

Frank D. McCann
Professor of History Emeritus
University of New Hampshire, Durham, NH, USA

Among Brazil's objectives in becoming an active belligerent in World War II were "an improved position in world politics; consolidation of its preeminence in South America;[and] a more confident and intimate solidarity with the United States."¹ As planning for the United Nations organization went forward, Brazilian leaders desired a permanent seat on the Security Council.² In deciding what position to adopt regarding a Brazilian seat, the State Department gathered information on Brazil's participation in the war.³ Discussions, exchanges and commitments beginning in 1938 had by 1942 given the United States strategic air and naval bases in Brazil and had directed trade in key minerals away from the Axis toward American war production. In 1943 Brazil offered to raise an expeditionary force (FEB) that the United States could employ anywhere it thought useful. One of the objectives of this offer was to insure that Washington fulfilled its promises to provide arms. In August 1944 Brazilian troops disembarked in Italy and fought the Germany army continuously for fourteen months until its surrender in May 1945. At that point the Brazilians had some 15,000 troops in combat and they had another 10,000 who had completed advanced training in Italy but had not engaged the enemy. An unanswered question is why these "replacement" troops had not been used. The Brazilian authorities had decided even before the fighting stopped to return their troops rapidly and to disband the expeditionary force.

This latter decision was contrary to the spirit of the military alliance with the United States, signed in May 1942. Indeed American post-war planning, led by Under Secretary of State Sumner Welles, had "strategically targeted economic assistance to

promote Brazil at the expense of her neighbors so that she would emerge from the war as the dominant power in the Southern Hemisphere, one that would also be amenable to U.S. interests. Unlike Chile or Argentina, Brazil actively cooperated with the United States during the war and sent a 25,000-man expeditionary force to Europe.”⁴

The American officers involved in training the expeditionaries in Brazil and Italy thought that they were preparing the nucleus of an enlarged, modernized post-war army. They were keenly aware that what the FEB troops had learned in combat could not be reduced to a series of principles organized in a training manual. The war experience would have to be incorporated into the thinking, training, planning, and operations of the peace-time army.

Questions that arise from this situation are: **(1) Why was the FEB disbanded so precipitously despite strenuous American objections? (2) Why were the *FEBianos* not used as training cadre upon their return? (3) Given Brazil's war aims, why did the government decline to participate in the allied occupation of Axis territories?**

(1) Why was the FEB disbanded so precipitously despite strenuous American objections?

This question is difficult and likely my answer will not be completely satisfactory. If FEB personnel had been kept on active duty likely Washington could have been pressured to provide even more military aid, possibly a peace-time version of Lend-Lease. And Brazil's military status would have been viewed differently. What is startling is that the decision to demobilize was not taken in the euphoria after the collapse of Germany, but sometime in mid-March, 1945.⁵ General J. Garesche Ord, chairman of

the Joint Brazil-United States Defense Commission in Washington was aghast: “This means the destruction of the one United States trained major unit in the Brazilian Army.” He lamented that Minister of War Eurico Dutra’s decision was “in line” with the minister’s other recent decision “to break up the U.S. Army directed center of instruction in Brazil” and to reduce the number of Brazilian military personnel at American army schools. Because General Ord believed that this action would “seriously reduce the effectiveness of the Brazilian Army every effort should be made to persuade the Brazilian Government to retain this unit....⁶ On April 6, 1945, a directive from the American Army chief of staff declared: “The War Department considers that it would be most unfortunate for the units of the Brazilian Expeditionary Force to be broken up and demobilized immediately upon their return to Brazil. Since this force is the only completely United States trained unit in the Brazilian Army it is considered of great value as a nucleus for the training of other elements of the Brazilian Army and as a potentially valuable contribution by Brazil to hemisphere defense.” [emphasis added]

Because General Dutra had given the somewhat lame excuse that his army lacked suitable housing for an entire division, the Americans suggested that the FEB’s value could be retained “by breaking it down to units no smaller than regimental combat teams for dispersal throughout the various Brazilian military regions.” Such teams could then be the standard for the divisions of which they were apart. “It is, therefore, desired that every opportunity be taken to impress upon the Brazilian Minister of War, the War Department’s feeling that much of the benefit accruing to Brazil and to the hemisphere defense effort would be vitiated if the force is demobilized on its return to Brazil.”⁷

I am puzzled as to the level at which discussions took place relative to what was to happen once the German army was defeated. In mid-April 1945, the Brazilian liaison officer at the American Mediterranean Theater headquarters was in the dark regarding the division's post-war role. He wrote a memorandum to his superiors requesting information and advice. In fact this document was the only one that in a recent search the staff of the *Arquivo Historico do Exército* in Rio de Janeiro could locate that even mentioned possible occupation duty.⁸

American advice could not move Dutra, or presumably President Getúlio Vargas. Officers and troops received demobilization or new assignment orders while still in Italy. Oddly even as the Brazilian general staff was formulating the demobilization, Dutra was pressing the Americans to return the FEB not only fully armed, but with new weapons. He even went so far to say that he would “prefer the FEB to return to Brazil empty handed, unless the personnel could bring with it “new” (and here he repeated “new” several times) arms.” He went further by telling Brigadier General Hayes Kroner, the senior American officer in Brazil, that in considering the final terms of the financial settlement between their countries that “Brazil should have the same consideration as Great Britain.”⁹ Was Dutra serious in equating Brazil's war effort with Great Britain's? Kroner was clearly worried by Dutra's attitude and he must have wondered what the Brazilians were going to do with the weapons when they were demobilizing the only troops they had who knew how to use them. Kroner met with Dutra on April 30 and again on May 11 to discuss the FEB's return.

(2) Why were the FEBianos not used as training cadre upon their return?

This question is very difficult. After all the effort, expense, 465 dead, and 2,722 wounded and injured, the FEB was to be demobilized. But not just demobilized, Dutra's orders set an eight-day limit on the use of the distinctive FEB uniforms as well as the Smoking Cobra and Fifth Army shoulder patches. Moreover, the soldiers were not to form veterans groups, comment on the campaign, or even read publicly poetry the men had written. Veteran officers assigned to the new *Academia Militar das Agulhas Negras* were told not to discuss their experiences. In my 1973 analysis of this matter I said that I thought Dutra was likely the principal force behind these actions because he would benefit most from removing the FEB as a potential political instrument.¹⁰ At the time U.S. Ambassador Adolph Berle reported that FEB officers were 80 to 95 % opposed to the Vargas regime. He said that he had heard that the government was afraid that the first returning contingent would be used by Dutra or Eduardo Gomes (the two candidates to succeed Vargas) to overthrow the government. Dutra was not well liked in the FEB and was rumored to be losing strength generally.¹¹ I have found nothing to make me change my mind. In fact while working in the army archives in February 2008 one of the officers called my attention to something that has raised my curiosity even more. The 1945 and 1946 *Relatórios do Ministro de Guerra* were never turned over to the archive. Presumably they would contain some discussion of the demobilization policy and seemingly someone did not want their contents made public.¹²

In late July 2010, staff officers in the office of the commander of the Brazilian army (which replaced the minister's office) conducted a careful search of books then in

the office's collection. They were unable to find copies of the *Relatórios* for 1945 and 1946. It is possible that copies are in whatever papers are still in the possession of the Dutra family. It is also possible that there may be some clues in the Vargas papers for those years.

I recall a conversation with an officer in the war ministry in 1966 during which he pointed to 5 or 6 green leather bound volumes saying that they contained the plans for post-war incorporation of FEB experience, but he could not let me look at because they were still secret. Since then I have not been able to locate those volumes.

In May 1945, General Dutra, perhaps seeking to reassure General Kroner, promised that "this Ministry is resolved to utilize to the maximum the experience that the FEB units acquired in the war for the reorganization and instruction of the Army."¹³

What Dutra did not know and perhaps Kroner himself was not fully aware that Brazil's military status and relationship with the United States was then under serious debate in Washington. From 1938 onward the War and Navy Departments had gradually eclipsed the State Department in the realm of foreign policy making, particularly in the Americas. Secretary of State Cordell Hull had not favored the idea of a special relationship with Brazil and after President Roosevelt's death on April 12, 1945, Truman's team had little knowledge of Brazilian-American relations and even less sympathy for Brazilian ambitions. And that view eventually spread to the army staff, many of whom were also newcomers. Perhaps because so much of what had happened in Brazil was in the shadows Brazilian contributions were not well known even in the War Department.¹⁴

American officers were divided between those with direct experience with the Brazilians and those who had only theoretical views on how to deal with the American Republics. The two groups of officers saw things very differently. Those in Brazil recommended recognizing Brazil's emergence "as the dominant military power in South America." Referring to "Brazil's contribution, in the present conflict, to Hemispheric Defense," they advised building "Brazil into a power in the South American continent comparable to that of the United States in the North American continent..."¹⁵ The problem was that such a policy collided with the fault line between the Spanish-American republics and Portuguese-speaking Brazil, and the desire of Washington's bureaucracies to craft policies that engaged all of Latin America. The Joint Chiefs of Staff had approved a statement (JSC 629) that provided "for an integration of all Latin American armed forces into a hemisphere defense force equipped with United States material and organized and trained in accordance with United States standards." The War Department's intelligence section candidly admitted that "one of the main purposes of the integration policy was "to prevent European powers from providing arms and military missions to Latin American republics." If Brazil alone were provided with substantial American arms and equipment it would be "inevitable that European powers" would move into the breach with arms and military missions, particularly in Argentina, Chile, and Peru. The G-2 critics asserted that "a reversal of the policy would have a disastrous effect upon United States relations with Latin America ... [and] would lead to a Spanish-speaking bloc which would be hostile to both the United States and Brazil." Pan American unity "would be destroyed and Inter-American military cooperation disrupted." The negative evaluation concluded acidly: "The friendship of Brazil for the United States

... is a recent development and there is no assurance of its permanence.”¹⁶ On June 9, 1945 the Army staff's Operations Division (OPD) agreed with the foregoing assessment and recommendation against a pro-Brazil policy. OPD, showing lamentable ignorance of reality, reduced Brazil's wartime contributions to allowing American personnel in northeast Brazil to construct strategic air bases and to participate in the defense of the region. The author's final line caught the mood in Washington by saying: “Assurance of Brazil's friendship for the United States is no less than that of other Latin American countries.”¹⁷ How different in tone was OPD's assessment from that of officials more aware of the importance of those very same air bases. In an August 1943 report to the Senate investigation of the airfields projects, a special assistant to the Secretary of War, declared that without the Brazilian route to Africa “the entire course of the war might have been changed.” For Brazilian aspirations it was most unfortunate that “the entire project has from the beginning been treated as a secret one.”¹⁸ Obviously, secret projects are not widely known and can be easily forgotten.

(3) Given its war aims why did the Brazilian government decline to participate in the allied occupation of Axis territories?

Brazilian leaders in the second half of 1945 were preoccupied with other things and do not seem to have understood how much their “blood sacrifice” was lost from view in the rivers of blood shed on the world's battlefields. Historians have not been inquisitive as to Brazil's immediate post-war role in world affairs. They have concentrated on the fall of Vargas, the successor Dutra government and Brazilian activity

in the new United Nations. **No one has asked why** Brazil did not participate in the occupation of the defeated Axis countries.

Brazil was asked to contribute troops to the occupation but declined. While the above was going on in Rio de Janeiro and Washington, a different dialogue went on in Italy. General Mark Clark, former U.S. Fifth Army commander, who was about to take command of the occupation forces in Austria, asked General Mascarenhas about transferring the FEB to Austria. The FEB's chief of staff Colonel Floriano de Lima Brayner argued against it. He apparently thought that Brazil was paying the full cost of the FEB, and so "staying in Italy," he observed bitterly, "would cost incalculable and onerous fortunes of our public moneys." "The only thing the Americans did not charge for," he complained, "was the air we breathed because the banks could not measure it."¹⁹ Sadly, he was unaware that in early April 1945 the Lend-Lease agreement between the two governments had been modified to include the FEB. Decades later he still believed that the Americans did not appreciate them.²⁰ General Willis D. Crittenberger, commander of the Fourth Corps of the U.S. Fifth Army, met with FEB staff officer (G-3) Humberto de Castello Branco in Milan on May 10, 1945. He asked Castello why the Brazilians were in such a hurry to go home. He replied that Brazil was not represented on the allied council for governing Italy and so it should not contribute troops. He said that Brazil had no political interest in Europe. Castello and Brayner believed that the FEB had completed its mission and there was no reason for it to be part of the occupation of Italy or anywhere else.²¹ However, these were not decisions for field officers.

It is very possible that the "missing" 1945 and 1946 *Relatórios* of the Minister of War will shed some light on why Brazil did not participate in the occupation. It could be

that there are documents in some archive and I have just missed them.²² But if the Brazilian army had taken part in the occupation it would have given Brazil a much louder voice in post-war diplomacy. Ambassador Vasco Leitão da Cunha in his oral history at CPDOC observed that British General Harold R. L. G. Alexander, commander of the 15th Group of Armies had said: “The Brazilian is a fine soldier. I’m sorry to hear they want to go home and not go to Austria.” Leitão da Cunha was in Rome when he heard this and immediately telegraphed the Brazilian government saying “that the FEB ought to stay.” Apparently in the Itamaraty the diplomats were not looking to expand Brazilian influence and prestige; one of them responded: “Isso é cavação deles para ganhar ouro.” (This is a sneaky way for them to earn gold.) As if the war-weary veterans were thinking only of lining their pockets! The Ambassador summarized his reaction by saying “We give up conquered gains.” (“*Nós abdicamos das vantagens conquistadas.*”) “And we did not know how to take advantage of what we had done, we stay with intrigues, lesser things, when we had a natural ally. We stayed out of step with the United States.” He concluded by saying that the Germanophiles [in the War Ministry] did not lose their Germanophilia. They fought without enthusiasm.” Because of its role in the war “Brazil stopped being an adolescent country and became a serious country.” “We do not know how to take advantage of the things that we do well. We ought to celebrate [them], but Brazilians don’t know what the *pracinhas* did. This is not taught in the *colégio*. It was natural that the Americans, who were fighting in the Pacific ignored the existence of the FEB. But that Brazilians ignored the merits of the FEB, is a thing, unpardonable! Unpardonable! I, when I go to the FEB monument [in Rio de Janeiro], I am depressed.”²³

It is not my intention to engage in an exercise of counterfactual history, but just think what Brazil might have gained with more attention to getting the most out of its war effort.

NOTES

¹ Oswaldo Aranha to Getúlio Vargas, Rio de Janeiro, Jan.25,1943, Aranha archive, CPDOC-Rio.

² Edward Stettinius, Memo of Conversation with Ambassador Carlos Martins (at Nelson Rockefeller's house), Washington, Sept. 27,1944, 832.00/9-2744, National Archives, Washington DC (NA). Dumbarton Oaks conference was Aug.21 to Oct.4, 1944. Secretary of State Cordell Hull and President Roosevelt favored a seat for Brazil and proposed it at the conference, but that "both the British and the Russians emphatically opposed our view." See Hull, *The Memoirs of Cordell Hull* (NY, 1948), II, 1678. Aranha's successor as foreign minister, Pedro Leão Velloso Neto, commented in Jan. 1945 that "We did not enter this war in order to exact rewards.... But our allies will be the first to realize that such action presupposes the admission of Brazil among the powers....": *A Noite*, Rio de Janeiro, Jan. 4, 1945. Example of Brazilian diplomatic position see *Foreign relations of the United States : diplomatic papers, 1945. General : the United Nations*, Volume I (1945), pp. 42-43 "Record of Informal Meeting with Diplomatic Representatives of Certain American Republics, [all except Argentina & El Salvador] Held at Washington, Jan. 31, 1945, 3 p.m." RSC Lot 60-D Box54:ISO. Doc 243: Ambassador Martins speaking: "The continued cooperation of Latin America [my comment: read Brazil] in peace as well as in war requires that it be given a permanent seat on the council."

³ Major Polk, Oct 27, 1945: Memo for the Record; "Requested information re. Brazilian participation in the war." Operations Plans Division (OPD) 336.2 Brazil, Section V, Cases 85 - , RG165, Box 967, Modern Military Branch (MMB), NA. The statement sent to State's Philip O. Chalmers of the Division of Brazilian Affairs was a rather bland review of the FEB apparently written by someone who did not have first-hand information.

⁴ Christopher O'Sullivan, *Sumner Welles and Postwar Planning and the Quest for a New World Order, 1937-1943* (NY: Columbia University Press, 2003) p. 95.

⁵ General Kroner in Rio wrote General Ord in Washington on March 22 that Dutra had told him "recently" that "he planned to discharge or transfer to the reserve, the private soldiers of the FEB and retain on active duty for training purposes a large number of officers and non-commissioned officers" because of the "lack of suitable military housing facilities." Supposedly the plan was "under close study by the Brazilian general staff." Memo for the record, April 6, 1945, "Demobilization of the Brazilian Expeditionary Force, OPD 336.2 Brazil Section V, Cases 85-, RG 165, Box 967, MMB, NA.

⁶ MG J. G. Ord to Asst. Ch. of Staff, OPD, Washington, Apr. 3, 1945, OPD 336.2 Brazil, Section V, Cases 85 --, RG 165, Box 967, MMB, NA.

⁷ Col. F.W. Edwards (Deputy Chief, Pan American Group, OPD –WD GS) Memo, April 6, 1945, OPD 336.2 Brazil, Section V, Cases 85 --, RG 165, Box 967, MMB, NA.

⁸ Major Aleyr d'Avila Mello (Official de Ligação junto ao MTOUSA e ao AFHQ) to Gen. Olimpio Falconieri da Cunha (Cmt dos OND/ 1Esc – FEB), Apr 14,1945, #251PLC, Oficio confidencial, Arquivo do Exército, Rio de Janeiro. He was clearly concerned with securing transportation to Brazil, but he raised

the question of the division's "military role" once the war ended. Would it be "ocupação? limpeza? Reajustamento e repouso?" There was no indication that he received an answer.

⁹ BG Hayes Kroner, Rio de Janeiro, March 22, 1945, OPD 336.2 Brazil Section IV, Cases 56-84, MMB, NA.

¹⁰ McCann, *The Brazilian-American Alliance, 1937-45* (Princeton University Press, 1973), p. 440.

¹¹ Berle, Rio de Janeiro, July 10, 1945, 832.00/7-1045, RG 59, NA.

¹² This is very odd and contrary to established policy. There are three sets of ministers' *Relatórios* in the *Biblioteca do Exército* and in the *Arquivo Histórico do Exército* both in Rio de Janeiro, and in the *Centro de Documentação do Exército (CDOC- EX)* in the army headquarters in Brasília. The staffs of all three are active-duty personnel who were puzzled by the missing *Relatórios*. There were 17 copies of these reports printed and a printed note on the 1944 volume said it was to be deposited in the "*Arquivo Secreto do Ministro*." Officers at the Arquivo Histórico had no knowledge of such a secret archive. However they telephoned friends in the office of the Commander of the army in Brasília (the successor office after the Minister of Defense office superseded the old chain of command) and found that indeed the 1945 and 1946 *Relatórios* are in the Commander's office. I intend to read them during my next visit to Brasília.

¹³ General Eurico Dutra to BG Hayes A. Kroner, Rio de Janeiro, May 15, 1945 (signed copy in Portuguese), OPD 336Brazil, RG165, MMB, NA.

¹⁴ The senior American officer in Rio de Janeiro summarized "Brazil's contribution, in the present conflict, to Hemisphere Defense (sic), in order of importance: Air Bases in Northeast Brazil; strategic materials; troops for overseas combat; naval and air assistance in anti-submarine warfare; and neutralization of Axis activities. To these should be added the moral value of having one South American country actively participating in the war against the Axis powers." BG Hayes Kroner, Rio de Janeiro, May 18, 1945, "Notes on "THE PRESENT AND FUTURE POSITION OF BRAZIL (Sic)", OPD 336 Brazil, RG165, MMB, NA.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, Kroner admitted frankly that the pro-Brazil policy he recommended would reduce Argentina "to the relative power of Mexico or Canada." But by way of justifying his view observed that "the attitude of Argentina during this war has demonstrated clearly that what the United States needs and must have, is, definitely, one strong friend in South America." (Emphasis was in original)

¹⁶ MG Clayton Bissell, Asst. Chief of Staff, G-2, Washington, June 1, 1945 and BG John Weckerling, Deputy Asst. Chief of Staff, G-2, Washington, June 6, 1945, OPD 336 Brazil, Section IV, RG 165, Records WD General and Special Staffs, MMB, NA.

¹⁷ MG J.E. Hull, Asst. Chief of Staff, OPD, Washington, June 9, 1945, OPD 336 Brazil, Section IV, RG 165, Records WD General and Special Staffs, MMB, NA. This document was initialed as "Noted" by the army chief of staff on June 12, 1945. For a study of the broader debates then in progress see Sonny B. Davis, *A Brotherhood of Arms: Brazil-United States Military Relations, 1945-1977* (Niwot, Colorado: University Press of Colorado, 1996), 43-54. Davis commented (p. 51) that "The JCS members suffered from myopia." And that "U.S. leaders saw Brazil- U.S. ties as episodic."

¹⁸ Julius H. Amberg (Special Asst. to Secretary of War) to Hugh Fulton (Chief Counsel, Truman Committee), Washington, August 13, 1943, Tab A, OPD 580.82 Brazil (3-30-42), MMB, NA.

¹⁹ He did not understand that the American army had to account for all its expenditures, but all the accounting did not mean that Brazil would be handed a bill at the end of the war. It is a shame that he did not understand how the Lend-Lease system worked. Floriano de Lima Brayner, *A Verdade Sobre a FEB: Memórias de um chefe de estado-maior na campanha da Itália, 1943-1945* (Rio de Janeiro: Editora Civilização Brasileira, 1968), pp. 511-513. He described the American attitude as one of "ingratidão."

²⁰ There are many documents on adjusting the Lend-Lease agreement; see for example: MG John E. Hull (ACS, OPD) Memo for Commanding General, Army Services Forces, Washington, April 5, 1945, OPD 336.2 Brazil, Section IV, Cases 56-84, MMB, NA.

²¹ John W. F. Dulles, *Castello Branco: The Making of a Brazilian President* (College Station: Texas A & M University Press, 1978), p. 167-168. Castello thought that if the Allies abandoned Italy “it will catch fire and, moreover, nazi-fascism will resurge a little from the ashes....” But he admitted to his wife that “*I am saturated* with all this and it is high time to return.”

²² Archivists in the Modern Military Section of the National Archives were puzzled by the question of Brazil's decision, I reviewed thousands of file cards on records of the era, but have not yet found pertinent documents. But the search continues.

²³ Ambassador Vasco commented that “A razão de ser da FEB foi mais política que militar. Foi uma confirmação com sangue da nossa aliança com os Estados Unidos. E foi uma confirmação para os Aliados da nossa posição antinazista e antifascista.” ... E nós não soubemos aproveitar essa vantagem, ficamos com fofoquinhas, coisas de somenos, quando tínhamos um aliado natural. Ficamos de pé atrás com os Estados Unidos. Vasco Leitão da Cunha, *Diplomacia em Alto-mar: Depoimento ao CPDOC* (Rio de Janeiro: Editora FGV, 2003), pp.104-106.