

# Lighting the Cobra's Pipe: The Forgotten Team at the Heart of the Wartime Brazilian-American Alliance, 1942–1945

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## Abstract

*This article contextualizes the arrival and subsequent performance of the 25,000-man Brazilian Expeditionary Force (BEF) in Italy – the only soldiers from South America to participate in combat operations against the Axis during World War II – by asking what made this joint military venture possible in the first place. Using archival records from the Joint Brazil-United States Military Commission (JBUSMC), an organization created in 1942 to oversee the alliance's collaborative military efforts, the article assesses the contributions of a transnational team of administrators, liaison officers, translators, educators, officers, and other military personnel tasked with building the Brazilian–American military apparatus from the ground up.*

*Though their success bore long odds, the achievement of training, outfitting, feeding, and incorporating the eager Brazilians into the U.S. 5th Army command structure in Italy remains one of the least remembered but most striking cases of multinational military cooperation in American military history—a form of warfare that has since become ubiquitous in Western coalition operations abroad.*

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## Introduction

On Monday, April 12, 1943, a colonel in the War department's Foreign liaison section summoned a tall American intelligence officer named Vernon A. Walters into his office for a life-changing assignment. A group of Portuguese speaking officials were coming to tour the nation's military installations the following day, and the colonel wanted Walters to accompany them. Stunned by the invitation, Walters reminded the colonel that Portuguese was not a

language in his repertoire. “You speak Spanish, French, Italian and all of that stuff,” the colonel replied. Enduring Walters’ protests for several minutes, the senior officer bore down: “You seem to be under the impression that I am *inviting* you to be here tomorrow morning,” he said. “I am not. It is an order. See that you are here, and see that you are speaking Portuguese.”<sup>1</sup> Needless to say, Walters spent a feverish night studying all the Portuguese material he could find.

Walters’ unexpected assignment qualified him to play a crucial role in an unlikely wartime alliance then forming between the United States and Brazil. With no historical precedent for combined military operations between both nations, by mid-1944 the US–Brazilian alliance had managed to raise, train, outfit, and transport a 25,000-strong *Força expedicionária brasileira* (Brazilian expeditionary force, hereafter FEB) to the Italian mainland where, under command of the US Fifth army, it became the only South American nation to participate in combat operations against the Axis.<sup>2</sup> As his language abilities improved, Walters played a vital role in this enterprise; liaising between American and Brazilian officers and mediating linguistic, doctrinal, and cultural issues as they arose, Walters strove to ensure the alliance’s collaborative efforts succeeded.

He was far from alone. Numerous military officers, bureaucrats, liaison personnel, translators, trainers, and educators like Walters worked under the umbrella of a joint commission created to coordinate the alliance’s combined wartime efforts. Collectively, this forgotten cohort spent the war shaping the FEB into a functional fighting force. However, despite their pivotal role, the joint commission and its personnel rarely appear in historical retellings of this unique wartime venture, the vast majority of which falls into two categories. The first adopts a top-down approach,

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<sup>1</sup> Hope Ridings Miller, “Party With Purpose Planned by Portuguese Envoy,” *The Washington Post*, April 16, 1943, p. B7; Vernon Walters, *Silent Missions*, New York, Doubleday, 1978, pp. 5–7, 24–61 [italic font in original].

<sup>2</sup> Though the alliance also equipped and trained a Brazilian fighter squadron that saw combat in Italy, this paper focuses solely on the creation of the expeditionary force.

emphasizing the alliance's strategic, political, and economic dimensions, as well as the civil-military maneuvering of leaders negotiating the terms of the alliance.<sup>3</sup> The second utilizes a bottom-up approach, focusing on the social, cultural, and operational experience of Brazil's soldiers.<sup>4</sup> Between these levels exists what Paul Kennedy has labeled "the middle level of war," an interwoven connective tissue occupied by a middle management "who turn the bigger aim into something that those fighting at the front can understand and deploy." It is precisely this mid-level of analysis — the history of this alliance's middle management — that remains, to borrow Kennedy's words, an "intellectual 'black hole'" in the historiography of the FEB.<sup>5</sup>

This paper aims to bridge these existing narratives by presenting a history of alliance-building from within. As we will see, the FEB's success in Italy hinged on the contributions of individuals tasked with overcoming political, military, and cultural challenges exacerbated at every stage by an ever-present language barrier. Whether staging state visits, translating for military and political leaders, organizing training programs, conducting observer missions, or facilitating combined operations, these individuals played a prominent role guiding the Brazilian-American alliance along its unlikely wartime journey culminating in the Italian campaign.

During the war certain Brazilians argued it would be easier for a snake to smoke than for their countrymen to fight in the war. Yet, enter the war they did—wearing unit patches adorned by a

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<sup>3</sup> For several examples, see Frank D. McCann, *The Brazilian-American Alliance, 1937-1945*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1973; Frank D. McCann, *Brazil and the United States During World War II and Its Aftermath: Negotiating Alliance and Balancing Giants*, London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2018; Neill Lochery, *Brazil, The Fortunes of War: World War II and the Making of Modern Brazil*, New York, Basic Books, 2014; Joseph Smith, *Brazil and the United States: Convergence and Divergence*, Atlanta, The University of Georgia Press, 2010.

<sup>4</sup> See Francisco Ferraz, *Os Brasileiros e a Segunda Guerra Mundial*, Rio de Janeiro, Jorge Zahar Editora, 2005; Cesar Campiani Maximiano, *Irmãos de Armas: Um Pelotão Da FEB Na II Guerra Mundial*, São Paulo, Codex, 2005; C. Maximiano, *Onde Estão Nossos Heróis: Uma Breve História Dos Brasileiros Na 2ª Guerra*, São Paulo, Santuário, 1995; C. Maximiano and R. Bonalume, *Brazilian Expeditionary Force in the Second World War*, Oxford, Osprey Publishing, 2011; Frank D. McCann, *Soldiers of the Pátria: A History of the Brazilian Army, 1889–1945*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2004.

<sup>5</sup> Paul Kennedy, "History from the Middle: The Case of the Second World War," *The Journal of Military History* (January 2010), p. 38.

green cobra smoking a pipe, no less.<sup>6</sup> For all their work assisting the Brazilian–American alliance, this group of middle managers was the group that lit the cobra’s pipe.

### **Building the Framework for Cooperation**

The idea of a Brazilian–American wartime alliance gained traction between 1938 and 1941 as the United States edged closer to war. Building on years of warming diplomatic, cultural, and economic ties generated through President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s “Good neighbor” policy toward Latin America, by 1940 American military strategists envisioned Brazil as a strategic bulwark against the threat of Nazi Germany in the Atlantic. In their eyes, improving diplomatic relations with Brazil was the first step toward making the nation the lynchpin of a US-led Pan-American hemispheric defense network.<sup>7</sup>

The tenor of Brazilian diplomatic relations at the time, however, hinted at the difficulty of achieving this strategic ideal. Eager to achieve Brazil’s technical, military, and economic independence, president Getúlio Vargas oriented his quasi-fascist *Estado novo* (New state) on a program of modernizing reform throughout the 1930s. Aware of tightening economic relations between Brazil and Germany and currents of pro-Axis sympathy in Brazil, American leaders feared that without intervention Vargas’ regime might fall further into Germany’s strategic orbit. France’s abrupt collapse in 1940 led American military planners to envision a worst-case

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<sup>6</sup> The meaning of the original phrase roughly correlated to the English phrase “when pigs fly.” For more on the creation of the Brazilian unit patch, see McCann, *Brazil and the United States During World War II*, pp. 206–208. See also, T.R. Ybarra, *The Cobra Puffed a Pipe*, “The Atlanta Constitution”, September 5, 1945, p. 7.

<sup>7</sup> Stetson Conn and Byron Fairchild, *The Framework of Hemisphere Defense*, Washington, DC, United States Army Center of Military History, 1958, pp. 279, 292–295, 314–316; Andrew Buchanan, *World War II in Global Perspective, 1931–1953: A Short History*, New Jersey, Wiley-Blackwell, 2019, p. 156; Virginia Prewett, *Brazil’s War Role*, “The Washington Post”, August 29, 1942, p. 9.

scenario: a German seizure of the defenseless northeastern Brazilian bulge — a mere eight hour flight from Dakar — might sever the United States from raw South American resources, bring the Panama Canal under threat, and ignite an Axis-backed coup in Brazil analogous to the Spanish Civil War. US Army chief of staff General George C. Marshall's May 1939 visit to Brazil signaled America's desire to forge a closer military relationship and, above all, persuade Vargas to sever all ties with the Axis.<sup>8</sup>

Early military collaboration was ad hoc and impersonal. American military planners hoped to utilize airbases carved out of the Brazilian jungle near Natal to support anti-submarine operations in the South Atlantic, facilitate trade, and springboard manpower and materiel to distant combat theaters around the globe. Wary of American long-term intentions, Brazil teetered on the brink of full partnership for months, unwilling to declare war on the Axis nor authorize unconditional American access to its national interior unless its vital interests were at risk.<sup>9</sup>

However, by 1941 Vargas had signed a Lend-lease agreement with Roosevelt to equip Brazil with the arms, supplies, and equipment it needed for hemispheric defense.<sup>10</sup> In exchange, Roosevelt agreed to use American capital to subsidize the construction of a steel mill in Rio de Janeiro's Paraíba valley — the first of its kind in Latin America — and establish economic and military advisory missions in the country to oversee Brazil's continued industrial development. Local Brazilian commanders, American state department officials, and embassy personnel oversaw initial collaborative efforts as American advisors slowly arrived in Brazil to build airbases, overhaul the Brazilian military, and coordinate intelligence activities.<sup>11</sup> In May 1942,

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<sup>8</sup> A. Buchanan, *World War II in Global Perspective*, 156; F. McCann, *Brazil and the United States During World War II*, 20–34; Conn and Fairchild, *Framework for Hemispheric Defense*, p. 120.

<sup>9</sup> F. McCann, *Brazil and the United States During World War II*, p. 38.

<sup>10</sup> For specifics on the Lend-lease agreement, see National archives and records administration [hereafter Nara], College Park, Maryland, RG 218, UD-96, b. 5, ff. BDC 22.

<sup>11</sup> *Brazilians, Here, Give Assurance of War Aid*, "The New York Times", October 1, 1942, p. 7.

the United States and Brazil signed a bilateral political-military agreement to help “regulate their cooperation in military and economic matters for common defense.”<sup>12</sup> However, Brazil still had not declared war against the Axis; certain American officials stationed in Brazil increasingly felt that while Brazil remained neutral, cooperative defense measures would yield “no worthwhile results.”<sup>13</sup>

Throughout early 1942, attacks on Brazil’s merchant fleet bred fears of Axis hegemony in the Atlantic. In August, a series of deadly U-Boat attacks off the coast of Bahia and Sergipe sent hundreds of Brazilian sailors to their deaths. The event galvanized anti-German sentiment across the country. On August 22, 1942, Vargas and his cabinet responded by declaring war on Germany.<sup>14</sup> With Brazil committed to the fight against the Axis, the declaration of war resolved much of the confusion regarding the Brazilian–American wartime relationship and its stance towards the Axis, their new common enemy.<sup>15</sup>

### **The Joint Military Commissions and the Genesis of the Brazilian Expeditionary Force**

The May 1942 joint political-military accord laid the foundation for an alliance that, for better or worse, endured until 1977. To ensure the alliance’s policies were efficiently translated into

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<sup>12</sup> “Political military agreement between the United States of Brazil and the United States of America,” Nara, RG 218, UD–96, b. 4, ff. BDC 9010; McCann, *Brazil and the United States During World War II*, pp. 127–28.

<sup>13</sup> Lucius D. Clay, “Report and Recommendations of American Section of Joint Board for Northeast Brazil,” February 24, 1942, Nara, RG 218, UD–96, b. 4, ff. BDC 5440; McCann, *Brazil and the United States During World War II*, pp. 63–126.

<sup>14</sup> F. McCann, *Brazil and the United States During World War II*, pp. 119–123; Joel Silveira and Thassilo Mitke, *A Luta dos Pracinhas: A Força Expedicionária Brasileira—FEB na II Guerra Mundial*, Rio de Janeiro, Editora Record, 1993, p. 15; Democrito Cavalcanti de Anuda, et al., *Depoimento de Oficiais da Reserva Sobre a F.E.B.*, Rio de Janeiro, Rua Araujo Porto, 1949, p. 53; K. Bartlett, *What Brazil’s Entrance Into the War Means to Us*, “Daily Boston Globe”, August 30, 1942, pp. D3.

<sup>15</sup> Cited in F. McCann, *Brazil and the United States During World War II*, p. 128; S. Conn and B. Fairchild, *Framework for Hemispheric Defense*, pp. 318–19; Gerson Moura, *Brazilian Foreign Relations, 1939–1950*, Brasília, Fundação Alexandre Gusmão, 2013, pp. 130–31.

actionable outcomes, each side agreed to form binational military commissions in their respective countries. Tasked with encouraging joint planning, standardizing training, equipment, and administration protocols, and creating liaison channels for exchanging intelligence and other information, the commissions functioned as the alliance's core administrative infrastructure. Together, they played a crucial role defining, synchronizing, and streamlining the alliance's military efforts through the end of the war.

The alliance's earliest policy recommendations originated in the commission's Washington, DC office. Officially known as the Joint US–Brazil Defense Commission, the Washington commission was composed of a body of American officers drawn from across the War department, the Operations division, and Navy and Army Air Force headquarters who worked closely with a group of English-speaking Brazilian military attachés. Drafting the alliance's initial recommendations throughout the summer and fall of 1942, this binational commission debated the issues of economic aid, materiel disbursement, and defense planning at the heart of the inchoate alliance.<sup>16</sup>

On October 28, 1942, the War department authorized the creation of a sister commission in Rio de Janeiro to implement policies developed in DC.<sup>17</sup> Instructed to oversee the development, training, and equipping of the armed forces in Brazil and the joint project of hemispheric defense, throughout the war the Rio Commission would channel its official reports through the Washington commission, which relayed them in turn to the War department in DC.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> “Estrategia coordenada dos Estados Unidos e do Brasil,” *Jornal do Brasil*, September 11, 1943. For more on these recommendations, see Nara, RG 218, UD–96, b. 3, ff. BDC 5410 (1–4).

<sup>17</sup> The Rio commission was officially called the Joint Brazil–US Military Commission (JBUSMC), not to be confused with the Joint Brazil–US Defense Commission (JBUSDC) in Washington, DC.

<sup>18</sup> S. Conn and B. Fairchild, *Framework of Hemisphere Defense*, pp. 318–319.

In February 1943, Major General James Garesché Ord, a bespectacled World War I veteran and graduate of the US military academy, was appointed chairman of the Washington commission. Denied combat leadership for physical reasons, Ord spent the rest of the war in his commission leadership role. Largely absent from most histories of the FEB, Ord was remembered by his peers as the man “largely responsible for the initial plans and coordination of effort with Brazilian military authorities which resulted in the creation of the Brazilian Expeditionary Force.”<sup>19</sup> Granted the final say in the majority of the alliance’s economic, military, and technical matters, the Washington commission’s archival material bears Ord’s omnipresent imprint as a crucial figure in the alliance’s organic development.

The commission’s task was vast and complex. Operating along similar lines as other contemporary Allied commands — an American chairman leading alongside a foreigner of equal rank — Ord worked with his counterpart, Major General Estevão Leitão de Carvalho, to ensure both nations developed the institutional, interpersonal, and organizational capabilities required to function as military partners. Under their leadership, commission personnel managed a dizzying array of correspondence, generated complicated travel itineraries, managed the alliance’s financial resources and transportation between both countries, and accounted for thousands of Lend-lease items earmarked for Brazilian use — everything from trucks to Portuguese language typewriters. Nearly all the commission’s official documentation needed translation and duplication. Finalizing any alliance plans required a deluge of conferences and the accompanying correspondence between members of Brazil’s Ministry of war, their American military attachés, and members of the Rio commission. They, in turn, maintained a near-constant dialogue with the

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<sup>19</sup> See “James Garesché Ord,” *Assembly*, vol. 20, no. 1 (Spring 1961), p. 82.



Washington commission and their superiors in Brazil's Foreign ministry at Itamaraty palace and on Capitol hill.

Amidst the ongoing effort to reinforce Brazil's northeastern defenses and modernize its military, both sides approved a plan to create a Brazilian expeditionary force. Several factors motivated the idea to send Brazilian soldiers overseas. For one, by late 1942 outrage over the recent German U-boat attacks had fused with a growing political desire within Vargas' cabinet to see Brazil take its place among the allied nations at the postwar peace table. To merit such a place, Brazil needed a material contribution in the fight against the Axis. In private, Vargas' cabinet reasoned that such a contribution would not only signal Brazil's commitment to their alliance with the US, but that fighting overseas might also unify Vargas' divided political base. Meeting in secret immediately after the Casablanca conference in January 1943, Roosevelt and Vargas agreed in principle to the possibility of a larger combat role for Brazilian forces abroad. Over the next four months, diplomatic and military personnel hashed out the particulars of equipping, training, and transporting an unproven foreign force overseas. The idea received official approval in May 1943.<sup>20</sup>

Before there could be an expeditionary force, larger tasks awaited. Many of the alliance's leaders were yet unfamiliar with their ally's personalities, military capabilities, customs, and doctrine. Because "coalition warfare is at its base a relationship of personalities and national styles," cultivating trust and friendship early on would improve the likelihood of allied success on the battlefield.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> F. McCann, *Brazil and the United States During World War II*, pp. 148–172.

<sup>21</sup> Frank McCann, "The Força Expedicionária Brasileira in the Italian Campaign, 1944–45," *Army History* vol. 26 (Spring 1993), p. 8.

## "Wooring" Each Other

In September 1942, General Ord hosted a welcome event for his Brazilian commission colleagues in Washington. Eager to impress General Carvalho and his attachés, Ord and his staff planned an extravagant reception followed by a weeks-long tour of the nation's vital military installations. Making arrangements for a guard of honor and a flag ceremony, the appointed host for the Brazilian delegation wondered in a note to Ord whether they would "be able to get the music for the Brazilian national anthem," adding "and that playing it would be appropriate."<sup>22</sup> His question underpinned the general sense of confusion present in the alliance's earliest interactions — feelings exacerbated by the language barrier and lack of established working relations. Designed to bridge the evident cultural divide, the commission's reciprocal visits built goodwill while establishing and reinforcing a productive collaborative dynamic that served the alliance well throughout the war.

The difficulty of building friendships without prior collaboration became clear over the coming months. Still uncomfortable in each other's language, at Carvalho's welcome reception commission members and other military guests struggled through discussions of Pan-American strategy and Brazilian military affairs using hand gestures and broken French. Even if they were "learning fast," overcoming the language barrier was a prerequisite for efficient collaboration.<sup>23</sup>

With its personnel handling the logistical nightmare of tracking expenses, scheduling flights, organizing visits, finding accommodation, and identifying Portuguese-speaking liaison officers to escort the Brazilian visitors thousands of miles across the country on the ensuing nationwide tour,

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<sup>22</sup> Letter, Major General J.G. Ord to Brigadier General E.H. Marks, September 12, 1942, Nara, RG 218, UD-96, b. 1, ff. BDC 1350.

<sup>23</sup> *Gold Epauettes — Brazil's New Draft Law, Other Military Subjects Discussed by Be-Medeled Officers at Fete*, "The Washington Post", September 18, 1942, p. B6.

Carvalho's visit was the Washington commission's baptism by fire in large-scale, long-term event planning. However, commission personnel soon learned the value of building interpersonal chemistry by encouraging and overseeing frequent interaction between the unfamiliar allies. After Brazil formally entered the war, such events became the typical means of exposing the alliance's members to each other's war capabilities, doctrine, culture—and arguably most importantly—to their language. Vernon Walters, who himself served as a translator on several tours through Brazil and the United States, framed these early visits as efforts to “[woo] the Brazilians in an attempt to get them to increase their assistance beyond the already valuable bases” in northeastern Brazil.<sup>24</sup> Building friendship and goodwill certainly motivated Ord and Carvalho to spare no expense hosting their esteemed visitors. On a more practical level, however, staging visits to each other's countries enabled commission members to gauge the progress of the alliance's affairs in real time, familiarize themselves with each other's idiosyncrasies, and identify broader challenges requiring attention.

Between May and June 1943, General Ord embarked on a similar tour of Brazil, a visit which provided him and his American colleagues insight into the state of combat readiness among their Brazilian counterparts. In a detailed ten-page report to his superiors, Ord recounted a series of observations from his inspection of Brazilian coastal defenses, tactical problems, and field exercises. According to Ord, Brazilian officers had inherited an outmoded defensive military doctrine from a French military mission operating in the country since 1919.<sup>25</sup> Brazilian artillerymen practiced on a strange admixture of French, British, German, and American artillery

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<sup>24</sup> V. Walters, *Silent Missions*, 71.

<sup>25</sup> For more on the influence of the French Military Mission, see Anuda, et. al., *Depoimento de Oficiais da Reserva Sobre a F.E.B.*, pp. 55–56; Cesar Maximiano, “Learning on the Job: Training the Brazilians for Combat in the Gothic Line,” in Hargreaves, Rose, Ford (eds.), *Allied Fighting Effectiveness in North Africa and Italy, 1942–1945*, London, Brill, 2014, pp. 121–122.

pieces in dire need of standardization. They, along with the infantry, still lacked the technical expertise taught in a realistic, comprehensive training program. Performing exercises in the jungles and deserts of northeastern Brazil wearing threadbare uniforms, the Brazilian soldiers' physical conditioning, however, impressed Ord, who reiterated the importance of equipping them with modern implements. Assuming the expeditionary force's principal officers improved in their management of combined operations, Ord expressed optimism that a force could indeed be raised given four to eight months of rigorous battle training.<sup>26</sup> Not coincidentally, Ord's report preceded a decision three days later to send the first cohort of Brazilian officers to train at US army schools.<sup>27</sup>

Challenges aside, Ord departed Brazil feeling more confident in their joint enterprise. In all his interpersonal interactions, he recorded his peers' "kindly, considerate, extremely hospitable, and courteous" behavior toward his group.<sup>28</sup> That these feelings were reciprocated has been demonstrated by historian Frank McCann, who argued such visits fostered a "sea change in the opinions of key Brazilian generals."<sup>29</sup> In a June 7, 1943 memorandum, Ord conveyed Vargas' stated desire to "accept and follow the United States' strategic direction in the war" and rely on the commission to settle military questions that arose.<sup>30</sup> General Gustavo Cordeiro de Farias, a garrison commander in Natal often caricatured for his admiration of Nazi Germany, increasingly expressed his enthusiasm for the Brazilian–American project after Ord's visit. General Eurico Gaspar Dutra, Brazil's minister of war, was another vital figure in the alliance who, prior to his

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<sup>26</sup> General J.G. Ord, "Observations of Certain Brazilian Forces," June 16, 1943, Nara, RG 218, UD-96, b. 1, ff. BDC 1350, pp. 1-10.

<sup>27</sup> F. McCann, *Brazil and the United States During World War II*, p. 187.

<sup>28</sup> J. G. Ord, "Observations of Certain Brazilian Forces," 10.

<sup>29</sup> F. McCann, *Brazil and the United States During World War II*, p. 187.

<sup>30</sup> General J.G. Ord, "Report of Recent Visit to Brazil," Nara, RG 218, UD-96, b. 1, ff. BDC 1350, p. 1.

own journey to the United States in the autumn of 1943, was “not very friendly” toward his American allies.<sup>31</sup> Ord hoped to change his attitude by staging the most elaborate visit yet. Dutra’s weeks-long visit illustrated the lengths Ord and Carvalho were willing to go to win his abiding support. Handpicking American officers to accompany the Brazilians everywhere they went, the commission organized meetings with President Roosevelt and his inner circle, embassy members in Washington, members of the Office of the Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs, and civil-military leaders at installations nationwide. Public pageants, luxurious banquets, and a show of force described as the “most ambitious program of its kind ever attempted,” left a marked impression on Dutra.<sup>32</sup> Decorating his American escort, including his translator Vernon Walters, at the conclusion of his visit for “bringing two nations...closer together,” Dutra waxed effusive in his praise of Ord, the commission, and the American people to the Brazilian press.<sup>33</sup> Crucially, Ord later recorded that as a result of his visit, for the first time Dutra “began to accept advice.”<sup>34</sup>

Dutra’s position in Vargas’ inner circle and role as minister of war left no doubt as to the value of securing his support early on in the FEB’s formation. General Mascarenhas de Moraes, the FEB’s eventual commander, later acknowledged the advantageous nature of “establishing profitable personal command relations” prior to the Brazilians’ arrival in Italy.<sup>35</sup> Dutra’s, and other visits staged by the commission, demonstrated the significance of strengthening the alliance’s military, political, and cultural ties, as well as the personal bonds between its leaders. They also embodied

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<sup>31</sup> V. Walters, *Silent Missions*, 73.

<sup>32</sup> *Brazil’s War Minister Given Preview of Exhibition by Army*, “The Washington Post”, September 3, 1943, p. 1; “Maj. Gen. Dutra, Brazil’s Minister of War, Arrives Here Tomorrow on Official Visit,” *The Washington Post*, August 16, 1943, p. 6.

<sup>33</sup> “Extract from Air Bulletin [sic] No. 265,” Nara, RG 218, UD-96, b. 1, ff. BDC 1350, pp. 1-3.

<sup>34</sup> General J.G. Ord, “Brazilian Army and Air Force,” Nara, RG 218, UD-96, b. 5, ff. BDC 5440.

<sup>35</sup> Marshal J.B. Mascarenhas de Moraes, *The Brazilian Expeditionary Force by Its Commander*, Washington, DC, U.S. Government Printing Office, 1966, p. 9.

a more practical utility: Frequent interaction forced commission personnel to reckon with logistical issues involved in planning Pan-American collaborative efforts; it reinforced the overriding necessity of building a pool of capable translators and liaison escorts to facilitate open dialogue; it enabled commission leaders to gauge the ideological leanings, preferences, and linguistic capabilities of their counterparts; and it provided opportunities to develop friendships upon which future efforts would hinge.

Inter-American visits continued for the duration of the war. The friendships they built compensated for much of the alliance's early cultural and linguistic friction. As the mid-level managers guiding these efforts, commission personnel increasingly served as the War department's eyes on the ground as it made strategic decisions for the alliance, as well as the Brazilian ministry of war's gateway into Washington to acquire greater military legitimacy through bilateral cooperation. Armed with what it had learned along the way, the commission prepared to oversee the training of the FEB's commanders, staff officers, and others in the US.

### **Stateside Training**

By the time the allies announced the creation of a Brazilian expeditionary force in August 1943, the first contingent of Brazilian officers were already training at American schools across the United States under the oversight of the Washington commission. Their enrollment, integration, and training suffered at times, unfolding amidst the lingering uncertainty over the FEB's ideal size, structure, and operational role. Over time, however, commission personnel worked with key army administrators to address the language barrier and streamline the Brazilians' training process by implementing pedagogical and organizational changes catered to their specific needs.

The lion's share of FEB officers received training at Fort Leavenworth's Command and general staff school (C&GSS). Under the watchful eye of World War I veteran and school commandant Major General Karl Truesdell, Brazilian officers were but one of many foreign contingents who enrolled there to learn the intricacies of command, staff duties, and tactical problems encountered on the battlefield. An estimated 259 Brazilian officers — a fourth of the estimated total cycling through American institutions during the war — enrolled at a special training course at the C&GSS, the most of any "foreign nation to pass through its classrooms."<sup>36</sup>

Organizing the Brazilians' training in the US could be a long, convoluted process. The Washington commission processed all training requests from Itamaraty and the Rio commission in correspondence with the Foreign liaison section of the American Military intelligence division, G-2. Forwarding letters to an array of prospective civilian and military training institutions, the struggle to keep abreast of itinerary changes, flight plans, and accommodations amidst a lack of daily communication with Rio kept Washington commission officials busy.

The Brazilians' first encounter with American culture was a jarring experience. In the bustle, some officers were lost in airports; others were not greeted at all. One American attaché noted how "Brazilians in the United States [were] at a loss at becoming oriented when they first arrive."<sup>37</sup> As one proposed solution, Brazilian officers were often encouraged to come two weeks early to be immersed in American culture and "polish their English to the greatest extent possible."<sup>38</sup> With each successive class, the Washington commission arranged for American personnel to receive incoming students, usher them through customs, transport them to their

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<sup>36</sup> F. McCann, *Brazil and the United States During World War II*, p. 198, 218fn48.

<sup>37</sup> Letter, Brigadier General C.M. Adams to Col. Kenner Hertford, July 23, 1943, Nara, RG 218, UD-96, b. 1, ff. BDC 1350.

<sup>38</sup> "Brazilian Students for Basic Flying Training in the United States," March 1, 1943, Nara, RG 218, UD-96, b. 1, ff. BDC 3520; "Note for Record," February 27, 1943, Nara, RG 218, UD-96, b. 1, ff. BDC 3520.

accommodation, and prepare for their transfer to schools all over the country. It also continued its practice of providing administrators extensive background reports of their prospective enrollees. Equipped with a thorough understanding of their students' linguistic, ideological, and technical backgrounds, the practice helped administrators identify areas of common ground and build courses around their respective needs.

Leavenworth's C&GSS course immersed Brazilian officers in the art of leading corps and division-sized forces. Using a mixture of classroom instruction and practical exercises, the Brazilians spent hundreds of hours learning the basics of American tactics and technologies while planning and executing modern military operations. Brazilian student engagement varied; according to commission reports, while some were considered lazy and inattentive, others studied "conscientiously in the evenings" and even asked "for extra hours of instruction on material" they failed to grasp.<sup>39</sup>

Linguistic difficulties evident at orientation became most acute in the classroom. Almost every report to the Washington commission made some passing reference to the students' proficiency in English or the difficulties arising therefrom. Brazilian men enrolled in an Oklahoma artillery course remembered American instructors translating English to a "terrible Spanish" they assumed the Brazilians could understand, or to a "horrible Portugal Portuguese" during critical training sessions. Rather than clarity, one Brazilian remembered, "confusion reigned."<sup>40</sup> Another class shifted the focus from classroom lectures to hands-on technical work due to language difficulties. In this situation, English-speaking Brazilians helped ensure their colleagues understood the materials. One Lieutenant Vidal proved to be "of inestimable assistance in interpreting and

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<sup>39</sup> Colonel Adrian St. John, "Brazilian Officers Under Brazilian Divisional Tng. Program," January 4, 1944, Nara, RG 218, UD-96, b. 5, ff. BDC 9930, pp. 1-2.

<sup>40</sup> Elber de Mello Henriques, *A FEB Doze Anos Depois*, Rio de Janeiro, Biblioteca do Exército, 1959, pp. 68-69.



insuring [sic] a correct understanding of the work by the Brazilian officers,” even giving up his own leave to serve as an assistant instructor, fix incorrect manual translations, orient incoming Brazilian classes, and compile a list of technical terms.

One of the more important steps in building cohesion came through the commission’s concerted efforts to ameliorate routine communication difficulties. As the pace of enrollment accelerated into 1944, Ord identified Portuguese-speaking enlisted men from the American armed services and assigned them to teach and interpret lessons in the classroom. These men were required to be “socially acceptable” Portuguese (or Spanish or French) speaking combat veterans.<sup>41</sup> Vernon Walters was among the first group to be called to Fort Leavenworth to help organize a “special English course” to precede the Brazilians’ course at the C&GSS.<sup>42</sup> As part of it, these instructors translated map exercises, instruction memoranda, examinations, and field manuals into Portuguese before the Brazilians’ arrival. By November 1944, the commission’s Portuguese-speaking pool of interpreters became so adept in translation one Brazilian observed, “Brazilian officers were almost unconscious of the language barrier.”<sup>43</sup>

The commission’s frequent adjustment and oversight of the training process was visible in the incremental modification of the Brazilians’ learning environment. Administrators and instructors frequently transmitted recommendations for improvement to commission leaders, who approved policy changes. Whether dropping nonessential learning components, keeping classes small to maintain closer contact between Brazilian learners and their American instructors, giving translators additional time to prepare learning modules, or quartering commission personnel with

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<sup>41</sup> Colonel Milton A. Hill, “U.S. officers to attend the Command and General Staff School special course for Brazilian officer students,” January 20, 1944, Nara, RG 218, UD-96, b. 5, ff. BDC 9930.

<sup>42</sup> V. Walters, *Silent Missions*, pp. 77–78.

<sup>43</sup> “Informal notes re Brazilian General staff group 18 Oct–13 Nov. 1943,” Nara, RG 218, UD-96, b. 5, ff. BDC 9930.

the Brazilians to bolster language learning, Ord saw the benefits of this iterative learning process. By November 1944, the commission considered the training of FEB officers in the US complete. By then, most of the force was already fighting in Italy. Among the Brazilian officers who had returned to Brazil to train the unit's lower echelons prior to their departure, Ord noticed an increase in "active cooperation" and goodwill after their stint in the US.<sup>44</sup> His observation hinted at the social, linguistic, and technical achievements of the commission's work overseeing the stateside training of the FEB's cadre of officers.

### **Setting the Stage**

Finalizing the creation of the FEB proved a monumental task. Forecasting the force's arrival in the Mediterranean for the spring or summer of 1944, by late 1943 commission personnel worried the alliance lacked sufficient time to recruit and train the requisite-sized force. Under pressure by Brazilian leaders to deliver their nation's soldiers to combat before the war's end and motivated by Allied logistical and temporal constraints, alliance leaders reduced the projected corps-sized force to a single 25,000-man division. By mid-1944, the FEB's imminent deployment forced commission officials to overlook deficiencies in the number and aptitude of its junior officers, the unit's health and hygiene standards, and its capacity to raise replacements and assimilate within the American command hierarchy.<sup>45</sup> Although these issues would haunt the FEB throughout its combat tour, the alliance's relative success and the organizational work making it possible cannot be ignored. Having already built the alliance's administrative infrastructure, organized state

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<sup>44</sup> General J.G. Ord, "Brazilian Army and Air Force," Nara, RG 218, UD-96, b. 5, ff. BDC 5440.

<sup>45</sup> F. McCann, *Brazil and the United States During World War II*, pp. 185-198.

visits, and handled the supply and training of its principal officers, the alliance's mid-level managers now played an instrumental role ushering the FEB into combat in Italy.

From the outset, commission personnel set their sights on fostering closer command relationships among FEB leaders and reducing friction from the force's arrival. In December 1943, the commission organized an extensive tour of the North African and Italian battlefields for the force's newly appointed commander, sixty-year-old General Mascarenhas de Moraes, and his staff. In order to "continue their familiarization" of the Allied fighting effort in the Mediterranean, the visiting party spent over a week witnessing large-scale tactical demonstrations and visiting Allied leaders to resolve points of concern, including possible points of disembarkation, how to establish procedures for receiving, warehousing, and distributing supplies, and the FEB's in-theater training.<sup>46</sup> Accompanied at all times by Ord, two additional commission members, and Vernon Walters acting as translator, the advanced tour supplanted the alliance's theoretical knowledge about the war overseas with empirical evidence, alerting the FEB's leaders to the challenges awaiting them in Italy.

The tour dovetailed with the commission's broader plans to anticipate additional challenges. Between December 1943 and March 1944, a liaison team composed of four Brazilian officers worked under commission auspices at US Fifth Army headquarters to prepare the FEB's arrival. With each observing a different component of warfare in the Mediterranean, commission personnel routed dozens of detailed reports to their superiors in Rio. The reports reinforced the critical need for English-speaking liaison officers, the translation of American operating procedures, and the importance of competent staff officers.<sup>47</sup> To General Ord, Allied staff

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<sup>46</sup> Letter, Eurico Gaspar Dutra to João Batista Mascarenhas de Moraes, December 4, 1943, Nara, RG 218, UD-96, b. 1, ff. BDC 1350; "List of Matters to be Discussed," Nara, RG 218, UD-96, b. 1, ff. BDC 1350.

<sup>47</sup> Memorandum, "Visit to Headquarters, Fifth Army, for Liaison with Brazilian Officers," March 29, 1944, Nara, RG 218, UD-96, b. 6, ff. BDC 9930, pp. 1-3.

officers confided their private worries that the communications barrier, supply shortages, sanitation, and security might complicate the Brazilians' integration. Unfortunately, the bulk of the liaison team returned to Brazil a mere month before the FEB's embarkation; with so little time to implement their recommendations, their reports fell on deaf ears.<sup>48</sup>

In early July 1944, the first group of Brazilians set sail in an American-operated troopship for Italy. Commission personnel supervised every stage of the FEB's journey across the Atlantic. In Rio, a group of US Army technicians working under the Rio commission oversaw the complex loading procedures of the Brazilians' supplies and equipment; a team of four Portuguese-speaking liaison officers accompanied the FEB across the ocean, ensuring smooth interactions between the two nationalities on board. Another team proceeded to Italy in advance to liaise between the Rio commission and the US Army commanders responsible for the FEB. This collective group served as the commission's eyes on the ground, conveying vital information as to how the FEB was getting along in real time.<sup>49</sup> Eventually, they formed the core of the Brazilian liaison detachment, a unit "responsible for verifying the effectiveness of Brazilian assimilation" in Italy.<sup>50</sup>

The war-torn quay of Naples came into view on July 16, 1944 after two hot weeks at sea. The dock teemed with life. American liaison officers restrained Brazilian soldiers from rushing the gangplanks, preserving order until the FEB's commander could meet the American theater commander. Through the efforts of one American liaison officer, an "enthusiastic reception" awaited the first group of Brazilians; jubilant crowds of spectators waved as a band played

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<sup>48</sup> J. B. Mascarenhas, *The Brazilian Expeditionary Force by Its Commander*, p. 22.

<sup>49</sup> Major Dean B. McNealy, "Historical Report of the Brazilian Liaison Detachment," Nara, RG 407, E427, b. 5284, ff. 301-(BEF)-0.3, pp. 1-29; "Army Contingent Parades in Brazil," *The New York Times*, April 1, 1944, p. 4.

<sup>50</sup> C. Maximiano, "Learning on the Job," p. 129; Mariano Gabriele, "La forza di spedizione brasiliana (FEB) nella Campagna d'Italia (Settembre 1944 - Aprile 1945) in *Studi Storico-militari*, Roma, USMME, 1985, pp. 415-422.

“Onward, Christian Soldiers” and “Roll Out the Barrel.” The scene would be repeated several times as the rest of the FEB arrived in Italy. “Crowds of newspaper men, photographers, military police, the band, and dockworkers made” the arrival of the second group in October, one newsman reported, “probably the greatest landing since the first doughboys arrived in Ireland more than two years ago.” Another described the pandemonium as a “spectacle which seemed to have been lifted intact from a Gilbert and Sullivan operetta.”<sup>51</sup> The safe delivery of the Brazilians to a combat zone and their friendly reception in Naples seemed to justify all the commission’s hard work and planning that made it possible. The real work, however, was just beginning.

### **Assisting the FEB in Italy**

The Brazilians entered the line at a critical time for the allied armies in Italy. Dogged by diminished morale and severe manpower shortages, by late 1944 the British Eighth and American Fifth armies had woven together a polyglot coalition they hoped could drive German forces from the Gothic line — a defensive matrix stretching from the foothills of the coastal Apennines to the Adriatic. Rather than rehash the FEB’s operational history, this section traces the “untiring efforts and intelligent cooperation” one Brazilian general attributed to the liaison officers, translators, advisors, and attachés behind the scenes who helped integrate Brazilian soldiers into combat in northern Italy.<sup>52</sup> For nine months, commission personnel, members of Allied force headquarters’ Brazilian liaison detachment, US Fifth army and IV corps officials labored to orient each successive FEB echelon on the battlefield more efficiently than the last.

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<sup>51</sup> D. B. McNealy, “Historical Report of the Brazilian Liaison Detachment,” pp. 2–3; “Brazil Lands More Troops for Italy War,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, October 15, 1944, p. 1; “Brazilian Force Arrives in Italy to Help Allies,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, July 19, 1944, p. 7.

<sup>52</sup> D. B. McNealy, “Historical Report of the Brazilian Liaison Detachment,” p. 13.

The first FEB contingent — the 6th Regimental combat team — arrived woefully under-equipped for the coming winter. As more experienced Allied divisions departed from Italy to bolster the ongoing invasion of France, Allied leaders committed the FEB piecemeal to the fight, equipping them with surplus materiel painstakingly sourced from depleted theater stocks. In their reports, American liaison officers cited a recurring series of vague “misunderstandings” that foiled the Brazilians’ introduction to combat. Most Allied units were given months — if not years — of tactical training behind the frontlines prior to entering battle; the Brazilians’ training was condensed into several weeks. The 150 American officers and enlisted men tasked with overseeing their tactical training arrived late. In the meantime, liaison officers conducted haphazard English, physical conditioning, and rifle familiarization courses on thousands of outdated Springfield M1903 rifles.<sup>53</sup>

When the American training team did arrive, logistical issues generated confusion and frustration. Brazilians and Americans alike complained of an insufficient number of translators. Faulty communications caused accidents as American advisors implored the Brazilians to observe blackout conditions, drive more carefully, and keep their schedules.<sup>54</sup> The liaison officers attached to the 6th Regimental combat team unanimously felt more equipment was needed to properly train their counterparts. In fact, the unit was not properly equipped until the last of its three-week training at Vada, Italy, likely because, as the commission later discovered, much of its force-marked equipment had been erroneously earmarked for the invasion of Southern France and consequently, sat languishing in supply depots hundreds of miles away. Unable to practice large-scale combined infantry operations without live ammunition, adequate weapons, and

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<sup>53</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 4–7.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 7–8.

simpler necessities like boots, tents, and stoves, both sides learned the hard way that issues in supply and training were intricately bound.<sup>55</sup>

The joint commission hoped to learn from these mistakes to improve the orientation process for the FEB's second and third echelons arriving that autumn. It dispatched a two-man team on a four continent, fifty-two-day odyssey to account for missing Lend-lease materiel and sort out logistical mix-ups. Their report led to the assignment of a permanent commission liaison to bridge the language barrier between Brazilian and American theater supply officers. In addition, when the FEB arrived on the frontlines under the command of General Willis D. Crittenger's IV corps, the commission assigned a permanent seven-man Supervisory Training Group to help IV corps personnel manage the remaining training of Brazilian forces on Italian soil. Despite their recommendations, the 1st and 11th Brazilian regiments received only two weeks of real training, hampered by "linguistic difficulties" that American observers deemed "practically unsurmountable."<sup>56</sup>

To address these issues and create an efficient operational dynamic, the alliance needed time it simply did not have. Linguistic and logistical issues combined with the lack of an adequate replacement depot, training facilities, and the materiel to sustain them to create a minefield of operational challenges. American observers later wrote that it was not until April 28, 1945 that a group of Brazilians received more than six weeks' training. The war in Italy would end five days

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<sup>55</sup> Lt. Colonel Nathan S. Mathewson, "History and Training of the 6th Combat Team until its Entrance into Combat," Nara, RG 407, E427, b. 5284, ff. 301-(BEF)-0.3, pp. 1-2.

<sup>56</sup> "Coordination with BEF," December 14, 1944, US Army Heritage and Education Center [Hereafter Usahec], Carlisle, Pennsylvania, *Willis D. Crittenger Papers*, b. 18, pp. 1-12; "Training of the 2nd Echelon of the 1st Infantry Division B.E.F.," Nara, RG 407, E427, b. 5284, ff. 301-(BEF)-0.3, pp. 1-4.

later, prompting Mascarenhas to remark, “the only trained troops in the Brazilian Expeditionary Force never entered combat.”<sup>57</sup>

Brazilian morale suffered over the winter months, but not indefinitely. Three failed attempts to capture strategic mountain heights from the enemy shook the confidence of Brazilian and American leaders alike.<sup>58</sup> Yet, weathering extreme conditions General Clark later deemed “more rugged than anywhere else on the Fifth Army front,” the FEB, its advisors, and leaders learned from failure, implementing new measures to improve its combat effectiveness over its tour in Italy.<sup>59</sup>

To address the language barrier, Mascarenhas appealed to General Mark Clark to transfer his chief aide-de-camp, Vernon Walters, to the FEB as their head combat liaison officer. Walters’ extensive background working under the commission made him a useful divisional asset.<sup>60</sup> The US Fifth army assigned twelve additional staff officers to liaise at FEB headquarters. They were ordered to “reduce to a minimum the natural” linguistic difficulties and “differences in previous training and practices.” Subject to sleep deprivation, artillery barrages, and torrential weather, these men proved their worth almost immediately, bypassing shortage issues, translating time-sensitive information, and acting as vital intermediaries. Their insights helped Crittenberger maintain close command relations with Mascarenhas.<sup>61</sup>

Crittenberger hoped that despite their initial difficulties, the FEB could develop its latent capabilities to become both competent defenders and promising fighters. By mid-winter, the

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<sup>57</sup> Captain Frank T. Cameron, “Historical Report of the Brazilian Replacement Depot,” Nara, RG 407, E427, b. 5284, ff. 301-(BEF)-0.3, pp. 1–10.

<sup>58</sup> *Tres Violentos assaltos da FEB*, “O Jornal” (RJ), January 7, 1945.

<sup>59</sup> Transcripts of the Debriefing of General Mark Clark by Lt. Forest S. Rittgers, Jr., October 1972, Usahec, *Mark W. Clark Papers*, b. 1, p. 80.

<sup>60</sup> V. Walters, *Silent Missions*, pp. 115–17.

<sup>61</sup> According to observers, Crittenberger called often, personally visiting the Brazilian sector dozens of times. “History of the IV Corps, 1941–1945,” Usahec, *Willis D. Crittenberger Papers*, b. 10, ff. 1, pp. 343–344.



FEB's liaison officers had used their quartermaster contacts to procure enough US winter underclothing and overcoats to equip Brazilian soldiers fighting in the snow. They organized joint patrols with sister units like the American 10th Mountain division to facilitate the frequent exchange of intelligence and expertise. Walters even conducted an impromptu ski lesson for bewildered Brazilians learning to traverse snow drifts on combat patrols. Though few Brazilians — like any Allied soldier — ever adapted completely to the sapping rhythm of modern warfare, the alliance's mid-level managers helped the FEB become more effective in battle. By the end of the campaign, Crittenberger felt the FEB's liaison detachment's coordination had all but eliminated the misunderstandings stemming from "language and experience differences" altogether — a monumental accomplishment.<sup>62</sup>

## Conclusion

By the end of the war in Italy, the FEB had largely overcome its early operational setbacks. In February 1945, they played an integral role conquering several strategic Apennine heights blocking the Allies' entrance into the Po valley. Both their successes and their sacrifices demonstrated their centrality to the subsequent spring offensive: Amid other tactical victories, after capturing the well-defended town of Montese the FEB received the surrender of two German generals, 800 officers, and 14,700 men a few weeks later – all at the heavy cost of 443 dead, 1,577 wounded, and 9,625 sick and injured soldiers.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Joel Silveira, *A FEB Adaptada às condições da campanha de inverno na Itália*, "O Jornal" (RJ), February 4, 1945; V. Walters, *Silent Missions*, 130–131; McNealy, "Historical Report of the Brazilian Liaison Detachment," p. 19.

<sup>63</sup> F. McCann, *Brazil and the United States during World War II and Its Aftermath*, pp. 198–213; C. Maximiano and R. Bonalume, *Brazilian Expeditionary Force in the Second World War*, pp. 33–34.

While the FEB's wartime achievements are well documented, the sustained efforts of the alliance's unsung mid-level managers who facilitated these successes are not. One liaison officer felt this forgotten team deserved more credit for mediating Brazilian–American wartime affairs: “We consider ourselves responsible for Brazilian successes,” he noted, “militarily and as to long range diplomacy.”<sup>64</sup> In his postwar memoir, General Mascarenhas reciprocated these feelings. Expressing high praise for his Anglo-American superiors, he reserved space to highlight the “outstanding services” of Walters and “an active group of officers of the US Army to whom we are very indebted.”<sup>65</sup>

As this article has shown, many individuals spent the war working behind the scenes to ensure the alliance's wartime success. With the outcome always in doubt, their efforts to settle “constant questions arising” regarding “practical collaboration” between both nations as they built the joint commission, hosted visits, oversaw training, transported the FEB abroad, and integrated them into combat minimized much of the alliance's inevitable collaborative friction, creating the conditions upon which the FEB could excel.<sup>66</sup> Their service not only sparked the match that lit the cobra's pipe in Italy — it established the framework of an alliance that endured in the efforts of the joint commission for decades to come.

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<sup>64</sup> D. B. McNealy, “Historical Report of the Brazilian Liaison Detachment,” p. 30.

<sup>65</sup> J. B. Mascarenhas, *The Brazilian Expeditionary Force by Its Commander*, p. 7.

<sup>66</sup> “Secret,” speech by General J.G. Ord, August 3, 1945, Nara, RG 218, UD–96, b. 1, ff. BDC 1350, pp. 1–3.