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# Agency of CIA Monitors Broadcasts in Saigon

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BANGKOK—In a strange house in an alley of Soi 39 (39th St.) here, the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency produces documents that quite often end up in the hands of fishmongers as wrapping paper.

The house, with faded green walls, red-tiled roof and surrounded by a corrugated tin fence of for didding height, is conspicuous by its shabbiness in an otherwise reasonably manicured neighborhood.

It is also conspicuous by the abnormal number of antennas it sprouts.

It is the regional office of an American government agency blandly identified as the Foreign Broadcast Information Service.

Under its roof, approximately 20 American-employed foreign nationals monitor the outpouring of enemy and friendly news and propaganda broadcasts originating in eight Southeast Asian nations.

Supervised by a handful of Americans, the spew of words is recorded and translated into English. The process turns the clutter of 4 languages and dialects gathered from the air waves into a digestible product to be read by FBIS's clients.

The clients are mostly Americans—Asian political specialists and military men assigned to intelligence duties. They read the FBIS reports to detect trends, alterations in political positions, and the rise and fall of leaders in Asian countries.

For the monitors, working around the clock in three shifts, listening to the diatribes or oily persuasion broadcasts can be deadeningly dull. Much of the propaganda is repetitious in theme, and is meant to be.

But there can also be moments of exhilaration for even the most jaded monitor. Recently, a "Prince Sihanouk" broadcast came on the air, but the FBIS specialist realized almost immediately that the voice was fake.

The deposed Cambodian monarch, now living in Peking, has been a standout performer in propaganda work for the Chinese communists. Had he died? Had the Chinese cut him off the air?

It was later learned—much to the embarrassment of FBIS Americans—that the bogus Sihanouk voice had really come from an American-financed Cambodian government station.

With such goings-on, it seems surprising that the daily FBIS summary of "significant" broadcasts is not a secret document. But it is one of the few products of the CIA, of which FBIS is a part, that is not stamped secret.

"We are the straight forward outfit in the agency," an FBIS employee explained.

While other CIA sections monitor certain types of coded enemy—and sometimes friendly—radio traffic, FBIS eavesdrops on programs that peasants are hearing over a communal radio, and soldiers in barracks or in bivouac are listening to on transitorized sets.

That explains why the monitoring is not considered a classified project.

Not that the bulky stapled sheaf of blue-ink summaries is available to just anyone. But copies of the daily report can be begged, borrowed or purloined. In Vientiane, the Lao capital where both sides in the Indochina war have diplomats, FBIS is "must" reading in every embassy.

Eventually the discarded FBIS copies end up in the market place, where peddlers use them to wrap fish.

The FBIS distillation of Southeast Asia's war of words is probably most eagerly read by military briefers, who must put pins on maps and inform their generals of daily combat action. While enemy radio broadcasts describing "great victories" are read with a jaundiced eye, their exaggerations are sometimes no greater, one officer admitted, than what the friendly governments of Laos, Cambodia and Thailand are reporting about the same actions.

"By having both versions, we're in a position to judge what really happened," the officer explained.