

I find it interesting to look back and recall how SITA was first developed in this region of world. Thinking of my input in our company's development, I can't help but remember the opposition that we faced from the National Aeronautics Administrations and other agencies across various countries. Understanding how tough our challenges were, I find it important that close friends and strangers, as well as SITA professionals around the world, are able to recognize these Latin American lands "on the other side of the ocean", which greatly differ from its European counterparts—especially Paris.

I will start by reminiscing how I first came to SITA. In late 1959, as the Director of Operations for Telecom (Colombia's national telecommunications company), I was part of Colombia's delegation to the I.U.T (International Union of Telecommunications) in Geneva, where we established the international framework and regulations for radio communications. While at the I.U.T., I was contacted by Santiago Quijano Caballero, a Colombian residing in Berlin, who brought up SITA and its objectives, including developing its Latin American operations. Quijano asked me if I would be willing to help with this project in Colombia as well as other countries, which my employer at the time (Telecom) had close ties to.

I said that it would be a pleasure to host the SITA delegates in Colombia to analyze their offer and that perhaps I would be able to give them some contacts. Some time passed, and by mid-1960, I had the opportunity to speak with Jose Silva and his French colleague in my office. As I listened to them explain SITA's strategy, I proceeded to provide them with my opinion and other relevant information.

I explained that in Latin America—generally speaking—all functions related to aeronautical transport fell under the jurisdiction of the National Aeronautics Administrations and that, as a result, all operations would need to start with their acknowledgement. I then told them about a number of friends who were communication directors in various countries, including: Peru, Ecuador, Venezuela, and Mexico. Convinced of SITAs potential to establish itself as a player in the region, I wrote to various friends abroad urging them to accept meeting requests from Jose Silva.

I'd like to add that Jose Silva gave the impression of being a well-traveled man who fostered public relations, demonstrating that SITA was not only an interesting new player in the market but, also a company with proper financial resources!

Years passed and I continued with my professional responsibilities at Telecom. Throughout those years, I often received visits from Jose Silva and Obaldo Martinez, a Spanish national. Over time, the three of us developed a long-standing friendship.

Jose, a retired official from the Portuguese military forces, was a strong man who spoke multiple languages and was a true "international man." He had impressive knowledge of wines and easily distinguished himself socially due to his charm and personal anecdotes of trips around the world. Ubaldo, tall and skinny, was a great conversationalist who also had an understanding of the world. Undoubtedly, Jose and Ubaldo complemented each other very well. Together, they informed me that SITA was having trouble expanding operations in countries like Peru, Ecuador, and Colombia, while the European business was flourishing.

In 1966, six years after our first meeting, Jose Silva shared with me SITA's decision to place more emphasis in developing the Latin American region due to the impressive growth in commercial aviation. With this growing opportunity, Jose asked me to work with him as Colombia's representative and assistant for all regional functions. The offer was captivating due to the challenges of the vision, professional independence, and the opportunity to travel frequently—including vacations which, at a personal level, were important to my family and me.

After giving it some thought and discussing it with my wife, who happens to be a German national, I decided to accept the offer at the end of 1966, marking the beginning of the long legal battles that SITA ultimately won to establish itself.

I was given a small office space at the Civil Aviation Administration, four teleprinters and a telex, with only one "point to point" connection to AF. The operation was run by a supervisor and four operators from the Civil Aviation Administration. Some companies located at the airport sent their messengers to pick up and distribute their messages while other messages were processed using the telex.

The perforated tapes were thrown into small baskets and some fluttered happily through the air!!! The older generation of SITA employees around the world can surely remember this.

There was a filing cabinet and two small metal desks. Ubaldo Martinez, who was the representative in the region, would come to Bogota every once in a while, given the fact that he was also in charge of Peru and Ecuador—with the occasional escapes to Paris and Madrid where his family resided. There was also a French national whose name I cannot recall who was independently in charge of the accounting, not sure how.

A few days after starting with SITA I told myself that I was crazy for accepting the job under those circumstances; I certainly missed the comfort and responsibility that I had during my 8 year tenure at Telecom. On top of that, as a telecommunications engineer, it wasn't clear to me what my role was or how my technical skillset was useful. Taking into account all of these things, I began to ask myself if this was the big international company that had been portrayed to me?

BUT, a lot of things happened that perhaps I will describe at another time that led me to stay at SITA for 26 years—first as UA, then UZ, and finally as DA and DU (acronyms that I assume you will understand).

I would like to add that upon my retirement and thanks to the work, dedication, and consistency of many friends across many countries, whom I remember fondly and deserve all of my recognition for their dedication and effort, SITA's northern sub region in South America grew to include an additional 8 countries, not taking into account 4 countries in Central America.

Type "B" traffic was replaced by type "A" traffic, automation and high-velocity circuits were established all throughout the region, and legacy operators were replaced by engineers and technicians. Users were no longer simply aviation companies, but also travel agencies and a number of selected manufacturers. Lastly, I also think that it is important to point out that SITA's logo was present in various buildings acquired, where the new automated centers were properly conditioned.

Until next time.