

Oakland residents say invasion's 'overdue'

Oakland County residents, along with the rest of the nation, woke up Wednesday morning to hear that the holidays would hold more than expected.

The U.S. invasion of Panama definitely gave them more to think about than gift lists. Most were supportive, many thought it was overdue.

People interviewed ranged from a retired two-star major general from Birmingham to people mailing packages at the Birmingham Post Office or headed for work or to shop on the streets of Rochester.

Retired major general Stan Conley, of Birmingham, said he will be very surprised if Panamanian dictator General Manuel Noriega is found. "With his activities of the last decade, he has immense resources. I doubt that he will be taken alive."

He wants the U.S. to do what it has to do, then get out of Panama. "We will no longer be essential to running the canal. It should be much better."

GENERAL CONSENSUS of those up and out early in front of the Birmingham Post office was that the U.S. actions were justified.

"The U.S. was justified in going into Panama," according to William Morgan of Birmingham who said he had been listening to radio reports of the invasion since 3:30 a.m.

The U.S. has a position of leadership to maintain, said Morgan who insisted our objective should be bringing Noriega to fair trial.

Virginia Gilbert of Troy said invading Panama was something "that had to be done" to oust Noriega. The U.S. simply had too much at stake in Panama — namely the Panama Canal and the safety of U.S. citizens — to allow Noriega to continue in power.

Kathy O'Keefe of Birmingham thought invading Panama was "the right thing to do." By his detouring ways and possible drug dealings, Noriega threatened U.S. interests, she

said, "and things would only get worse."

"The U.S. invasion of Panama was 'great,' according to Ed Vallo of Birmingham. "We couldn't let him (Noriega) push us around forever."

BUT FORMER 48th District Judge Carl Ingraham was not particularly thrilled by the U.S. invasion. "I didn't feel threatened by Noriega or Panama," he said. "The U.S. shouldn't be poking into other countries. We support rebels in some countries while we back the establishment in others. We have enough problems of our own to handle."

His comments were seconded by Scott Schwartz on the streets of Rochester. "Let's mind our own business, would they (Panama) do that to us?"

And supported by Marguerite Kowaleski of Farmington Hills, a five-year member of the Metro-

troit Central America Solidarity Committee. "I don't like the idea of us invading another country. But, if we can invade Panama, why can't we do it somewhere else? Are we going to end up running the country?"

Denise Hammond, the Republican treasurer of West Bloomfield Township, said, "If they don't know where he (Noriega) is, then we shouldn't be there."

BUT MOST OTHERS disagreed, feeling the invasion was overdue.

"We should have done it a long time ago," said Barb Woods, of Rochester. "He (the President) is a little late in my book."

"It's overdue," agreed Ernest Heller, another Rochester resident. "We can't afford this kind of situation in our backyard."

Charles Slate, an insurance salesman from Troy, said: "It's about time. I don't think we can let this cancer fester. If we don't invade now, it would only mean more casualties . . . both in Panama and here with the drugs this guy (Noriega) is pushing."

"I think it's about time they did something," said Jim Smith, a long-time officer of the Veterans of Foreign Wars — Post 2645 of Southfield. "Otherwise this guy (Noriega) would team up with all the Colombians. Plus the fact he's declared war on us. What do you do when people declare war on you? You go to war."

Smith, a past commander of the post, said he's against war. "But this is to prevent a war," he said.

"IT SEEMS TO make sense," said Southfield resident Kenneth Chelst. "Chelst said he was up at 1 a.m. and 'apparently heard the news before some of the Congressmen.'"

He said from watching the news on television, "the sense you get is that the Panamanians are supportive. The only question is what would have happened if two months ago the Americans had supported the coup. We could have avoided all this."

"I support the invasion, but I never had to put my life in risk," he added.

Dr. Saul Weingarden, a Southfield physician, said he doesn't have enough information at this point to form an opinion. But he said his initial reaction was one of surprise.

"Given the atmosphere of the world trying to diffuse all hot spots, I was a little surprised," he said. Because Castro and Noriega are good friends, Weingarden said, "by inference this is almost a move against the Soviet Union."

This report was compiled by staff members Judith Berne and Pat Murphy.

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