

Creation of the Brazilian Ministry of Aeronautics and its first performances in a context of world war

Creación del Ministerio de Aeronáutica de Brasil y sus primeras acciones en un contexto de guerra mundial

Criação do Ministério da Aeronáutica do Brasil e suas primeiras atuações num contexto de guerra mundial

Heitor Esperança Henrique^I

Andreia Elizabeth Bohn Luder^{II}

ABSTRACT

The Brazilian aeronautical sector underwent major changes in the 1940s. One of these changes was the creation of the Ministry of Aeronautics, which culminated in the union of the army and navy air forces in a single force, resulting in the sending of the 1st Fighter Aviation Group to fight in the Mediterranean operation theater in World War II. This action was only possible as a result of the Brazilian government international policy and the creation of a joint commission between Brazil and the United States, which was carried out by the Joint Brazil-U.S Air Division. The Defense Commission significantly marks the process of organizing the newly created Brazilian Air Force in the administrative and operational sector in the U.S. mold, allowing to understand the actions that involve the airline industry in international relations.

Keywords: Ministry of Aeronautics. Brazilian Air Force. International Relations. World War II.

RESUMEN

El sector aeronáutico brasileño experimentó grandes cambios en la década de 1940. El principal fue la creación del Ministerio de Aeronáutica, que culminó con la unión de las fuerzas aéreas del ejército y la marina en una sola fuerza, lo conllevó al envío del 1er Grupo de Aviación de Caza para combatir en el teatro de operaciones del Mediterráneo en la Segunda Guerra Mundial. Dicha acción solo fue posible debido a la política internacional del gobierno brasileño y a la creación de una comisión conjunta entre Brasil y Estados Unidos, la cual fue

llevada a cabo por la División Aérea del JointBrazil-U.S. La Comisión de Defensa marca significativamente el proceso de organización de la recién creada Fuerza Aérea Brasileña en el sector administrativo y operacional en el modelo estadounidense, permitiendo entender las acciones que involucran al sector aéreo en las relaciones internacionales.

Palabras clave: Ministerio de Aeronáutica. Fuerza Aérea Brasileña. Relaciones internacionales. Segunda Guerra Mundial.

RESUMO

O setor aeronáutico brasileiro passou por grandes mudanças na década de 40. A principal delas foi a criação do Ministério da Aeronáutica, que culminou na união das forças aéreas do exército e da marinha em uma única força, tendo como consequência o envio do 1º Grupo de Aviação de Caça para lutar no teatro de operações do Mediterrâneo na Segunda Guerra Mundial. Tal ação só foi possível em decorrência da política internacional do governo brasileiro e da criação de uma comissão conjunta entre o Brasil e os Estados Unidos, que foi desempenhada pela Air Division da Joint Brasil-U.S. A Defense Commission marca significativamente o processo de organização da recém-criada Força Aérea Brasileira no setor administrativo e operacional no molde estadunidense, permitindo compreender as ações que envolvem o setor aéreo nas relações internacionais.

Palavras-chave: Ministério da Aeronáutica. Força Aérea Brasileira. Relações Internacionais. Segunda Guerra Mundial.

I. Fundação Faculdade de Filosofia, Letras e Artes de Mandaguari (FAFIMAN) – Mandaguari/PR – Brazil. PhD in History by Universidade Federal do Paraná. E-mail: heitorehenrique@gmail.com

II. Universidade Federal do Paraná. Curitiba/PR – Brazil. Master's degree Student in History by Universidade Federal do Paraná (UFPR). E-mail: andreialuder@hotmail.com

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The acronyms and abbreviations contained in this article correspond to the ones used in the original article in Portuguese.

1 INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this article is to discuss the creation of the Ministry of Aeronautics and its performance in World War II. Therefore, it must be known that, prior to 1941, the national air sector was divided into the civilian, commanded by the Department of Civil Aviation (DAC), which belonged to the Ministry of Road and Public Works; the Army Aeronautics Arm; and the Navy Naval Aviation, each under the regiment of the respective arms. Although Vargas encouraged Brazilian aeronautical development during his administration, the country did not have a single corps that could be called Air Force and that represented the interests of the state or guaranteed national air power during an international conflict. This problem was only solved through Decree-Law No. 2,961 of January 20, 1941, which creates the Ministry of Aeronautics.

2 A POLITICAL ACT

The development of the air sector in the world, during the period between wars, was going through a process of broad growth. The plane decreased distances, brought people together and facilitated national integration. In Brazil, the national aeronautics designed its development in the 1930s and it was during Estado Novo that the main aviation institutions were created and employed to facilitate national integration, communication, trade and defense of the territory.

Vargas' first action regarding the sector was to start organizing an aeronautical mentality. His first act was the creation and organization of the Department of Civil Aviation (DAC) on April 22, 1931, through Decree No. 19.902. DAC was responsible for issues related to civil and commercial aeronautics, and was distributed in three divisions: administrative, operational and traffic. DAC was associated with the Ministry of Transport and Public Works. Therefore, it was created a body which was responsible for the development of civil aviation, but without legislation that efficiently regulated national civil and commercial aviation. For now, the Brazilian State would follow the recommendations of international civil aviation conventions.

The military air forces followed a different structure. Considered the first military aviation school in the country, the Brazilian Naval Aviation was created in August 1916. The Army Aviation was created in 1914, but its operations started effectively only in July 1919 under the technical guidance of the French Military

Mission. The common element in the military aviation is the post-World War I understanding that the aviation arm would be of vital importance to the next conflicts. The debate that follows among air power theorists is how to use it and organize it.

In Brazil, military air forces remained separate and responsible for safeguarding the national territory. However, it was necessary to better integrate the Brazilian nation. As a response in 1931, the Military Air Mail (CAM) was created, which should also be under the General Post Office responsibility. In 1934 the Navy began a debate about the organization of the Naval Air Mail, inaugurated in 1935 and kept in operation until 1940. Its routes included only the coastal region, while the countryside was in charge of CAM which, from 1931 to 1940, was one of the main means of communication. CAM allowed hard-to-reach places were seen and included in a nation project.

The advances related to aeronautics originated mainly because the Brazilian State needed to be updated in relation to this new technology and its war use. The advances also occurred because Getúlio Vargas is an aviation man, being considered by the media of the time as the "friend of aviation" (FRAGA, 2017, p. 137). The first legislation on civil aviation takes place on the eve of the Estado Novo. In 1938, the Brazilian Air Code (CBA) was created belatedly after it had been slowly discussed for eight years (INSTITUTO HISTÓRICO CULTURAL DA AERONÁUTICA, 1990, p. 451). Meanwhile, the issues concerning the aviation arms were under the responsibility of the Army and the Navy commands. On January 20, 1941, through the Decree-Law, Law No. 2,961, the Ministry of Aeronautics was created. Civil and military issues were brought together, allowing better control and security of the airspace and facilitating the use and the development of technologies aimed at the airline industry. With regard to the civil sector, the previous organization with DAC and CBA facilitated its assimilation to the Ministry, while the air forces of the army and the navy came together and an air force initially called National Air Forces was created, being called Brazilian Air Force afterwards (FAB).

This entire process of the airline industry updating involves political and strategic issues. FAB's creation put an end to the division of air power. It starts building up and takes a social and political role but, for its reorganization, it was necessary to avoid internal conflicts that could occur between the army and the navy. Therefore, Vargas chooses a civilian to command the post, being understood that neither the two arms would have any privilege in the reorganization of the internal staff of the military sector. The gaúcho¹ attorney

Joaquim Salgado Filho, who had been Minister of Labor from 1932 to 1934, was chosen to take office. Similarly, like the president, the minister was also a national aviation enthusiast, and he sought to develop the sector with the support of the civilian population, private companies and international relations between the Brazilian and the USA governments.

3 ENTRY INTO THE WAR

The effects of world war affected Brazil. Vargas acted in a pendulum system between the United States and Nazi Germany interests and tried to take trade agreements from both sides that favored the national industrial development program. The U.S. government sought to create a plan for political and economic cooperation that could involve the American republics. Thus, the proposals of the “Good Neighbor” policy were planned to combat the Axis influence on the continent. Therefore, a military mission to the countries of South America is proposed in order to strengthen the bonds between the beneficiary countries. The attempt at a first mission in 1940 was a relative failure due to the Brazilian government’s reluctance to the presence of the U.S. troops which occupied the Northeast, a region considered sensitive to an Axis attack.

Unlike Vargas, Salgado Filho was favorable to a closer approach with the U.S. government which, during Roosevelt’s administration, boosted the industrial development of the aeronautical sector and guaranteed the necessary infrastructure: airports, routes, navigation mechanisms, air traffic control, weather forecast and research which would lead to future improvements (CROUCH, 2008, p. 642-643). U.S. airlines were under government support and Pan American Airways (PanAm) was one of the top companies which benefited. During Roosevelt’s administration, the company expanded its routes throughout the American continent, competing with the German Airline Lufthansa for the Latin American market. PanAm also corresponded to the U.S. military necessity to monitor the movement of axle aircraft across America. To this end, the Airport Development Program (ADP) was created, a joint action between PanAm and the government, in which the company, with the support of its subsidiaries, would build and equip airports in Latin America that were of strategic interest of the U.S. military. Because it was initially the performance of a civil company and of its subsidiary, there was no hurt on the U.S. government image, since it was not seen as an interventionist action in a Latin State. Thus, it kept the “Good Neighbor” policy running.

Salgado Filho understood that, for the air sector expansion, it was necessary to refit, expand and equip the Brazilian airports and air bases. However, the Brazilian government itself could not provide technicians, material and funding for the improvements. The way out was to use ADP through Panair do Brasil S.A., a subsidiary of PanAm. On July 25, 1941, through Decree-Law No. 3,462, Panair is authorized to build, improve and equip airports in Amapá, Belém, São Luiz, Fortaleza, Natal, Recife, Maceió and Salvador. The Minister’s action helped solve the unease that had remained between the Brazilian and U.S. military regarding the northeastern issue, since the air bases that were of the U.S. interest were under the ADP. This kept the Brazilian government image of neutrality.

The year 1942 was decisive for the Brazilian government in foreign policy when it was forced to position itself by choosing the Allied side. The main factors that led to this decision were Rio Conference, the Finance Minister Souza Costa mission to Washington, the political-military agreement signed with the United States and the torpedoing of five Brazilian merchant ships by German submarines. Brazil declared war in the Axis on August 22, 1942. Washington Agreements were signed on May 23, 1942, from the negotiations between Brazil and the United States. Following, committees were set up to assist the dialogues and negotiations between the two countries. Two committees were created: one based in Washington and the other in Rio de Janeiro.

Rio Commission would link the U.S. military and naval missions in Rio de Janeiro, which was the Brazilian federal capital in an effort to improve the operational conditions of the Brazilian armed forces.

For the committee in Washington, the first task would be to organize a defense plan for the Northeast,(...). The focus should be the equipping of the Brazilian troops, which were responsible for the defense of the region and the U.S. military facilities. (OLIVEIRA, 2015, p. 53-54).

The Commission based in Rio de Janeiro was called the Joint Brazil-United States Military Commission (JBUSMC) and the one in Washington, the Joint Brazil-United States Defense Commission (JBUSDC). General Estevão Leitão de Carvalho, a direct subordinate to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, was chosen to represent the Brazilian side. To represent the American side of the commission, General John Garesche Ord was chosen. In the joint committee of JBUSMC, there was the air division department, represented by the American Colonel Floyd B. Wood and Brazilian Colonel Aviator Vasco Alves Secco. The latter represented the Ministry of Aeronautics in relation to the development and improvement of the

civil air sector and FAB. In addition, negotiations for the purchase and acquisition of the necessary equipment took place via Lend-Lease. Lend-Lease program, or Loan and Lease Act, represented the loan of large amounts by the United States to the countries that fought the Axis during the war with the option of paying at low interest rates or returning the material in the post-war period (OLIVEIRA, 2015, p. 46-47).

Having Vargas decided to send Brazilian contingents to the war abroad, it was responsibility of JBUSDC representatives to organize the necessary actions to train, transport and incorporate the allied forces. The Brazilian representatives in the Commission, General Leitão de Carvalho, Vice Admiral Álvaro Vasconcelos, and Colonel Aviator Vasco Alves Secco, took on the dual mission of continuing negotiations to rearm the contingent of operations in the South Atlantic and organizing the sending of Brazilian troops abroad. Throughout the discussions, it was decided to send a Brazilian Expeditionary Force (FEB) and the mobilization of FAB elements to constitute Air Units. FEB and FAB would follow the organizational standards of the U.S. Army and Air Force and would use U.S. material and equipment via lend-lease. (INSTITUTO HISTÓRICO CULTURAL DA AERONÁUTICA, 1991, p. 511-512).

From April 1942, through the United States agreements, Brazil began to receive a small number of Curtius P-36A fighters and North American B-25B bombers. After the declaration of war, in August, 1942 it could be noticed that it was urgent to provide the Brazilian air units with adequate means for the defense of the coast. Since then, FAB has received a large number of Lockheed A-28A Hudson and Consolidated PBY-5A Catalina aircraft. It also received many P-40E and P-40K fighters, as well as modern training aircraft such as the Fairchild PT-19, the Vultee BT-15 and North American AT-6C/D (LIMA; VASCONCELOS, 2003, p. 18). All the planes were brought from the United States to Brazil via direct flight and, in some cases, adverse weather conditions were faced due to the lack of appropriate instruments to ensure precise information to the pilots. In total, 130 planes were piloted by Brazilian teams in 1942; 243 in 1943; 64 in 1944; and 15 in 1945, totaling 452 aircraft during the years the war would still last. (BUYERS, 2004, p. 19).

At the time of Brazil's entry into the war, FAB was had approximately 200 pilots and 200 aircraft maintenance technicians, in addition to the bureaucratic and administrative areas (BUYERS, 2004, p. 44). The initial performance took place on the coast of Brazil. Although it is still in the organization phase as an autonomous armed force, in 1943 it began to participate in a more coordinated

way in patrolling and protecting of convoys in the South Atlantic and in joint action with the surface elements of the Brazilian and North American navy. This activity became known as the anti-submarine campaign. The equipment used by FAB for patrolling were the Catalinas and the Hudsons of the 1st Patrol Group and the Vultees Revenge of Santa Cruz Air Base (TORRES, 1985, p. 112).

"The submarine offensive off the coasts of South America has forced the organization of sea convoys as the best means of defense. The naval escort between Trinidad and Recife was provided by American warships, from Recife to the south the escort was made by Brazilian warships. The air protection of the convoys, along the Brazilian coast, was made by using Brazilian and North American aircraft, distributed by the air bases on the coast." (INCAER, p. 9-10).

This air patrol represented a great effort for FAB. Thousands of flight hours were carried out monthly, with adverse weather conditions and along the Brazilian coast. FAB's biggest victory in the anti-submarine campaign was the sinking of the German submarine U-199 on January 31, 1943 in Rio de Janeiro. Lima (2003) states that this was the only submarine proven to be sunk by FAB aircraft. That's why it is considered the most important act of the anti-submarine campaign.

4 THE 1ST FIGHTER AVIATION GROUP

Weeks before the official creation of the 1st Fighter Group, all FAB units were requested to volunteer to form the group. The vacancies for aviator officers were soon filled. Most of them came from Rio de Janeiro and practically all of them were in the School of Aeronautics. From the Northeast, several volunteers were called who served in the air units based in Fortaleza, Natal, Recife and Salvador. Among the many aviators who volunteered to join the group, there were some who already had a load of experience as an aviator. In addition, many had already regularly participated in some missions over the course of the Brazilian coast (LIMA; VASCONCELOS, p. 23-31). The volunteers who would form the 1st Fighter Aviation Group, pilots and men responsible for maintaining the aircraft, 116 were from the Army, 33 from the Navy, and the vast majority, 226, were members of the newly created Aeronautics (BUYERS, 2004, p. 44-50).

In the European campaign, the Brazilian Air Force was represented by the 1st Fighter Aviation Group. The group was created through Decree-Law No. 6,123 of December 18, 1943, signed by President Getúlio Vargas. On December 27, Major Aviator Nero Moura, who was a member of Minister Salgado Filho

office and had actively participated in structuring the Ministry of Aeronautics, is designated Commander of the 1st Fighter Aviation Group. Major Nero Moura, in addition to commanding, was responsible for its entire organization and chose his 36 auxiliaries, including officers and privates, consisting of Commander Major Aviator Nero Moura; operations officer Captain Aviator Oswaldo Pamplona Pinto; information officer First Lieutenant Aviator José Carlos de Miranda Corrêa, and squadron commanders Captain Lafayette Cantarino Rodrigues de Souza, Captain Fortunato Câmara de Oliveira, Captain Joel Miranda and Captain Newton Lagares da Silva.

Major Nero Moura gave freedom of choice to the commanders of the pilots who would integrate the future Combat Squadrons. After the group organization, the successive training stages started. The first phase takes place on January 3, 1944, with the journey of Major Moura and his keymen from Brazil to Orlando, Florida, for training at the Army's School of Applied Aviation Tactics. The second phase of the training takes place at the North American base at Albrook Field in the Panama Canal Zone. On March 18, 1944, there was a meeting

between Major Nero Moura group and the volunteers from Brazil to adapt to the American administrative and operational organization. The third phase began on April 5, 1944, when the group moved to Aguadulce Air Base for training as a Tactical Air Unit and, finally being allowed to actively participate, from May 11, 1944, in the Panama Canal defense scheme. This last phase was marked by the raising of the National Flag sent by the Minister.

Figure 1 is the record, still in Brazil, of the delivery of the Flag to FAB officers. The personalities present are Minister Salgado Filho and his wife Berthe Salgado, who was representing the Brazilian woman. The National Flag was delivered to Capt. Aviator Francisco Sabroza and 1st Lt. Aviator Horacio Machado, in a military ceremony held at the School of Aeronautics on May 5, 1944. In the figure, the institution of the Ministry is represented by Salgado Filho and the State by the National Flag. Capt. Aviator Francisco Sabroza and 1st Lt. Aviator Horacio Machado represent the 1st Fighter Group. The raising of the flag reinforced the feeling of collectivity in the group and its degree of importance in representing the Brazilian nation and the actions of the Ministry during the war.

Figure 1 - A Flag that goes to War.



Source: MINISTRY OF AERONAUTICS. 1975, p. 05.

The fourth and final phase of the 1st Fighter Group training program is at Suffolk Air Field in the United States. The mission was to adapt them to the plane that would be used in the Mediterranean Theater of Operations: the modern Thunderbolt P-47. Until that time, the pilots were being trained on Curtiss P-40. On the day before the departure, the group presented a great cohesion that represented a symbol of the transformation of men and machines into an Air Combat Unit. The 1st Fighter Aviation Group was under the operational control of the XXII Tactical Air Command, incorporated into the 350th Fighter Group named 1st Brazilian Fighter Squadron, because the Brazilian personnel was equivalent to an American fighter squadron.

On September 11, 1944, the 1st Fighter Aviation Group leaves the United States toward the Mediterranean Theater of Operations. The voyage was made by ship and arrived in Italy on the 19th, going to Tarquinia Air Base in Livorno. Operations began on the 31st. However, air supremacy in the Italian skies belonged to allied aircraft. Thus, the Brazilian group operated predominantly as a unit of fighter-bombers. The main mode of attack used by the 1st Fighter Group was the dive bomber, which aimed to prevent the flow of supplies to the German front line and to stop the enemy troop withdrawal. The group also conducted reconnaissance missions and, to a lesser extent, escort missions (INSTITUTO HISTÓRICO CULTURAL DA AERONÁUTICA, 1991, p. 556).

Besides the hunting group, the 1st ELO (Liaison and Observation Squadron) also participated in Italy. It consisted of a squadron that was under the command of FEB, whose objective was to observe the war field, doing aerial reconnaissance and artillery calibration. The groups carried out 682 missions in Piper Cub aircraft, or L-4H in the military version (LIMA, 1989, p. 337-340).

In December 1944, Minister Salgado Filho and a retinue of Brazilian officials traveled to the Italian front. The goal was to get acquainted with the needs and shortcomings that the 1st Fighter Group could have concerning the necessary materials for men, camp and aircraft and if these needs could be solved through a request to the Joint Committees. However, the main problem was the pilot replacement. There was no prediction for pilots' substitution. Only in December, Brazilian pilots had already carried out

134 missions. Salgado Filho was worried because the airmen were fatigued and could be victims of fatal accidents.

The war ended in Europe on May 8, 1945, and the 1st Fighter Group carried out 444 missions. There were casualties during the period. The so desired pilot recompletion and replacement did not occur, since Vargas believed that the war would soon end. Even so, a second group of pilots who were being trained in the United States was assembled when the conflict ended. The Brazilian group was considered extremely valuable since the beginning of its performance. The staff was dedicated and the pilots behaved like war veterans due to the excellent skills they got during their training for the mission executions. The main 1st Fighter Group achievement was the aerial reconnaissance, on April 21, aimed for the displacement of a German unit between Ostiglia and Gespino. On April 22, 11 aerial bombing missions were carried out with 44 aircraft sorties. The actions continued until April 24. Americans were impressed by the group extensive action on April 22 and the enemy vehicle and material destruction.

5 CONCLUSION

The war ended, Getúlio Vargas' Estado Novo¹ government and Minister Salgado Filho mandate also ended. But their actions have influenced current governments. Due to the alliance with the United States in 1942, Brazil became the main partner in neutralizing the Axis influence in Latin America, while Vargas takes the opportunity to equip the armed forces and build Volta Redonda steel works. Salgado Filho was skilled in articulating the negotiations that involved the entire national air sector reequipment. The 1st Fighter Group training and participation in the war allowed Brazil to acquire war experience, strengthening the newly created FAB.

On April 22, 1986, the 1st Fighter Aviation Group and FAB received from the US President, Ronald Reagan, a Presidential Unity Citation for Extraordinary Heroism and Performance of Duty demonstrated during military operations in Italy, which gave some credit to the Allied Nations Armed Forces (INSTITUTO HISTÓRICO CULTURAL DA AERONÁUTICA, 1991, p. 564-566).

A commendable performance by the United States in the war was only possible thanks to the creation

of the Ministry of Aeronautics, which brought together the Army and Navy air units and created FAB, launching the national air power foundations. The technical and administrative challenges were great and the approach with the U.S. helped the beginning of the air force and the civil sector

standardization, accelerating the development of the entire aeronautical sector. Thus, the beginning of the Ministry of Aeronautics helps analyse how economic and political relations interacted and shaped the sector, as well as the unfolding of power games and influences during World War II.

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