

18 July 1998

MEMORANDUM FOR: Ambassador Corr

FROM: General P.F. Gorman, USA (Ret)

SUBJECT: USARSA Aviation Training

As instructed, Dr. Mendelson-Forman, Gen. Woerner and I visited Fort Rucker on Thursday, 16 July. Our USARSA escort was Lt. Col. Harkins. We were met, and guided throughout our stay of five hours, by the Chief of Staff of the U.S. Army Aviation Center and School, and the Commanders of the Student Brigade and the "Spanish Helicopter Battalion" [as the USARSA activity at Fort Rucker is referred to at that location]. We participated in a briefing/discussion on operations and resources, visited a class on human rights, and then inspected two flight simulator facilities and a maintenance training hanger.

The "Spanish Battalion" has a cadre of 70: 10 officers, 13 Warrant Officers, 6 enlisted, and 41 Department of the Army Civilians. Of these 5 officers, 1 WO, and 13 DAC are "overhire," chiefly to meet unanticipated requirements to train large numbers of Mexican pilots, crew chiefs, and mechanics for 73 UHIH recently presented by the U.S. to Mexico.

The Mexican program dominates the battalion's undertakings much as the Salvadoran program dominated it in 1984, when I caused the battalion's antecedent to be established at Fort Rucker to provide for efficient use of the Army's bilingual Instructor Pilots. The commander of the battalion reported excellent relationships with Fort Rucker's chain of command, and with his "other commander" at USARSA.

TRADOC's management of USARSA aviation training seems complex and opaque:

- a. Funds to support training are provided from Fort Monroe as a function of student load, which in turn are based on charges for each course established by the Security Assistance Agency at Fort Monroe. Thus resources vary according to numbers of students and type of training. But since Fort Rucker contracts with civilian firms for services, such as maintenance of aircraft, it has large fixed costs. This year the Mexicans fell short of funds, and failed to send a large number of student-pilots, occasioning a substantial shortfall in resources for the "Spanish Helicopter Battalion." The Aviation School addressed this problem to TRADOC. USARSA evidently did not figure in the negotiations.
- b. There is another bilingual aviation training detachment at Fort Eustis (3 NCO and a dozen or so DAC) that is separately resourced and managed.
- c. If managerial oversight is being provided for the three separate programs, it is being exercised from Fort Monroe. Overall course pricing and resource allocation appears to be neither understood, nor available at Benning, Rucker, (and reportedly) Eustis. Yet competition for students exists, and appears to be intensifying: the Mexicans met their fund shortfall in part by accepting offers from the California National Guard to train "co-pilots;" the U.S. Air Force, in San Antonio, TX, offers aviation mechanic training in Spanish at prices "substantially less" than that at either Rucker or Eustis; Brazil hired Sikorsky to conduct UH-60 training.
- d. Personnel at Fort Rucker were unaware of any attempt to engage either USACOM (to which Mexico is assigned under the Unified Command Plan) or USSOUTHCOM (which has UCP purview over the Caribbean and Central and South America) to ameliorate the current funding shortfall, or the short-sighted planning that figured in the Mexican UHIH program.

There appeared to be little attempt to exploit the proximity of Fort Benning, or the excellent telecommunications between Forts Rucker and Benning. E.g., the “Spanish Helicopter Battalion” is justly proud of its courses in aviation safety management and air mission command, but makes no effort to extend its expertise to the Command and General Staff Course at USARSA. And USARSA conducts exercises in planning and conducting airmobile operations, but does not involve either the students or the faculty at the “Spanish Battalion.” Given the fact that most aircraft losses in Latin America reflect pilot or maintenance error, and that fleet command and control is universally weak throughout the region, this seems a grave oversight. It presents, however, an opportunity for “distributed learning” — collaborative learning via video teleconferencing — that could be implemented immediately.

Students depart with copies of the translated manuals used in their instruction. The “Spanish Helicopter Battalion” reported that annually it translates some 15,000 pages of U.S. military manuals. [Lt. Col. Harkins stated that USARSA reckons translation-publication costs @ \$20 per page; hence \$300,000/year. However, the battalion has a full time translator for quality control, and uses its bilingual Instructor Pilots and other instructors for translation as an additional duty. Its costs, therefore, may not be comparable.] No provision is made, however, for providing changes to such publications after departure, even when such updates incorporate instructions that could save lives, or obviate loss of an aircraft. Publication, distribution and configuration management seem an obvious mission for the Army Training Support Center via its Digital Training Access Center (DTAC).

Recommendations to Commanding General, TRADOC:

1. Formally designate as “USARSA” those bilingual aviation training activities at Forts Rucker and Eustis with students from foreign countries under the purview of either ACOM or SOUTHCOM [e.g., USARSA Helicopter Battalion, USARSA Maintenance Training Detachment].
2. Provide the Commandant, USARSA, that managerial overview of USARSA activities sufficient for his answering to either CINC, or to CG, TRADOC, for course relevancy, competitive pricing, or customer satisfaction, and for long range planning.
3. Place the U.S. Army Training Support Center in direct support of USARSA to enable distributed learning, and to provide DTAC information distribution and archival services.
4. Direct the Commandant, USARSA, to implement distributed learning among students at Forts Benning and Rucker.
5. Direct the Commandant, USARSA, to conduct a study of the cost-effectiveness of issuing Internet-capable computers to USARSA students in lieu of paper-based publications, both to facilitate their course-work at USARSA, and to enable their continuing education after graduation.