

The following excerpt was taken from the "dxersguide" blogspot of Oct/Dec 2014. It is with great appreciation that I am posting it here.

<http://dxersguide.blogspot.cl/2014/11/wavescan-nws298.html>

The first wireless station in the Panama Canal Zone was installed by Dr. Lee de Forest for the United States navy near the Atlantic entrance to the canal at Colon in 1906 and it was on the air originally under the callsign SL. The 35 kW longwave spark wireless transmitter operated on 1250 metres, 240 kHz.

A couple of years later, a 100 kW spark transmitter was installed and the callsign was regularized to an American navy callsign NAX. This station was in regular usage up into the 1930s.

The United States navy operated two other wireless stations in the Panama Canal Zone: stations NNL at Coco Solo and NBA at Balboa. The Coco Solo Station was located at a submarine base and it was on the air in the 1920s.

Additionally, the U. S. army also operated half a dozen wireless stations in the Canal Zone, and these were located at army camps and they were on the air under army callsigns, such as:-

WUCG Fort de Lesseps WUCH Fort Sherman WUCI Fort Randolph

The two best known wireless/radio stations in the Panama Canal Zone were the navy communication station NBA at Balboa, and the army broadcasting station at Quarry Heights. That is the story next time, when we present part 2 of the story about radio broadcasting in the Panama Canal Zone.

Back in August 1918, the American navy inaugurated their first high powered wireless station in the Panama Canal Zone. This station, rated at 200 kW, was launched under an American navy callsign, NPJ, though this was soon afterwards regularized to the better known NBA.

The station location for NBA was always given as Balboa, though originally it was located in the Darien district about half way along the canal. When electronic valve equipment was installed at a new location in 1929, a new callsign was allotted, NDG. The transmitter was at the Summit, and the receiver station was located across the canal at Farfan.

However, a do-it-yourself typed QSL card verifies the usage of the callsign NBA in 1972. Reception of NBA as heard in the United States was on July 27, and the frequency was 17697.5 kHz with a power of 5 kW.

Around the same time, the American army established a communication station at Quarry Heights under the callsign WVJ and the purpose for this facility was intercommunication with other army stations in the area. However, in 1940, a small low powered broadcasting transmitter was co-installed with station WVJ in the basement of the army barracks for the purpose of disseminating army information to army outposts.

In January of the following year (1941), army personnel began broadcasting music over this small transmitter for the entertainment of army personnel. The unofficial callsign was

PCAC, standing for Panama Canal Artillery Command. Daily broadcasts of news were taken from the Panama Star & Herald, and on Sundays news was read from the latest available issue of Time magazine.

This small, unofficial, irregular and unlicensed radio broadcasting station is considered to be the first American army entertainment station, a forerunner to AFRS, the Armed Forces Radio Service. Regular programming began in April, and it was carried on two channels in parallel, WVL shortwave and WVUB mediumwave.

In an attempt to obtain additional suitable programming, the staff wrote to the NBC network in the United States, requesting recordings, and soon afterwards almost one ton of pre-recorded program discs arrived at the station in Quarry Heights. However, a few months later, on Pearl Harbor Day, December 7, 1941, the Panama station was closed so that it could not be used as a homing beacon for incoming enemy bombers.

The radio broadcasting station was re-opened with new imported equipment as a regular unit of the AFRS network a little over a year later at the same location in Fort Clayton. That was in March 1943, and four broadcast transmitters were now available:-

WVL	5 kW	790 kHz	Regular programming
WVUB	¼	1420	Parallel relay
WVUC	¼	1480	Occasional special programming
WVL	.4	2380	Subsequently modified to 2390 kHz

At the same time as the new station was installed at Fort Clayton, a relay station was installed at Fort Gulick on the Atlantic coast of the Canal Zone. This station radiated with 1 kW on 1420 kHz.

Then in 1948, the entire facility at Fort Clayton was transferred to a permanent home, into Building 209 at this same army barracks.

According to entries in the World Radio TV Handbook, the twin AFRS mediumwave stations located at Fort Clayton and Fort Gulick (or Fort Davis under its newer name) were closed some time around the year 1971. We would suggest that the programming was still on the air for the next many years, though now only in the standard FM Band 2.

During the short era of military confrontation between the United States and president Manuel Noriega of Panama in December 1989, the United States implemented its psychological warfare procedures under the project title "Operation Just Cause". The active FM station(s?) at the American base(s?) carried programming of special music and information for this purpose, beginning on December 20.

In addition, the Americans activated a mediumwave station (the previous 5 kW AFRS unit?) and it was on the air under the identification slogan, "Radio Liberacion". There was also a mobile radio transmitter on the air under the identification slogan, "Voice of Liberty". These temporary stations ended their service under Operation Just Cause when hostilities culminated a little over a week later, on December 29.

Just a very few QSLs from the AFRS stations in the Panama Canal Zone are known, and these were letters from WVL Quarry Heights on shortwave in the immediate postwar era.