

The CIA
on Swan Island
Wireless Adventure, and
the Revenge of United Fruit,
in KS4-land

A Presentation by Bart Lee, K6VK

For the ANTIQUE WIRELESS ASSOCIATION, 24 AUG 2006 and the

MOUNT DIABLO AMATEUR RADIO CLUB, 16 OCT 2009

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Swan Island on the Horizon,
c. 1922, occupied by United Fruit since 1909,
named after Pirate Captain Charles Swan of the
Cygnets in the 17th Century



United Fruit, a “multi-national”

- A Boston Company with Three Subsidiaries?
- 1) Wireless Specialty Apparatus Company, Inc. (WSA)
- 2) the country of **Guatemala** (and some others)
- 3) “The Company” also known as the **CIA** (U.S. Central Intelligence Agency)

United Fruit, a “multi-national”

BOSTON,

the land of the bean and the cod

where the Lodges speak only to Cabots

and Cabots speak only to God...

The Caribbean Sea,
Swan Island in its Midst
enjoying only 'Location, Location, Location'



Swan Island, a map



United Fruit Plantation

Swan Island
Boundary
Marker 1912
“Boundary of
Property
Leased to
the United
Fruit Co
Dec 10, 1912”



United Fruit Company of Boston

- Bananas, Bananas, Bananas - Yes we have Bananas, LOTS OF **BANANAS**, also Cuban
- Sugar and some
- Coconuts, too.



Wireless Telegraphy, c. 1903

- Spark radio systems, Morse code messages, shore stations and ships at sea; a Marconi shore station, Lizard, Cornwall

(reconstruction
at Lizard Point,
Cornwall, UK)



Photo Bart Lee,
2005; Curator
David Barlow

Wireless Telegraphy, c. 1909

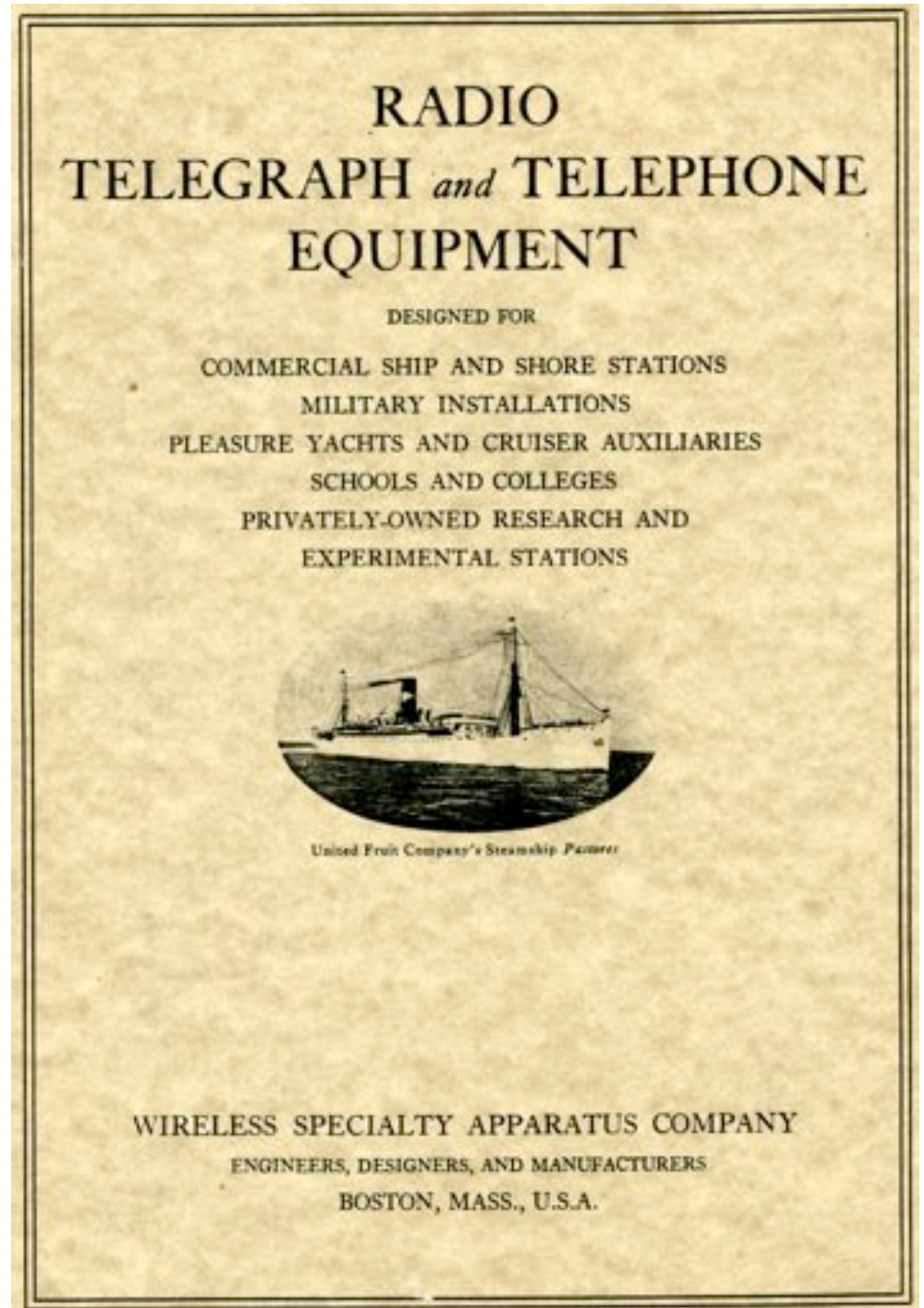
- Spark radio systems, Morse code messages, shore stations and ships at sea; a Marconi ship station (*Empress of Britain*, callsign MPB), reconstructed at the British Museum:



Photo Bart Lee, 2002

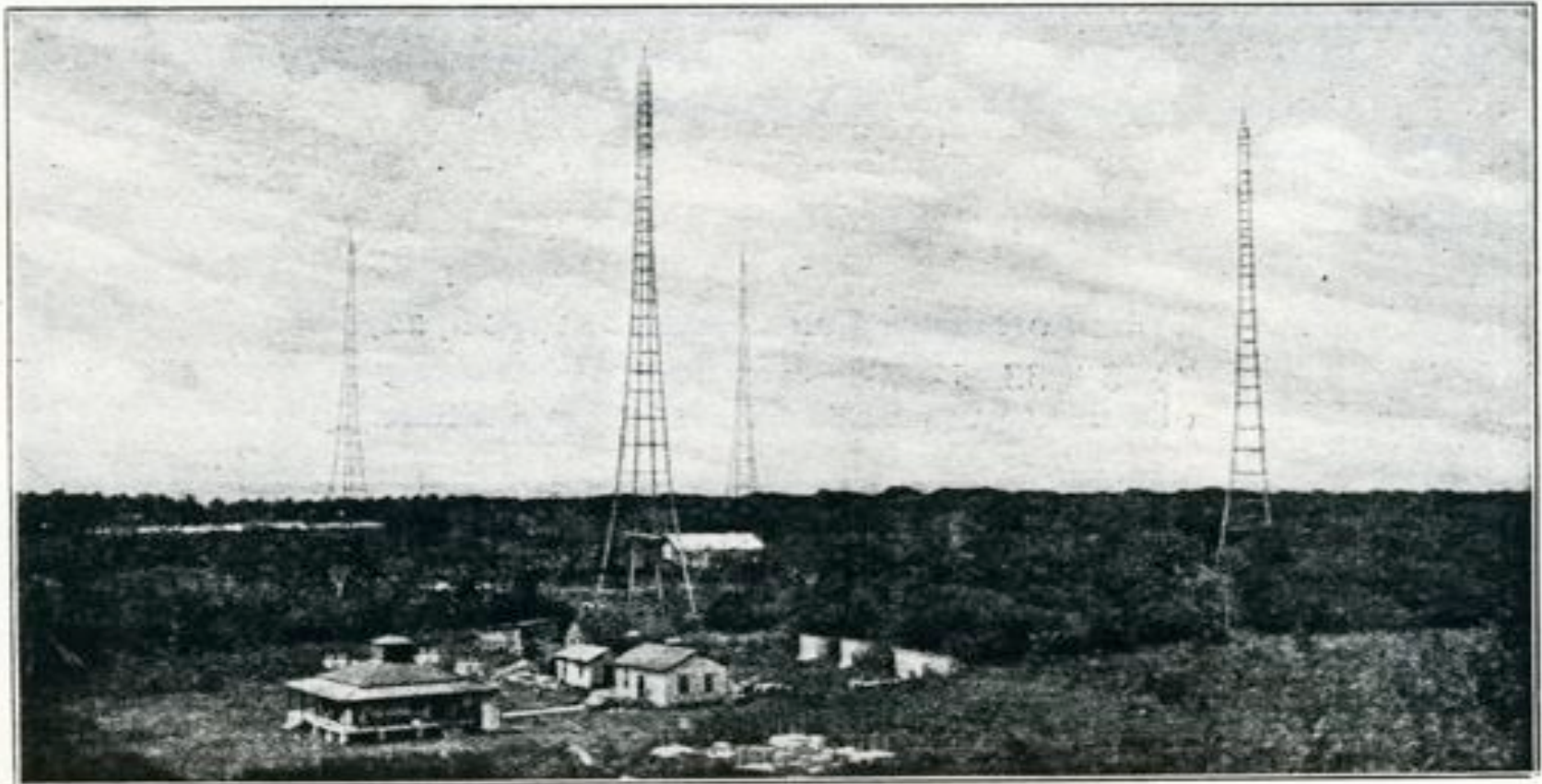
Wireless on Swan Island

Wireless
Specialty
Apparatus
Company, a Subsidiary
of United Fruit Co.;
UFCO Steamship
Pastores on the cover
of the catalog:



Wireless on Swan Island

- The station and its antenna towers, c. 1922

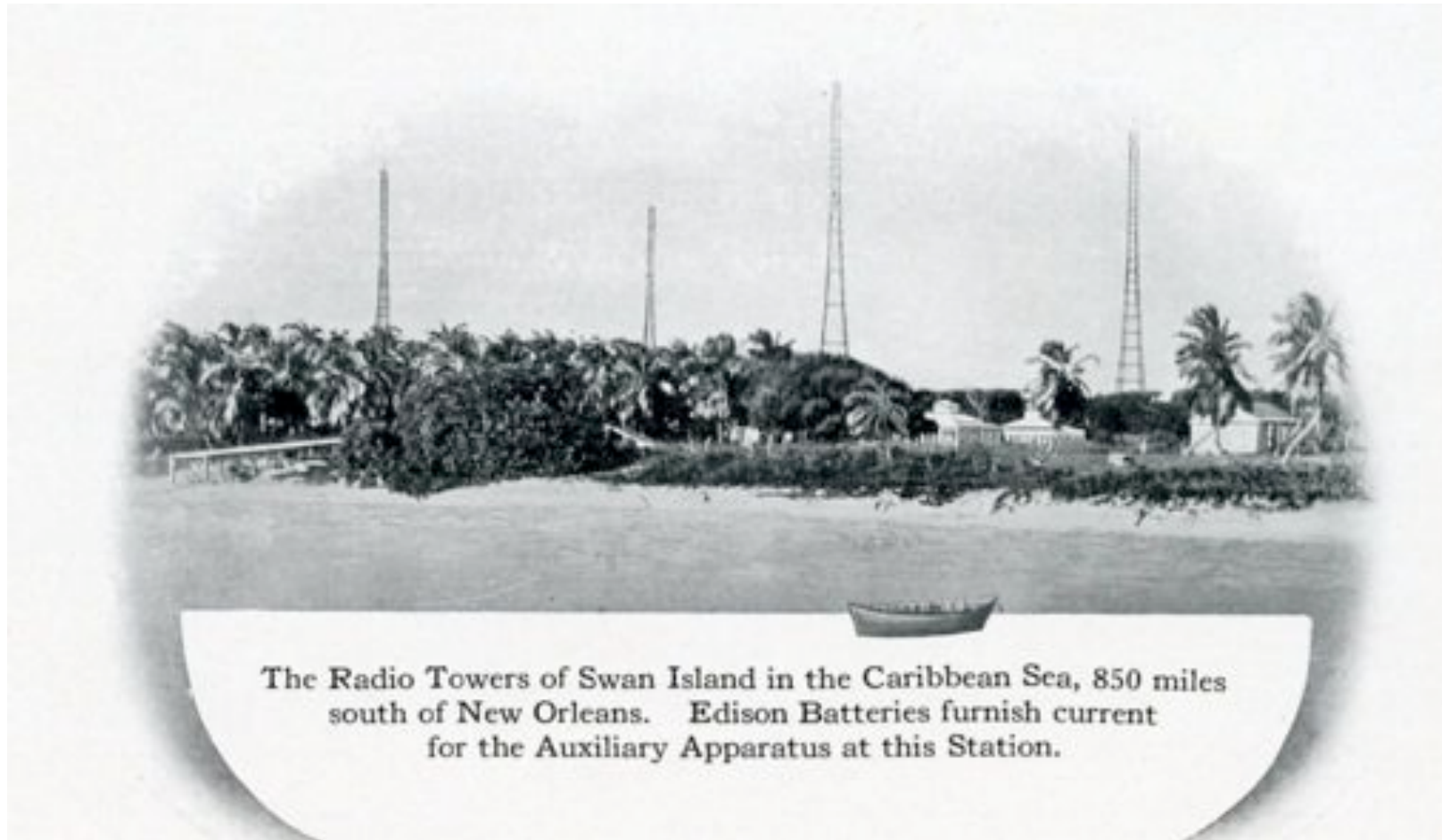


Swan Island Station of the United Fruit Co., equipped with 5 K.W. WIRELESS SPECIALTY transmitter and receiver.

[4]

From the WSA Catalog

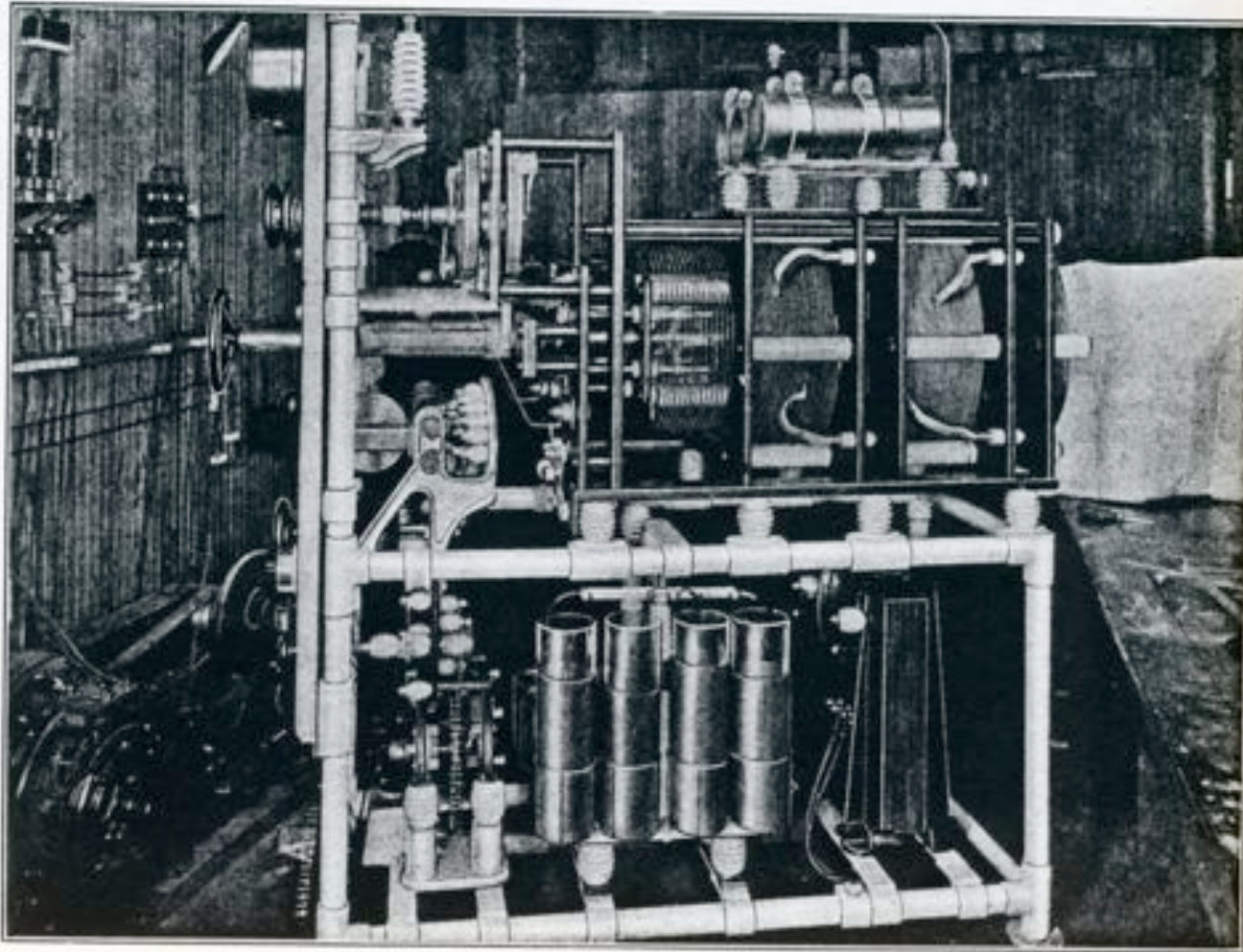
Wireless on Swan Island



The Radio Towers of Swan Island in the Caribbean Sea, 850 miles south of New Orleans. Edison Batteries furnish current for the Auxiliary Apparatus at this Station.

From an Edison Company Promotional "Letter" 1915

Wireless on Swan Island

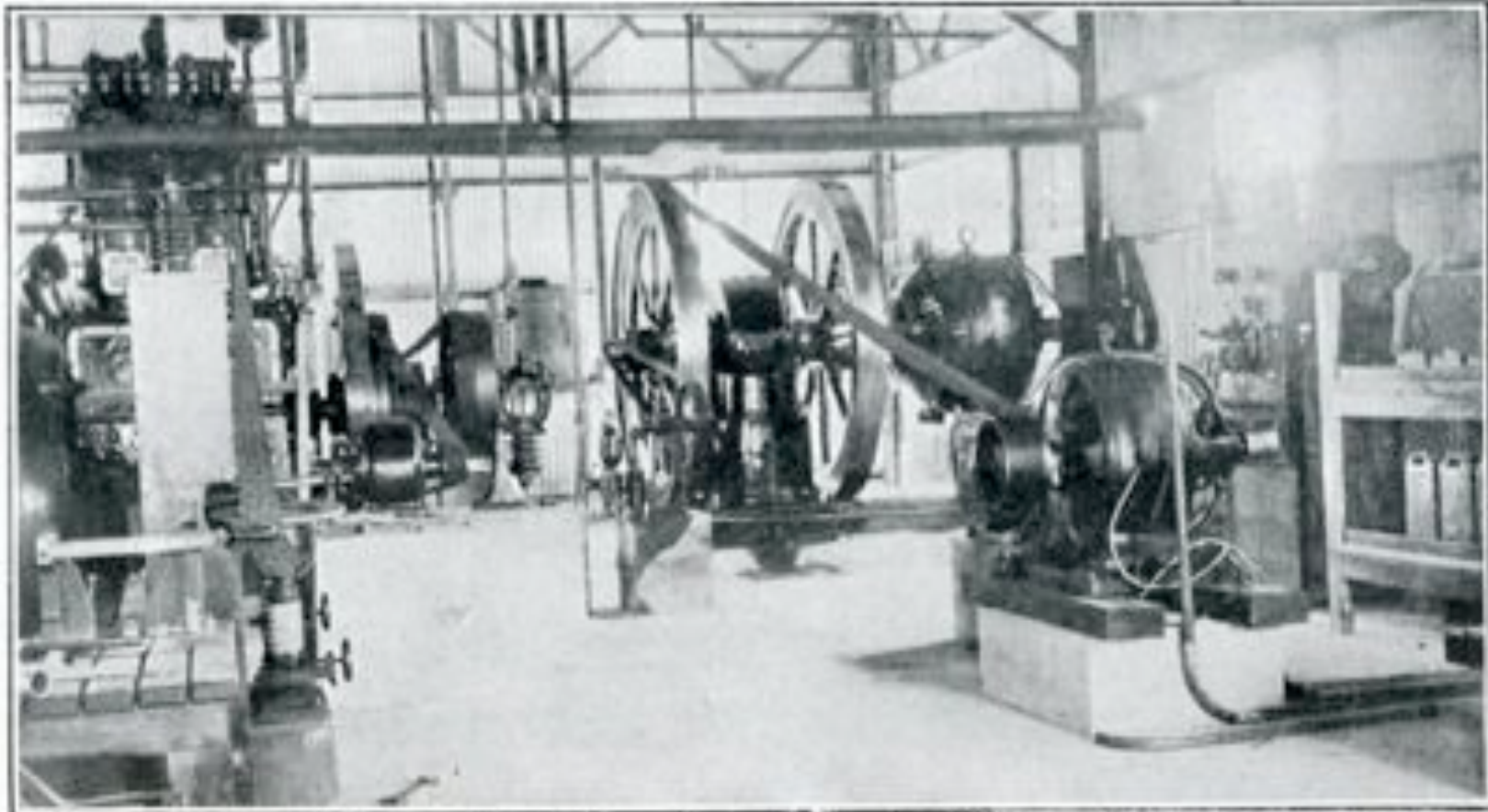


5 K.W. Transmitter designed and built by the WIRELESS SPECIALTY APPARATUS COMPANY and installed in the United Fruit Company's station at Swan Island, Caribbean Sea

[70]

From the WSA Catalog

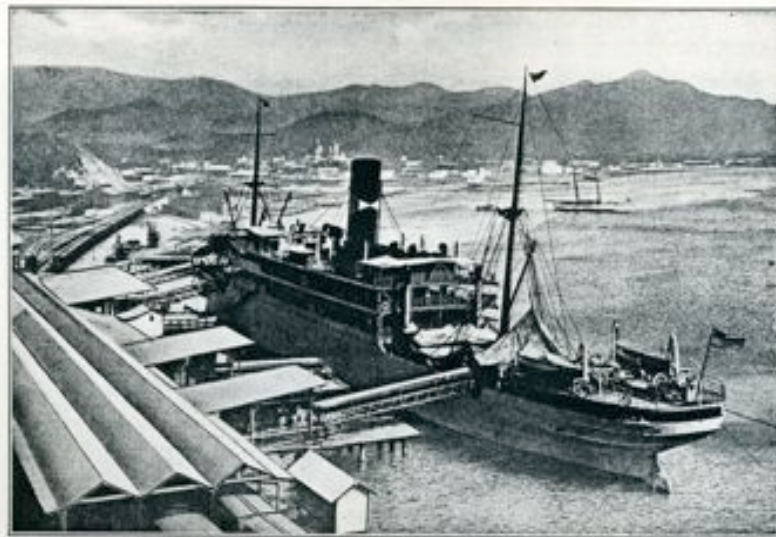
Wireless on Swan Island



View No. 1. Edison Batteries Operating Auxiliary Apparatus at Swan Island Station

From an Edison Company Promotional "Letter" 1915

Wireless on Swan Island - a **Banana Boat** and Wireless Cabin



The United Fruit Co.'s Steamship Yarraloka at Santa Marta, Colombia



WIRELESS SPECIALTY APPARATUS installation on the United Fruit Co.'s Steamship Yarraloka

[10]

From Radio Broadcast magazine: Vol. I, No. 1, 1922

Wireless on Swan Island

Happy Wireless Operators (1922, no hurricane)

From Radio Broadcast magazine: Vol. I, No. 1, 1922

Below: View of the Radio Station at Swan Island, near the tower of the antenna in the foreground of the Spanish flag.



Above: In spite of its limitations and growth, the Swan Island radio station was still always dignified.

UFCO Station US on Swan Island 1922

Wireless on Swan Island

- a pre-paid 1912
'stamp' for a UFCO
Wireless Service
message (in 1913

**Tropical Radio
Company**, which with
WSA became part of
RCA in 1919)



Stamp from Bart Lee collection

Tropical Radio Caribbean Stations

- Radio Stations UFCO & Callsigns (1922)
- All weather observation stations as well, from 1914 to 1932
- U for United + a second letter
- *Radio Call Letters & Radio Stations:*
- WNU New Orleans, Louisiana
WBU Burrwood, Louisiana
WIO Fort Morgan, Alabama
- US [United-Swan] Swan Island
- UC Tela, Honduras
- UA Puerto Castilla, Honduras
- UG Tegucigalpa, Honduras
- UX Port Limon, Costa Rica
- UB Almirante, Panama
- UJ Santa Marta, Columbia

F.A.A. RADIO in KS4 –LAND,

FAA and Weather Bureau Personnel on Site

- Weather Bureau manned Swan Island during hurricane seasons from 1938.
- In 1946, the FAA installed a non-directional navigation beacon radio station for guidance of Caribbean air traffic. Its callsign was SWA and it operated on 407 kHz.
- The FAA radio station used the callsign WSG and communicated with Miami by radio-teletype on short wave frequencies.

Amateur Radio on Swan Island

QSL Images collected by Thomas Roscoe, K8CX, <http://hamgallery.com> .

- Before and after World War Two, FAA and U.S. Weather Bureau personnel lived on Swan Island. Many were amateur radio operators. KS4-land was KD4-land first.

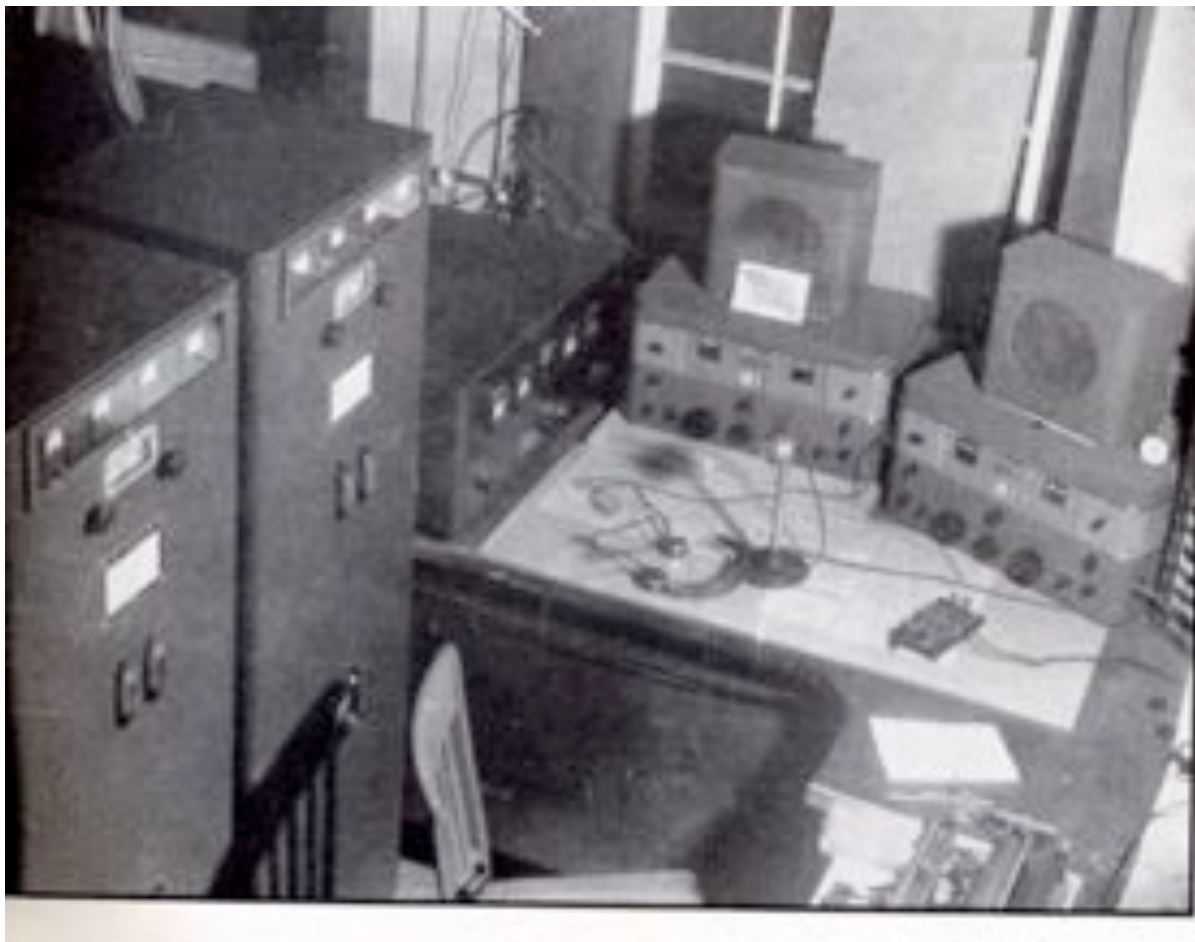


Via K8CX
From W5KNE

The Weather Bureau's Amateur Radio Operators' Swan Island Station, 1941



KD4GYM's 20 meter Station



●
The operating position at KD4GYM. The two tall rigs to the left are c.w. transmitters for Navy schedules. Next, on the operating table, is the 100-watt HT-9 transmitter which was used on 14-Mc. phone. The two receivers (AR-77's) are on the operating table along with the phones, mike, bug, and the mill.

From: *Radio*, July, 1941, p. 8, The Story of KD4GYM by Steve Paull, KD4GYM (W9FPF)

1947, 875 watts with a SuperPro Receiver, KS4AF in 1948



Via K8CX From W8OZA

xW5LMT, running 100 watts, pp 809s



Via K8CX From W2ILC

“On the Route of the Flying Clippers” Pan American Airways 1953



Via K8CX from W8UAS

W3ZQ/KS4 -- 1963

“Site of the U.S. Weather Bureau
Hurricane Upper Air Sounding Station
(Supported by FAA Communications)”



Via K8CX
From W2GGE

James Takaki (1967, Hawaiian, also F7BY, probably also on government service) operator of KS4CC in 1968

SWAN ISLAND, WEST INDIES

KH6BCB/KS4

P.O. BOX 1148, MIAMI, FLA. 33148

JAMES I. TAKAKI

Via K8CX From K8CX

Swan Island Amateur Radio Club,
(James Takaki, KH6BCB, 1968),
remembering Captain Swan



Via K8CX
From
OE1HGW

Palm Trees and Radio Towers



Via K8CX From W9TYL (1971); see also W3ZQ/KS4 1963

HR6SWA, Swan Island, Honduras, 1975.

On Sept. 1, 1972, the United States yielded Swan Island to Honduras, keeping the right to operate on the island. ARRL deleted it as a DXCC entity. After Sept. 1, 1972 contacts count only as Honduras.



Via
K8CX
From
K8CX;
note
suffix
SWA
same as
the FAA
Beacon

The CIA on Swan Island 1954

- The CIA Overthrew the elected government of Guatemala by Radio Warfare from neighboring countries and likely **Swan Island**, and insurgency.
- Guatemala wanted to expropriate United Fruit's vacant agricultural land, and was going **Communist**, importing arms from the Eastern Bloc; Che Guevara was active there.
- Boston's **United Fruit** stockholders made up part of "America, Inc.": **Henry Cabot Lodge** was the US UN Ambassador; **John M. Cabot** was high in the State Department and exUFCO president; Secretary of State was **John Foster Dulles** and his brother **Allan Dulles** was CIA Director.
- The CIA sent **E. Howard Hunt** (of Watergate infamy later) and **David Atlee Phillips** to wage Radio Warfare, in part from **Swan Island** – and it worked!
- **United Fruit** saved its land; **decades of bloodshed followed.**

The CIA on Swan Island 1954



According to E. Howard Hunt, left, he and David Atlee Phillips, right, landed on Swan Island in 1953 to set up high power propaganda shortwave radio station to be used against Guatemala. He said that they had to repulse “Guatemalan students” who objected.

The CIA on Swan Island 1954

Images from Peter McCollum, <http://www.militaryradio.com/spyradio/>

- CIA radios supplied to insurgents → RS-1



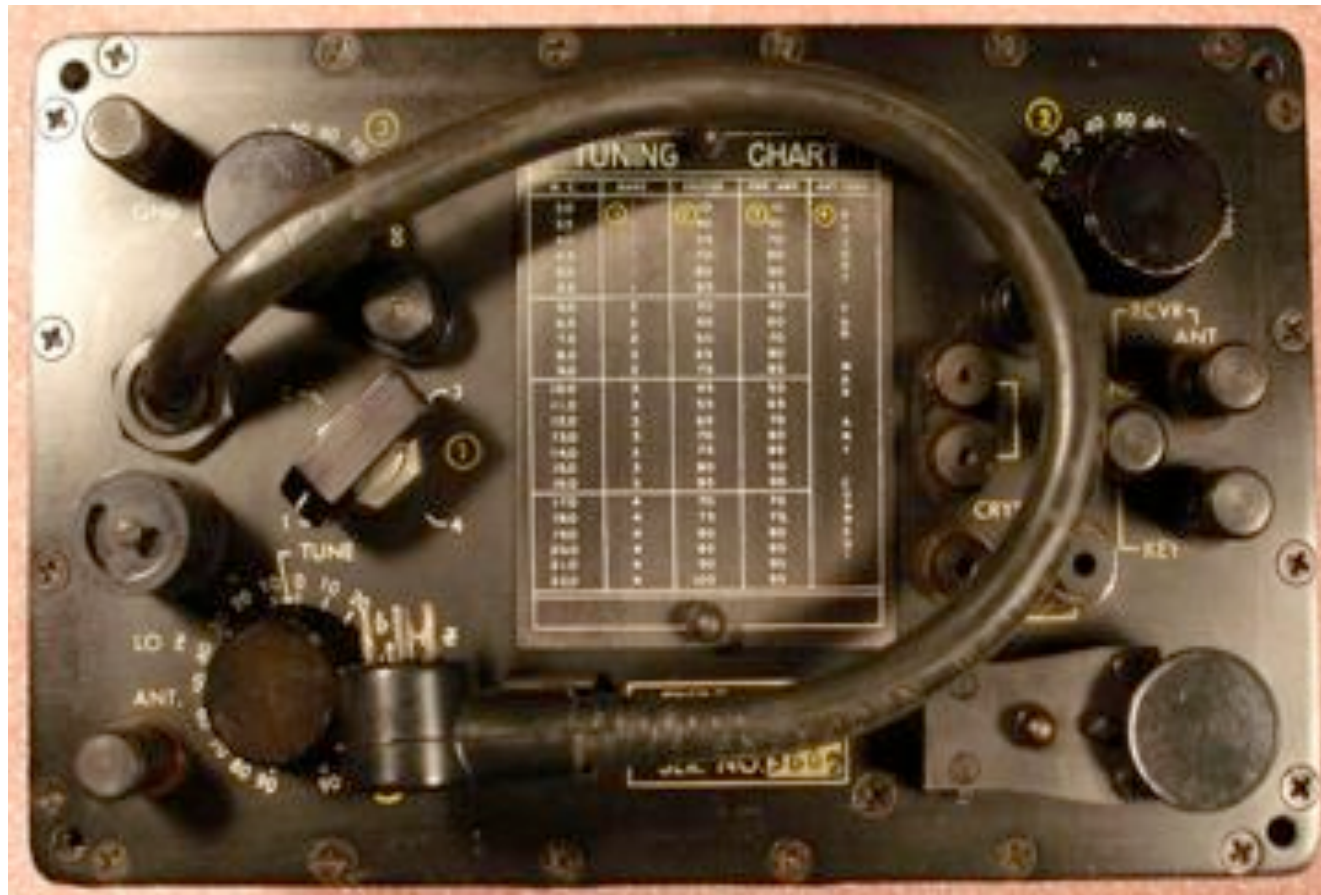
The CIA on Swan Island 1954

- Receiver RR-2B



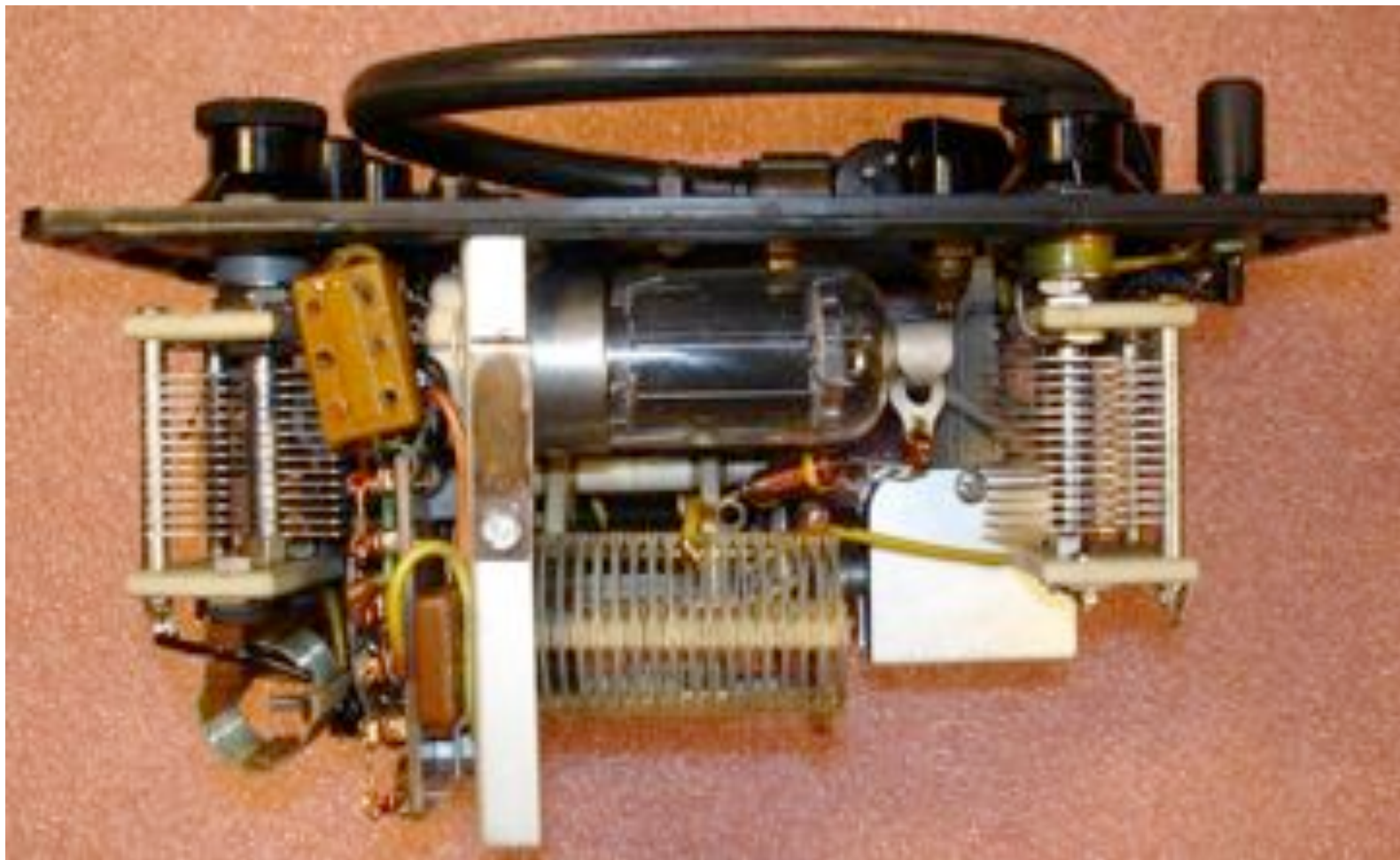
The CIA on Swan Island 1954

- Transmitter RT-3
- From the Dennis Monticelli collection (AE6C)



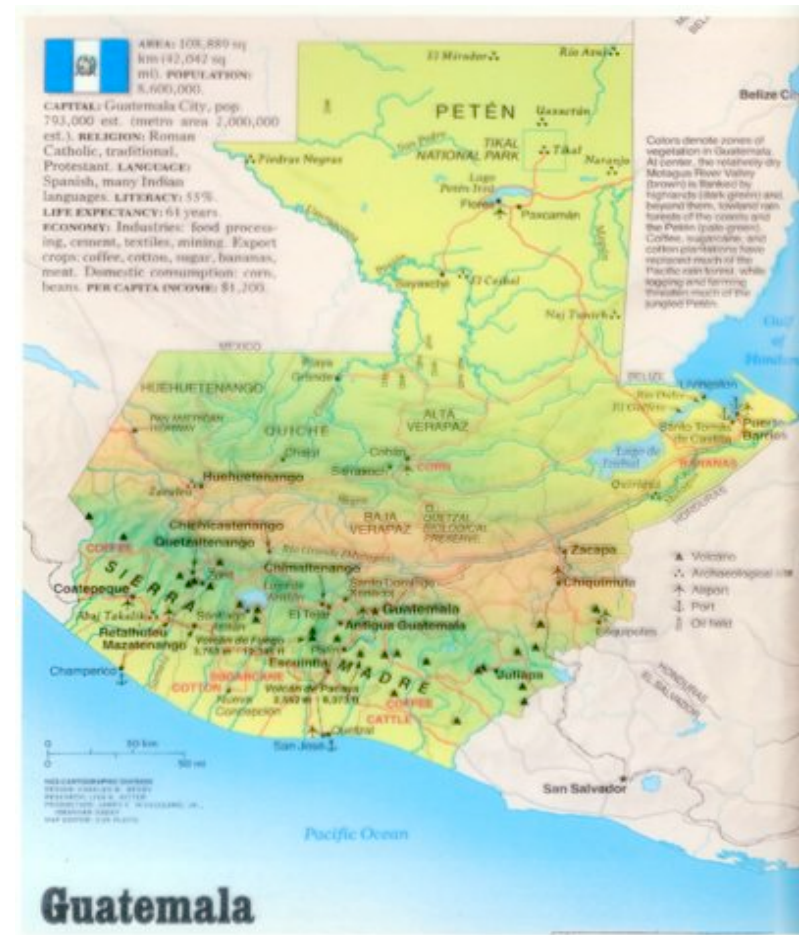
The CIA on Swan Island 1954

- Transmitter RT-3 inside



The CIA on Swan Island 1954 -- Guatemala, Swan Island 250+- miles East:

A British diplomat, according to CIA Officer Phillips, concluded: “The soldiers had nothing to do with it. The war was won by that radio station.”



The CIA on Swan Island 1954

- The CIA overthrew the Guatemalan government, Swan Island's radio stood down, and then Hurricane Janet came by:



The CIA on Swan Island 1954

- Hurricane Janet 1955 -- Down came the Radio Towers

[On Swan island] “ ... on September 15 [1955]... [a]t 1100 hours, from our closed retreat, we heard the giant twin radio towers crash to the ground after being knocked from their foundations by the 100-knot wind ...”

[From the air] “As we approached Swan Island ... the only ... radio they had was an emergency transceiver that was operated by hand cranking a small generator in the unit that was called a Gibson Girl.... What we did see when we got there was the islands covered with downed coconut trees that were laid out like match sticks and clearly lined-up indicating how the wind blew them down. There were also five (5) huge radio transmitters, flat on the ground and parallel to each other, and also indicating the direction of how the hurricane winds blew over the island.”

The CIA on Swan Island -- 1960

- The Cuban Revolution – 1959 – Real *Communists* in Cuba!
- “The Revolution is not a dinner party” said Mao Tse Tung
- Cuba expropriated United Fruit’s and other U.S. interests on the island, and imprisoned and executed many thousands of Cubans.



Some 9,389 Cubans have been listed by name as murdered by Che and Fidel and “the Revolution.”

The CIA on Swan Island -- 1960

- CIA officer David Phillips got another radio station up on Swan Island in 30 days, with help from the Navy.

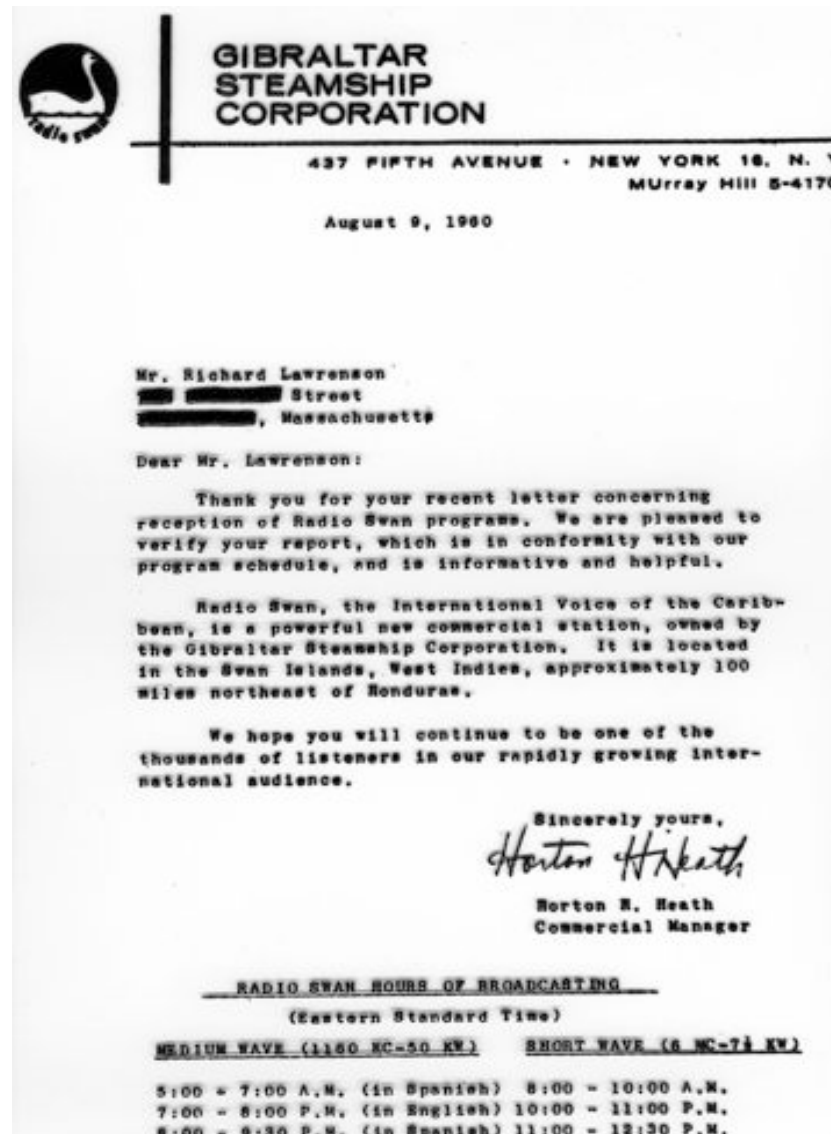


RS transmitters were portable jobs mounted in vans parked under a roof. The small announcers studio building is at the right, though most of the programming was on tape and flown in from Miami. (Photo by Tom Kneitel)

Photo and text
from *Popular
Communications*,
1985

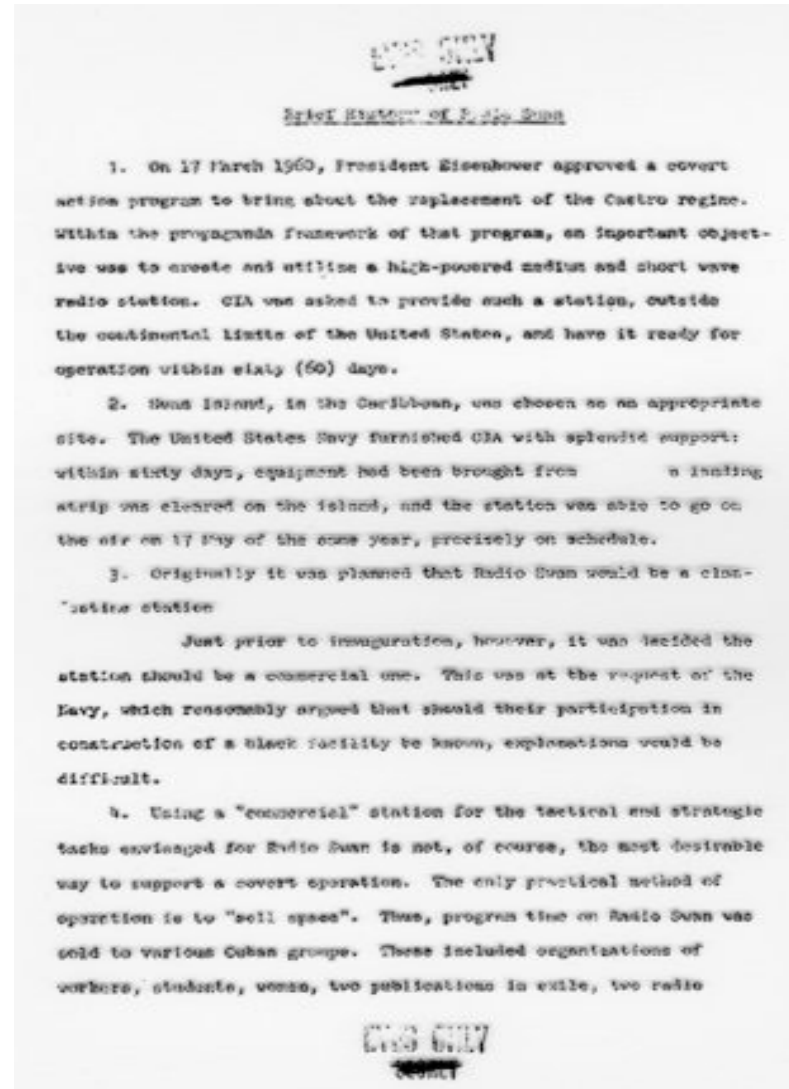
The CIA on Swan Island – 1960

Gibraltar Steamship Corporation, running *Radio Swan*, was a CIA proprietary company whose “President” was Thomas D. Cabot, a former president of United Fruit Company.



The CIA on Swan Island – 1960

CIA wrote a
Brief History of
Radio Swan for
itself:



The CIA on Swan Island – 1960

CIA document, page 1 of 4, interpolations {} by Bart Lee

- **[The CIA's] Brief History of Radio Swan. -- 1. On 17 March 1960, President Eisenhower approved a covert action program to bring about the replacement of the Castro regime. Within the propaganda framework of that program, an important objective was to create and utilize a high-powered medium and short wave radio station. CIA was asked to provide such a station, outside the continental limits of the United States, and have it ready for operation within sixty (60) days.**
- **2. Swan Island, in the Caribbean, was chosen as an appropriate site. The United States Navy furnished CIA with splendid support: within sixty days, equipment had been brought from [intentional blank {West Germany}], a landing strip was cleared on the island, and the station was able to go on air on 17 May of the same year, precisely on schedule.**
- **3. Originally it was planned that Radio Swan would be a clandestine station [intentional blank {like *La Voz de Liberation* in 1954}]. Just prior to inauguration, however, it was decided the station should be a commercial one. This was at the request of the Navy, which reasonably argued that should their participation in construction of a black facility be known, explanations would be difficult.**
- **4. Using a "commercial" station for the tactical and strategic tasks envisaged for Radio Swan is not, of course, the most desirable way to support a covert operation. The only practical method of operation is to "sell space." Thus, program time on Radio Swan was gold to various Cuban groups. These included organizations of workers, students, women, two publications in exile, two radio stations in exile, and several political groups. [intentional blank {Boston Radio Station WRUL's}] Programs (on tape) were produced in [intentional blank {Boston}] and later, on Swan Island. *****

The CIA on Swan Island – 1960
The Radio Swan & Radio Americas
period, 1960 to 1968



The CIA on Swan Island -- 1960

- *Radio Swan* broadcast to Cuba along the same lines as the radio propaganda against Guatemala.
- Before and during the 1961 CIA Bay of Pigs invasion, *Radio Swan* provided both operational and disinformation transmissions.
- President Kennedy denied air support to the insurgents and Castro's forces repulsed them.
- Radio Swan continued as a propaganda station, as *Radio Americas* ("purposelessly" said Phillips).

The CIA on Swan Island -- 1960

Radio Swan broadcasting to Castro's Cuba from 1960, *Radio Americas* until 1968



The CIA on Swan Island -- 1960



CIA Still at Work in 1975?

Radio Swan's Ghost –
in Honduras; A Press Card



CIA Still at Work in 1975?

Radio Swan's Ghost, claiming paternity



The CIA on Swan Island – 1980s

- More Trouble in Latin America – Sandinistas in Nicaragua

In the 1980s the CIA, despite Honduran sovereignty, used Swan Island for a base for supplying Contras dedicated to the overthrow of the elected Sandinista government in Nicaragua, as did private supporters. See PLANE SUPPLYING CONTRAS CRASHED, 11 BELIEVED KILLED... PLANE STRUCK BY MISSILES, New York Times; January 25, 1988.

“[A] small station ... was established on Swan Island in support of a variety of operations which were being conducted as part of our support for the CIA's efforts in Nicaragua. ...The communications setup for this facility was something that we called a flyaway package. Basically it consisted of a HF [high frequency] transmitter/receiver[,] a PC-based communications terminal and a KG-84 encryption device.”

From an ex-CIA operative on Swan Island

Amateur Radio on Swan Island - 2008

- A Dxpedition to the Middle of Nowhere, HR6/HQ8



“Have a Banana!”



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Presentation Diploma

