

Noriega Called 'CIA's Man' in Court Papers

PW 5/16/91
Associated Press

MIAMI, May 15—Manuel Antonio Noriega was "the CIA's man in Panama," controlling an \$11 million agency slush fund and even supplying Washington with information on Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev, according to defense documents released today.

Noriega, backed by the Central Intelligence Agency, also sent Exocet missiles to Argentina for use against British ships in the 1982 Falklands war and funneled hundreds of thousands of CIA dollars to leaders of the "contra" rebellion in Nicaragua, his attorneys said.

The statements were included in 107 pages outlining classified information the defense expects to present at the ousted Panamanian leader's drug-smuggling trial in July. The material was released at the request of news organizations and Noriega's defense attorneys by the Justice Department security office, which is acting as custodian.

The Justice Department deleted key sections of the documents, including details of Noriega's contacts with President Bush. Also missing were sections from Noriega's meetings with Oliver L. North and late CIA director William J. Casey, as well as four pages describing his aid to the U.S. Army Intelligence unit in Panama. Many of the deletions appear to deal with Noriega's aid to the U.S.-backed Nicaraguan rebels.

The defense says the CIA cultivated Noriega even before he came to power in 1983 because it feared his populist boss, the late president Omar Torrijos. "Noriega became the CIA's man in Panama, an alternative to the man considered a dangerous leftist by American intelligence, Omar Torrijos," the defense said.

With Noriega heading Torrijos's

intelligence network, the CIA gave him "contingency funds" that over the years amounted to \$11 million and were not listed on agency books, the defense said. The CIA and the U.S. Army have acknowledged direct payments to Noriega of only about \$300,000 during his career.

Noriega also passed hundreds of thousands of dollars from the CIA, at Casey's direction, to maverick contra leader Eden Pastora until he fell out of favor with the United States, the document says.

Much of the document deals with U.S. support for the contras' "guns-for-drugs" flights to Costa Rica, but some sections are censored and none directly involve Noriega. Other parts say Noriega faithfully reported to the CIA about Torrijos's meetings with President Fidel Castro in Cuba and offered information about more distant communist countries.

In January 1985, Noriega met with Hans Juergen Wischniewski, East Germany's parliament president and foreign affairs chief. The meeting included discussion of personnel changes in the Soviet Union, information that Noriega immediately passed on to the CIA.

"This information was instrumental in U.S. support for then little-known Gorbachev and his people," the defense said.

More than a page on connections between Noriega, the contras and Argentina's former military government were deleted. But one remaining section says that in the Falklands war, despite the official U.S. tilt toward England, the CIA "was concerned that Argentina's forces . . . would be crushed."

"Gen. Noriega shared their concern and arranged for the purchase of Exocet missiles which the Argentinians later used with great effect," the defense said. The Exocets hit several British ships and were Argentina's only effective weapon.