

FOREIGN BROADCAST INFORMATION SERVICE
PANAMA BUREAU
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APO MIAMI 34004

7 August 1981
MPA #1030

MEMORANDUM FOR: Director, FBIS
THROUGH : Chief, Operations Group
SUBJECT : Monthly Report -- Panama Bureau -- July 1981

I. GENERAL

The disappearance on Friday, 31 July, of the plane transporting Gen Omar Torrijos, Panama's strong man and commander of the National Guard, prompted an urgent call early the next day from the office of the CINC, USSOUTHCOM, asking the bureau to maintain an open watch on Panamanian transmitters and to report the media's treatment of the disappearance and subsequent developments. The first official announcement that the general's plane was missing was picked up just after noontime on Saturday, and a little more than an hour later the bureau monitored the first confirmed report that the plane had crashed and that there were no survivors. This was phoned immediately to the special task force set up by USSOUTHCOM to monitor the developing situation and to the embassy. The bureau's open watch was maintained throughout the weekend period to report media reaction and the events surrounding the initially tense political situation. On Monday, expressions of appreciation for the bureau's weekend coverage were phoned in to the bureau chief from the embassy and USSOUTHCOM.

The FBIS Wire had advised the bureau that the initial report confirming Torrijos' death had generated a CRITIC message.

II. OPERATIONS

A. Monitorial/Editorial

1. Line problems dogged the bureau's remote monitoring system throughout the month, leading to occasional gaps or delays in reception of programs. As the month ended, Nicaraguan and Guatemalan receivers could be tuned and monitored remotely, but the San Salvador receiver could not be tuned and San Salvador coverage depended heavily on phone feeds.

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2. Local line problems also interrupted the bureau's LATIN and ACAN-EFE services periodically throughout the month. By the end of the month, ACAN reception had improved after replacement of a poor-quality landline, and LATIN's troubles were momentarily quiet, apparently due to repairs in the New York transmitter.

3. Despite these reception problems, the bureau continued to have a heavy processing backlog, with one monitor on extended sick leave, a new monitor in training, and a third on TDY at Key West. Extensive overtime was being used to keep the backlog under control.

III. ADMINISTRATION

A. Personnel

1. [redacted] arrived on PCS 8 July to fill the additional editorial slot authorized by Headquarters. STAT

2. [redacted] entered on duty 13 July to fill an existing monitorial vacancy. The bureau was also authorized to add two additional monitorial positions to its T/O and an intensive recruitment campaign is under way to fill them. STAT

3. The bureau chief, accompanied by the bureau chief-designate, traveled 14-18 July to Managua, Tegucigalpa, Guatemala, and San Salvador to inspect the stations of the bureau's Central American remote monitoring network and to meet embassy officers.

B. Building and Grounds

In compliance with the recommendation of the Safety Officer following his recent inspection visit, a number of additional AC outlets were installed in the operations building to replace existing extension cords.

IV. VISITS

1. [redacted] analyst, J-2, USSOUTHCOM, on 8 July. STAT

2. A two-man audit team from Headquarters 20-22 July to conduct an audit of the bureau's property and records.

3. Sergeant MacDonald, NCOIC, and Sergeant Vozel, in charge of maintenance,

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Plans and Operations Division, U.S. Army Communications Center, on 29 July.

 STAT

Chief, Panama Bureau, FBIS

Attachments:

Monthly Production Report
Operations Attachment
Engineering Attachment
Publications Coverage Report
Coverage Schedule

cc: Chief, Paraguay Bureau
Chief, Key West Bureau