

FOREIGN BROADCAST INFORMATION SERVICE  
PANAMA BUREAU  
DRAWER 927  
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4 March 1981  
MPA #1008

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

I. GENERAL

The American Embassy, Panama, has sent in a strongly worded memo to the State Department recommending that Panama Bureau be exempt from State's worldwide instruction that FBIS field bureaus be made to conform to the local compensation plan and position classification system. The reasons given were treaty-related measures that "grandfathered" employees on duty prior to 1 October 1979 at no less than their previous salaries and classifications and the bureau's continuing adherence to an area employment compensation and classification system consonant with that of the Panama Canal Commission, U.S. Southern Command, and other U.S. agencies operating in the canal area.

II. OPERATIONS

A. Monitorial/Editorial:

The bureau's wordage remained high in February--again around the 400,000 mark--due to continuing developments in Central America and U.S. policy pronouncements affecting the region. The status of U.S. economic assistance to Nicaragua and indications of the Nicaraguan Government's treatment of political opposition, as well as Nicaragua's support for the Salvadoran rebellion were the main subjects of interest during the month. The situation in El Salvador and possible moves for talks aimed at a political settlement under the auspices of the Socialist International prompted heavy selection. On the counterinsurgency front, large-scale government operations at month's end appeared to be successful against the guerrillas.

B. Lateral Services:

1. In connection with local reaction to the canal defense exercise Black Hawk IV 18-25 February, the bureau provided support for SOUTHCOM J2 and the American Embassy political section by translating and wirefiling a

number of items from Panamanian and Cuban sources critical of the exercise.

2. At a special request of AG, the bureau wirefiled a 3-week sample of program summaries of Nicaraguan government-controlled newscasts and special programs on regular coverage. One lesson learned by the bureau during this exercise was that its initial estimates of its ability to provide the service were off by as much as 50 percent: editors needed an additional half-hour extra or so per program to come up with a "clean" summary, and communications personnel found that the extra punching came to about 4-5 hours per day.

C. Coverage:

The clandestine "Radio Liberation" to El Salvador was lost on 6 February; the transmitter has not been heard since that date. On the other hand, "Radio Venceremos," another pro-FMLN transmitter broadcasting for El Salvador, is continuing its operation after being off the air for a few days at midmonth because of "technical difficulties." Unfortunately the programming of Venceremos is not as interesting as Liberation's was, its power seems to be weaker, and its modulation is frequently poor. The station broadcasts two programs on weekdays and Saturdays and adds a third, midday, program on Sundays.

D. Communications:

1. Bureau technicians, with the cooperation of Army and Panama Canal Commission personnel, installed the recently received Granger UHF equipment to replace the deteriorated communications landline. The system went into operation 24 February, and all radioteletype circuits between Chiva Chiva and the Corozal ASC have been solid since then. The bureau's telephone lines will be installed on the UHF system in the near future.

2. The bureau remote-control Central American network system was put into operation following a period of testing of the recently installed 4-wire line on the bureau's dedicated circuit. A minor problem still exists with the telephone switching equipment in Managua where the telephone ring cannot be heard during incoming calls, but everything else is working well. In particular, the ease with which the bureau can remote-tune the receivers in Managua and San Salvador has been a pleasant surprise.

3. The bureau experienced outages on 18 and 19 February, the first for 3.5 hours and the second for 2.5 hours, due to trouble at ASC.

E. Training:

Headquarters editor [redacted] completed the field editorial training program on 6 February and remained over for 2 additional weeks to work the editorial desk in regular rotation to cover scheduled editorial annual leave and sick leave. STAT

III. ADMINISTRATION

A. Personnel:

1. Editor trainee [redacted] departed 20 February on completion of his TDY. STAT

2. Communications section supervisor [redacted] was awarded Quality Step Increase at a special ceremony on 26 February. STAT

B. Building and Grounds:

A new intercom system (Aiphone LAH-20) was installed throughout the operations building, linking Main Radio, monitoring positions, editorial room, admin office, dining/kitchen area and other remote parts of the building.

IV. VISITS

1. [redacted] safety officer, on 11 February for a bureau safety inspection. STAT

2. [redacted] FBIS Headquarters engineer, on TDY 20-25 February. STAT

3. [redacted] FBIS director, on TDY 23-26 February. STAT

[redacted] STAT

Chief, Panama Bureau, FBIS

Attachments:

Monthly Production Report  
Operations Attachment  
Engineering Attachment

cc: Chief, Paraguay Bureau  
Chief, Key West Bureau