

STAFF SERGEANT ANTONIO BONILLA

US Army



Antonio Bonilla entered the US Army in 1980 as an MP (Military Police). In 1984, after graduating from the Defense Language Institute (DLI), he switched to Military Intelligence. He attended and graduated from the Interrogators and Strategic Debriefers courses at the US Army Intelligence Center, Fort Huachuca, Arizona. After graduating, SSG Bonilla spent much of the rest of his career in Panama.

Assigned to the 470th MI Brigade in Corozal, Panama, in 1985, SSG Bonilla worked real world missions and projects of national interest throughout Central America. He was selected as the "Pilot Debriefers" for a Central American Military Deserters and Refugees program. He individually screened and assessed more than 400 foreign nationals while working jointly with foreign, US military and national intelligence agencies.

He also conducted intelligence seminars on interrogation techniques, document exploitation, report writing and other topics for more than 250 Central American Military Intelligence personnel.

While assigned to the Collection & Exploitation Company, 746th MI Battalion, 470th MI Brigade, Bonilla was the NCOIC of a group of 23 officers and enlisted personnel of various intelligence disciplines that supported US Army South (USARSO) and several national-level agencies with sensitive intelligence missions throughout region. As a result of Bonilla's leadership ability, he was selected and served as First Sergeant of the C&E Company. His actions directly contributed to C Company, 746th MI Battalion being awarded the Director of Central Intelligence Human Intelligence Collector of the Year Award for Fiscal Year 1989.

Bonilla's greatest contribution came in late 1989 during Operation JUST CAUSE, the operation to oust Panamanian strongman GEN Manuel Noriega. LTC Ben L. Elley, Commander of the 746th MI Battalion, chose Bonilla as his finest Panama expert to support the Deputy Commander of Joint Task Force South. MG Marc Cisneros Commanding General, USARSO, then handpicked Bonilla to lead the effort to force the peaceful capitulation of the Panamanian Defense Forces (PDF). Spending days on the telephone talking to commanders of outlying military zones, SSG Bonilla used his powers of persuasion, knowledge of the enemy, and understanding of the Latin American culture to coerce enemy military zone commanders to serve their country by living to see its rebirth instead of dying needlessly.

SSG Bonilla then set about establishing a telephonic intelligence network that took spot reports of fugitive GEN Noriega's location from Panamanian sources. This network

supplied information that was instrumental in flushing out GEN Noriega and also produced information leading to the discovery of the largest weapons cache found during the entire operation. SSG Bonilla's efforts in support of these operations undoubtedly saved hundreds of US and Panamanian lives and spared numerous towns from destruction and collateral damage that would have occurred had the enemy forces chosen to fight. For these actions, SSG Bonilla received the Bronze Star.

After Operation JUST CAUSE, SSG Bonilla continued working in Panama with the Regional Liaison Office where he coordinated on a daily basis with high-level members of the new Panamanian Police Force and government officials.

SSG Bonilla left the Army in February 1990. His awards and decorations include the Bronze Star Medal, Meritorious Service Medal, Army Commendation Medal, Army Achievement Medal, and Good Conduct Medal (with 2 Oak Leaf Clusters).