



**DEPARTMENT OF THE NAVY**

COMMANDER

U. S. NAVAL FORCES SOUTHERN COMMAND

FPO AA 34099-6004

REFER TO:

5710

Ser N522A/087

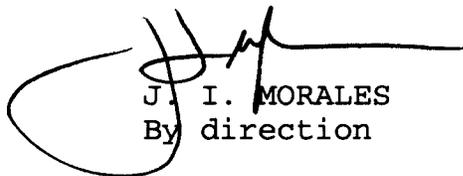
14 Mar 01

FIRST ENDORSEMENT on LT Wilfredo Vargas, , USN,  
ltr of 14 Jan 01

From: Commander, U.S. Naval Forces Southern Command  
To: Commander, Navy Personnel Command (NPC-440C)

Subj: PERSONNEL EXCHANGE PROGRAM MID TOUR REPORT SYMBOL  
(OPNAV 5700-5)

1. Forwarded.

  
J. I. MORALES  
By direction

Copy to:  
USMILGP Venezuela (w/encl)



DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE

USMILGP - Venezuela  
UNIT 4980  
APO AA 34037 - 0008

SCVE-NAVY

14 JAN 2001

MEMORANDUM THRU NAVY SECTION CHIEF AND COMMANDER USMILGP

FOR: CHNAVPERS (Pers-2)

SUBJECT: Mid-tour Report (Supercedes prior reports)

1. Name: Wilfredo Vargas, LT, USN
2. Unit: Comando Aviación Naval de Vanezuela (CAN)
3. Location of Station: CAN, Puerto Cabello, Venezuela
4. Rank/rate: Lt (Promotion during tour does not present a problem)
5. Billet title: Aviation Maintenance Officer (AMO)
6. Billet description: Aviation Maintenance. Small amount of responsibilities and/or supervisory requirements. Minimal classified information required by individual filling the billet.
7. Type of aircrafts: Casa S-400 and S-43 series, Bell 412, Augusta Bell 212, Cessna 210 and 310, King air 90 and 200, Turbocomander, Dash-7.
8. Type of training required: Aviation Maintenance Training
9. Security clearance requierments: Secret Clearance.
10. Language requirements: Spanish
11. Nearest City: Valencia, 30-miles S.
12. Proximity to large cities: Caracas, 150E; Maracay, 65-miles SE.

REMARKS:

1. Facilities

A. Housing

1. No government housing available for U.S. personnel.

2. The American Embassy prohibits the rental of houses for security reasons.
3. Apartments are usually unfurnished or partially furnished.
4. Apartments range from one to four bedrooms to penthouses
5. Houses and apartments meeting the American Embassy security criteria range from \$1800 to \$3500 per month. Rent ceilings can be found at [HTTP//www.dfas.mil](http://www.dfas.mil)
6. Landlords normally require one to three months rent in advance, in lieu of, the Embassy's policy of no security deposit.
7. Realtors or property managers require a significant finders fee, covered under the MIHA category of Overseas Housing Allowance.
8. Approximately one to four weeks stay in a hotel upon arrival during apartment hunting is typical. A maximum of 60 days is allowed.
9. Renter's or personal property insurance is highly recommended. Several companies offer brochures at the American Embassy in Caracas.

#### B. Dependent Schools.

1. An accredited American School in Valencia offers grades 1-12 in English.

#### C. Commissary

1. There are no commissary facilities on base. US products are available in ample supply, and numerous locally-manufactured substitutes are available.
2. The American Embassy in Caracas operates a small commissary stocked with US products. There is a \$100 membership fee per year assigned, with 50 percent refunded when member PCSs out. Prices are considerably higher than AF Commissary prices.
3. Bulk dry goods and cold storage (refrigerated and frozen goods) can be ordered via the USMILGP in Caracas. Deliveries on US military aircraft are scheduled monthly from Charleston AFB, S.C. and transported to Maracay by USMILGP personnel.

#### D. Base Exchanges

1. There are no US Exchange facilities in Venezuela

2. Exchange shopping is available through the Mission Support Program located at Ft Gillem/Ft McPhearson, GA. Orders from the Aafes catalogue can be placed with the USMILGP, shipped to Charleston AFB, then placed on the monthly Mission Support aircraft.
3. The Venezuelan armed forces operate an exchange-style mini mall (IPSFA) in Maracay. A larger five-story complex is located in Caracas near Fuerte Tiuna.

#### E. Public Markets and Stores.

1. There are numerous supermarkets and grocery stores located throughout Puerto Cabello and Valencia. Stores are well stocked with a variety of local items and many US products.
2. There are American-style shopping centers in Valencia, Maracay and Caracas. Several more are under construction. US-based establishments include Burger King, McDonalds, Pizza Hut, Dominos Pizza, Wendy's, and many more.

#### F. Recreation

1. Local theatres show current US movies in English (subtitled in Spanish). Local video stores rent American and European movies also subtitled. Privacy laws are not enforced so the video and audio quality are often fair to poor.
2. Caracas, Valencia and Maracay have baseball stadiums and professional teams. Many of the US minor league teams send young talent to Venezuela for the winter season. Tickets and availability are extremely inexpensive.
3. Caribbean beaches combining spectacular mountain views and world-class fishing and scuba diving sites are located less than 40 miles from Maracay and Valencia.
4. There are several MWR-style recreational housing areas set up at specified locations throughout Venezuela. These houses are fully equipped and are rented on a daily, weekly or monthly basis. Closest to Valencia is the naval housing at Agustin Armario Naval Base in Puerto Cabello, the Turiamo Naval Base housing contracted through the IFIMIL in Fuerte Tiuna in Caracas, and the Ocumare beach houses near Maracay, which are rented at DIRSER at the Venezuelan Air Force Air Station, Base Aerea El Libertador (BAEL) in Maracay.

5. Membership at a local country club costs approximately \$600 to join and \$100 per month. The club offers golf, swimming, tennis, basketball, horseback riding and billiards.
6. Numerous travel agencies are located throughout Maracay and Valencia. The American Embassy affiliate, TURISOL, is located in both Maracay and the US Embassy. Only the embassy branch provides tickets funded by GTRs from the USMILGP .

#### G. Mess Facilities

1. Officer and enlisted Venezuelan dining facilities on base serve three meals a day, 365 days per year.
2. Several restaurants are located within minutes of the CAN.
3. Numerous reasonably-priced restaurants are located in Valencia and Maracay, serving all types of food (Mexican, Chinese, Venezuelan, etc.).

#### H. Public Transportation and Rental Vehicles.

1. Inexpensive taxi and bus services are readily available. Local bus transportation is not recommended due to increases in thefts, muggings and robbery. Licensed taxis are identified by the license plate; none have fare meters. Caution should be exercised while using public transportation.
2. Rental vehicles are available but very expensive. Expect to pay over \$80 per day for a compact. Vans are not available. A Budget Rent-A-Car is located at the Parque Aragua shopping center, while numerous rental car companies are available at the Valencia International Airport.

#### I. Medical and Dental

1. There is a large regional military hospital located ten minutes from CAN. All other medical support is by TRICARE LATAM. There are numerous English speaking doctors in Valencia. All arrangements, billing and payment investigations regarding medical support are the responsibility of the member assigned.
2. Dental support is the same as medical (para I.1)

## 2. What to Bring and What Not to Bring.

### A. Appliances

1. All US appliances will work in Venezuela. The voltage is 110-120 VAC-60Hz. Also, 220-240 VAC are available for high voltage requirements. Power outages are frequent. These are oftentimes preceded by brownouts or voltage drops. When power returns, it often spikes above 120 VAC, damaging sensitive equipment and burning out lights in the process. Stereo equipment, computers, telecommunications electronics, and appliances should have voltage-surge protectors. Uninterrupted Power Supplies (UPSs) available at stateside computer/office warehouses are extremely efficient and provide the best protection against voltage drops, spikes and outages.
2. Bring stateside washers and dryers if possible.
3. Bring refrigerators, since many apartments do not have them installed.

#### B. Privately-Owned Vehicles

1. The American Embassy General Services Office (GSO) has the latest inter-governmental regulations regarding restrictions on shipping vehicles into Venezuela. Currently, the Sport Utility Vehicle is restricted from shipment into Venezuela, due to high incidence of car jackings. The USMILGP, through GSO arranges all in-country shipping permits, customs transactions, port and over-land transportation paperwork. POVs may be sold locally prior to returning stateside—the GSO has the full details.
2. A dependable, roadworthy vehicle maintained in optimum condition may end up saving your life in Venezuela. Local roads are often in a state of disrepair. Major Highways provide free towing services to the next exit. Despite this, numerous incidents of carjackings and robberies following breakdowns are reported every month.
3. Insurance.
  - a. All American vehicles must be insured. The GSO provides a list of stateside companies which underwrite policies to American personnel in Venezuela
  - b. American cars retain a higher than stateside resale value during the average tour in Venezuela. The GSO will provide details on in-country sales upon departure.

#### C. Clothing and Footwear.

1. Winter clothing is seldom needed, but a light jacket may be necessary. Summer clothes are the norm year-round

2. Even though US sizes and styles are available, everything is very, very expensive.

#### D. Furnishings.

1. Most apartments/houses have air conditioning. Styles vary from central air conditioning systems to separate window unit air conditioners. Most apartments have no heating provisions, since this proves unnecessary.
2. Shipping ceiling fans is highly recommended, since they are very expensive in Venezuela and can drastically reduce monthly electricity costs.
3. Most bedrooms will accommodate all sizes of US bedroom suites. Also, most apartments come with a dining room capable of accommodating most US dining room sets.

### 3. Banking and Mail.

#### A. Maintain stateside Sure Pay Accounts.

B. Personal check cashing and currency exchange are provided through a commercial bank located in the US Embassy in Caracas. Checks can currently be cashed up to \$500 per day. If cash advance is desired prior to traveling TDY, the USMILGP authorizes the transaction based on 80 percent of the anticipated per diem. The finance office cashier at the US Embassy will provide the US currency—give the teller several days notice just in case funds are low.

C. ATMs are available throughout Venezuela. CIRRUS and PLUS affiliated cards can be used to conduct transactions from stateside banks, but this is not recommended. Numerous incidences of fraudulent ATM transactions are recorded weekly. In one incidence, three US personnel assigned to Venezuela were victimized for over \$900 by the same bank ATM system.

D. Some local travel agencies will cash/exchange stateside personal checks with valid American Express or certain gold credit cards.

E. There is a complete postal service available through the APO at the US Embassy in Caracas. There are size restrictions for incoming packages due to the small storage area at the APO. Expect to receive your mail once a week; Mail runs are usually shared among the pep personnel stationed within this region.

### 4. Community Relations

A. Currently, local relations are excellent. There are no perceived bad feelings against Americans. Most people are extremely helpful, courteous and patient.

B. The military is very respected and carries a lot of weight in the local community.

C. There is also an International Womens Club in Valencia (If applicable)

#### 5. Churches and Synagogues

A. Over 90 percent of Venezuelans are Catholic.

B. Numerous other denominations are present in Venezuela, in small quantities.

C. There are English-speaking interdenominational churches in Maracay and Valencia.

#### 6. General Comments.

##### A. Valencia.

1. The Third largest city in Venezuela.
2. Located on the southern side of the coastal mountain range on the western shore of Lake Valencia.
3. Climate high and low mean temperatures: tropical temperatures range from upper 90's F to lower 70's F. Rainy season extends from April to November and dry season extends from November to April.
4. It is a large industrial center with many automobile factories and military installations.

##### B. Economy.

1. The current exchange rate is 699.75 Bolivars to \$1 US Dollar. Compared to 170 Bs in 1993.
2. The cost of living is at the same level as Caracas. Prices have escalated 200-300 percent over the last three years, due in large part to the devaluation of the bolivar.
3. Gasoline presently cost 80 Bs per liter for 95 Octane (approximately 40 cents a gallon).

4. Utility costs are expensive; electricity costs approximately \$100-200 per month; bottled natural gas costs \$10 for a two week supply. Bottled Water is delivered to homes or available at supermarkets. Telephone and electricity rates have been raised every billing cycle over the last two years and are expected to continue to rise.
5. Telephone costs are very high. The international tariffs are used to subsidize the national phone system. ATT, Sprint, and MCI operators can be contacted from any phone. Cellular phones are very popular and inexpensive by US standards. Incoming calls are free to cellular customers. Pay phones use pre-paid cards available in denominations of 500, 1000, 2000, or 2000 Bs. There is also an international call-back service called Global-Phone. This service has international rates lower than any other long distance carriers. Additionally, CableTel has an internet service which can be configured to make international phone calls for a fraction of the telephone service cost.
6. The inflation rate for Venezuela has been between 75 and 110 percent annually for the past 3 years and is expected to maintain that pace.

#### C. USN Servicing Centers

1. Servicing organizations for finance and personnel are at PERSUPP DET, NAS Roosevelt Roads, Puerto Rico. Contact can be made direct or through the Navy PEP coordinator at USSOUTH Atlantic Force by DSN or direct line.
2. Servicing organization for medical and dental are contacted through Tricare LATAM located at Ft Gordon, GA.
3. Servicing for traffic management (HHG delivery), commissary, and AAFES Mission Support is the USMILGP in Caracas. Shipments are coordinated for airlift from Charleston AFB, S.C.
4. Temporary Lodging Allowance (TLA), Temporary Living Expense (TLE), and TDY reimbursements are provided by the US Embassy.
5. Administrative support including TDY orders and travel GTRs is provided by the USMILGP, Caracas.

This product was updated on 14 January 2001.



Wilfredo Vargas, LT, USNR  
Personnel Exchange Officer, CAN, ARV