

Brazilian Army Aviation today



The embryo of what would become Brazil's Army Aviation Instruction Centre (*Centro de Instrução de Aviação do Exército* or *CiAvEx*) was created by the then Ministry of War a century back. The Brazilian Aviation School operated for just over six months in 1914, ending its activities owing to cyclical difficulties that arose after outbreak of the First World War. The institution was reorganised and re-opened in June 1919, under technical auspices of the French Military Mission and was named as the Military Aviation School, operating at Campo dos Afonsos, in Rio de Janeiro.

In 1927, after many internal changes, the school received much boost in the form of a large number of aircraft for training of pilots "for protection of national airspace", a mission that fell on the Brazilian Army until creation of the Ministry of Aeronautics in 1941. Experience in conflicts after the Second World War, showed the need for forces to operate in the third dimension of the battlefield.

In 1985, then Minister of the Army, General Leônidas Pires, ordered a study to determine the need for a specific Army Aviation Branch for the Ground Forces, which subsequently led to creation of *Aviação do Exército* (Army Aviation) on 3 September 1986. Intended as a helicopter force, the plan was to attach a flying unit with each army brigade. The Taubaté army complex was importantly chosen as first base of the 1st Army Aviation Battalion (1ºBAvEx, *Batalhão de Aviação do Exército*) while an aviation material command was also created (DMAvEx, *Diretoria de material de Aviação do Exército*). Facilities were created and hangars, ramps, a runway, a housing area and classrooms built.

Meanwhile, the Army sought to acquire helicopters and selected French types which could (in part) be license built by Helibras of Brazil. The first two helicopter types were the AS.350L1 Squirrel, or *Helicóptero de Ataque* (HA-1) and AS565AA Panther or *Helicóptero de Manobra* (HM-1) as christened in Brazil. The first Squirrel was

officially inducted during a ceremony on 21 April 1989 and the long-sought army requirement came into fruition.

The Brazilian army is gradually expanding its own air arm. Re-organisation took place in 1990 and 1993 and the original 1st battalion was renamed 1º *Esquadrão de Aviação de Exército* and reorganised into the 1st Group (1º *Grupo AvEx*) together with the newly formed 2nd, 3rd and 4th squadrons. In 1992 *CiAvEx* got a 5th squadron, following the first Aviation Sergeant's Training Course. Training improvement and specialisation courses for officers and NCOs of Brazilian Army Aviation are imparted at this school. Taubate is also resident of 1º *Batalhão de Aviação do Exército* (1º *BAvEx*) and 2º *Batalhão de Aviação do Exército* (2º *BAvEx*) the first operating a mix of HA-1, HM-1 and the new HM-4.

2º *BAvEx* operates a mix of HA-1 and HM-1s and the squadrons are no longer only at Taubaté. At beginning of the 21st Century, a third base was created