

Look Who's Turning 40

"SICOFAA"

by

Major Juan M. Maurtua
CSAF Liaison Officer to SICOFAA

As a career aviator, having flown the line for 14 years, I thought I knew just about every acronym the Air Force could throw at me. SICOFAA (See-Ko-Faa) and CONJEFAMER (Con-Hef-A-Mur), must be a new space program involving the EAF!; or a cure for the common cold and congestion. Boy, was I wrong!! Not only was I wrong, but the future of the USAF's relationship with the Air Forces in the Western Hemisphere depends on these.

Space, the final frontier, the 60's, these were the challenges Gen Thomas D. White, then Chief of Staff of the AF, was confronting. Wanting to capture the momentum of the time, the Chief called for a meeting of his counterparts throughout the Americas. The purpose was to foment and strengthen the bonds of friendship that unite all of the Air Forces in the Western Hemisphere. Thus was born SICOFAA.

SICOFAA which in Spanish stands for "Sistema de Cooperación Entre las Fuerzas Aéreas Americanas" translates to "System of Cooperation Among American Air Forces." SICOFAA, as an organization, brings together and encourages friendship among air and space professionals, provides a forum for representatives of the different AFs in the Western Hemisphere and explores common aeronautical issues.

The Chiefs of the American Air Forces welcomed enthusiastically a proposal to meet every year in a friendly and voluntary atmosphere. This annual meeting came to be known as CONJEFAMER, "Conferencia de los Jefes de las Fuerzas Aereas Americanas", "Conference of Chiefs of the American Air Forces." In 1999, the Chiefs will travel to Santiago, Chile for the XXXIX (39th) CONJEFAMER, and in 2000, the USAF will host the XL (40th) CONJEFAMER.

The official language of SICOFAA is Spanish, and member nations participate on an equal and voluntary basis. All members of SICOFAA have an equal right to be heard and to vote on any pending issues. Decisions taken by the organization or its subgroups are presented to CONJEFAMER as "Recommendations" for approval. Upon approval, the Chiefs return to their countries to implement their decisions within their own AF, thus building cooperation, coordination, and standardization throughout the system.

Charter members are countries which have signed the "Charter of SICOFAA;" to date, 18 member nations, from the US, Canada, Central and South America, and the Caribbean. Six other countries in the hemisphere prefer to participate as observers and can express ideas and opinions, and can collaborate in work and tasks but cannot participate in the final vote on recommendations

As time progressed, the Chiefs implemented intermediate levels of operation; thus, gradually giving way to a coherent, dynamic and functional entity. Special committees and symposia, made up of experts, to investigate problems and their ramifications provided recommendations to the Chiefs on ways to improve operations and administration. The Chiefs also agreed to implement a planning meeting called PREPLAN that was to meet before each of the CONJEFAMER conferences. PREPLAN meets in the spring and analyzes subjects the committees present for the Chiefs consideration. The work done during PREPLAN helps alleviate the workload of the Chiefs by reducing their activities, and accelerating the summit's progress. PREPLAN takes place under the auspices of the United States Air Force, but the presidency of the meeting belongs to the Air Force hosting the upcoming CONJEFAMER.

SICOFAA provides a forum for nine committees to discuss cooperation between the AFs on specific issues. The nine committees are Aerospace Science and Technology (COCITAE), Accident Prevention (PREVAC), Control of Illegal Flights (COVI), Information Systems-Telecommunications (SITFAA), Medicine (MEDFAA), Mutual Logistics Support (ALM), Search and Rescue and Assistance in Case of Disaster (SAR-APCADE), Education & Training (CORHEE), and Meteorology (CIMFA) (in recess).

After four decades of existence, and looking ahead to the future, the foundations of SICOFAA are becoming stronger every day. We are already on the threshold of the twenty-first century, and SICOFAA's achievements throughout its history show great promise for the future.

SICOFAA 21st Century challenges?

An initiative to formalize procedures in case of aircraft accidents on foreign soils has culminated in the writing of a manual. The primary objective of this manual is to establish combined procedures to be followed should an accident occur to one or more aircraft of one country in the territory of another country. In 1986 the vision of the 11th Accident Prevention (PREVAC) committee made it possible to produce the "Manual of Combined Procedures for the Investigation of Accidents to Aircraft of the Member Air Forces of SICOFAA". Chile and Uruguay proposed this manual based on the lessons learned from an exercise that was based on an actual case that had taken place in Uruguay. The manual spanned some 14 years, and involved issues such as privileged information, country sovereignty, laws, regulations, red tape, etc. We are very close to having an approved document by all member countries. In writing and working for

approval of this manual, this committee, like SICOFAA itself, is taking on an importance and usefulness of undeniable value for the 21st Century.

Another initiative is how aviators, and most importantly, all air force support personnel, can combine their aerial and mechanical expertise, actually working and flying together in combined exercises such as Chile's participation in a recent Red Flag, and air shows such as the Chilean Air show (FIDAE). In FY98, USAF F-16's participated in a combined flying exercise in Argentina, USAF C-130's flew down to Chile for Airlift training missions, and USAF personnel participated in a combined exercise "Fuerzas Unidas" in Honduras just to name a few. We continually have combined bilateral and multilateral exercises where we exchange our way of doing business in our ever changing demanding day-to-day operations.

We are also carrying out a resolution to update high frequency (HF) radio equipment for the tele-communication & information (SITFAA) system. This will support the communications system for the Control of Illicit Flights (COVI) and for the support of Search and Rescue and help in cases of disaster (SAR-APCADE) operations. SITFAA demonstrated its functionality during the recent hurricane Mitch disaster, in which SITFAA network supported a 10 fold increase in communications traffic over the previous year in the short span of two months.

Another more sensitive initiative currently being worked, initiates an effort to share Counterdrug intelligence within our air force counterparts in the region. This effort is being sponsored with the auspices of Science & Technology (COCITAE) and Illicit Flights (COVI). This particular task is currently undergoing legal and sovereignty issues.

SICOFAA has come a long way from its slow beginnings, the organization has grown and has great potential for future growth. The bottom line is that we currently have regional stability in the LATAM region. We continue to bond our friendships and maintain strong healthy relationships with other American Air Forces, and most importantly we focus on multinational cooperation among states which epitomizes the SICOFAA mission.