

## Television Monitoring

Jack Doughty, former BBC Monitor, 1963-1990

At BBC Monitoring, the monitoring of television broadcasts only started in 1982. Prior attempts to arrange monitoring from Helsinki fell through. Early satellite TV from low-pass satellites was not easy to intercept. It became a more practical possibility when geostationary satellites came into use. FBIS, the US equivalent of BBC Monitoring, set up a big steerable dish in 1982 for research. Russian monitors went down to it to take informal notes on major news bulletins. Later, several fixed dishes were set up to cover specific satellites. From April 1983, a pilot scheme for television monitoring was conducted. Six of us monitored Soviet TV on an in-house basis, with the aim of working out techniques. Coverage was on the same principles as for radio monitoring: reporting news items, talks, features etc. as slugs (brief headings), summaries, monitor's reports (describing proceedings in third person), and texts. For TV, notes on visual content would be included where necessary.

I was given the job of compiling visual aids and setting up a training scheme. The visual aids consisted of photos of people and military hardware from papers and books, and later taken from the screen using a Polaroid camera.

It was important to be able to recognise people, particularly in line-ups, e.g. on the Lenin Mausoleum at parades, in Soviet times, and also on other occasions. From the time Gorbachev came to power, leaders' wives were more often seen, so they had to be identified too. Recognition of tanks, planes, ships etc. was also an essential requirement.

The training scheme consisted of a crash-course of only two or three days. In the case of the Russian team, this was based on Soviet training tapes selected by me. For other teams, I trained the Chief Monitors and Assistant Chiefs if any (the smaller teams do not have them), initially on English-language tapes (BBC, ITV), and then on tapes in their own language. They then trained the rest of their own teams.

Military hardware and personalities are probably the greatest point of interest in all television monitoring. It is important to be able to identify ships, tanks, planes, missiles etc., and there is particular interest in military parades. One has to learn to identify the rank badges, shoulder-strap colours etc. of military personnel

In television monitoring, it is important to look out for anything worthy of note, including in the background. For example, a news item on the field testing of a new tractor in Zaporozhye showed a large military signals unit in the field behind the test ground. Such information is

useful to the MoD. On another occasion, a notice board shown incidentally on screen during the Chernobyl crisis gave a list of precautions to be taken by local inhabitants, far more drastic than anything that had been revealed elsewhere at the time.

After a while, the supply of tapes of interesting material to the MoD for further processing became increasingly important. This required “cutting” the video tapes, initially by just linking two video recorders and “crash editing”, but later using a proper video editing console. An example of an interesting item of this type occurred during the US air raids on Libya. Libyan TV showed the alleged remains of a US missile in Tripoli, but it had Russian lettering on it, and was actually one of their own Russian-supplied ground-to-air missiles.

Compiling photo records from the screen (for all teams) also became an increasing part of my job. I eventually obtained my own room, own console and finally the newly-created official post of “Senior Assistant, Video Monitoring” in 1989. I retired in 1990, so this article is only based on my experience up to then.

*Jack Doughty worked at BBC Monitoring as a Russian Monitor, Assistant Chief Monitor, Senior Assistant Video Monitoring between 1963-1990. This involved transcribing Moscow Radio and TASS news items, talks, and features, including both political and a wide range of technical subjects. He researched the subjects of metallurgy, shipping and shipbuilding, agriculture and the oil and gas industry to produce glossaries for use by the team. Jack happened to be the only Russian monitor on night shift when Russian forces invaded Czechoslovakia in 1968. Other memorable moments include transcribing the Warsaw Pact statement, the death of cosmonaut Komarov and Leonid Brezhnev’s state funeral. In the last few years, he was mainly concerned with the monitoring of Soviet Television, training monitors of all language pairs in this subject and producing training material and reference files, as well as monitoring the programmes himself.*