

Corsairs vs. Mustangs: The last dogfight

BY CHUCK LYFORD WITH BARRETT TILLMAN

I was seated in first class enjoying a cocktail at 33,000 feet, looking west at the vast Pacific Ocean en route to Guatemala on a Pan Am 707 when a thought passed: "I sure hope this isn't a one-way trip."



THE SOCCER

Roy Ginnell

It was the summer of 1969. But while the Vietnam War proceeded, an unlikely feud was brewing in Central America.

For me, it started with a middle-of-the night call from my flying partner and good friend, Ben Hall. "Chuck, I just got a call from a contact in El Salvador, and they are at war with their neighbor Honduras." With few details, the call was an inquiry to see if any qualified American P-51 pilots could help out. Before I heard much more I said, "Count me in." I knew this was an opportunity for a really grand adventure.

Ben said our next move would be to get on an early United flight to San Francisco and meet representatives from the Salvadoran Air Force (FAS) at the Mark Hopkins Hotel.

Ben Hall was one of my greatest mentors. I started flying Mustangs when I was 19 and would trade engine work that I had learned while boat racing for flight time. While at San Jose State, I purchased my first airplane, a P-51D, fresh from the California Air National Guard. I would never have learned how to fly that airplane as well as I did without Ben. We kept our two airplanes in adjoining hangars at

Paine Field, Washington, and flew around the area with great glee.

As time went on, I learned to fly formation, do aerobatics, and tail chase through the mountains and clouds of the Northwest. Ben and I started doing flight demonstrations that turned into an airshow act called "Mustang Air Shows." For years we did those shows all over the western U.S. and Canada.

In 1969, I was 29 years old with about 3,500 hours total time including 950 in warbirds and 800 in Mustangs, so I felt confident. However, since neither Ben nor I had any combat experience, we thought it would be wise to include someone who had been in combat and could give us some training. Ben had flown in the Army Air Corps during WW II and received some training in the concepts of dogfighting. So we placed a late-night call to our friend and fellow Mustang pilot, Bob Love.

Bob was an F-86 ace in Korea with six MiGs to his credit, and had flown my P-51 racer, the *Bardahl Special*, in the first Reno pylon race in 1964. He was a great stick and extremely aggressive. His only drawback was

Roy Grinnell's rendering of Honduran Captain Fernando Soto's first victory of the 1969 "Soccer War," an El Salvadoran P-51D. Soto also downed two Corsairs later that day.



WAR



Chuck Lyford flew the *Bardahl Special* to second place in the 1965 Reno unlimited championship, clocking 362mph. (Photo courtesy of author)

his vision. He just wouldn't wear glasses, so we often had to repair the airplane from collisions with power lines and bushes. During the Reno race he lapped the entire field in six laps but cut four pylons and was penalized one lap for each cut. Bob knew many of the folks in El Salvador and said he would go south with us. We instantly appointed him our leader, and he joined us the next day.

When Ben and I arrived at the San Francisco meeting, we were met by Ernesto and Roberto, later to become good friends. They had been commissioned by the FAS to hire some experienced Mustang pilots because their current pilots had not received enough training in the new Trans-Florida Cavalier P-51s. Ernesto Regalado and Roberto Llach were unable to tell us

as we climbed south out of Guatemala City. The mood in the airplane was one of exhilaration. We had not been shot or arrested! I scanned the airplane to locate the instruments, found a chart, and checked the fuel. Then I introduced myself to my copilot Eduardo who didn't speak English, but he was very nice and smiled a lot. Ben was in the back seat with our mechanic, Chuck Hassen.

Now to navigate. Fortunately, Ben had been living in El Salvador with his wife Ester so he could communicate with Eduardo. I got a heading and altitude as the late afternoon sun was setting over the Pacific. However, the beautiful orange sunset illuminated one of the biggest masses of thunderstorm I ever saw, all hunched over the little country of El Salvador. All nav aids were shut down due to the war so we had to DR.

To condense a long-long night, we settled in some farmland, still in Guatemala, and resumed our flight to El Salvador the next day. In daylight, the countryside combined with volcanic mountains was absolutely beautiful. We were able to contact the San Salvador tower, and during our descent we were jumped by a camouflaged Corsair

THE FOOTBALL WAR

A simmering border dispute between Honduras and El Salvador erupted in the aftermath of a soccer game between the national teams in 1969. On July 14, during the North American qualifying round for the World Cup, El Salvador's army attacked Honduras. The reasons were varied, but centered upon cross-border immigration and economic factions. Fighting continued for four days, then the Organization of American States brokered a cease fire on the 20th. Overall, the larger Salvadoran army inflicted heavier losses than it sustained. Military-civilian fatalities are indefinite but appear on the order of 900 Salvadorians to 2,000 or more Hondurans.

The OAS arranged for Honduras to withdraw from occupied Salvadorian territory in August, and a treaty was signed 11 years later.

—Barrett Tillman

WE JUMPED INTO A PIPER AZTEC ... AS I PULLED UP TO THE RUNWAY, A TRUCK WITH FLASHING LIGHTS TRIED TO CUT ME OFF. I TURNED BACK SHARPLY AND TOOK OFF ON THE TAXIWAY. WE NEVER CALLED THE TOWER

much about the conflict, and pointed to a Texaco road map indicating the problems were in an area on the eastern border. Not much to go on, but the compensation was generous, so we were all on the afternoon Pan Am to Guatemala.

We deplaned at La Aurora Airport in Guatemala City and entered the transient lounge with forged boarding passes indicating that we were traveling to Panama City. We were whisked down a stairway at 90-second intervals and slipped out to the ramp, trying not to look like a group. Each time the guard opened the door, our escort handed him a wad of Yankee dollars. We were told to casually walk to two twin-engine aircraft with pilots standing by. I was last. All of a sudden from up on the second-floor balcony, an airport guard started yelling in Spanish. I could tell by his intensity and emotions, as well as the automatic weapon slung across his body, that we were being challenged to halt. My escort yelled at me to run and took off. I thought, "Whoa...this doesn't look like a good idea," but I found myself running at full speed rather than being alone on the ramp. After a 60-yard sprint we jumped into a Piper Aztec; I was told to pilot the plane. The Salvadorian in the right seat had started the engines and we split pronto. The other plane with Bob and our escorts was already rolling down the runway, but as I pulled up to the runway, a truck with flashing lights tried to cut me off. I turned back sharply and took off on the taxiway. We never called the tower.

Once airborne, my breathing and pulse settled

that popped in view at our 4 o'clock high. We knew that Honduras had Corsairs, but no one told us that El Salvador also had some Goodyear FG-1s. We learned that the FG had been sent to look for us, expecting wreckage due to our failure to arrive last night.

Arrival in a war zone

We landed at Ilopango, San Salvador's main airport, and it became overwhelmingly clear that this was a country at war. Anti-aircraft guns ringed the airport and everyone had weapons pointed in nearly every direction. The main hangar had been bombed and was still smoking.

We were greeted by Maj. Salvador Henriquez and Archie Baldocchi, considered the father of the FAS. They asked if we needed anything before our briefing. I mentioned that a shower would be nice, and some breakfast. It had been a long, bug-infested night!

Bob Love and our hosts arrived about a half an hour later. They had encountered the same weather and landed at a private strip featuring a splendid dinner and cocktails. Trust an ace to find the bed of roses!

Our briefing was presented by Maj. Enriquez and the exec, Maj. Peli Regalado. We learned that the ground fighting during the first days had been intense with loss of many troops strafed in buses and the loss of aircraft amounted to almost one-fourth of the active El Sal fighters. Before we arrived they had lost two Corsairs and a Mustang in air

The Soccer War Mustangs were Cavalier-modified P-51Ds. Note the taller 51H tail and the tip tanks, among other mods. Pictured is the first Cavalier Mustang that was originally modified in 1944 for high-speed testing by North American. Eventually, it reached .82 Mach. Cavalier Aircraft Corporation bought it in 1957 for the princely sum of \$931 and rebuilt it as a weapons testing platform for the Army. It formed the basis for the later Trans-Florida conversions under David Lindsay's direction. The airplane is still in the Lindsay family and is flown by David's son, Edward. (Photo by Xavier Meal)



combat, and another 51 in an accident. Another Mustang had been interned in Guatemala, low on fuel.

The war began on July 14 but ground fighting had nearly stopped due to an ammunition shortage, as the fresh troops fired their weapons on full auto and burned through five days' ammo in two days.

The most serious issue for the FAS was to deny the Honduran fighters any further chance of shooting up our ground forces. We were given our choice of fighters, and were told we could start immediately. Without hesitation, we picked three of the Cavalier P-51s (tail numbers 401, 403, and 405). They were part of a batch of six remanufactured Mustangs just received from Dave Lindsey's shop in Sarasota, Florida. I knew Dave: he had installed Rolls-Royce "dash seven" Merlins in mint condition.

Before leaving FAS headquarters, we were honored with membership in Escuadrilla 1 of the Escuadron Caza 7 Bombardeo, being awarded the rank of captain. We were photographed, measured for tailored flight suits, and given a handful of tracks to pin on. We also were given fake ID: I was Capt. Carlos Molina of the FAS. I received my fancy new black flight suit, not the best color in the hot sun, and decided I would remain in civilian clothes. It might momentarily give me an opportunity to get out of a bind should I end up somewhere unexpected. With help, I generated additional ID complete with a blue OAS armband

Mustang Reborn: The Trans Florida Cavalier

Trans Florida Aviation was founded at Sarasota in 1957, seeking a market for surplus P-51s as high-end executive aircraft. The first of some 25 executive Mustangs was completed in 1958, with counter-insurgency models provided for U.S. military evaluation in 1967.

Meanwhile, things percolated in Latin America. With war increasingly likely against Honduras, in early 1969 the Fuerza Aérea Salvadoreña (FAS) chief, Major Salvador A. Henriquez, sent representatives to the U.S. to obtain warbirds that could be quickly readied for combat. However, Washington had embargoed military exports to both countries so some bureaucratic legerdemain was required. Most of the future FAS Mustangs were flown to neutral nations to "disinfect" them, passing through Haiti or the Dominican Republic before arriving in El Salvador.

At the beginning of the war in July, the FAS had four P-51K Mustang Cavaliers, air force numbers 401, 403, 404, and 405. They were painted in U.S. Air Force Southeast Asia camouflage but required the demilitarized process to be reversed. Browning .50 caliber machine guns were installed as were improvised gunsights. Additionally, the Cavalier tip tanks were removed to improve combat performance. Locally made drop tanks offered more mission flexibility. Finally, Army radios were installed to afford reliable communication with other Salvadoran forces. All were fitted with the tall tail introduced on the P-51H.

The Mustangs saw little air combat, mainly being used as attack aircraft.

El Salvador received at least one more Cavalier (FAS 406) but it arrived July 15 and missed combat while being armed. Hostilities ended four days later. —Barrett Tillman



identifying Chuck Lyford as an official observer. The OAS included members from all the Americas who tried to negotiate an end to the war. My OTHER wallet identified me as Capitan Molina. Later it came in handy when I moved around El Salvador. At the occasional roadblock, Capt. Molina was saluted and offered an escort wherever he was going.

Not quite ready for prime time

After inspecting our birds, we reported that the airplanes required several modifications before combat. The large fuel tanks permanently installed on the wingtips were removed: we needed all the speed we could get and didn't need extra fuel in our small op area. More important, we needed to install some sort of gunsight. We also insisted on adding armor plate behind our seats. The thin aluminum seats wouldn't have stopped a well-shot arrow, let alone the 20mm cannon rounds from the FAH's F4U-5s.



Honduran F4U-5s retained their original armament of four 20mm cannon, nominally with 230 rounds per gun. This is Soto's No. 609 that knocked down a Mustang and two Corsairs. (Photo by Dan Hagedorn)

Because of my racing experience, I knew we could get away with raising the boost on the engines from 61 to 80 inches. In a bind, with the transport banks, those engines could pull the extra power for a brief time without damage. To protect the engines we set the oil pressure up about 20 pounds and added toluene to the fuel. We lacked time to install water injection.

I had flown the Corsair and knew it was a great fighter, especially the F4U-4s and '5s with the big

P&W Double Wasp engines with water injection. The Hondurans had both models. I knew the "Hog" turned well with its power and big wing, especially at the lower altitudes. I also knew the Mustang was faster, and with energy would climb like a rocket. Avoiding a turning contest in combat is essential, unless one gets caught, and we planned to remain at altitude hoping to drop down in slashing attacks using the Mustang's great speed and climb. Since the beginning of the war a single Honduran Corsair had notched up three victories and we intended to even the score for the Mustang in what history would record as the last engagement of prop-driven fighters.

Work continued on the mods throughout the night, and with a lot of help we were able to finish by 5 a.m., including some quickly-made fiberglass wingtips. At dawn we had yet to get the airplanes to the gun stands to align our sights when Archie drove up at high speed and told us to be airborne in five minutes. My first scramble!

Scramble!

A phone call from the border (there was no radar) reported two Honduran Corsairs overhead. After a second night without sleep, I grabbed my helmet, strapped on my chute and climbed aboard my bird while they topped her off with fuel and ammo. Bob and I taxied out at a brisk speed to avoid getting caught on the ground by attacking fighters. With barely enough heat in the engines, we taxied onto the runway for a quick takeoff. As I cranked my canopy closed, it jammed and there I sat—a sitting duck on the runway as Bob flew northward.

Don't panic—do something! I found one of the Cavalier "upgrades" was a little air vent inside the canopy rail that would not clear the armor plate. I lifted the front part of the canopy over the armor, dropped it back, and roared off about two minutes behind Bob. The early morning weather was good as we climbed for the border, looking for the distinctive gull-winged fighters. Our scramble had been a complete thrash, and I had left my chart behind. I was not only looking for enemy fighters, I also had to get a feel for the landmarks if I got separated from Bob. Knowing his vision, I have never looked harder for anything in my life!

Having raced hydroplanes for 10 years, competed at Reno, and flown dozens of airshows, I thought I had been through some exciting times. But for those who have never flown with the possibility of another airplanes appearing out of nowhere to shoot you down, it is a new level of awareness and excitement. I had hunted before, but never had I experienced being hunted.

We flew in a loose deuce formation three-quarters of a mile apart using a single weave at each turn, seeking anything that flew. After an hour or so, we headed back to base and spotted a Cessna 180 flying east over El Salvador. We dove from about 18,000 feet—it was a Salvadorian aircraft and we flashed by at high speed. I noticed

FAH vs. FAS

The 1969 war was the last time that piston-engine fighters engaged each other in air combat. Both air forces flew Corsairs while the Salvadorians also had Mustangs.

FUERZA AEREA HONDURAS (FAH)

- Eight F4U-4 (one decoy)
- Eight F4U-5 (one decoy)
- Three AT-6C (armed)
- Three AT-6G
- Five T-28A
- Six C-47s
- One C-54
- One C-82
- Several Cessna 170/182/185
- 14 operational fighters
- 11 trainers
- 8 transports
- Several lightplanes

Source: Former Vice President Walter Lopez

FUERZA AEREA EL SALVADOR (FAS)

- Five FG-1D Corsairs operational plus nonflyable and decoys. Three lost in combat.
- Six P-51Ds plus one TF-51 operational. One lost in combat.
- Two SNJ-5s and one T-34 trainer doubling as recon aircraft.
- Four C-47s and one C-54
- Seven Cessna U-17s and two Cessna 180s
- 12 fighters
- 5 transports
- 3 trainers
- 9 utility aircraft

Source: ACIG.org

Honduras: The Corsair View

After WW II and Korea, the bent-wing Vought Corsair logged its last combat in Central America. Honduras received 18 F4Us from 1956 to 1961. The largest batch was ten F4U-5s ferried 2,500 miles from Litchfield Park, Arizona, to Tegucigalpa in 1956. Four -4s were delivered in 1960-61. About the same time, El Salvador received Goodyear FG-1s.

Thus did the "tipo Corsario" arrive in Central America. It fought a fratricidal conflict in 1969, featuring the Corsairs of Honduras and El Salvador.

Early on July 17, Honduras Capt. Fernando Soto took off from Tegucigalpa with two other F4U-5s flown by Captains Edgardo Acosta and Francisco Zepeda. "Sotillo" Soto was one of the more experienced FAH fighter pilots, with 400 hours in Corsairs since 1960. He led his wingmen down on ground targets near the border, but Zepeda's guns jammed. Soto ordered him to pull up and await rendezvous.

Then, recalled Soto in a 1977 interview, "All of a sudden, Zepeda called us to say he has two P-51s on his back." Soto and Acosta abandoned their strafing and raced to Zepeda's assistance.

"I got there pretty quick," Soto said. When in range, he fired and the Salvadoran Mustangs broke in each direction. Soto was confident that the Corsair could defeat the P-51 below 10,000 feet, and pursued the engagement. He followed the Mustang to the right and turned inside "real, real easy." On the inside of the '51's turn, Soto fired three bursts from his four 20 millimeters and knocked off the left wing. The Mustang crashed on the Honduras side of the border before the pilot could bail out.

When Soto looked around for the other P-51, it was gone.

Soto's fourth mission of the day, late in the afternoon, went to San Miguel, El Salvador. He and Acosta were flying together when they saw two Corsairs approaching from the north. Figuring they were FG-1s, the Hondurans jettisoned their bombs and climbed rapidly. By the time they reached 13,000 feet they were directly above the two FGs, flying steadily 2,000 feet below.

Still unseen, Soto and Acosta split-essed to attack, coming in behind and above. Soto hit the first FG, which caught fire, and the pilot



Honduran Capt. Fernando Soto who shot down two El Salvador P-51s and an FG-1 on July 17, 1969. No other pilot scored an aerial victory in the conflict. (Photo by Walter Lopez)

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bailed out. Soto's speed from the dive carried him beyond the second Salvadorian, but Soto was confident that Acosta could handle him. Soto was quickly disillusioned when he looked back, for the enemy Corsair was in range and gunning. Radio problems had plagued the Hondurans, and Soto had not heard Acosta call out two more hostiles that had not been seen.

Soto wracked his Corsair through tight turns, dives, and zoom climbs in a downhill battle, trying to shake the blue-and-white marked fighter behind him. Finally, he rolled over to begin a split-ess but turned out to one side. The Salvadorian continued down to complete the maneuver, leaving Soto on top. He fired several bursts, then hit the left wing

and shot off the aileron. Closing the range, he fired again and the enemy fighter exploded. Soto was sure that the pilot had neglected to depressurize his fuel system.

As he turned back toward Acosta, Soto passed a parachute at 2,000 feet. It was the first FG pilot, headed toward a safe landing. The dogfight had only lasted long enough for the chute to descend about 9,000 feet, but to "Sotillo" Soto "it was like a century."
—Barrett Tillman

Acknowledgments: Gen. Walter Lopez Reyes (Ret), former Honduras Corsair pilot; Col. Jim Bassett, USAF (Ret), former advisor to the FAS; and ACIG.org.

Soto flew this F4U-5, FAH number 609, which is preserved as a memorial in Honduras today. (Photo by Dan Hagedorn)





The author commented, "The Mustang on the hard stand with tail raised is my airplane with me standing by the prop. We were bore sighting the guns and getting ready to fire to align the fixed sights we had installed. My not speaking Spanish left me in the dark regarding some of these matters, especially the first few days." (Photo courtesy of author)

the right door was missing. It was one ferocious dude named Ricardo seated next to a 100-pound bomb looking for something to drop on in Honduras. Ricardo and his friends from the aero club gave new meaning to macho. We returned to base without seeing anything else and taxied to the stand to align our guns.

Our sights were primitive but the best we could manage. We cut off a six-inch piece of quarter-inch stainless rod and threaded one end, drilled a hole in the top of the cowlings about five feet in front

slightly to get the convergence point at 800 feet. Not great for air to ground, but better for air to air. We fired our six Browning .50s into the target and held our thumbs up to the inside of the windshield where the front sight and the impact point lined up. We then cut a couple of quarter-inch strips of black tape about an inch long and put a "plus" mark on the inside of the armored glass to line up with the front sight and the point of impact. Combined with a short opening squirt of the .50s to see where the tracers hit, it worked extremely well. Bob said we were now ready for some up-close WW I-style air to air. With no experience in these matters, the thought crossed my mind that this action could become more exciting than I wanted!

We expected to be attacked early in the morning or at sunset, and a patrol was put up over the city a half-hour before first light. Bob was hard to keep on the ground, and Ben and I alternated flying on his wing. When Ben or I were not flying as Bob's number two, we flew with some of the FAS pilots to keep a group airborne over San Salvador. The air force chief wanted to make sure the citizens would

see that their air force was on the job.

We flew missions as often as possible and were paid by the sortie plus a bonus for any damage we inflicted on the Hondurans. We were to be paid for an enemy aircraft only if it were shot down over Salvador. But no matter how often we flew along the border, we never spotted anything in the air. We looked so intensely for aircraft that we had a difficult time figuring where the border was in the heavy jungle.

WE HEADED BACK TO BASE AND SPOTTED A CESSNA 180 FLYING EAST OVER EL SALVADOR ... IT WAS ONE FEROCIOUS DUDE NAMED RICARDO SEATED NEXT TO A 100-POUND BOMB LOOKING FOR SOMETHING TO DROP ON IN HONDURAS

of the windscreen, and that was our front sight. We jacked up the Mustangs' tails so they sat level and fired the guns down a taxiway at some large cardboard targets in front of a huge dirt pile. We boresighted the guns and adjusted them inboard

CORSAIR VS. MUSTANG



VOUGHT F4U-5 CORSAIR



NORTH AMERICAN P-51D MUSTANG

Engine	Pratt & Whitney R2800-32W, 2,300hp	Packard Merlin V1650-7, 1,720hp
Empty	9,680 lb.	7,635 lb.
Loaded	14,600 lb.	9,200 lb.
Power loading	6.3 lb./hp	5.3 lb./hp
Span	40.9 ft.	37 ft.
Wing area	314 sq. ft.	235 sq. ft.
Wing loading	46.4 lb./sq. ft.	39.1 lb./sq. ft.
Height	14.7 ft.	13.3 ft.
Top Speed	469mph at sea level	437mph at 25,000 ft.
Initial climb	3,780 fpm	3,200 fpm
Armament	Four 20mm cannon	Six .50 cal. machine guns

Could this trouble be Bob's vision? He was the one with the chart!

Day Two

On our second day flying, we were instructed to recover at a small jungle strip on an island down by the ocean. It was a secret 4,300-foot grass strip carved out of the jungle with a clean approach over the water. After touchdown I was directed into a cut-out area among the palm trees and signaled to shut down. Before the prop wound down, my airplane was completely covered in huge palm branches to hide it from the air. We were quickly refueled from a camouflaged truck loaded with 55-gallon drums that were hand pumped into the wings. The ammo was brought out from the jungle in wheelbarrows. I dismounted and strolled into the shade of the jungle for a pee and quickly retreated with a black cloud of mosquitoes surrounding my body. The only way to avoid them was to stand in the hot sun. Fortunately, we were never on the ground for more than 30 minutes.

The U.S. contingent to El Salvador (left to right): Bob Love, mechanic Chuck Hassen, Ben Hall, and Chuck Lyford standing. (Photo courtesy of author)



Due to the attrition in the first days, the FAS was paying cash for and receiving a new Mustang each evening. They were bought off the U.S. civilian market and flown down from Texas. It took about two days to arm, camouflage, and put them on the line. I spoke with the delivery pilot, a farmer from Oklahoma who was having the time of his life. However, he said there were dealers shopping for Mustangs for Honduras. I realized that we might have an ID problem if we encountered any strange Mustangs in the air, and asked what the Honduran flag looked like. I was informed that all Central American flags are near identical: two horizontal blue stripes with a white stripe in the center. Just different shades of blue. Great! The following day we started putting a yellow stripe around the fuselages of our Mustangs. Each night

we added another stripe, continuing the process on the wings. Now we could quickly ID a foreign Mustang at a distance.

We flew on each day while the negotiators tried to settle the feud. Because of the ongoing effort, the new rules of engagement called for all combatants to stay behind their own borders. The only problem was the actual border was hard to keep track of in such a small area with our eyes always on the sky. Bob Love was intensely interested in payback. He wanted to find a Honduran pilot named Capt. Fernando Soto. He was reported to have shot down two of our FG-1s and a Mustang on July 17, before we arrived. Bob figured Fernando would be easily found leading any flight we encountered. I must admit that knowing Bob's ability, Fernando was lucky he didn't poke his nose across the border (wherever it was!) with Bob in the air. I felt pretty sure that he would have been toast, especially after we were told about the touching memorial for one of our downed pilots, and heard about his young widow coming to the base to cheer on her fallen husband's comrades.

We were ready to provide ground support after Bob tested some homemade 500-pound bombs, but we found those missions chancy because it was hard to tell who was where, and we seldom shot for fear of hitting our own. We had no FAC or even air-to-ground radios that worked.

We never did spot any of those pesky Corsairs, possibly because we let the Hondurans know through channels that there were some *muy malo* American aces (actually just one) waiting for them to cross the border. Our informant was U.S. Army Warrant Officer Will McDaniel who flew the negotiators to Tegucigalpa, Honduras, and back. He would ask any Honduran pilot he saw if they knew there was a \$25,000 price tag on his head, and advised them of some really serious hunters across the border. Will spoke fluent Spanish and told of some interesting responses from our adversaries. We rewarded him with lots of gin and \$100 bills.

A short war

The war was declared over on the afternoon of the tenth day, July 18, and we flew for two more days just in case someone decided to get in a last blow. I can't remember ever being more tired, and I crashed for 12 hours of nonstop sleep.

I had a chance to do some fantastic flying, made many new friends and fortunately all survived, with nothing more than a few bullet holes in Ben Hall's airplane. Our band of four and I were just paid guests who assisted a small country in a time of trouble. For me, I had the pleasure of flying one of my favorite airplanes with free fuel, unlimited ammo, and HOT GUNS! Talk about adventure travel: what a trip! ✈

(Author's note: Bob Love died in 1986 at age 68. Fernando Soto departed the pattern in 2006, age 67.)