

How the

# BBC and CIA

## Keep Tabs on the World

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If you want to *really* know what's going on in the world — listen to what it's saying! This is how the BBC's superlative news service is kept abreast of world affairs and how America's Central Intelligence Agency keeps Washington and the President informed.

LISTENING to news bulletins in some 40 languages is a major role of the BBC monitoring service. By eavesdropping on local broadcasting, the main news stories of the day are often first revealed.

Particularly today, with political unrest, rapid changes of government and the unstable situation in many countries, radio is the first means of learning of events as they happen.

Local broadcasting, via radio, is not confined to the population within a country. There is little possibility of using radio as a means of releasing information to the local people without it being heard by keen news monitors somewhere in the world.

I have had many occasions when I've been able to supply Radio New Zealand, or the private commercial networks, actual recordings of announcements, giving the

first news of a sensational government move or the death of a world figure.

It is a matter of knowing when and where to listen that gives the keen shortwave listener an advantage and if one is news conscious, then the chances of being at the right spot on the radio dial when a news story breaks is a distinct possibility.

### BBC monitoring service

The continued expansion of world broadcasting has a more immediate impact on the monitoring service, than on any other part of the BBC as it represents a direct increase in the task of listening and reporting. The job of the BBC monitoring service is to provide speedy and accurate reports of significant news and comment from foreign broadcasting stations in all parts of the world.

It is a national service, supplying information not only to the BBC itself, but also to government departments, the press, and other bodies concerned with international affairs. It works in close collaboration with its United States counterpart under an exchange agreement, which means virtually world-wide coverage. In return for its own extensive product, the monitoring service is able to receive and supply to its customers material from stations principally in the Far East and Latin America which are received by United States monitors.

The service is based at Caversham, near Reading, and has two main parts — Reception, which is responsible for listening, and Transcription and Output which selects and edits material for sending out by teleprinter and printed documents to numerous recipients. There is also a small unit in Nairobi with the primary task of monitoring broadcasts directed to or emanating from East and Central Africa.

Technical facilities are provided by the BBC Engineering Division, and include a separate receiving station at Crowsley Park in Oxfordshire.

In the reception unit, voice broadcasts are listened to live, to ensure the speediest reporting of important news, and recorded so that the monitor playing back the recording can secure the greatest accuracy in translation. A high degree of linguistic and translating ability is naturally required from the individual monitor. Subject to general directives, the monitor is expected to exercise judgements in the primary selection of material.

### Receivers

The BBC monitoring service is world-renowned for its use of news bulletins from foreign stations.

These are incorporated in BBC news or the World Information Bulletin released each week and based on listening by the monitoring service.

The equipment used is of the highest quality and, having visited the monitoring ▶



A bird in Bush House is worth . . . Much of the news gathered by the BBC Monitoring Service is fed to the newsroom in Bush House. This photo shows the newsroom where more than 250 news programmes are prepared every day for broadcast on the BBC's External Services. They are compiled in a newsroom which, with an editorial staff of well over a hundred, is the biggest in the BBC and one of the largest in the world.





Listen to the world! A section of the listening room at the BBC Monitoring Service at Caversham Park.



service, I can vouch for the high standard of equipment and the aerial systems.

According to Chris Greenway, the manager of the monitoring station, the best receiver is the Racal 1772. The monitoring service's standard receiver is the Racal 1792 which costs about A\$10 000 on the open market. It is fully synthesised, has 99 memories and is very stable in operation.

The BBC also has examples of the 30-year-old GEC BRT 400 and the Racal RA17 from the late fifties. Chris Greenway rated the Racal a very nice piece of DX gear when he was interviewed for the Austrian Radio Panorama programme recently.

There is a choice of five aerial types for connection to each monitor's receiver — an 80 m beveridge, 77 sloping V, 60 rhombic, 60 beveridge and a 57 rhombic. Beveridge aerials are positioned at 20 degree intervals around the compass. DXing of unknown transmissions is achieved quickly via the post office which takes a bearing and telexes its opposite number in an appropriate country, asking it to do likewise; the bearings are phoned back to the BBC, so that the location can be identified.

## CIA monitoring service

In the United States a similar organisation to the BBC monitoring service exists, though its listening information is not available to the general public. In a recent *New York Times* report, comment was made that the first indications that something important is stirring in foreign capitals are often the whispers, rumours and fragmentary dispatches of friend and foe alike reported by radio and television broadcasts around the world.

Twenty four hours a day, broadcasts are monitored by a little known arm of the Central Intelligence Agency, the Foreign Broadcast Information Service (FBIS). When rumours foreshadowing a major announcement in Moscow began to circulate, analysis at the intelligence agency tuned into the FBIS. What they heard was confusion.

The FBIS sifts items for news at its central office in Rosslyn, Virginia. Agents in the field glean news daily from foreign radio and television broadcasts and from newspapers. The material is compiled for eight daily reports on the world's regions which are published each weekday. Foreign broadcasts sometimes reach Washington before word can be relayed by the CIA's more active gatherers of information.

In the case of the recent death of Soviet leader, Yuri Andropov, agency officials said in response to questions from the press that they had heard nothing of unusual activity in Moscow. Those monitors who follow Radio Moscow closely found that there was a sudden switch of programme material and the playing of classical music in

place of their regular programming as they did when Leonid Brezhnev, the previous Soviet leader, died in 1982.

This example is typical of a major news story monitored by the various listening services. Monitoring enables the radio services to often be aware hours before the official announcement of major world events.

## Listening equipment

Readers may be interested in the equipment used by the writer in his work as a technical representative for many international stations.

The monitoring of BBC signals is confined to a domestic type receiver. The Sony ICF2001, which is widely used throughout the world, is the basis on which BBC reception is graded in New Zealand. BBC engineers like to receive reports in a domestic situation so that the reception is typical of that experienced by any listener.

Since first commencing to monitor the BBC in 1942 an Ekco 7-tube receiver was used, which was later replaced by an Eddystone 840A. Since 1980 three Sony ICF 2001 receivers have been used for all monitoring work. This covers not only the BBC, but Radio Canada International, Voice of America and Radio Sweden reported on a weekly basis. Vatican Radio, Radio Netherlands and the Italian Radio are reported monthly.

The aerial consists of a conventional inverted-L, 10 metres high and 30 metres long. In all, six aerials are fed into a push-button system from a 20 metre lattice tower in my property. These include a trapped, multi-band dipole and several long wire aerials running across neighbours' properties to a mast further down the street.

For DX listening I have the choice of a Racal RA17, Hallicrafters SX122, McKay Dymek DR22, Allied SX190 and several other receivers. As I am blind, all incoming signals are recorded and from this information the reception report to the distant radio station is prepared. The final typed copy is produced by one of the office staff.

As well as aerials, an earth is essential. Mine is in the form of a large concrete pipe set in the ground, filled with rocks, surrounding a copper pipe. It is kept in a damp condition, providing a good earth to all receivers.

The recording equipment includes two Telefunken reel-to-reel recorders, as well as several tape decks including JVC and AIWA models. A phone line is fed into the recorders so that news bulletins and information of value to local and national radio services can be fed to stations in Invercargill or as far afield as Auckland.

The monitoring of signals both in war time and peace has given me a unique place in radio history providing many news stories hours ahead of conventional information received by radio services or the press. ●