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RENAULT FT-17
IN BRAZILIAN ARMY 1921 – 1942

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In the 1st World War the Brazilian Army sent to France Captain José Pessoa Cavalcanti de Albuquerque, who began his motorization and mechanization studies at Versailles School, of Combat Cars afterwards serving in the 503rd Artillery Regiment of Assault Cars, in 1919, where he had the opportunity of knowing the Renault FT-17 combat cars.

After his return to Brazil, he influenced the Army for the acquisition of combat cars. The model Renault FT-17, was chosen though he, himself, thought it wasn't the ideal model of combat car to equip our armored force. He published his first detailed work on the weapon development and the use of armored in the scenery of European operations during First World War, entitled "TANKS NA GUERRA EUROPÉIA"(Tanks in the European War), published in 1921 in Rio de Janeiro – DF, this was the first work published in Latin America. Later on, he established AMAN (Military Academy of Agulhas Negras in Resende – RJ) and was also the founder of the Center of Instruction of the Coast Artillery, transformed in school in 1942.

Left**: Cover of the book "The Tanks in European War" authored by Captain Jose Pessoa Cavalcanti de Albuquerque published in 1921. (Credit photo: Author collection)**

Right: **Captain José Pessoa Cavalcanti de Albuquerque. (Credit photo: AMAN)**

The purchase of combat cars will happen before the contract of a Military Instruction Mission because only after the First World War, the Brazilian Army will contract a French Military

Mission to assist in the modernization and restructuring of our Army.

In 1921, 12 new combat cars Renault FT-17 arrived in Brazil from the factory DELAUNAY-BELLEVILLE, in France, being 6 with molten tower (Berliet) armed with cannon Puteaux of 37mm, 5 with riveted octagonal tower (Renault), armed with machine guns Hotchkiss caliber 7mm (this was the caliber used in Brazil, while in France the caliber was 8mm) and one model TSF (wireless telegraph) with no rotative tower as in the other ones for communication with the superior echelons.

Some of the twelve Renault FT-17 belonging to the Company Car Robbery in 1921, in the city of Rio de Janeiro. Note the two types of towers and weaponry, Puteaux 37mm cannon and machine gun Hotchkiss 7mm. (Credit of photo: EsMB)

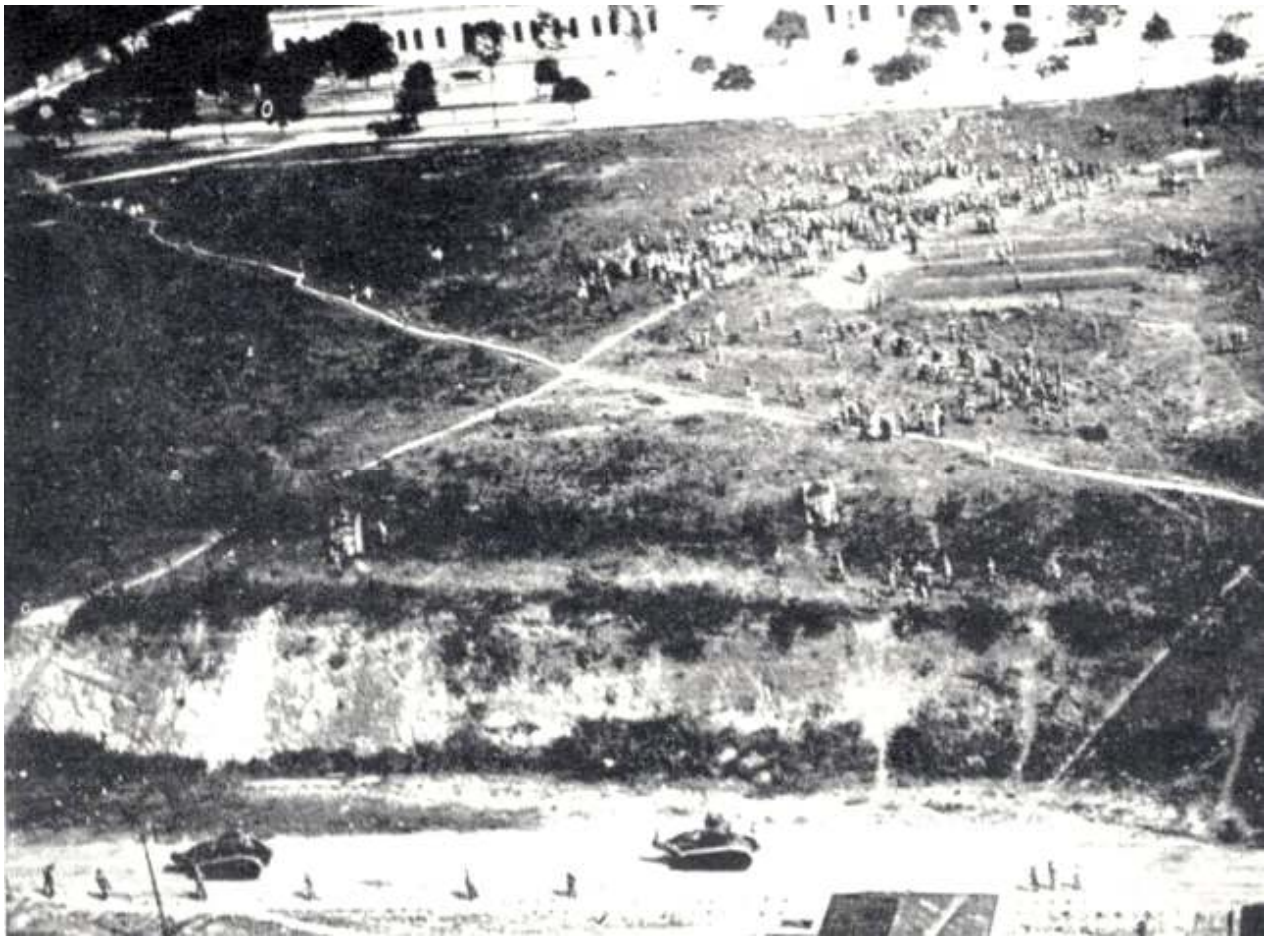
Back view of the Renault FT-17 TSF parading during the celebrations for the day of independence. September 7, 1923, in Rio de Janeiro. Note the emblem of the vehicle and its name Ypiranga. (Credit photo: UFJF/Defesa)

They are going to form the COMPANY OF ASSAULT CARS created by Decree l5.235, on December 31st, 1921, in Vila Militar, Rio de Janeiro – DF. Thus, Brazil becomes the pioneer of armored weapons in South America.

On November 3rd, 1921 the first exercise of combat cars occurred along with the military aviation in Rio de Janeiro, then in Federal District on the grassy hill in Vila Militar.

The first public appearance will be on August 25th, 1922, when all the Company was formed in Campo de São Cristóvão, Rio de Janeiro where the National Pavilion was introduced and then received by the Company and the Combat Cars, a novelty, were shown to the public. The Combat Cars are also going to parade on September 7th, 1921, during the commemorations of our Independence Day

It should be emphasized that on this date, Duque de Caxias, was chosen the patron of the Company of Combat Cars. A year later, the date of August 25th, became the Soldiers Day (Warning 443 of August 25th, 1923). Forty years later he became the Brazilian Army patron (Decree 51429 of March 13th, 1962). The tank crew uniforms were peculiar indeed.



First simulation of combat with military aviation, occurred in the city of Rio de Janeiro, on November 3, 1921. Noted several Renault FT-17 in the field. (Credit photo: UFJF/Defesa)

Above metal emblem worn on the helmet of the crew of the Renault FT-17 in the Brazilian Army. Below the emblem pattern of each car, only changing its name. (Photos credit: Author archive)

Left -Tank crew uniform in 1922. The visual of tank crew uniform is very interesting; different details due to the needs, distinguished, mostly, by the characteristic leather helmet and by the bandage, knee coiled canvas true ribbon to the ankle, which replaced the traditional legging of leather. (Photo credit: AHEx)

The first public appearance of the Renault FT-17 was given a parade organized by the Brazilian Army on October 19, 1921, in honor of General Charles Mangin, a member of the French Military Mission of Instruction in order official country.

The first operational task in the country occurs during the Revolution of 1924, when the Company is sent to occupy the city of São Paulo after the rebellious forces retreat. The time photos show a parade of the six (6) operational Renault FT-17 because the model T.S.F. was never totally operational, as far as we know and was set aside in 1925.

Parade of the 11 (eleven) Renault FT of the Company by Assault Cars in the Rio de Janeiro, in 07 of September 1921. (Credit photo: Author collection)

In 1925, the warning n.º 254, May, 18th designates the Company as the COMPANY OF COMBAT CARS.

The revolution of 1930, an important mark in the Brazilian history, brings the country into the XX century. The military units involved in carry Getúlio Vargas into power, accomplished the Army scope, which we consider as being the birth of our industry of assault cars. In Porto Alegre, Rio Grande do Sul, the first three armored caterpillars, a Brazilian project and conception, are built each being produced in by Shipbuilding Alcaraz & Cia, Shipbuilding Mabilde and Shipbuilding So Ltd. By seizing wheels and caterpillars of agricultural tractors, they transformed them in combat cars.

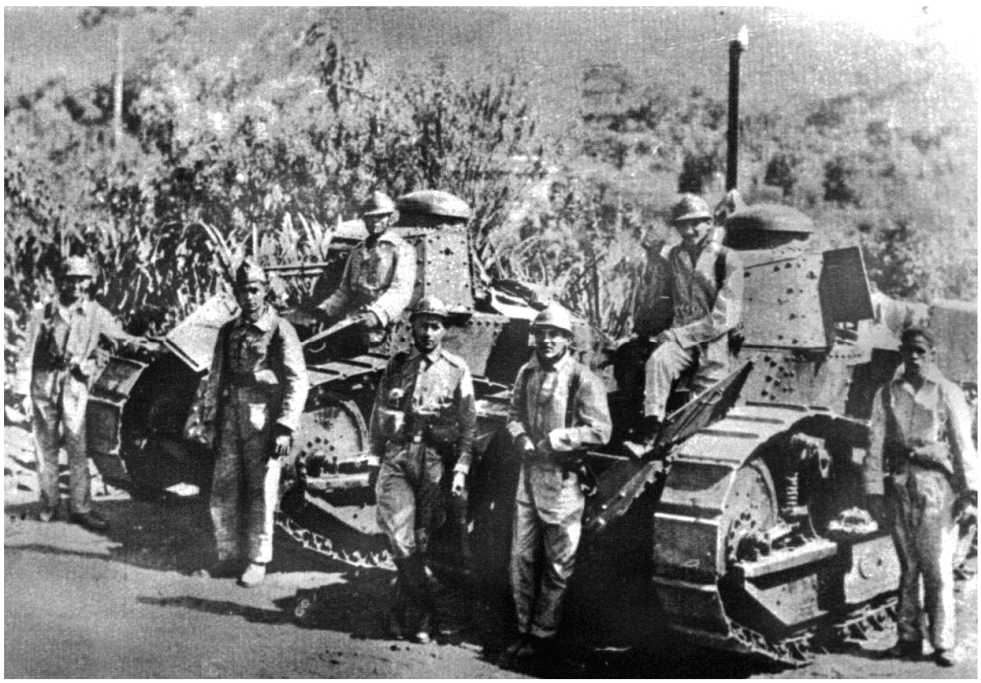
The three armored tanks, built the Shipbuilding's, exposed in Campo de Santana in Rio de Janeiro, DF, after the victory of Getúlio Vargas in the Revolution of 1930. In the foreground can see PARAHYBA in Rio Grande do Sul center, built whit wheels of agricultural tractors, converted to caterpillars, and in the back the MINAS GERAES, built from a caterpillar's tractor Caterpillar. His conception was very modern for the time. (Credit photo: Author's collection)

These vehicles were operational within their limitations, brought to Rio de Janeiro, DF; they were exposed to the public in Campo de Santana and participated in the victorious force parades in that revolution.

The production of these vehicles was an isolated attempt, not the only our; others occurred in 1924, 1930 and 1932, but they were not a government military force attempts. In fact they came from the rebellions forces and no doubt they were the first attempts to have the defense material industry in Brazil, which become true in the, 70`s and 80`s but this again is another story.

The Decree n.º 20.986, of January 21st 1932, extinguishes the Company of Combat Cars; they hadn't managed to motivate our body of officers and due to their precarious state, they are transferred to the Infantry Battalion School. Months later, the remainders of the Company of Combat Cars will be used operationally due to arise of the Constitutionalist Revolution in São Paulo, on July 9th of that year.

These vehicles, at least half a dozen, will be used separately or in pairs, in some sectors where combats occurred between rebellious troops and legalists, being used to keep bridges, and to attack machine gun nests. They were used in mountainous locations, as at the border of Minas Gerais and São Paulo, therefore their appropriate use wasn`t decisive as the instrument to define the superiority and even to guarantee victory of the legalist forces in that conflict



Tree different times. Renault FT-17 operating in the Revolutions of years 1920 to 1930. Note the soldiers' uniforms and helmets of the crew operated the combat car. (Photos credit: AHEx e UFJF/Defesa)

In 1935, by the warning n.º 248, of April 22nd, the Section of Combat Cars in the Guard

Battalion, is created and they use the existing combat cars in the Infantry Battalion School. The Section of Moto mechanization was created in the General Staff of the Army thanks to the direct influence of the French Military Mission, under the command of General Paul Noel. No doubt, it was an important step ahead.

The Company of Assault Cars establishment was an isolated attempt of Captain José Pessoa, which fails, having no continuity, but the initiative was a pioneer one. The opposite motivations to its survival served as an alert and would be given a new opportunity. In 1938, General Waldomiro Castilho de Lima, after observing the development war operations by the Italians in Abyssinia, decides to replace the old combat cars Renault FT-17, already obsolete, for combat modern cars FIAT-ANSALDO CV II that were in operation, with relative success, in the mountainous grounds of the Spanish Civil War and in Ethiopia's arid lands.

Fiat-Ansaldo CV 3 35 II in Brazilian Army, years 1940. (Credit photo: UFJF/Defesa)

The ideas of Capitan José Pessoa will be resumed by another captain who is going to manage to implant definitively the weapon armored in Brazil; he is Captain Carlos Flores de Paiva Chaves and, on May 25th 1938, by the warning n.º 400 the Center of Mechanization and Mechanization Instruction for Auto Machine guns Squadron was established in Rio de Janeiro where, besides the new cars acquired in Italy, they also aggregated to these the last five Renault FT-17 of the Section of Battalion Guards of Combat Cars, that proceeds as the Center of Mechanization and Mechanization Instruction Combat Car Platoon. During the Second World War, Brazil received from the United States modern combat cars to modernize the recently created units. The decree Reserved n.º 4.130, of February 26th 1942, transforms the Center of Mechanization and Mechanization Instruction Combat Car Platoon in the School Company of Combat Cars, extinguishing for the time being the use of Renault FT-17 and replacing them for medium combat cars Sherman M-4 and M-4A1.

From 1942 on the whole Brazilian armored material is of North American origin, due to our entrance in the Second World War along with the allied forces of Brazil.

The vision of Capitan José Pessoa on the combat cars was, no doubt a very advanced one for his time. In his work "The Tanks in the European War", he ends up by affirming: ***"It was true, the new weapon, was of decisive effect, and without it, there is a general belief that the Allied would have lost the bloody game that was played in Europe's vast board, between the sea and Switzerland western borders".***

Currently there are six Renault FT-17 preserved in the country, five are held by the Army

and one is a private museum. Of these, five are from the armed version with 37mm Puteaux cannon and tower Berliet. One Renault owns a hexagonal tower and 7mm Hotchkiss machine gun. Between 2009 and 2011, one Renault FT-17 with Berliet turret and armed with 37mm Puteaux cannon has been fully restored and is in full operation, with original engine and participates in military parades on special dates.

Two Renault FT-17 preserved, one at the Museum Conde Linhares (Army Museum), in Rio de Janeiro and the other in the Museum Eduardo Matarazzo (Private Museum) in Trough, SP. (Credit photos: Author)

Two additional Renault FT-17 preserved as monuments. The left is the Military Academy of Agulhas Negras - AMAN in Resende, RJ. The right of the 13th Mechanized Cavalry Regiment in Pirassununga, SP. None of them has the 37mm Puteaux cannon, are just a sham cannon. (Credit photos: Author)

Renault FT-17 awaiting restoration and belonging to the Army. (Credit photo: Author)

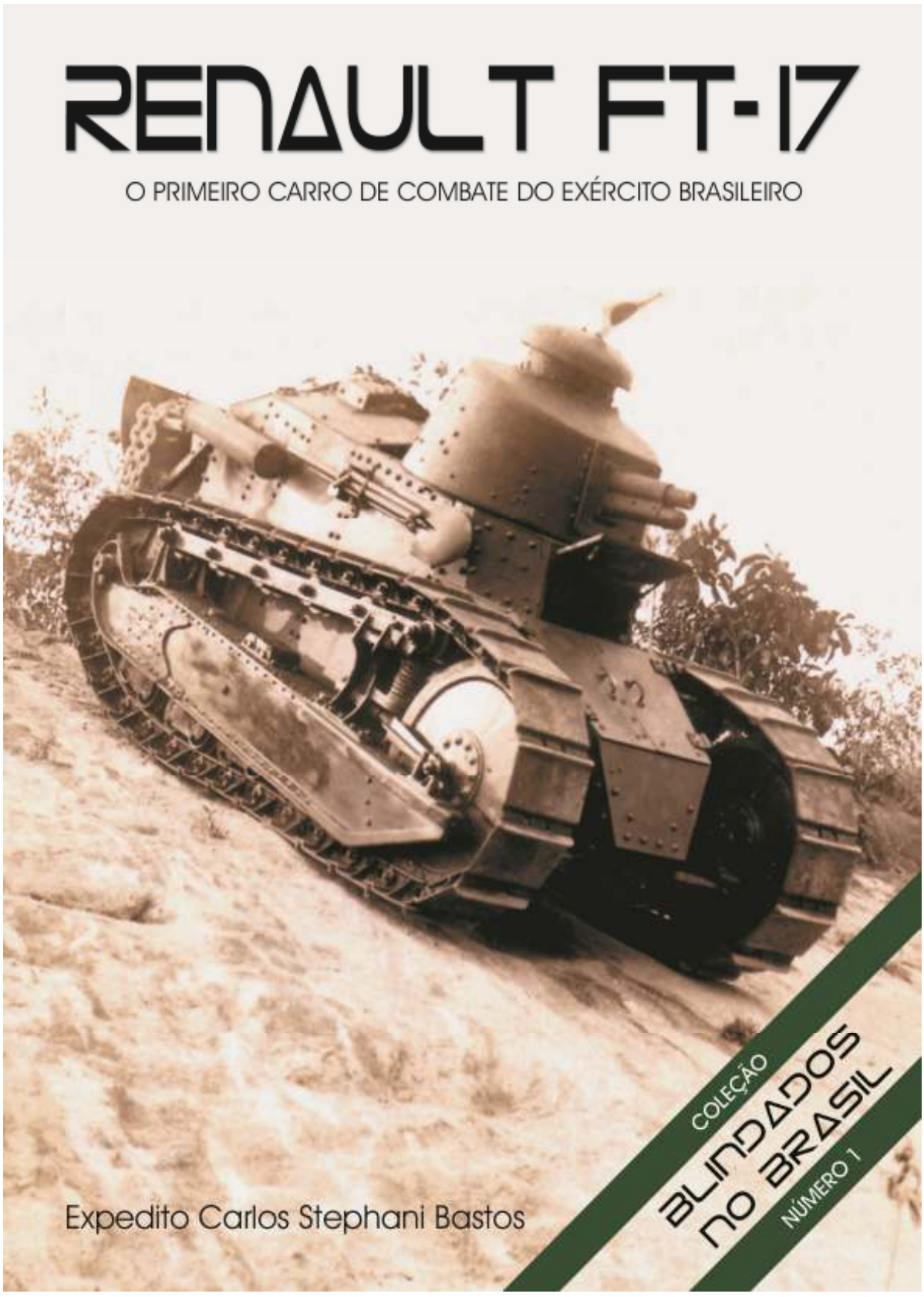
Renault FT-17 Instruction Center Armored General Walter Pires, in perfect condition, with original engine, restored between 2009 and 2011, opening the parade. (Credit photos: Author)

Interior details and view of the engine of the Renault FT-17 restored and owned by the Center for Instruction Armored General Walter Pires, Santa Maria, RS made 15 years celebrations in the center in October 2011. Note the emblem and the name Guararapes. (Credit photos: Author)

Reconstitution prepared by the author of the three models of Renault FT-17 used in the Brazilian army, in 1/35 scale kits with the manufacturer DES KIT (Resin) and RPM (injected plastic).

Renault FT-17 in 1/35 scale with manufacturer's DES KIT (Resin). Note the uniform of the soldier next to the vehicle and the unit's emblem and the name of this car in its rear side. (Author collection)

Renault FT-17, car gun (Hotchkiss 7mm), the Polish manufacturer RPM, 1/35 scale. Note the unit's emblem and the name of this car in its rear side. (Author collection)

Renault FT-17, car TSF, the Polish manufacturer RPM, 1/35 scale. The fixed structure at the location of scratch was made in the tower. (Author collection)

Cover of the book written by the author, entitled: RENAULT FT-17 - FIRST CAR ARMY COMBAT BRAZILIAN - ISBN 978-85-62342-05-9, Volume 1 collection Armored in Brazil - Publisher Taller and UFJF / Defense, 2011.