colonel Sierra, the school's commandant. He added, "We intend to operate the school in the same spirit of Pan-Americanism that has long been the hallmark of USARSA in Panama."



New Headquarters, U.S. Army School of the Americas, Fort Benning, Georgia

Among USARSA's long-standing features to be continued are: conducting all instruction in Spanish; continuing to fill the position of the school's deputy commandant by a Latin American; and maintaining the multinational flavor of the school's faculty, and encouraging more countries to provide instructors. Even the School's name and its long-standing motto, "One for All and All for One," will remain unchanged.

"We are expanding the scope of the curriculum by offering more of the skills required for national development," noted Colonel Sierra, indicating that

USARSA's curriculum will include: two medical courses; a psychological operations course; a refinement of the high-level resource management course currently taught at USARSA; and an engineering course for lieutenants and captains, emphasizing maintenance management. "Unlike most of the nation building courses taught at the school in the 1960s and 1970s, these courses will focus on maintaining equipment and managing projects, rather than teaching operator skills," said Colonel Sierra.

USARSA will remain operational at Fort Benning while the Army conducts an additional study to determine the most suitable location for a permanently reconstituted School of the Americas. The Department of the Army noted that this study will be based on the long-term training needs of our Latin American allies and will consider anticipated student load, faculty requirements, funding, environmental impact, and other factors.

#### ENDNOTES

1. History of the Panama Canal Department, Vol. IV: The Reconversion Period 1943-1947, prepared by the AC Historical Section of the Panama Canal Department, Caribbean Defense Command, pp. 65-76.
2. The USARSA emblem, which is also the school's shoulder patch, is based on the shoulder sleeve insignia of the old Caribbean Defense Command and the U.S. Army Caribbean during and following WWII, and from 1963 to 1974, that of the U.S. Army Forces Southern Command. The emblem reflects the school's motto, "Uno Para Todos y Todos Para Uno" ("One for All, and All for One").
3. Latin American Ground School 1948 Course Catalog.
4. School of the Americas Distinguished Visitors' Information Packet, not dated (estimated to have been published 1966-69), pp. 1-3.
5. Migdalina Fuentes, "Is it beneficial for the United States and Latin America that the School of the Americas remain here" [in Panama], La Prensa newspaper (Panama City, Panama), in Spanish, June 12, 1983, p.1-C.
6. Jules Debois, Danger over Panama, Indianapolis, Ind./New York: Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1964, pp. 373-374.
7. "Agreement on Certain Activities of the United States of America in the Republic of Panama," Documents Associated with the Panama Canal Treaties (Selected Documents No. 6B), The Department of State, Bureau of Public Affairs, Office of Media Services, September 1977, pp. 53-55.

#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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has briefed numerous news media representatives from the United States, Latin America, Europe, and Japan, and has written extensively on USARSA for the local military media. He has a B.S. degree in Languages and Linguistics from Georgetown University where he also studied international relations.