



# **WINGS OVER PERU**

## **The Douglas 8A in Cuerpo Aeronáutico del Perú service**

Latin American aviation specialist **AMARU TINCOPA** continues his occasional series on the history of military aviation in Peru with the story of the Northrop-designed Douglas 8A in *Cuerpo Aeronáutico del Perú* service, with which the type saw combat in Peru's 1941 conflict with neighbouring Ecuador, as well as during three domestic uprisings in 1948



**I**N THE SUMMER of 1937 the *Cuerpo Aeronáutico del Perú* (Peruvian Aeronautic Corps — CAP) launched a modernisation programme aimed not only at the replacement of a number of aircraft on its inventory which were obsolescent and/or approaching the end of their operational careers, but also the acquisition of a light ground-attack aircraft. The *Comandancia General de Aeronáutica* (Aeronautics High Command — CGA) ordered the establishment of an ad hoc unit, the *Comité Técnico de Adquisiciones* (Technical Committee for Acquisitions — CTA), which was tasked with the selection and evaluation of potential candidates for purchase.<sup>1</sup> The basic requirements established by the committee for the CAP's ground-attack aircraft were as follows:

- Type — two-seat monoplane;
- Construction — metal;
- Powerplant — 800 h.p. radial piston engine;
- Bombload — not less than 500kg (1,100lb);
- Undercarriage — retractable;
- Armament — 4 x 7.65mm (0.3in)-calibre fixed machine-guns + 1 in a flexible position.

The evaluation process started in January 1938 with the Italian Caproni Bergamaschi AP.1 monoplane, which was quickly discarded, as its technical characteristics did not comply with the requirements established by the CTA.<sup>2</sup> The process continued with the evaluation of other Italian types, including a Breda Ba.65 monoplane equipped with a Breda Type M turret, Meridionali's Romeo Ro.37 biplane with an A.30

inline engine, plus two designs from the USA; the Douglas 8A (an updated version of the US Army Air Corps' A-17, originally designed by the Northrop Corporation, which was part-owned by Douglas and taken over fully by the latter in 1937) and Seversky's 2PA-204 (sold to the Imperial Japanese Navy Air Force as the A8V1).

By mid-July 1938 the CTA had completed its evaluations and issued its report to the CGA, ruling the Douglas 8A as the winner and recommending the purchase of 20 airframes.<sup>3</sup> However, shortly after the Peruvian government notified Douglas of its intention to purchase the type, Congress in the USA opposed the sale, stating that the manufacturer was committed to rearming the USAAC and was therefore unable to fulfil any other requirements.<sup>4</sup> Eventually, after a great deal of political manoeuvring, clearance was granted for the sale of ten Douglas 8As to Peru, the contract being signed in August 1938.<sup>5</sup>

### **The Peruvian 8A**

The Douglas 8A-3P, as the Peruvian variant was designated by the manufacturer, differed from the USAAC's A-17 in having a retractable undercarriage (although the USAAC's A-17A was also so equipped) and a semi-retractable bomb-aiming tub, as well as a more powerful 1,000 h.p. Wright R-1820-G103 Cyclone engine in place of the A-17's 825 h.p. Pratt & Whitney R-1535 Twin Wasp Junior.

With these refinements the 8A-3P could achieve a maximum speed of 238 m.p.h. (383km/h)

**OPPOSITE PAGE, TOP** Showing the type's distinctive perforated flaps for dive-bombing, one of Peru's initial batch of Douglas 8A-3Ps undergoes flight testing in the USA before delivery.

MCPHAIL VIA AUTHOR

**MAIN PICTURE** A line-up of Peruvian training aircraft at Las Palmas airfield, Lima, in 1956. Nearest the camera is an 8A-3P, with an 8A-5, fitted with machine-gun gondolas, alongside.

AUTHOR'S COLLECTION





**ABOVE** With only the red, white and red vertical bars of the rudder providing any clues as to its intended destination, one of Peru's original ten 8A-3Ps, all built at Douglas's El Segundo factory, is test-flown over the California coast in late 1938 or early 1939. Seven of the 8As were transported to Peru by ship and three were delivered by air.

at 8,695ft (2,650m), with a service ceiling of 24,000ft (7,300m). The internal fuel load gave the 8A-3P a range of 650 miles (1,050km) and a 305-mile (490km) combat radius. Armament comprised four fixed Browning M1919 0.3in-calibre machine-guns mounted in the wings, plus another on a flexible mount operated by the bomb aimer/wireless operator, and a 1,210lb (550kg) bombload carried internally and on external racks.<sup>6</sup> The aircraft retained the A-17's perforated flaps,<sup>6</sup> which allowed dive-bombing attacks.

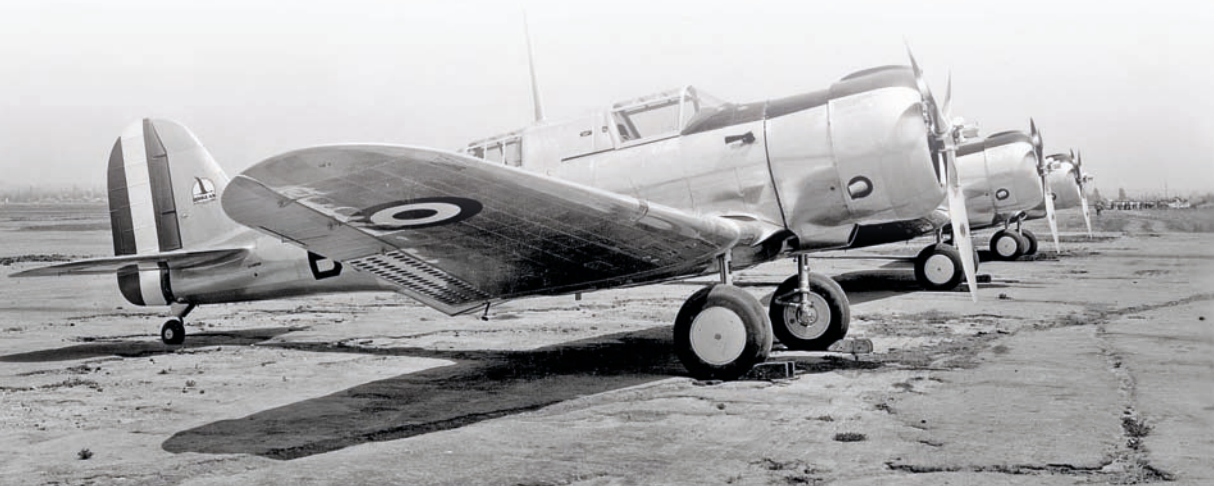
### **Delivery and entry into service**

Delays affected the start of production and it was not until early November 1938 that the first 8A-3P rolled off the assembly line, the remaining examples following at a rate of three per month. By early March 1939 testing and acceptance had been completed and the aircraft were cleared

for delivery. Seven airframes were dismantled, crated and taken by rail to Los Angeles harbour, where they were loaded aboard a steamer bound for Callao, near Lima, arriving later that month.

In the meantime, the remaining three 8A-3Ps were delivered by means of a long-distance formation flight, the trio departing Los Angeles for Lima on the morning of May 31, 1939.<sup>7</sup> The aircraft were flown by Lt-Cdr Armando Revoredo Iglesias with Capt Jorge Virgil Morey as radio operator/flight engineer; Lt Enrique Espinoza Sánchez with Oscar Espejo as radio operator, and Ernesto Gómez Cornejo carrying Federico Vera in the rear seat, and completed the following stages: Los Angeles—El Paso, Texas; El Paso—Brownsville, Texas; Brownsville—Tapachula, Mexico; Tapachula—Panama City and Panama City to Lima, with a refuelling stop at Chiclayo in north-western Peru. Having covered some

**BELOW** Three of the 8A-3Ps await their formation delivery flight to Peru on the tarmac at El Segundo in May 1939. The first of the Peruvian 8A-3Ps to be completed made its maiden flight on November 21, 1938, and the ten were given c/ns 412–421. The 8A traced its heritage back to the Northrop Gamma 2F, developed into the USAAC's A-17.







**ABOVE** For the 4,700-mile (7,600km) delivery flight from Los Angeles to Lima, the three 8A-3Ps were given the serials BO-1G to BO-3G, the first of which is seen here during the flight on June 4, 1939, with Lt-Cdr Armando Revoredo Iglesias at the controls and Capt Jorge Virgil Morey in the rear seat as radio operator/flight engineer.

4,700 miles (7,600km), the flight landed safely at Limatambo airport in Lima at 1745hr on June 5, after a total flight time of 24hr 45min.

On their arrival, the seven crated aircraft were sent to Las Palmas airfield, where they were assembled and tested by Douglas personnel, who had accompanied them by ship. The aircraft were then assigned to the recently activated XXXI *Escuadrón de Información y Ataque* (31st Information & Attack Squadron — XXXI EIA), a reconnaissance and ground-support unit based at Las Palmas under Lt-Cdr Revoredo. The unit comprised three *Escadrilles* — Nos 91, 92 and 93 — of three aircraft each, representing a total of nine aircraft (plus one reserve) on strength.

With the arrival of the remaining aircraft from the USA in June, the unit began an intense operational training programme at Las Palmas, which was completed in September 1939, at which point XXXI EIA was declared fully operational.

In early 1940 Revoredo began planning an ambitious long-distance tour of South America as a means of projecting Peru's air power and demonstrating the high level of preparedness of the CAP. An ad hoc unit, named "*Los Zorros*" (The Foxes), was created for the purpose and was made up of five aircraft, to be manned by a group of highly experienced officers. On the evening of March 23, 1940, the five 8A-3Ps left Limatambo bound for Quito, the Ecuadorean capital, for their first stop.

The next morning, as the flight prepared to depart Quito, 8A-3P serial XXXI-2, flown by Capt José Bernales, hit a boulder located at the edge of the Mariscal Sucre airport runway while taxiing, incurring damage to one of its wingtips and rendering the aircraft unfit for flight. Revoredo

ordered Bernales and his mechanic to wait for a spare wing from Lima, while the group continued to Bogotá, Colombia.<sup>8</sup> Bernales then flew the repaired machine back to Lima.

The remaining four aircraft continued the tour, visiting Bogotá, Caracas in Venezuela, Paranaibo, Belen do Pará, Fortaleza and Rio de Janeiro in Brazil, Asunción in Paraguay, Montevideo in Uruguay, Buenos Aires in Argentina, Santiago de Chile and, finally, La Paz in Bolivia, covering some 11,125 miles (17,900km) before landing back at Limatambo on the morning of May 3, 1940.

The first operational loss of an 8A-3P was recorded on April 12, 1941, when Lts Luis Cossio Tudela and Bernales suffered an engine failure, resulting in a fatal crash, at Ckari, near the city of Cuzco in the Andes. The pair were taking part in a nationwide tour aimed at raising funds for the National Armed Forces Reserve.

### **Action over Ecuador**

On July 5, 1941, escalating border tensions between Ecuador and Peru erupted into a full-blown conflict after Ecuadorean army elements allegedly attacked Peruvian posts along the border, prompting a swift response from the Peruvian government. In Lima, the latter seized the opportunity to deploy its superior armed forces and launch a large military operation against the weaker Ecuador, with the aim of forcing the Quito government into negotiations to resolve the border dispute once and for all.

Not involved in operations during the early stages of the conflict, XXXI EIA was kept at readiness at its home base of Las Palmas. However, on July 24, 1941, it was reassigned to *No 1 Grupo Aéreo* (No 1 Air Group — 1 GA) and

*Four of the five 8A-3Ps that set off on the CAP's five-week tour of South America in 1940, dubbed "Los Zorros", during their visit to Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. The fifth was forced to return to Lima after damaging a wingtip while taxiing in Ecuador at the beginning of the tour.* IEHAP VIA AUTHOR



and ordered to deploy to the *Teatro de Operaciones del Norte* (Northern Operations Theatre — TON).<sup>9</sup> That morning XXXI EIA left Las Palmas at 1000hr and headed north, bound for Teniente Coronel Pedro Ruiz Gallo airbase in Chiclayo, where the 8A-3Ps arrived at 1230hr. Shortly after, at 1400hr, No 91 Escadrille departed Chiclayo for a secondary airfield located at Piura, where the unit spent the night. The next morning, 1 GA issued a directive ordering No 91 Escadrille to deploy to the forward airfield at Tumbes and establish its command there, which was accomplished by 1130hr. The following day, 1 GA Command ordered the transfer of XXXI EIA's remaining escadrilles from Chiclayo to Talara, where they were stationed to await further orders.

Combat came for XXXI EIA on July 27, 1941, when a pair of No 91 Escadrille 8A-3Ps — serials XXXI-91-1 and XXXI-91-3 — took off on an armed reconnaissance sortie over the Ecuadorean towns of Cuenca and Santa Rosa at 1645hr. Bad weather, however, prevented a clear view of Uzcurrumi Bridge, one of the sortie's objectives, which had been attacked by Peruvian Caproni Ca.310 bombers, and the aircraft landed back at their base at Tumbes at 1812hr.

### **Bridge demolition**

Two days later XXXI EIA received orders to destroy the bridges at the villages of Federico Páez and Uzcurrumi, and to attack the bridge at Arenillas and the Ecuadorean Army units stationed nearby. A formation of 8A-3Ps departed Tumbes at 1115hr, each armed with six 30lb (13.5kg) anti-personnel and four 110lb (50kg) demolition bombs, the latter causing significant damage to the bridges. The sortie continued with an attack using machine-guns and the anti-

personnel bombs on Ecuadorean army elements, before the aircraft returned to Tumbes at 1330hr.

July 30 marked No 92 Escadrille's operational debut as two aircraft, XXXI-92-2 and XXXI-92-3, undertook an armed reconnaissance sortie over the Ecuadorean defensive positions around Arenillas and the north bank of the Santa Rosa River, as well as over Chacras, the town of Santa Rosa's railway station and other objectives. The two 8A-3Ps were scrambled from Talara at 1045hr, and on reaching their designated targets, successfully attacked Ecuadorean army positions on the north bank of the Santa Rosa River and around Arenillas with 4½lb (2kg) anti-personnel bombs. The aircraft returned to Talara to re-arm, before repeating the attack and returning again at 1520hr, reporting that the majority of Ecuadorean army units had abandoned Santa Rosa.

A sortie by No 91 Escadrille was also flown on July 30, the unit searching for Ecuadorean army movement in the Quebrada Seca—Jubones—Girón—Tarqui—Cuenca areas.

On the morning of July 31 No 91 Escadrille flew a number of sorties in support of airborne operations aimed at capturing the towns of Machala, Santa Rosa and Puerto Bolívar, and attacked troop concentrations around Pasaje. The unit also provided air support to forces advancing towards those towns. At 1115hr the same day No 93 Escadrille was redeployed from Talara to Tumbes, where the unit commander received orders to perform an armed reconnaissance around Macará and its surroundings. During this sortie a number of targets of opportunity were attacked and intense groundfire was reported between La Toma and Macará.

Meanwhile, the 8A-3Ps of No 91 Escadrille attacked supply barges discovered around Puerto

*Wearing the original bare-metal finish in which the aircraft were delivered and their somewhat long-winded unit codes — XXXI for the Escuadrón; 92 for the Escadrille and 1 for the individual aircraft — a formation of 8As patrols over Peru's northern coastal region in July 1941, at the time of the conflict with Ecuador, also known as Guerra del 41 (The War of '41).*



Bolívar before proceeding eastwards towards Machala, where they attacked a horse-drawn convoy loaded with supplies. The aircraft then struck an army truck convoy and two infantry companies near Girón and Tarqui, causing heavy casualties among the Ecuadorean forces.

### **Ceasefire – but flying continues**

The first day of August saw a ceasefire. Operations, however, continued as No 91 Escadrille flew a “top cover” sortie for *Ejército Peruano* (Peruvian Army — EP) forces landing at Puerto Bolívar and Machala. Four days later No 91 undertook reconnaissance sorties over Pasaje, Guabo and Uzcurremuni to confirm reports of Ecuadorean forces in the area.

The next morning two 8A-3Ps — XXXI-91-2 and XXXI-91-3 — escorted a Caproni Ca.111 transport of the 105 *Escuadrilla de Transporte* (105 ET),

carrying a high-ranking EP officer, from Tumbes to Santa Rosa, before undertaking reconnaissance duties over Machala.

A violation of the ceasefire by Ecuadorean forces on August 9 led to a renewal of hostilities, XXXI EIA returning to flying retaliation strikes against objectives in Guayaquil and Cuenca. The following day No 91 flew to Sullana, from where the unit's 8A-3Ps performed an armed reconnaissance sortie over the areas of Macará, Zabiango, Carlomagno, Loja, Célica, Laceiba, Zapotillo and Alamor. Meanwhile, No 92 flew to Piura in order to re-arm, as the bomb stocks at Tumbes were exhausted, before heading for Sullana. From the latter an uneventful armed reconnaissance patrol was undertaken over the areas of Alamor, Zapotillo, La Ceiba, Saucillo, Carlomagno, Sabiango and Macará.

On August 22, 8A-3P XXXI-93-3 returned to

*The damage to XXXI-91-2 of No 91 Escadrille is inspected by CAP personnel after a landing mishap at Villa auxiliary airfield in October 1941. That month the conflict with Ecuador drew to a close and the 8As were recalled to Lima, where most had returned by early November.* AUTHOR'S COLLECTION







**ABOVE** The CAP's 8As were used extensively during the conflict with Ecuador, often as bombers; here an 8A-3P is rearmed with fragmentation bombs before another bombing sortie from Tumbes forward airfield on the Peru-Ecuador border, in late July 1941. The 8A was also fitted with a pair of Browning 0.3in machine-guns in each wing.

No 93 Escadrille after undergoing repair at Las Palmas. Two days later No 91 flew the American military attaché from Tumbes to Santa Rosa, and on August 25 No 92 flew an armed reconce patrol in search of Ecuadorean forces over the road towards Pucará, Guanazan and Yulo.

After a lull in operations XXXI EIA returned to action on the evening of September 11, its units performing a number of sorties against Ecuadorean Army units near Porotillo, in retaliation for a bloody ambush against an EP reconnaissance patrol earlier that day. Operations continued three days later when Ecuadorean army positions in and around Pucará, Santa Isabel, Jubones canyon and Uzcurremi were attacked by the 8A-3Ps of Nos 92 and 93 Escadrilles. Several sorties were flown against the towns of Piedras and Piñas on September 19, in which a total of 383 FN SS-34 ammunition cartridges, as well as 20 x 30lb and 10 x 25lb (11kg) bombs, were used.

Hostilities between Peru and Ecuador finally came to an end with both nations' signing of the *Auerdo de Talara* (Talara Agreement) on October 2, 1941.<sup>10</sup> According to the terms of this document, both sides set about the demilitarisation of the border and, accordingly, the gradual withdrawal of units to their home bases was put into effect, XXXI EIA withdrawing from Sullana to Talara the same day at 1310hr. After performing various drills and exercises, most of the unit had returned to Lima by early November 1941.

Back at Las Palmas leave was granted for the unit's crews while all its aircraft were sent to the *Arsenal de Aeronáutica*<sup>11</sup> for mandatory inspection and overhaul, much needed after three months of constant operations from poorly prepared air-

fields. The unit suffered another loss of men and materiel when 2nd Lt Cesar Benavides Bielich and 3rd Class Sub-Officer Tito Martin Lynch were killed when the 8A-3P in which they were flying crashed into a hill near the Huaynacocha lagoon in Junín in bad weather on October 16, 1941.

### **New allies; enter the 8A-5**

The signing of a military aid programme between Peru and the USA in late 1941 after the latter's entry into the Second World War, and the Lend-Lease and Hemispheric Defense Co-operation Agreements signed by the two nations in the spring of 1942, opened a new chapter for Peru's military forces. The commitment of Peru to the Allied cause put strategic assets in Peruvian territory — oil refineries in Talara and raw material shipments from Callao and Chimbote harbours, for example — at risk of potential attack by Axis forces.

As a result the CAP's air units were strengthened and given new assignments; XXXI EIA was no exception, becoming an important part of the CAP's strategy for coastal defence. The unit was thus tasked with patrolling the central and northern coastal areas of the country, in order to investigate any suspected activity from Imperial Japanese Navy vessels, especially submarines.

By April 1942 XXXI EIA was back to full strength, all its aircraft having been overhauled at the *Arsenal de Aeronáutica* and returned to the unit. To comply with their newly assigned coastal duties the aircraft were painted in an overall matt Sea Blue finish. For identification purposes the leading aircraft of each escadrille were given red or blue cowlings. The 8A-3Ps were also equipped



**ABOVE** Fitted with a 1,200 h.p. Wright GR-1820 Cyclone engine and machine-gun gondolas under the wings, the 8A-5 was the most powerful and heavily armed variant of the Northrop/Douglas series of attack aircraft. Norway's 8A-5s became A-33-DEs in USAAF service, an example of which is seen here at Kelly Field, where they were stored.

with a liferaft fitted on the rear canopy to increase the crew's survival chances in case of ditching.

The Douglas 8A-5 was conceived in response to a pre-war requirement issued by the Norwegian government for an A-17A powered by a 1,200 h.p. Wright R-1820-G205A Cyclone engine, to equip its *Heerens Flyvevaben* (Army Flying Service). The result was identical to the Peruvian 8A-3P and Iraqi 8A-4 variants, but capable of carrying heavier armament in the form of a pair of Browning 0.5in-calibre machine-guns in gondolas mounted beneath the wings, raising the number of fixed weapons to six. The bombload was also increased to 1,810lb (820kg).

A total of 36 Douglas 8A-5s was ordered in early 1940 but none was delivered, the USA placing an embargo on the aircraft when Norway was finally forced to capitulate to German forces that June. A Norwegian government-in-exile was

swiftly established in the UK and its reformed air force established a training centre known as "Little Norway" at Toronto Island Airport in Canada. The 8A-5s and other aircraft purchased by the Norwegian government were sent to the base to serve as trainers. The 8A-5s served until mid-1941, when 18 of the surviving machines were repossessed by the USA as part of Reverse Lend-Lease, and pressed into USAAF service as A-33-DEs.<sup>12</sup> The Americans found no use for the type, however, and considered sending them to the Soviet Union; this proved fruitless and the airframes were put into storage at Kelly Field in San Antonio, Texas.<sup>13</sup>

Meanwhile, back in Lima, the CGA, aware of the availability of the aircraft, requested their purchase to bring XXXI EIA up to full strength, as stipulated in Peru's original strategic plan for 1939-44. Negotiations began in Washington DC

**In November 1943 a total of 13 refurbished Douglas 8A-5s, along with ten Curtiss Hawk 75As, were flown from Texas to Las Palmas, where this line-up of 8A-5s was photographed shortly after their arrival in November 1943. The aircraft were apparently ferried in an Olive Drab scheme, as seen here, but were repainted in a camouflage scheme early in 1944.**

AUTHOR'S COLLECTION





*Although of poor quality, this rare photograph shows the overall matt Sea Blue finish applied to the 8A-3Ps from April 1942, and following this machine's assignment to the newly activated 23 EIA. Note the use of Arabic numerals instead of Roman, which were phased out in 1942.*

IEHAP VIA AUTHOR



but, again, the USA's War Department opposed the sale, reasoning that the aircraft may be used against Ecuador, one of America's other Lend-Lease allies. The Peruvians restated their case in August 1941, only to be rejected again. Finally, in June 1943, with Peru firmly established as an American ally, Congress approved the transfer of 13 Douglas 8A-5 airframes to the CAP, along with two sets of propellers and five engines, under the tenets of the military aid programme.<sup>14</sup>

After several years of Royal Norwegian Air Force use and a period of storage, the surviving 8A-5s were in poor condition and, as part of the agreement, the USA committed to perform inspections and/or major repairs as necessary to the airframes before their delivery to the CAP.<sup>15</sup> The batch of refurbished 8A-5s<sup>16</sup> were ready for acceptance in early November 1943 and on the 16th were collected and flown to Lima by a group of officer pilots of the newly activated *No 23 Escuadrón de Información y Ataque* (23 Information & Attack Squadron — 23 EIA), along with ten Curtiss Hawk 75A-8s<sup>17</sup> [see *Wings Over*

*Peru, TAH25*]. The formation flew from Kelly Field to Brownsville, and from there to Veracruz-Tapachula and on to Managua in Nicaragua, San José de David (David Field) and Rio Hato in Panama, and Cali in Colombia before arriving at Talara and then Lima on November 19, logging a total flying time of 29hr 45min.

### **Back to Talara**

Following the arrival of the 8A-5s, 23 EIA was deployed to Capitán Victor Montes airfield in Talara, where the new aircraft were joined by the nine surviving 8A-3Ps of the recently disbanded 31 EIA. (Roman numerals had been phased out by the CAP and Arabic numerals used instead from 1942.) In early December 1943, 23 EIA achieved operational status and began performing maritime patrol duties along the northern Peruvian coastline, in co-operation with USAAF units stationed at the nearby El Pato airbase.<sup>18</sup>

In early 1944 the 8A-5s of 23 EIA were sent to the Arsenal de Aeronáutica for inspection, and were painted in a new Dark Green, Dark Earth

**BELOW** *Another rare image, this time of 8A-3Ps at Capitán Victor Montes airfield near Talara, in December 1942. These 8A-3Ps have not yet been painted in the Sea Blue finish; the aircraft were repainted in batches so as not to remove the entire unit from service at once. All had been repainted by the time of the arrival of the 8A-5s, however.*

AUTHOR'S COLLECTION



*Showing the 8A-5's armament of four 0.3in machine-guns within the wings, a pair of underwing gondolas each containing a 0.5in machine-gun, plus a 0.3in machine-gun on a flexible mount in the observer's cockpit, this example is seen in the Dark Green, Dark Earth and Light Gray camouflage scheme applied from early 1944, and with a squadron badge below the front cockpit.*

DIRIN VIAAUTHOR



and Light Gray colour scheme — differentiating them from the 8A-3Ps, which retained their dark-blue overall finish — for the rest of the war.

With the end of the Second World War came the end of the economic and military aid given by the USA to its “backyard allies”, including Peru. As a result, the Peruvian *Ministerio de Aeronáutica* (Air Ministry — MA) was forced to realign the CAP's size and structure with its peacetime requirements. Thus 23 EIA was disbanded in January 1946 and its aircraft transferred to the simultaneously reactivated 31 EIA based at Lima, which operated a mixture of 8A-3Ps and 8A-5s. Also, during this period a new serial system was adopted, as follows:

- 100-series serials — fighters;
- 200-series — fighter-bombers and ground-attack aircraft;
- 300-series — transport aircraft;
- 400-series — training aircraft;
- 500-series — miscellaneous types;
- 600-series — helicopters;
- 700-series — liaison aircraft.

The 8A-3Ps and 8A-5s, given 200-series serials as fighter-bombers, reverted to a natural-metal finish with a coloured band applied to the rear fuselage, in which the letters A, B or C were applied for identification purposes.

### **The 1948 uprisings**

On July 4, 1948, disaffected Peruvian Army officer Cmdr Alfonso Llosa González Pavón led a right-wing rebellion against the President, Dr José Luis Bustamante y Rivero. The government swiftly ordered the CAP to take action. During the early hours of July 5 the *Comando de Operaciones* (Operations Command — COMOP),

under the direct command of the MA, ordered the deployment of three 31 EIA Douglas 8As and a pair of Curtiss-Wright CW-22B monoplane trainers of *No 35 Escuadrón de Información Terrestre* to Alfredo Rodríguez Ballón airport in Arequipa in southern Peru. After a 2½hr flight from Las Palmas to Arequipa, Cmdr Luis Cayo Murillo performed a reconnaissance sortie over the city of Juliaca, after which he issued a complete report to the head of the Army's *IV Región Militar*. Following radio communications with COMOP in Lima, Cayo received the order to attack the rebel forces.

At 1510hr on July 5 the three 8As took off from Alfredo Rodríguez Ballón with Capt Jorge Camell del Solar as flight leader and Capt Jorge Barbosa Falconí and 2nd Lt Pedro Izquierdo Kernan as his wingmen. Engine failure forced Camell and Izquierdo to abort the sortie and land at Cuzco, the alternate airfield, while Barbosa continued on to Juliaca, attacking the army barracks with bombs and machine-gun fire. After running out of ammunition Barbosa headed back to Arequipa, but became disoriented by the sun in his eyes. Unable to determine his position and with fuel levels decreasing alarmingly, a nervous Barbosa decided to return to Cuzco using geographical landmarks as references, managing to land at the former capital of the Inca empire with the day's last sunrays.

Three months later the 8As were back in action during the so-called *Rebelión de la Armada*, an attempted coup led by *Marina de Guerra del Perú* (Peruvian Navy — MGP) elements disaffected with the government, which started on October 3, 1948. With the main MGP bases and the bulk of the fleet captured by the insurgents, the CAP,





**ABOVE** Douglas 8A-5 serial 276 at Las Palmas in the late 1940s, by which time markings were minimal, with a small roundel aft of the cockpit and the aircraft's 200-series serial aft of that. Like the rest of the aircraft (apart from the black anti-glare panel on the forward fuselage), the rudder is bare-metal and no longer sports the original red, white and red stripes.

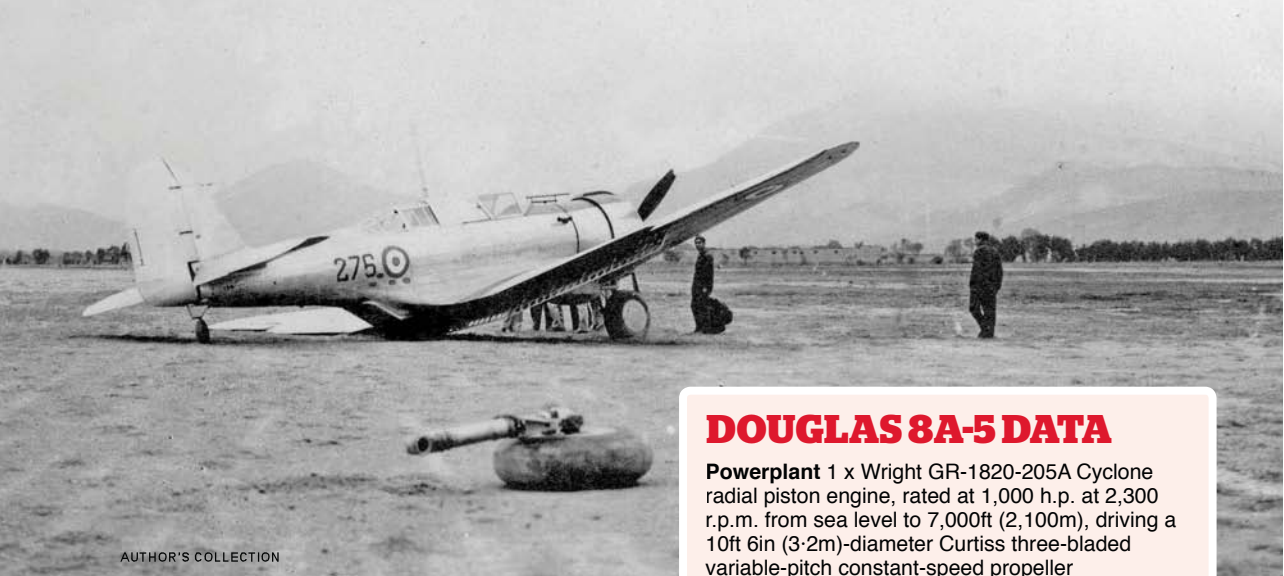


**LEFT** With the rear cowling of its Wright Cyclone engine removed, 8A-5 serial 266 of the re-formed 31 EIA undergoes maintenance at Vitor, Arequipa province, in February 1948. The year would prove to be another busy one for the CAP's 8As, with operations in support of the government to extinguish a right-wing rebellion in July and two more attempts to overthrow the government in October, the last of which was successful.

**BELOW** President Bustamante y Rivero reviews the aircraft and personnel of 31 EIA on October 6, 1948, after their participation in action against rebel sailors of the Peruvian Navy during the "October Revolution" of October 3-5. Before the month was out, the President had been ousted in a coup led by Army General Manuel Odria. IEHAP VIA AUTHOR







AUTHOR'S COLLECTION

**ABOVE** Having deposited its port mainwheel on the runway after a particularly heavy landing at Las Palmas, 8A-5 serial 276 is inspected by 31 EIA personnel. The damage was deemed to be minimal and the aircraft was swiftly repaired and returned to service within a few days. The type proved itself to be a rugged and dependable asset for the CAP.

which remained loyal to the government, was ordered to launch attacks against the rebel forces. The task fell to 31 EIA, and a seven-aircraft formation took off from Las Palmas at 0945hr on October 3 to attack the rebel fleet facing the Miraflores, Barranco and Chorrillos districts of Lima. The formation leader instructed his men to perform mock dive-bombing attacks over the ships to persuade their crews to surrender; but, as the first aircraft approached, dozens of anti-aircraft guns opened fire against the formation, although none of the aircraft was hit.

After returning to Las Palmas the unit awaited fresh orders, departing again at 1130hr to attack the fleet flagship *BAP Almirante Grau*, which was refuelling at the naval base in Callao harbour. After arriving over their objective, the 8As began their bombing runs into a barrage of anti-aircraft fire from the ship; all received hits, although none was critical. After completing their sortie, the 8As returned to Las Palmas, where inspection by ground personnel revealed bullet hits on every aircraft, with 8A serial 277, flown by 2nd Lt Bohórquez, being the worst-hit, having landed with a flat tyre owing to bullet damage.

A third sortie was launched at 1700hr. Three 8As, led by Capt Barbosa, departed to attack rebel vessels sighted off San Lorenzo Island, near Callao. After discovering their targets, the aircraft each dropped four 110lb (50kg) bombs in salvos, achieving some near-misses and damaging some of the ships. By the end of the day, after thousands of civilian and military casualties, the "October Revolution" had lost its momentum and by nightfall most of the fighting had ceased, the rebel fleet returning to Callao harbour to surrender.

## DOUGLAS 8A-5 DATA

**Powerplant** 1 x Wright GR-1820-205A Cyclone radial piston engine, rated at 1,000 h.p. at 2,300 r.p.m. from sea level to 7,000ft (2,100m), driving a 10ft 6in (3.2m)-diameter Curtiss three-bladed variable-pitch constant-speed propeller

### Dimensions

Span	47ft 8¾in	(14.55m)
Length	32ft 6in	(9.9m)
Height		
Thrust-line level (tll)	12ft 6in	(3.3m)
Tail down	10ft 0in	(3.05m)
Tailplane span	17ft 7in	(5.4m)
Tailplane area	35.8ft²	(3.3m²)
Fin area	9.7ft²	(0.9m²)
Propeller-tip clearance (with tll)	8½in	(20.6cm)
Wheel track	11ft 0in	(3.35m)

### Wing

Area	363ft²	(33.7m²)
Chord		
MAC*	96.9in	(246cm)
Maximum	114in	(289.5cm)
Aerofoil section		
Root	NACA 2415	
Tip	NACA 2409	
Dihedral	5.5°	
Incidence	2.5°	
Sweep	5°	
Flap area, total	49.8ft²	(4.6m²)

### Weights

Empty	4,874lb	(2,211kg)
Loaded		
Attack sortie	7,500lb	(3,402kg)
Bombing sortie	8,600lb	(3,900kg)

### Performance

Maximum speed		
at sea level	208 m.p.h.	(335km/h)
at 8,700ft (2,650m)	238 m.p.h.	(383km/h)
Landing speed	66 m.p.h.	(106km/h)
Climb	1,200ft/min	(370m/min)
Service ceiling	24,000ft	(7,300m)
Maximum range	1,180 miles	(1,900km)

### Armament

4 x fixed forward-firing 0.3in machine-guns;  
2 x 0.5in machine-guns in wing-mounted gondolas;  
1 x 0.3in machine-gun on flexible mount in observer's position

**Bombload** up to 2,205lb (1,000kg)

\* Mean aerodynamic chord

1 The CTA was an ad-hoc outfit comprising three officers designated by the CGA

2 In compliance with the terms of a 1936 contract signed between the Peruvian government and Caproni, the former committed to give the Italian company the first purchase option on any future CAP aircraft unless their performance characteristics or price could be bettered by the competition

3 The CAP's operational requirements for 1939–44 stipulated sufficient aircraft to equip two squadrons, comprising three escadrilles of three aircraft each, plus one reserve aircraft

4 There were concerns in Washington DC regarding the sale of military hardware to a government deemed to be sympathetic to fascism, as the administration of Gen Oscar R. Benavides was

5 Douglas 8A was the designation given to export versions of the A-17

6 The M1919 was modified to fire 7.65mm-calibre ammunition on the Peruvian machines

7 These aircraft were given the civil registrations BO-1G to BO-3G

8 The replacement wing arrived tied to the undersurface of a CAP Curtiss BT-32 Condor

9 The TON was an ad-hoc arrangement of aerial,

ground and naval forces created in January 1941 to protect Peru's northern territories

10 The *Acuerdo de Talara* was a first step towards the definitive peace agreement, the *Protocolo de Paz, Amistad y Límites de Río de Janeiro*, signed in Rio on January 29, 1942

11 *Arsenal de Aeronáutica* was the name given to the former Caproni works at Las Palmas after its expropriation in the summer of 1941

12 A-33DE; this followed the USAAF-type designation system (A = Attack)

13 These aircraft had the USAAF serials 42-13584 to 42-13601

14 An additional airframe was eventually sent to Peru as an attrition replacement, raising the total number of 8A-5Ns delivered to the CAP to 14

15 This included the provision of new engines

16 This batch of refurbished aircraft received new USAAF serials for record-keeping purposes, running from 42-109007 to 42-109019

17 This was part of a total of 28 aircraft purchased as part of the Lend-Lease programme in 1942

18 El Pato was an airbase built by the American government in accordance with the defence agreement signed between the USA and Peru on April 24, 1942

Within a month of the bloody conclusion to this attempted revolution, the Peruvian government faced yet another uprising.

### The final act

On October 27, 1948, Army Division General Manuel A. Odría broadcast a manifesto from Arequipa, calling for an insurrection against the Bustamante y Rivero government. In Lima 31 EIA was again called into action, with two escadrilles, authorised to use lethal force if necessary, deploying to Arequipa to contain the rebel forces. However, unbeknown to the 8As' crews, the coup successfully removed the government during the unit's flight. As the pilots climbed out of their machines after landing at Arequipa, armed

guards rounded them up and placed them in custody. The local CAP commander ordered the removal of all bombs and ammunition from the six aircraft pending further orders, which arrived a few hours later. In a twist of destiny, the recently released pilots found themselves escorting the C-47 carrying Gen Odría and his staff to Lima.

More than 15 years of wear-and-tear in service, along with a chronic lack of spares, meant the progressive reduction of the 8A fleet. Only a few remained airworthy by the beginning of the 1950s, and in early 1958 the story of the Douglas 8A in Peru finally came to its final chapter, when all remaining examples were withdrawn from service, the type having provided sterling service for nearly two decades.



**BELOW** Douglas 8As of 31 EIA taxi out for take-off at Teniente Coronel Pedro Ruiz Gallo airfield in Chiclayo in July 1947. For comprehensive information on *Guerra del 41*, see the author's *Air Wars Between Ecuador and Peru, Volume 1: The July 1941 War (Helion & Company)*, reviewed in this issue's Books in Brief section on page 122.

AUTHOR'S COLLECTION

