

# Latin American P-38 Postscript

written by Dan Hagedorn | July 12, 2023



For LAAHS members who may have already acquired either a [Kindle](#) or [hard copy](#) of the book *P-38 in Latin America* (Aviation Art & History, edited by Julio Arróspide, 2022, ISBN 9798838761699) via Amazon, as inevitably happens, “Murphy’s Law” has engaged.

While doing research on a completely unrelated topic at the National Archives in College Park recently, I happened across references to four post-war converted P-38s, all in what we might, for lack of a better definition, describe as “F-5G variants” which shed new light on the twilight careers of these aircraft that I hope this wonderful forum will permit me to introduce into the literature as a postscript.



*Lockheed P-38L, U.S. registration N62345, C/N 8469. (Photo via the author.)*

N62345, cited in U.S. Customs clearance documents, oddly, as a P-38L (msn 8469) and owned by Worldwide Survey's, Inc., of Los Angeles, cleared through Brownsville, Texas of October 27, 1955, bound for Bogotá, Colombia, piloted by Robert Poskuski (given in a second document as Peskuski) and Raymond Barrows, his mechanic, on an Export License issued by the U.S. State Department, B-2162. The astounding data in this clearance, however, was that the Export License had been issued in the name of the *Gobierno de Colombia, Ministerio de Guerra*.

The aircraft was almost certainly not intended for the *Fuerza Aérea Colombiana*, although this cannot be arbitrarily ruled out as a possibility. It was far more likely under contract to the Colombian Ministry of War to conduct aerial photogrammetric work along the border with Venezuela, which had been in dispute for decades – and possibly taking the opportunity to overfly some Venezuelan airfields in the area at the same time.

No hint of this obviously confidential excursion has been located in diplomatic, military intelligence or consular record.

A little more than a year later, the whereabouts of the aircraft in the intervening period unknown, N62345 – still owned by Worldwide Survey's, Inc., cleared Brownsville once again heading, this time, for San José, Costa Rica on Export License B-6809, being flown again by Peskuski (or Poskuski) but with Dorman N. Bass, his mechanic, also on board. This time, they almost certainly were dispatched to aerial survey the disputed border region between Costa Rica and Nicaragua. It isn't clear how long they conducted this work.



*Lockheed P-38, U.S. registration N34992. (Photo via the author.)*

N34992 cleared U.S. Customs at Brownsville October 27, 1955, as well, flown by Arthur R. Thomas with mechanic William Barkhoff on board heading down to an unspecified destination in Central America where the aircraft was apparently contracted to conduct extensive photogrammetric work for the Inter American Geodetic Survey (IAGS) which was administered by the U.S. Army. The extent and nature of these activities require additional investigation.



*Lockheed P-38, U.S. registration N91300, C/N 5286. (Photo via the author.)*



N91300 was perhaps the most exotic of all of the P-38 conversions and, cited on Customs Documents as simply a P-38 (msn 5286) and operated by the Hycon Aerial Survey's, Inc., cleared for Santiago, Chile December 13, 1955 on Export License B-5741 – much earlier than the other P-38 dispatched to Chile and noted in the book. She was being flown by Willard B. Thompson and, incredibly, also had Frank Lux (mechanic) and Frederick E. Collins (camera operator) on board. It is not clear how long the aircraft worked in Chile, or precisely what her mission was.



*Lockheed P-38, U.S. registration N1107V. (Photo via the author.)*

N1107V certainly was a surprise, as she was consigned on U.S. State Department Export License to the *Secretaria de la Defensa Nacional, Departamento Cartograficos Militar* in Mexico City, clearing on June 6<sup>th</sup> and again on the 9<sup>th</sup>, 1956.

This one nearly stopped my heart, as no prior references to such an arrangement had ever been found. The aircraft was almost certainly leased only, as, by October 2, she was at Brownsville again with the owner/operator cited as Hycon Aerial Survey's, Inc., although she was once again issued an Export License (A-9842) and then, curiously, commenced making numerous entry and exit passages through Brownsville from Monterrey, on – at least, the 2<sup>nd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup>, 9<sup>th</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup> of October 1956. She was flown exclusively during all of this period by John W. Hodgkin with camera operator Paul Hegg on board.

While these hitherto confidential excursions may well have been entirely pacific in nature, given the border incidents that prevailed in all of these geographic regions at precisely the same time, the possibility that these exotic aircraft were engaged to provide assorted national and military leaders with an aerial reconnaissance capability which they otherwise did not enjoy organically at the time, cannot be ruled out. As a lifelong student of history, I do not believe in coincidences.

My thanks to friends Kevin Grantham and the late William T. (Bill) Larkins for the accompanying images.