

# Once Again, We Can Say that “We Write History in the Sky”

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When it had become necessary for the Honduran Air Force (FAH) to replace the old but faithful basic trainers, the T-41 D and the Cessna 180, in 2007, several options were explored. I had heard of the Katana and the Diamond DA 20-C1, in which I performed a demo flight at the Military Aviation Academy on 21 February 2007, together with Lt Col Jorge Cabrera. The aircraft were remarkably interesting, however we needed something stronger, that the cadets would not easily “destroy”.

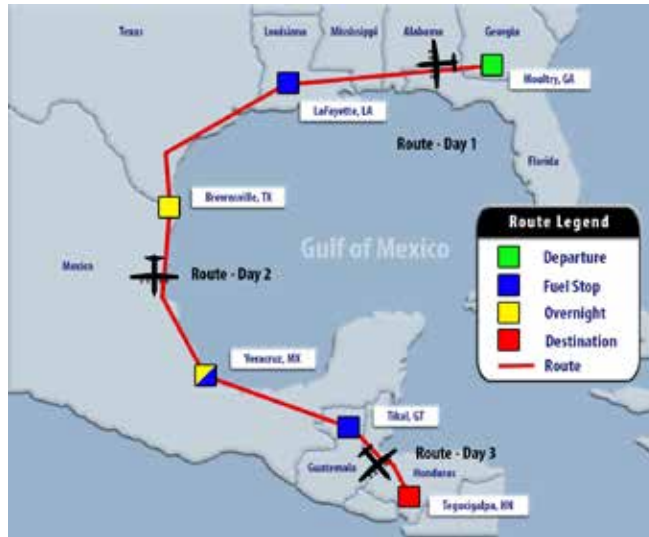
We then became aware of Maule Air Inc.’s latest offer, the MXT-7-180, similar to the legendary “Tecua” T-41. We had a chance to see the aircraft at the Military Aviation Academy, for the first time, through the evangelical ministry “Christ Loves You”, on 4 March 2008. We wish to thank Allan Sumner, his brother, and his father, for this kind gesture and for advising our senior leaders on the benefits of this aircraft, while at the same time giving classes to our future pilots and mechanics. I was very satisfied when I heard that the decision was made to buy four Maule MXT-7-180s, since at last we would have a new and modern aircraft to meet our needs. Lt Col Jorge Cabrera oversaw the purchase of the new aircraft, since at the time he was finishing the Air Command and Staff College course at Maxwell AFB, Alabama.

It was a great honor to have been selected by the senior leadership of the Honduran Air Force, along with Lt Iván Guerrero Arzú, and Lt Marco Rodríguez Guzmán, to travel to Maule Air Inc., in Moultrie Georgia and pick up the aircraft.

This mission was carefully planned many months in advance, with flight information supplements, instrument approach charts, en-route charts, and operational navigation maps (ONC) of the countries to fly over (see figure below), overflight and landing permits, fuel consumption estimates and other information. It is important to note the valuable assistance of Sgt. Kimberly Olivier, USAF, of

\* I would like to thank Almighty God who is always with me; my parents who supported me with their prayers; my wife Valeska Elvir who has been my support since I met her; the Honduran Air Force authorities who trusted me and the team of pilots they sent on this delicate mission; the Director of the Military Aviation Academy, Col Neyib Rivera Flores who also trusted our work; the team of pilots who flew that mission: Lt. Col Jorge Cabrera, Lt. Iván Guerrero, Lt. Marco Rodríguez and Brent Maule; the Maule family and finally to all those involved in this delicate and important mission of bringing in the new basic trainers to the Military Aviation Academy and the Honduran Air Force

Joint Task Force Bravo, who collaborated unconditionally to obtain the required flight information supplements.



**Figure. Flight route**

Source: Author

After a long wait we obtained the departure date of 6 June 2008, when we were given the last instructions from our senior leaders of the Honduran Air Force. Two days later we departed to our destination, Albany, Georgia. There we were met by Lt Col Jorge Cabrera and Brent Maule, the sales agent. The next day, we reviewed the aircraft and Global Positioning System (GPS) manuals to begin our training on 10 June and went to the Maule Air Inc. factory, where we were met by Mr. and Mrs. Raymond Maule, current owners of the company.

We received our first class, on aircraft pre-flight, followed by inspection of each of the new aircraft. The training was carried out in the company's training aircraft, with each of our pilots flying for 8 hours, except for Lt Col Jorge Cabrera and I who flew an additional hour to be qualified as instructors. Spence Field, a former military base, now functions as the training ground for the Maule Flight School, which served as the setting for our first hours of flight training.

The training included the following:

- Ground operations
- Take-off considerations with wind factor
- Short and normal takeoffs
- Stalls with and without engine

- Flight with minimum control airspeed, 40 Knots of indicated airspeed (KIAS)
- Forced landings
- Landings on grass runways
- Wind factored landings
- Short and normal landings
- Right side aircraft operations (for instructors)

Although the Tucano is not a fast aircraft, it was difficult to get used to the low speeds of the Maule, especially flying at the minimum 40 KIAS during short landings and takeoffs, a feature of this aircraft.

Two important pillars in this mission were our instructor, Mr. Raymond, who despite his age continues to fly with strength as a true pioneer of aviation and the Pastor of Spring of Life Church of Moultrie Georgia, who gave us spiritual support and prayed for the pilots and the aircraft the day before our departure.

Finally, 17 June arrived, the historic day where our journey began to bring the four aircraft to Honduras. We could not wait to fly the new planes; however, as professional pilots, we executed the briefing before the flight. We started with a prayer entrusting ourselves to Almighty God and then we discussed and reviewed all the navigation and aeronautical material to be used. After the briefing ended, an informal but significant ceremony was held, where the company executives showed their affection to the crew members of the Honduran Air Force by handing out the diplomas that accredited us to fly the aircraft. Brent Maule was the fifth crew member who collaborated in the lead plane of the formation commanded by Lt. Col Cabrera. Flying alone on the plane was an exceptional experience and after four continuous flight hours our first landing to refuel was at Lafayette International Airport, Louisiana, where we had lunch, reviewed the flight plan, checked the weather en-route, and were ready to take off again. Just after takeoff we saw rain approaching the airport, which could have made our itinerary difficult if we had not taken off on time.

After three and a half hours we saw night fall in mid-flight; the four planes in formation were approaching their second destination, Brownsville, Texas, where we spent the night. We reviewed the post-flight and rested that night to continue the next day. At dawn at the Brownsville airport, we again did a pre-flight, checked for fuel and complied with the regulatory procedures at the immigration and customs office to verify the export of the aircraft by Maule Air Inc. This process took a long time, causing a delay in takeoff and altering our flight plan. On 18

June, all the pilots practiced effective teamwork in mid-flight, by taking turns as lead aircraft.

Upon landing in Veracruz, we encountered our first problem, due to the type of fuel required. However, the commander and officers of the naval air base in Veracruz, Mexico, gave us their full cooperation in refueling, and made arrangements for us to spend the night there. The early hours of 19 June were particularly important as we prepared for the third and last segment of the flight. We took off from Veracruz International Airport to Tikal, our next stop for fuel. It was a tiring flight and one of great concern, as we expected bad weather en-route, especially on the border between Mexico and Guatemala. Once again, flight formation teamwork demonstrated its importance, as we had lost communication with Mexico Control, the controlling authority for that airspace, due to the long distance we were traveling.

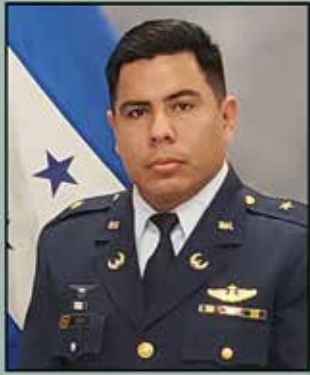
More than 150 nautical miles from Tikal, I was able to make the first contact with Tikal Approach which authorized us to fly directly from our position to the airport and thus avoid a stretch of about 60 nautical miles through which the airway passed. It was also very joyful to be able to converse with an old friend from Tikal Approach, whom I also thank for his help. Already exhausted from the flight, we finally managed to see the Mundo Maya International airport in the distance, in Tikal, Guatemala, where our comrades from the Guatemalan Air Force were waiting for us.

After refueling, we took off, bound for Toncontin, the shortest portion of the flight, but filled with great anxiety since we were just a few minutes away—a flight in which I had the honor of flying again as leader until we reached our national territory. It was a great joy for everyone to send a change of frequency with La Mesa Approach and listen to our people again.

At the border I handed over the leadership of the formation to Lt Col Cabrera, who oversaw the entire mission. We flew over our legendary Military Aviation Academy in formation followed by a flyover the Toncontin runway where a large delegation led by His Excellency, the President of the Republic Manuel Zelaya Rosales, awaited for us on the military ramp to officially welcome the four new aircraft. The afternoon of Thursday, 19 June 2008, was a very emotional moment—seeing so many people at the reception ceremony.

The following day, Friday, 20 June, we went to the Military Aviation Academy where a welcome ceremony was also held, and the aircraft were then integrated into the for training of new Honduran Air Force pilots.

*Once again, we can say that “We write history in heaven.” On this occasion, flying in the new Maule MXT-7-180 basic trainer, from Moultrie Georgia, USA, to the headquarters of the Glorious Honduran Air Force.*



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Honduran Air Force**

Graduate from the USAF Air Command and Staff College. Served as Base Operations and Training Chief and Flight Instructor at Col Héctor Caraccioli Moncada Air Base, Honduras. In 2014, he completed the Command Pilot course and received international certification in the Super King Air B200. He has served as flight instructor in the Cessna 152, Cessna 172, Cessna 210, Maule MXT-7-180, T-27 Tucano and the Super King Air B200 aircraft. In 2004 he graduated from the Quality in Education course from the Catholic University of Honduras and the Human Talent Development course from the University of Defense of Honduras. In 2007, he graduated with a degree in Aeronautical Sciences from the Defense University of Honduras and has a degree in Business Administration from the Autonomous University of Honduras.