FAIREY FOX DAY-BOMBER ◆ MARTIN'S INNOVATIVE XB-51

AVIATION HISTORY

www.TheHistoryNet.com

AZTEC EAGLES
MEXICAN P-47 PILOTS IN THE PHILIPPINES

INTERVIEW
B-17 PILOT SHOT DOWN OVER FRANKFURT

FIORELLO LA GUARDIA'S AMERICAN BOMBER SQUADRON IN ITALY

ONE MAN AGAINST THE ELEMENTS: FORGOTTEN SOLO ARCTIC FLIGHT

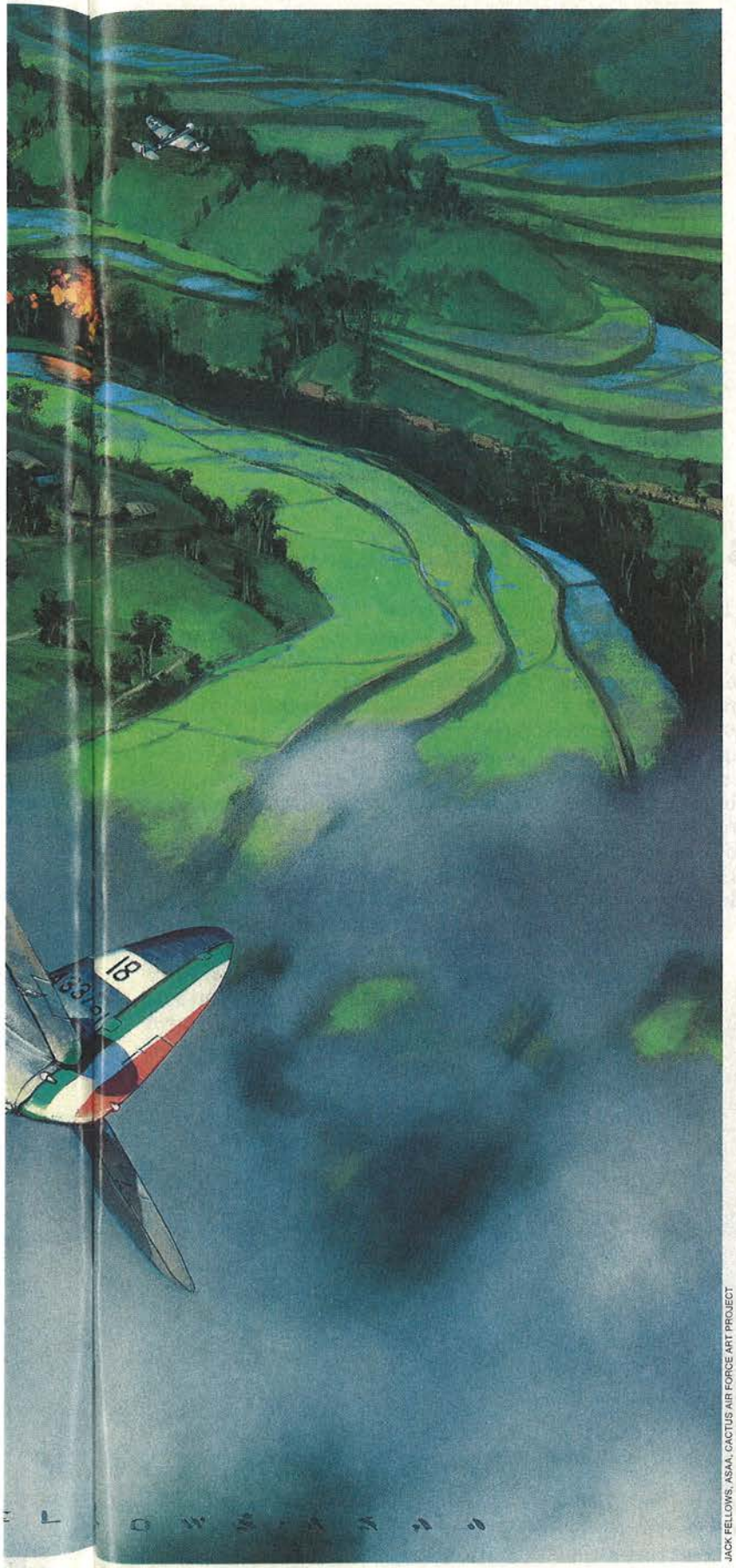
CESSNA 180'S NEW LEASE ON LIFE

0 09281 02400 2 05

RETAILER: Display Until May 19

U.S.: $4.99; CAN.: $5.99

MAY 2003



JACK FELLOWS, ASAA, CACTUS AIR FORCE ART PROJECT

THE ONLY MEXICAN AIR FORCE UNIT TO SERVE OVERSEAS DURING WORLD WAR II FOUGHT TO LIBERATE THE PHILIPPINES.

BY SIG UNANDER, JR.

Nearly a century after a bitter defeat by the United States, Mexico sent a military force to fight against the Axis powers alongside U.S. military forces in World War II. It was the first time that Mexico sent combat personnel abroad and the first time both nations battled a common threat. This unique unit was the Mexican air force, *Fuerza Aerea Mexicana* (FAM). Its pilots provided air support in the liberation of the Philippines and flew long-range sorties over Formosa, earning praise from Allied theater commander General Douglas MacArthur and decorations from the U.S., Mexican and Philippine governments.

In the late 1930s, as nations around the globe endured the Great Depression, political and military developments were brewing that would engulf the world in flames. U.S. and Mexican leaders knew that hemispheric defense would be a vital issue. The threat came at a difficult time, when both countries were struggling to achieve economic recovery. Relations were worsened by the nationalization of U.S. oil properties, and in Mexico there was fear of American intervention if Mexico looked unable to defend itself against an attack by the Axis powers. Relations between the nations' militaries, however, were less strained than those between their politicians. FAM officers maintained a dialogue with U.S. Army representatives and made efforts to acquire aircraft as World War II intensified.

Like the U.S. Army Air Corps of the 1930s, the FAM was a small, underfunded arm of the Mexican army. Its missions included reconnaissance, air support, airmail and mapmaking. It had tactical units but no modern pursuit planes. Mexico had no indigenous aircraft industry; therefore any planes capable of stopping an offshore attack would have to come from the United States.

On May 13, 1942, a Mexican oil tanker was torpedoed by a U-boat, killing 13 crewmen. A protest filed by the Mexican government was answered with the sinking of a second tanker. When Germany refused to indemnify Mexico, President Manuel Avila Camacho declared war on the Axis powers.

Although prompted by tragedy, Mexico's entry into the war actually proved beneficial to the country in some ways. Mexico's population united behind the war effort. The government received shipments of U.S. aircraft, including Douglas A-24B Banshee (Navy SBD Dauntless) dive bombers, North American B-25 Mitchells and Consolidated PBY Catalinas. While Mexican military authorities were grateful for the planes they received from the United States, any plan to send Mexican personnel to fight abroad at first ap-

Jack Fellows' *Strike of the Aztec Eagles* shows members of the 201st Squadron of the Mexican Expeditionary Air Force (FAEM) piloting Republic P-47D Thunderbolts as they dive to strafe a Japanese convoy on Luzon in the summer of 1945.

peared unrealistic, running as it did against tradition and politics. A more pressing priority was coastal defense. Additional Mexican units were activated, and coastal patrol and tanker escort missions were stepped up. They soon bore results. On July 5, 1942, Major Luis Noriega Medrano, flying a North American AT-6 Texan, bombed the German submarine *U-129* in the Gulf of Mexico, damaging the vessel.

In April 1943 President Franklin D. Roosevelt met with President Avila Camacho at Monterrey to encourage Mexico to participate offensively in the war. The Mexican president was at first noncommittal, but he would soon decide that Mexico should fight aggressively alongside the Allies. On November 13, he declared that Mexico was willing to take the offensive on condition that its forces serve in a defined sector under Mexican command. The Mexican constitution mandated that the president obtain permission from the Senate, which would require public support. A former army general, President Avila Camacho knew the army was unprepared, but he also believed that a tactical air unit could be readied quickly.

To sell the idea to the public, the president ordered the FAM to stage an airshow. Near Mexico City on March 5, 1944, more than 100,000 *capitalinos* watched as AT-6s and A-24Bs blasted a simulated enemy base with live ordnance. The show was a stunning success, and shortly thereafter the president declared that Mexico should fight and that the FAM would lead the nation in the conflict.

A special training group was formed in Mexico City, staffed with expert specialists chosen in a competitive recruiting process. The group consisted of 300 enlisted men and officers from all branches of the military, including 38 of the best pilots. Command was assigned to Colonel Antonio Cardenas Rodriguez, known for his goodwill flights over Latin America. He had flown combat missions over North Africa with the U.S. 97th Bomb Group and was well connected with senior American officers, including U.S. Army Air Forces General Jimmy Doolittle.

Group personnel were as diverse as their specialties. Volunteers came from the Rio Grande to the Guatamalan border, from large and small towns. Ramiro Bastarrochia Gamboa

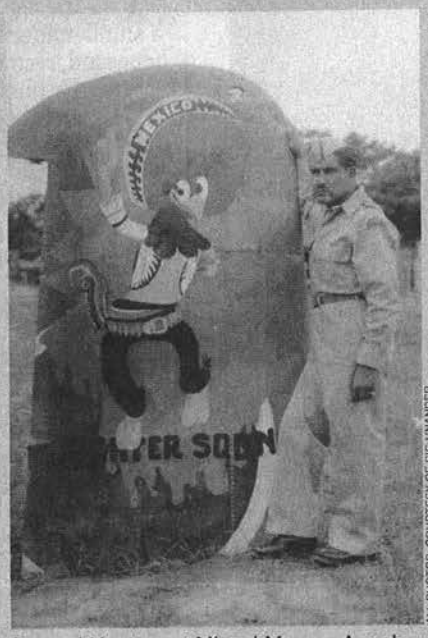
'PANCHO PISTOLAS' JOINS THE 201ST SQUADRON

When the Mexican Expeditionary Air Force (FAEM) arrived at Porac Aerodrome in the Philippines at the beginning of May 1945, the group had to quickly establish a squadron base in a primitive jungle area some distance from the American encampment—and do it fast. Officers and men labored together in the oppressive humidity and ever-present mosquitoes to meet that need.

With bamboo, lumber, stones and surplus materials, the Mexicans built operations offices as well as maintenance, supply, medical and dining facilities. In a central area surrounded by tents they raised the Mexican flag. Streets were named for famous boulevards in their homeland. One humorist erected a sign with an arrow reading "To the Zocalo—10,000 Kilometers," little realizing that the men who returned would march victoriously into that hallowed plaza in Mexico City at war's end.

The airfield had been previously used by the Japanese, and several abandoned aircraft, trucks, anti-aircraft cannons and other war materiel littered part of the camp area. Three second lieutenants of the squadron's 2nd Flight—Praxedis Lopez Ramos, Fausto Vega Santander and Miguel Moreno Arreola—explored this World War II "junkyard" and found a wrecked olive-green Nakajima Ki-84 *Hayate* fighter (known to the Allies as a "Frank") with its left wing still in good condition though partially severed. Back at the flight line, several FAEM mechanics were erecting an aircraft shelter. Lieutenant Moreno showed them the Ki-84, and they removed its wing and planted it in the ground, tip-up, in a visible spot near the main entrance to the Mexican encampment.

Moreno, who had aspired to a career in architecture before joining the air force, obtained several colors of aircraft paint and rendered the popular cartoon character "Pancho Pistolas" on the upright wing. Pancho, a happy, rowdy Mexican rooster wearing a sombrero and shooting a pair of six-guns into the air, was borrowed from the 1945 Walt Disney animated movie *The Three Caballeros,* in which Pancho gives his American friend Donald Duck a tour of Mexico on a magic carpet. The rooster was a stylized version of the "*charro,*" or gentleman cowboy, an important symbol in Mexican culture. It proved to be an instant hit with the men of the FAEM and became the mascot of the unit for the duration of the war. Pilots wore patches with it on their jackets, and the image of the rambunctious bird was published in newspapers and in the government's official history of the unit.



ALL PHOTOS: COURTESY OF SIG UNANDER

Second Lieutenant Miguel Moreno Arreola poses with his painting of the 201st Squadron's rowdy rooster mascot.

After the war, the Mexican air force adopted Pancho as the official logo of Fighter Squadron 201 (*Escuadrón Aéreo de Pelea* 201), which continued in service after the FAEM was disbanded in December 1945. A modified version of his likeness, in a circular motif with unit identification printed around the border, was developed and became the elite unit's standard insignia. The Pancho Pistolas insignia was painted on the forward fuselages of the Lend-Lease P-47s that the squadron operated into the late 1950s, and then on the North American T-28 Trojans that replaced them. Today the 201st Squadron, which is still operational as part of Air Force Group 4, stationed at Cozumel Military Air Base, proudly displays Pancho Pistolas as its official symbol. **S.U.**

came from the state of Yucatan; Pedro Martines de la Concho, a mechanic, hailed from Baja California; radioman Pedro Ramirez Corona was from the coastal hamlet of Colima; Miguel Alcantar Torres, a paratrooper with U.S. combat experience at Casablanca, Bizerte and Sicily, received an honorable discharge from the U.S. Army to join; Joaquin Ramirez Vilchis, a pilot and scion of a prominent Mexico City family, had commanded a cavalry unit in Jalisco. All were eager to serve with the elite FAM.

On July 20, 1944, at Balbuena Military Camp, the new group passed in review before the president, who told them they were headed to the United States for combat training. He reminded them that their "brothers from the Republic of Brazil" were fighting in Italy and that if necessary they would go there, concluding with an invitation to all personnel "to petition me with whatever you may desire."

Avila Camacho was undoubtedly surprised when, according to historian Dennis Cavagnaro, "a soldier in the rear ranks took two steps forward, smartly saluted and said, in a loud, clear voice, '*Mi Presidente*, I am Angel Cabo Bocanegra del Castillo, and, Sir, I request that a school be built in my home town of Tepoztlan, Morelos." Today, the school that was subsequently built still stands in that beautiful mountain village.

After the review and ceremonies, the young pilots and ground personnel bid their families farewell amid tears and singing of the traditional "*golondrinas*" and boarded a special train. On July 26, the men arrived at Nuevo Loredo, on the Texas border. The whole town turned out to cheer the first unit in history to leave the country on a fighting mission. Newsreel cameras captured the ceremonies as the men crossed the border into Laredo and were greeted by Mexican congressmen and U.S. military and civilian authorities. There, they entrained to Randolph Army Air Base at San Antonio. Personnel were then separated by specialty and sent to various bases for training. The pilots went to Victoria, Texas, to transition to Curtiss P-40 Warhawks.

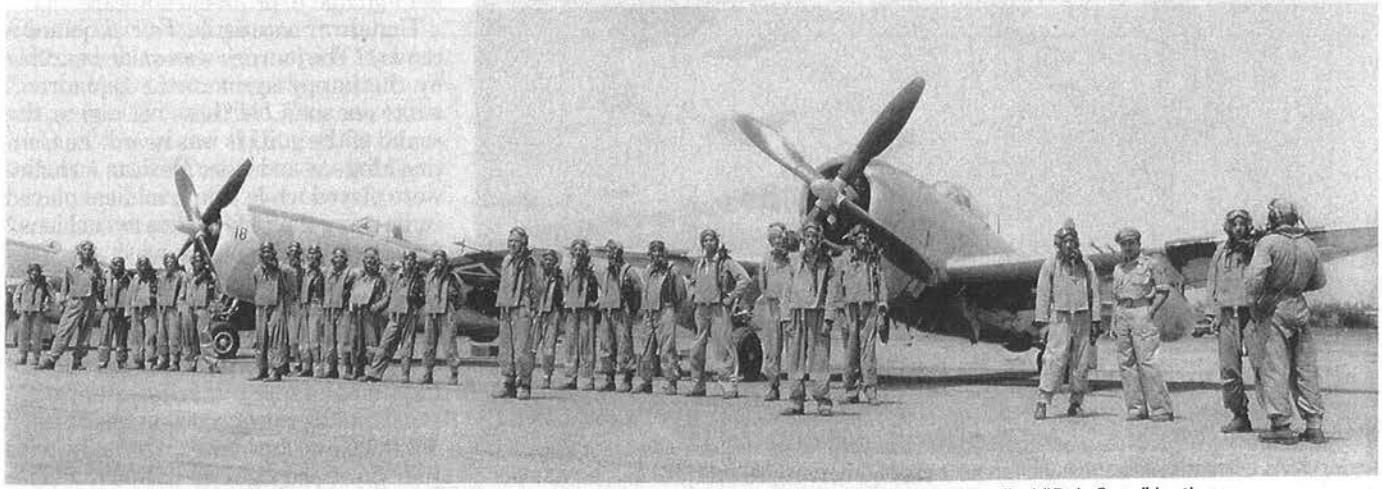
Their next posting was to Pocatello, Idaho. There, in October, pilots were reunited with ground personnel and began training as a unit. The pilots transitioned to Republic P-47D Thunderbolts with little difficulty. The mechanics took a liking to the big fighters, calling them "*Peh-Cuas*," short for P-47 in Spanish. A special unit, Section I, was designated to train the Mexicans and was commanded by Captain Paul Miller, a dedicated American officer who had grown up in Peru and was fluent in Spanish. Just 24, Miller had served as assistant air attache at the U.S. Embassy in Mexico. His priority was the pilots' safety and preparation for combat. As a result, he rigorously enforced the tight discipline that he believed was necessary to the Mexican airmen's success.

With the onset of winter, bad weather and below-zero temperatures began to limit flying and retard training. A change of station was requested by Colonel Cardenas, and on November 27 the unit left for Greenville, Texas, northeast of Dallas. There, the pilots flew an intensive schedule, incorporating ground attack, air combat, advanced acrobatics, instrument flying and navigation, and formation and high-altitude flight. Their P-47Ds were state-of-the-art aircraft. Equipped with twin turbochargers, they could top 40,000 feet, and in a dive they could approach the sound barrier. It was heady stuff for new fighter pilots, and dangerous as well.

After a rainstorm on January 23, 1945, a young second lieutenant, Cristoforo Salido Grijalva, attempted a takeoff from a muddy taxiway that he had apparently mistaken for an active runway. Warnings from the tower went unheeded. Salido hit his brakes and crashed before becoming airborne. His P-47 ended up inverted, and the young officer drowned in the mud that jammed the cockpit before the crash crew could free him. Salido's death hit the unit hard.

Morale was further eroded by the discrimination the Mexican airmen encountered in the area. A sign over the town's main street read "Greenville Welcome—The Blackest Land—The Whitest People." Pilots were amazed when they were refused service in a restaurant, but a more serious concern was off-base housing. An international incident was narrowly averted through hasty intervention between base officials and civic leaders. Accommodations were found for the men, and authorities circulated the word that the Mexicans were there as allies and should be treated with courtesy.

In some cases the youthful pilots' natural exuberance led to breaches of regulations. In one notorious incident, Lieutenant Reynaldo Perez Gallardo brought his Thunderbolt in hot and low over Greenville one evening, intent on celebrating his recent marriage by giving the locals a beautiful buzz job. The big "Jug" thundered down main street at over 300 miles an hour, its wingtips narrowly missing the buildings. Unknown to the lieutenant, inside a movie theater sat Captain Miller and his wife, enjoying a show. As Perez roared overhead, the vibrations reportedly "shook the building to its foundations." Miller was furious and summarily removed the lieutenant from flying status.



Pilots of all four of the 201st Fighter Squadron's flights assemble in front of their P-47s—affectionately called "*Peh-Cuas*" by the Mexican mechanics—on the flight line at Porac Aerodrome, near Clark Field in the Philippines.

The young lieutenant would later return to the unit and fly combat missions in the Philippines.

At year's end, Mexico prepared for the unit's deployment. Speaking to the senate, the president asked for the authority to send troops abroad. It was granted, and an order was issued redesignating the unit as the Mexican Expeditionary Air Force (FAEM). Rather than send the FAEM to join the Brazilian squadron in Italy, the Mexican president suggested operations in the Philippines to President Franklin D. Roosevelt. There, he said, the unit could aid "the liberation of a people for whom it is felt a continuity of idiom, history and traditions."

Top: General Douglas MacArthur welcomes FAEM commander Colonel Antonio Cardenas Rodriguez to his Manila headquarters in 1945, shortly after the 201st Squadron's arrival in the Philippines. **Above:** After personalizing a 1,000-pound bomb, ground crewmen hoist it for attachment to a P-47's underwing mount prior to a mission.

On February 22, 1945, the new unit was given its battle flags in a formal ceremony, complete with two bands and a 21-gun salute. With the entire FAEM at attention, and officials from both countries, family members and hundreds of civilians watching, Mexican Subsecretary of War General Francisco L. Uruquizo, representing the president, presented the Mexican battle flag to Colonel Cardenas and gave a speech. He emphasized that Mexico was fighting with the Allied nations to support democracy and human rights, and reminded the pilots to represent their country with valor and honor. The airmen passed in review, manned their planes and roared into the cold, clear sky for an hour-long demonstration of combat tactics. The proceedings were broadcast live on radio in Mexico and Latin America and covered extensively in area newspapers. Newsreel footage of the event was later shown in theaters across the United States.

The pilots completed their training with air-to-air gunnery practice at Brownsville. On the afternoon of March 10, Lieutenant Javier Martinez Valle was up over the gunnery range, pursuing a target trailing from a tow plane. Flying alone into the setting sun, Martinez encountered trouble. His aircraft went out of control, and he was killed in the ensuing crash. It was thought that his P-47 must have struck the target cable or counterweight.

On March 27 the FAEM members boarded the liberty ship *Fairisle* at San Fransisco, joining 1,500 U.S. troops bound for the Philippines. Seasickness and fear of attack by submarines weighed on the men as the voyage wore on, and the screaming sirens of battle station drills made them edgy. But there were some lighter moments. At New Guinea, for example, the base commander invited the pilots to a party where they enjoyed iced beer and watched the new color movie *Fighting Lady*. Returning to *Fairisle* after that interlude, some of the well-lubricated airmen fell during the climb up the cargo net and had to be assisted aboard.

Underway once again, *Fairisle* joined a convoy. "The journey was made bearable by the happy spirit of the Squadron," wrote one man. "In these hot nights, the sound of the guitars was heard: 'La Cancion Mixteca' and other Mexican melodies were played while young soldiers played cards using their life jackets as cushions." As the ships steamed west, General Douglas MacArthur cabled President Avila Camacho: "The 201st Squadron…is about to join this command. I wish to express to you, Mr. President, the inspiration and pleasure this action arouses…it is personally most gratifying because of my long and intimate friendship with your great people."

The convoy entered Manila Bay on May 1 and was received by the theater

air commander, General George Kenney—representing General MacArthur—Honorary Consul Alfredo Carmelo and other officials. Shortly afterward, they left by train for their assigned airfield at Porac, near Clark Field.

Porac was hardly a paradise. The Mexicans' new base of operations consisted of a dirt runway hacked out of the jungle, surrounded by low green hills. By night, small-arms fire could generally be heard, and by day there was the intermittent sound of artillery pounding the retreating enemy. A nearby prisoner of war camp had just been liberated, and the Mexican airmen were sobered by the ghastly sight of American and Filipino soldiers and civilians in a state of acute starvation. Filipino guerrillas were mopping up, and occasionally a Japanese soldier emerged from the jungle. There was a control tower in the center of the field, an encampment at one end where the Fifth Air Force's 58th Fighter Group had established itself, and not much else.

The 58th Group, to which Kenney had assigned the squadron, was a seasoned veteran of the New Guinea campaign, consisting of three squadrons. The 201st was attached as a fourth, though it would operate under Mexican command and administration and occupy its own area.

On May 17, 1945, the 201st began flying combat orientation missions, with its pilots assigned to various other squadrons. Shortly thereafter, however, the so-called Aztec Eagles started flying missions as a unit. Their initial targets were buildings, vehicles, artillery and enemy concentrations in the Marikina watershed east of Manila, where the U.S. 25th Infantry Division was encountering fierce resistance.

The squadron comprised four flights of eight pilots each. Commanding flight operations was Captain Radames Gaziola Andradé, a senior pilot with 4,000 flight hours. Pilots were briefed each evening for the first mission of the next day. In the morning, they took off at about 0800. Missions were short, though they lengthened as the Japanese were pushed back. After the first mission of the day, mechanics and armorers would refuel and rearm the aircraft. The second mission would take off about 1300. In the hot afternoon the pilots would relax while mechanics repaired the aircraft, armorers removed and cleaned machine guns and specialists checked radios and instruments.

The squadron soon began flying missions led by its own officers. On June 1, a sortie was launched in which 2nd Lt. Fausto Vega Santander, the squadron's youngest pilot, was killed. That loss came when a four-plane flight led by Lieutenant Carlos Garduno made a target run on an island off Luzon's west coast. Vega died when his P-47, for reasons that have never been explained, suddenly rolled and crashed into the sea.

Only a few days later another pilot, Lieutenant Jose Espinosa Fuentes, died when the P-47 he was flight-testing after repairs crashed at nearby Floridablanca after takeoff. The reported cause was engine failure, but one analysis found the rudder trim-tab linkage reversed. Witnesses said the engine had been running up to the moment of impact.

Throughout June, the campaign to liberate Luzon continued as the U.S. Sixth Army fought north toward Cagayan Valley in the central highlands, where Japanese General Tomoyuki Yamashita's Fourteenth Army was holding out. The troops advanced through rugged mountain passes above scenic valleys, sculpted with ancient rice terraces and dotted with the thatch-roofed houses of the Ifugao people. The fighting was a brutal combination of jungle and mountain warfare. Close air support proved crucial, and as the fighting moved deeper into the mountains, the 201st's missions changed from hitting visible targets to striking hard-to-see troops and fortified positions in close proximity to friendly forces.

The new targets were generally covered with jungle and virtually invisible. Steep mountains, bad weather and anti-aircraft fire made air support missions hazardous. A controller on the ground or in a liaison aircraft would mark Japanese positions with a colored smoke shell or rocket and confirm with the squadron leader as the flights orbited the area. The leader would make a "dry" pass over the target, then lead the first flight in.

The pilots dived one by one, ignoring enemy tracers and flak, dropped their ordnance and pulled up hard, nearly blacking out from G-forces as they felt the concussions of their 1,000-pounders ripping open the jungle canopy just below them. Debris was often thrown up 1,500 feet by the blasts, and the air was filled with black smoke. When a controller was unable to identify the target, or the frequent summer rainstorms closed in, the pilots had to abort and jettison their bombs in a safe zone. The controllers couldn't always see the effects of the bombing, but where they could, they frequently noted "very good" to "excellent" results. Amazingly enough, no friendly casualties were attributed to the 201st.

When the Japanese presented a visible target, the Aztec Eagles quickly pounced on their prey. On June 17 on a mission

Showered with confetti, returning 201st Squadron members parade beneath a flowering archway in Mexico City's Zocalo in November 1945. Leading the contingent is Lieutenant Moreno, proudly carrying the FAEM flag.

Seven 201st Squadron veterans pose before one of two remaining Mexican air force P-47s at Mexico City in January 1995, 50 years after the Aztec Eagles returned home.

to Payawan, in the central highlands, a controller with the call-sign "Bygone" directed the squadron members to attack enemy concentrations 4,000 yards northeast of that town. Lieutenant Amador Samano Piña later remembered: "Our leader, Lieutenant Hector Espinosa Galvan, discovered an enemy convoy on one of the secondary roads, and he ordered our seven planes to attack it. We came directly toward the target, machine-gunning. I took aim at a truck right in front of me, we got closer and I fired two bursts of machine-gun fire and almost immediately flames enveloped the truck. Quickly we pulled up to avoid the explosions after dropping bombs. The enemy responded vigorously with light arms fire and damaged two of our airplanes. This mission lasted from 1330 hours to 1545 hours."

As dangerous as close support was, a riskier assignment was in the works—very long-range (VLR) fighter sweeps across the South China Sea. The U.S. Navy, preparing to invade Japan, needed control of the sea lanes south of Kyushu, an area dominated by the island of Formosa (Taiwan), an occupied Japanese military bastion. Though enemy activity had been reduced by Fifth Air Force bombing, it was still a threat and—located almost 600 miles from the 201st's base—at the limit of the range of its P-47s.

Early in July, the 58th Fighter Group left for Okinawa. The 201st would operate from Clark Field while it brought its P-47 inventory up to strength with new P-47D-30 models and awaited more Mexican squadrons. In the meantime, the aircraft were fitted with auxiliary wing tanks and prepared for VLR missions.

Early on July 6, eight Mexican Thunderbolts took off from Clark with a maximum load, barely clearing the runway. Hanging over the vast expanse of the Pacific as they traveled north hour after hour, with the blazing tropical sun beating down on their cramped cockpits, the pilots became drained and dehydrated. Adding to their discomfort was the tension of flying single-engine aircraft over hundreds of miles of water with only basic instruments. A small navigational error, bad weather or high fuel consumption could force them to ditch.

Over Formosa, the Mexicans encountered no challengers. The Aztec Eagles owned the air. The sweep was completed successfully, and all pilots managed to return safely to Clark except Lieutenant Perez, who put down at Lingayen, out of fuel. After over seven hours in the air, in full survival gear, the men had to be helped from their cockpits. Each downed several ounces of hard liquor before debriefing, to break the tension.

More sweeps were flown in July. The Mexican pilots also practiced combat tactics and ferried new P-47s from Biak Island, New Guinea, to Clark—as well as flying war-weary Jugs to Biak for disposal. It was the height of the typhoon season by that time, and the weather conditions proved both unpredictable and treacherous.

On July 16, Lieutenant Espinosa Galvan, flying in foul weather, ran out of gas just short of Biak and was forced to ditch. His plane sank, and he apparently did not get out. Three days later two pilots—Captain Pablo Rivas Martinez and wingman Lieutenant Guillermo Garcia Ramos—flew into a thunderstorm and became separated. Garcia bailed out over a Japanese-held island and was saved in a dramatic rescue by an Australian Consolidated PBY crew. Rivas was never found. On July 21, Lieutenant Mario Lopez Portillo took off from Biak with an American pilot. They made it to Luzon before hitting stormy weather. Flying on instruments, they made a navigational error and crashed into a mountain.

On August 8 the Aztec Eagles returned to Formosa on a bombing mission led by Lieutenant Amadeo Castro Almaza. Crossing the sea at altitude, they dropped to the water near the island to evade enemy radar. Each pilot had his hands full, balancing a 1,000-pound bomb under the right wing with the near-empty external fuel tank under the left. Over the target, a cluster of buildings near the port of Karenko, they attacked. As Lieutenant Castro dropped his bomb, his P-47 lurched violently, due to the sudden loss of equilibrium, slamming him around the cockpit. Recovering, the shaken lieutenant radioed his companions to warn them. Their mission completed, the pilots landed at alternate airfields.

Two days later, the squadron flew its final mission, escorting a U.S. Navy convoy bound for Okinawa. Intelligence had concerns that Japanese suicide planes based on Formosa might attack the ships. The 201st provided air cover in shifts for a 12-hour period until they were relieved by USAAF Northrop P-61 Black Widows at dusk.

On the night of August 26, the men were watching a movie when Captain Gaziola suddenly ordered the film stopped. He announced that Fifth Air Force headquarters had received a message that an atom bomb had been dropped and Japan had surrendered. Later the report was verified, and the men cele-

Continued on page 70

AVIATION HISTORY MARKETPLACE

A listing of information from *Aviation History* Magazine Advertisers.
Use the coupon provided to order as many items as you wish. Enclose the amount requested for priced items plus a $1.50 handling charge.

Antiques/Reproductions

1. Celebrate America with Big-Bang® Carbide Cannons. Cast-iron and solid brass replicas. THE CONESTOGA COMPANY, INC. FREE information.

Art/Prints

2. MILITARY ART GALLERY—Featuring fine, limited-edition aviation military art. Robert Taylor, William Phillips, Stivers and others. FREE brochures.

3. STENBERG AVIATION—We strive to offer the best value in quality limited-edition art from many top artists. FREE information.

4. AIR ART NOTHWEST has beautiful limited-edition collectors' prints by Robert Taylor, Keith Ferris, Roy Grinnell and other top aviation artists! Satisfaction guaranteed. FREE newsletter/information.

Books/Documents

5. Bargain Books—Shop America's largest catalog selection and save up to 80%. Civil War, military history, biography, and much more. FREE Catalog from EDWARD R. HAMILTON BOOKSELLER.

6. Aviation, military and Western American history titles from SUNFLOWER UNIVERSITY PRESS—since 1977. FREE brochure and complete backlist on request.

Collectibles

7. Full-color, 124-page, fully illustrated, color catalog of handcrafted aircraft and ship models is now available from MOTION PERFORMANCE. Send $8.00, refundable.

8. COLLECTOR'S AIR MODEL CO. offers replicas of famous World War II, 1/72-scale, black plastic models of 1941–1945. Send for FREE brochure.

9. Navy and Marine Corps aviation insignia from the golden age to today. GOLDEN WINGS ENTERPRISES. Catalog $3.00.

AVIATION HISTORY

Reader Service Department
P.O. Box 5284
Pittsfield, MA 01203-5284

1. FREE	**4. FREE**	**7. $8.00**
2. FREE	**5. FREE**	**8. FREE**
3. FREE	**6. FREE**	**9. $3.00**

Tell me more! Please send information on the items circled below. I enclose $1.50 handling charge plus the amount for priced items.

I AM ENCLOSING:

$_____ for priced item

+ **$1.50** for handling

$_____ Total Remittance

NOTE: If only FREE choices are selected, handling charge still must be included!! **No cash or credit cards accepted.** Please make check or money order in U.S. funds payable to *Aviation History* Magazine, and mail to address above. Please do not use this address for change of address or any other correspondence. Address above is for **Reader Service** information only. Please allow 6-8 weeks for delivery.

Name _____

Address _____

City _____

State _____ Zip _____

COUPON EXPIRES 07/31/03 MAY '03

AZTEC EAGLES

Continued from page 28

brated with the traditional "*grito*" shout of joy.

Fifty-eight years have passed since the FAEM came home from the war in the Philippines. Its men paraded victoriously into Mexico City's national square on a sunny day in November 1945, presented their battle flag and heard President Avila Camacho, speaking to the crowd and to the nation by radio. His voice echoing over a sea of cheering people, the president said: "General, chiefs, officers and troops of the Expeditionary Air Force, I receive with emotion the Flag that the country has conferred...as a symbol of her and those ideas of humanity for which we fight in a common cause....You return with glory, having complied brilliantly with your duty and, in these moments, in this historic Plaza, you receive the gratitude of our people."

The young pilots who flew and fought with their Yankee counterparts are now gray-haired grandfathers, enjoying retirement. The P-47s with bright Mexican tricolor markings and U.S. star-and-bar insignia they flew so proudly have long ago been scrapped. The battle flag they carried rests in a place of honor in the National History Museum.

Five of those pilots became FAM generals; others went on to distinguished careers in aviation, business and academia. In reminiscing about their WWII experiences, they often mention the satisfaction they feel in having represented their country to help defeat a global threat. Above all, however, when they get together today they remember their fallen comrades.

The FAEM helped end Mexican isolationism. It paved the way for important accords between Mexico and the United States and demonstrated that Mexico was capable of mounting an expeditionary force in a successful partnership, achieving good results at reasonable cost. It also helped modernize the FAM.

Significant as these accomplishments are, perhaps the unit's most meaningful legacy is the improved understanding and cooperation it fostered between the American and Mexican peoples and the national and cultural pride the Aztec Eagles brought to their country. Those have proved to be enduring benefits. □

Sig Unander, Jr., writes from Oregon. For additional reading, try: Strategy, Security and Spies—Mexico and the U.S. as Allies in World War II, *by Maria Emilia Paz; and* Republic P-47 Thunderbolt—The Final Chapter, *by Dan Hagedorn.*