

# THE BAPTISM OF GENERAL MANUEL NORIEGA

By Joe R. Garman

President George H.W. Bush ordered the invasion of Panama in December 1989 for the purpose of capturing General Noriega on charges of massive drug trafficking. Noriega was incarcerated for 17 years in a federal prison in Miami, and then extradited to France where he was imprisoned for four years on money laundering charges. In 2011 he was transferred to a prison in Panama.

In January 1990, a Spanish New Testament came into the notorious prisoner's hands. Ten days later the editor of the Soul Winner's New Testament (Evangelismo Personal), Clift Brannon, a former attorney turned preacher, received a letter from Noriega. Noriega expressed his appreciation for the copy of the scriptures. Brannon immediately applied for a visitation permit.

In May, Brannon and a Spanish interpreter, Rudy Hernandez, were allowed to visit Noriega for a total of 6 hours. Following their visit, Noriega wrote Brannon as follows: *"The hours flew by without my being aware. I could have desired that they continue forever. There was so little time. Thank you for the deep and meaningful spiritual strength brought to bear on my mind and soul."*



In July, Brannon requested Spanish Bible correspondence courses be sent from ABA. In 1991, the former drug lord requested permission from the prison authorities to be baptized. But his request was denied upon the advice of his attorneys. In September, 1992, the Honorable William M. Hoeveler, United States District Judge in Miami granted permission for Noriega to be baptized.

On October 24, 1992 (United Nations Day!), ARM's baptistry arrived at the back door of the Federal Court House in Miami. A Deputy Marshall supervised the baptistry as it was transported into the courtroom and filled with water. That was a first. We were told this had never taken place in a federal courthouse before. Security was tight as Noriega was led into the courtroom.

Surrounded by 12 guards, Noriega, wearing civilian clothes, took off his jacket and shoes, and got into the baptistry. Brannon preached on the meaning of baptism as Hernandez interpreted, followed by prayer. Then Brannon immersed Noriega in Christian baptism and raised him up again (Rom. 6:4).

Rudy had an accordion, and began singing *Amazing Grace*, first in Spanish and then in English. The music reverberated off the marble floor. One of the guards later said, "At one time he was Public Enemy No. 1, but now he is my brother in Christ." Noriega must have agreed because when he autographed the above picture for me in 1995 he signed it "from Brother Noriega".

**MANUEL NORIEGA DIED MONDAY, MAY 29, 2017, IN A HOSPITAL IN PANAMA CITY. HE WAS 83. IN HIS LAST CORRESPONDENCE WITH ME HE WROTE, "GOD BLESS CLIFT, RUDY AND YOU WITH PHYSICAL HEALTH AND SPIRITUAL WISDOM. PLEASE KEEP UP THE GOOD WORK! I AM CONTINUING TO WALK WITH CHRIST."**

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