



## Aviación del Ejército Boliviano

The Bolivian army maintains a small aviation component although it mostly relies on the FAB for its aerial transport requirements. The immaculate Beech King Air E90 (left) is based at Base Aérea General Jorge Jordan Mercado, El Alto, La Paz, for transport of the Bolivian army Commander-in-Chief, serving with *Compañía Aérea del Ejército* 291. The independent *Compañía Aérea del Ejército* Santa Cruz, which flies from El Trompillo, operates this Cessna 210 (above) on liaison duties, and also hopes to get its Cessna 152 and EMBRAER EMB-810 (licence-built Piper PA-31 Saracoc) back into the air in the near future.



Above: As well as operating T-33s, *Grupo Aéreo de Caza 31* at *BA General Jorge Jordan Mercado, El Alto*, also operates aircraft for VIP/staff transport. Pride of the fleet is this Rockwell Sabreliner 60, used for presidential transport. It was due to be replaced by a 'gift' Fokker F28 from Argentina, but the transfer was halted during 1999. GAC 31 also operates single examples of the Beech Baron, King Air 200 and Cessna 210.

Left: Taxying at Santa Cruz, this Beech King Air E90 formerly served with GAC 31 on staff transport duties. Following conversion by ENAER in Chile, it now flies on photo-survey duties with the SNA.

Right: Many of the FAB's light aircraft fleet was confiscated from drug smugglers. This Piper PA-32 Saratoga was such an aircraft, and is now assigned to the headquarters of the *IIIª Brigada Aérea* at El Trompillo. As well as liaison work, the aircraft is used against its former masters on anti-drug production surveillance missions.



## Fuerza de Tarea Aérea

The *FTA* – better known as the 'Diablos Rojos' (red devils) – is a special FAB unit dedicated to the eradication of drug production and trafficking within Bolivia, working closely with US organisations such as the Drug Enforcement Agency. The *FTA*'s principal vehicle is the Bell UH-1H Huey (right), of which 18 are in service, most with door gun armament. Two Hueys serve as VIP transports in a smart quasi-civil scheme and 'Department of State Air Wing' titles. A Beech Baron and several Cessna 210s (above) are used for spotting and surveillance of the many illegal airstrips in Bolivia. Formed in 1982, the *Fuerza de Tarea Aérea* is due to be disbanded in the next two years, in part a victim of its own success. Drug production has fallen sharply within Bolivia, while the funds and US personnel are now required more urgently in other areas of South America.

