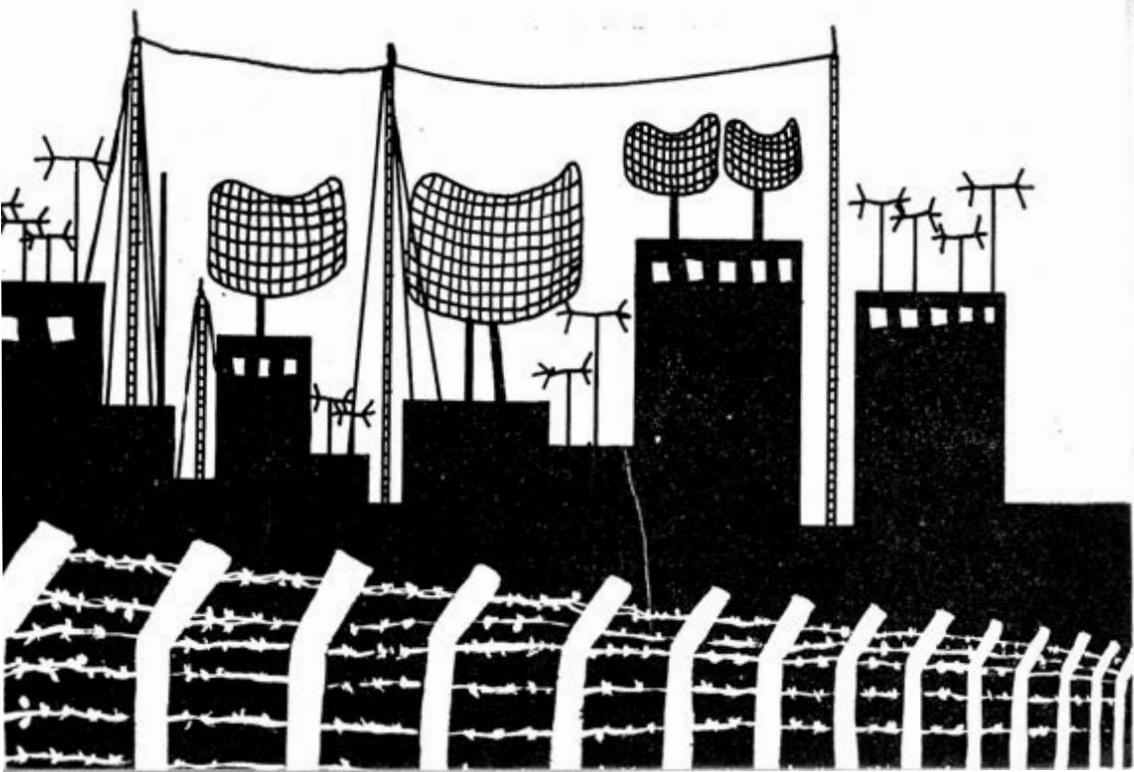


PRESENT AND FUTURE OF A



YANKEE BASE

by Roberto Correa Wilson

ONE morning in 1953, the Eritreans, accustomed to the desolate landscape of a medieval country in mid-20th century, suddenly saw a thick forest of antennae arise, followed by two radar screens which revolved silently from eight-story buildings, cutting off the fresh air of the tableland north of Asmara.

The Eritreans, who throughout the centuries have been attacked and occupied by the Egyptians, Turks, Italians, British, and now by the Ethiopians, associated this American base with the rule Emperor Haile Selassie has maintained over their country under the status of "federation," since 1952.

Although less well-known than the many bases in South Viet Nam and Okinawa

and the recently dismantled Wheelus Fields in Libya, the US Kagnew Station in Ethiopia is equally important to US world political and military strategy. And although it does not have the characteristics of a "combat base," like those of Kadena or Da Nang (the latter is the biggest military, naval and air complex in South Viet Nam), Kagnew is vitally important to Washington's huge system of strategic communication.

The Ethiopian government signed a treaty with the American authorities in 1953, by which this radio-communications complex was to be set up in Asmara, capital of Eritrea, two thirds of which is already under the control of the Eritrean Liberation Front (FLE). Two agreements

were signed that year: one for mutual defense and military aid, by which the United States promised to equip and train Emperor Haile Selassie's armed forces, and a second which arranged for the installation of a communications center in Asmara.

The choice of Ethiopia for the building of the base meant, apart from its utility from a geographical point of view, that Washington officially considered the country, which for more than 30 years has been under Selassie's iron rule, to be politically the most stable, not only in East Africa, but on the whole continent.

Kagnew Station, which cost 65 million dollars and is managed by communications specialists from the US Navy and Signal Corps, is the most important of five similar installations in the world. The

other four are in the Philippines, Hawaii, San Francisco and Maryland.

Some 7600 feet above sea level, and only 15 degrees north of the Equator, Kagnew Station has an exceptional position in world communications. The unusual combination of altitude and nearness to the Equator means it can offer radio communication service remarkably free from the interference found in other parts of the world.

The huge base is the latest big military installation to be set up in Africa.

According to American experts, Kagnew Station provides instant communication for the American president should he wish to contact the White House during flights over the Eastern Atlantic, Europe and Africa. It can send messages from



overseas American bases to the Pentagon, from Navy warships in the Indian Ocean and diplomatic communications from embassies and military missions in Europe, Africa and parts of Asia to the State Department.

Kagnew also transmits messages to American satellites and plays an important role in the US space program. Many space-ship flights are controlled from it, as are sea operations should the capsule come down in a neighboring area.

The base is also used for US espionage activities. Progressive forces have declared that Kagnew's electronic listening devices monitor the Arab states and extend deep into the territory of the USSR and other socialist countries. Over 1500 American specialists are employed on the base.

Kagnew's importance to the United States is seen in Washington's far-reaching undertaking to supply and equip the Ethiopian armed forces which have suffered many defeats at the hands of the FLE. Israel is also training some of them — for instance, the Israeli police are training an antiguerrilla commando which operates mainly in Eritrea, as well as the imperial secret services. The German Federal Republic is offering a million dollars per year to train and arm Haile Selassie's police force.

"Our aid consists simply of paying the rent for Kagnew Station," said an American official recently. But there was a lot more to it than this, for apart from the million and a half dollars' rent, Ethiopia gets over half of all the military aid the US gives to African countries. According to latest figures, the program has already cost over 100 million dollars.

The 110 officers and soldiers of the American Military Assistance Advisory Group that advises the three corps of the Imperial Armed Forces is the biggest United States base on this continent. High-ranking American officers work in buildings a few meters from those of the Ethiopian chief of staff.

All this helps to perfect and equip the Ethiopian Army (which has about 40 000 men mobilized and has modern artillery and supersonic planes) for the task of containing the growing menace that the Eritrean liberation forces are becoming to Kagnew Station. At present, Washington and Addis Ababa appear nervous about the nearness of the guerrilla forces' operations. The future of this radio-communications complex (which Washington believes "vital for the defense of the free world") depends on what the Eritrean Liberation Front can do in the next few years.