

26 October 1960

MEMORANDUM

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TO: Mr. William K. Harvey
Chief, FI/Division D.

From: Anita Potocki

Subject: NSA Telephone Request circa 28 September 1960 to Office of Security, relayed to FI/Division D, regarding Possible Access to the Recordings Alleged to Have Been Made of the Speech at the Latin American Youth Congress on 4 August 1960 in Havana by Bernon Ferguson MITCHELL.

Reference: CS-3/450,465, disseminated on 21 September 1960.

1. Referenced report, based on HZP-3852 dated 29 August 1960, was disseminated on 21 September 1960 as CS-3/450,465 to various U.S. Agencies, including NSA. Separately Ellen M. Hanna of the Panama Station prepared a dispatch forwarded as HZPA-10437 under date of 14 September 1960, referencing above report and calling attention to the fact that MITCHELL had been reported present at the LAYG Meeting according to disseminated report. HZPA-10437 was routed to various WH Division desks, none of which brought the contents to the attention of appropriate WH Division officials who might have been expected to have had some knowledge of or responsibility for follow-up of such information, and latter dispatch, therefore did not reach this office until 7 October 1960, through the good offices of Mr. [redacted] CI/Ops/WH. Mr. [redacted] was the individual who noted on the cover sheet that WH Division, when checked by phone, had advised that no attempt had been made to follow-up this lead or to determine who in the Agency might have responsibility for reporting such information directly to NSA or other U.S. Government agencies.

2. On or about 28 September 1960, Mr. J. D. Noell of O/S/SRS received a telephone call from NSA officials, calling his attention to the existence of a report CS-3/450,465 of 21 September 1960, which indicated that CIA had either had an observer or had contact with someone who had attended the LAYG, which individual had reported per reference that Bernon F. MITCHELL had made a speech in Havana on 4 August 1960 which speech "had been recorded". Ergo, NSA was most anxious to obtain either the originals or a copy of the "tapes" or "record" mentioned in the report, in order that persons familiar with MITCHELL and his manner of speaking might listen to same to check the identification made in referenced report. Mr. Noell relayed this request to the writer immediately upon receipt, whereupon within the space of two days or so, the writer in turn checked with the Office of Chief, WH/Operations, Mr. J. Esterline, who in turn referred the writer to the Panamanian Desk. After a succession of referrals, the writer ended up talking with a young lady in Panama Reports Section, whose name

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unfortunately escape me at this time. Notes made at the time of this conversation have either been mislaid or temporarily lost, and therefore are not available for referral at this writing. After several minutes of discussion back and forth with reference to the report itself, attempts to locate exact passage, etc. the writer finally arrived at a point where the request for access to the "recording" mentioned by NSA officials could be relayed to the Panama Desk officer. Reaction received amounted to a re-interpolation of what Para 3, k, of Referenced Report actually said, was intended to say, etc., how the information was probably obtained, and finally a virtual refutation of the statement that the "speech was recorded" as reported in dissemination. I was thereupon advised gratuitously that "if a recording actually was made, undoubtedly this was undertaken by the Cuban authorities themselves as the hosts for the meeting.... and therefore would be in Havana in the hands of the Castro authorities, and not in the possession of CIA either in the field or at Headquarters." A few more rounds of words were exchanged, and the writer finally advised the Panama Desk officer that above statement was mere assumption on her part, obviously was not based on any factual information she had first-hand or had developed through research into other papers available on this conference, wherefore CIA could not relay such a reply to NSA. Additional argument ensued, and the Panama Desk officer recollected that "someone else recently mentioned tapes brought up either from Cuba or Panama which someone had been looking for, but in a different connection..." She was thereupon requested by the writer to check into such separate inquiry, and advise the writer of the results. Another telephone call within about 24 hours resulted in agreement by Panama Reports Section either to initiate necessary field pouch themselves, or else to take up with the appropriate Operations Desk Officer the initiation of a formal inquiry to Panama Station, by pouch, the entire matter of existence of a tape or record-platter of the speech reported in reference, availability of such "recording" at or to the Station or the Agent who had brought in the original report, and request that if available, such recording be forwarded to Headquarters soonest. I was under the impression at the time that the party with whom I had talked had accepted this request as official, and that I had received a firm commitment that appropriate correspondence would be initiated to cover this point, allowing for "crash priorities" which might develop unexpectedly, so that a reply could be expected by late October or early November. I reiterated insistence by this office that without regard to any knowledge possessed by Hqs. Desk Officers of the circumstances of the reported LAYG meeting, at least a pro-forma written query to the field was required on basis of the NSA request that they be allowed to listed to the reported "recording", in order that a factual answer could be given their inquiry and the disseminated report be clarified in event the wording used therein had led to erroneous conclusions on part of the recipient.

3. At the time of these discussions the writer gained the impression that a relatively large amount of confusion reigned in the Cuban and Panamanian Desks of WH Division, based upon crash-priorities resulting from the U.N. meeting in New York, Mr. Castro's antics in New York, absence of various responsible

desk officers on other business, wherefore there might be some delay in getting the actual pouch written and out to the field. Mention also was made of a large amount of material recently sent back to Headquarters from the field in connection with the LAYC and from the Panama Station, which would also have to be checked prior to preparation of the outgoing dispatch, etc. However, the writer was assured that we would be kept advised of the progress made and specifically would be immediately alerted, when field reply on this point was received.

4. Above information was relayed to Mr. Noell upon completion of these arrangements, and he in turn advised NSA that we were checking with our field representatives in an effort to locate the actual recordings, tape or platter as the case might be, to which they desired access.

5. As of this morning writer was advised by Mr. Noell that NSA had again inquired of him last week, and again this week the status of our efforts to locate the requested recording of the MITCHELL speech on 4 August 1960, as they still desired to listen to the voice to verify the identification of the speaker as actually the former NSA employee, Bernon F. MITCHELL, as reported in reference. The writer thereupon retraced the entire performance, as related in paras 2 and 3, only to discover anew that no-one had the faintest inkling of what I was talking about, nor could anyone recollect that any request had been made by this office or the writer with reference to CS-3/450,465, para. 3,k. After initially calling Mr. ESTERLINE's secretary on this problem, the writer was referred by her to Mr. Phillips, who apparently is head of the Panama Desk. After a "jolly" chat well into the subject, Mr. Phillips, who had listened politely for a brief time, asked whether the writer realized that he knew nothing about the whole affair, and that he was primarily responsible for PP activities. He suggested I call a Mr. on Ext. 2031, who suggested that I might have been talking at time or original query with Miss Barbara Edmunds, Reports Officer, or "the other girl who works in that same office". However, Mr. got down to specifics right away. After obtaining the necessary copies of both the disseminated report and the HSPA-10437 dispatch referencing same, he agreed that there was some urgency in getting a definitive report from the field as to whether or not a "recording" had been made of the speech itself, who made it, who held it, and whether or not the original or a copy thereof could be obtained on a priority basis by Havana Station and forwarded to Headquarters for the purposes requested by NSA. He thereupon suggested that he could send out a routine cable to the field, text of which he virtually read to me over the phone, and asked whether in the interests of expediting same I could coordinate it for FI/D by phone in draft-form, which I did. He was advised that the indicator "ZGRACE" should be included in the heading, and we shall therefore receive a copy of the cable when it is finally sent out. We will also, obviously be included on the reply or replies from both Havana and Panama City, when available. I gained the impression that Mr. was reasonably impressed by the urgency of getting a straight-forward answer after much unnecessary delay, and the spot we were now in vis-a-vis NSA's original request of over a month ago. I am certain that we shall not get any run-around from

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Mr. [redacted]

6. Mr. Noell was advised by phone this morning of the latest developments. Mr. Noell advised that since the most recent query on this matter came from Jerry Brastow, Deputy to Al Grooms, he was of the opinion that this was merely a follow-up of some loose-ends concerning which someone on General Carroll's staff may have made inquiry to Brastow, in connection with the Carroll investigation of this case. General Carroll's staff, apparently, keep digging up such little unfinished pieces of business, and reminding various people at NSA, probably on a "tickler system basis" that such and such a lead has not been checked out in its entirety, and that status of such requests should be checked. Mr. Noell advised that in light of his original report to NSA that CIA was working on attempts to locate the "recordings" either in the field or at headquarters, he would make no further report to you until the copy of Mr. Tammey's cable of today's date is received from the field.

7. So far the situation seems to be under control once again. It is most unfortunate that such unnecessary delay in complying with the original request was caused by a variety of factors which in distilled fashion can be termed "lack of cooperation" by WH/Panama Desk officers with whom the original request was discussed. It is also unfortunate that from the outset, namely receipt of HZR-3652, this entire matter has been given obviously routine treatment by people who either lack the initiative to check on who might have responsibility within CIA for follow-up of this type of case, or who were not sufficiently "as courant" with the overt news to recognize the name Bernon F. Mitchell. I am not certain that you wish to take this matter any further, unless there are reasons of which I am unaware. My own impression is that perhaps the best thing would be to let the whole matter drop for the moment, at least until such time as we can again raise it, say by next Tuesday or so. In event we do not have a reply to Mr. [redacted] able by that date.

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Original & cc: Mr. Harvey for ZRGRACE File
cc: 201-282337 (Mitchell 201)
2 cc: C/S, SRS, Mr. J. D. Noell

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