



Fig. 1 A U.S. military policeman stands guard at the entrance of the main gate to the key AFVN station, which is located in Saigon.

Vietnam Network Moves On Automation

"S-Day" came in October in Saigon. Late in the afternoon the 19th, a button was pushed at the Saigon studios of the American Forces Vietnam Network. Instantly relays clicked, reels began to spin, and throughout the Saigon area red lights glowed on stereo FM radios. For the first time Americans serving in Vietnam received stereophonic music on their FM multiplex radio receivers.

The stereo sounds at 99.9 on the FM dial came from a Gates Automatic Tape Control system. AFRS-Vietnam staff, however, generally refer to the big machine as "The Monster" or "PFC Gates" because it can do almost anything a live announcer can do.

In the beginning almost all audio, transmitter and broadcasting equip-

ment for AFRS was borrowed from U.S. and Vietnam military and civilian agencies. Spare parts and supplies were obtained from various military resources, and all military personnel operating the station were drawn from other units. The station was operated by a five-man crew and several volunteer announcers and newsmen. The first radio programs were transmitted for 18 hours a day. From this understaffed, and equipment-short, beginning AFRT Vietnam grew with the expansion of U.S. Forces.

Small 50-watt repeating transmitters were strategically placed throughout the Republic where the majority of American troops could pick up the AFRT signal with transistor radios. The number of these repeating transmitters also grew

with the expansion of U.S. Forces.

In the autumn of 1964 AFRT Vietnam moved from the Rex hotel to larger and better-equipped spaces in the Brink BOQ, 101 Hai Ba Trung, Saigon. In early December of that year members of the Armed Forces Radio and Television Service staff made a visit to Vietnam to inspect AFRT facilities. Their report of this visit gives an idea of the situation at that time: AFRT broadcasts in Vietnam emanate from studio facilities in Saigon, and are rebroadcast by eleven relay outlets throughout the country. According to MACV estimates, 94 percent of the assigned and deployed U.S. military personnel in Vietnam are within range of radio broadcasts. The DOD team made personal observation at four of these outlets and found the coverage to be inadequate due to the technical impairment by equipment.

In February, 1965, radio programming was expanded from 18 to 24 hours a day. The installation of FM equipment in Saigon and the commencement of special FM pro-

gramming during afternoon and evening hours was another step toward expanded service. The biggest step made during this period, however, was made in March, 1966, when a new two-way Pacific link was made between Saigon and AFRTS, Los Angeles by underwater cable. This enabled AFRT Vietnam to receive West Coast programming 24 hours daily, and meant that major sports events, important speeches and top-rated special events programs could be broadcast in Vietnam as they are heard over the networks in the United States.

Television made its debut in Vietnam in February 7, 1966. Initiating the new service was a special program including speeches by Premier Nguyen Cao Ky, Ambassador Henry Cabot Lodge, and General William C. Westmoreland. This program was recorded on video tape in the airport terminal at Tan Son Nhut. Cables connected the cameras in the

terminal with the Blue Eagle aircraft which was parked close by. Later a studio was set up in downtown Saigon to produce the video tapes used for each Vietnamese broadcast (channel 9). U.S. (channel 11) programming materials consisted principally of top U.S. TV network programs on 16mm film provided by AFRTS Los Angeles.

The Saigon station, in addition to housing its own personnel, is also the network headquarters for administration, supply and engineering. The main studio building has, other than office and storage areas, an AM master control, FM master control, news room, three radio production studios, record library, TV film library, telescine and kinescope room, TV master control, and one large television studio. Other principal structures in the compound include a transmitter building which houses two 25,000-watt TV transmitters (channels 9 and 11), a 1000-

watt AM radio transmitter and a 1000-watt FM transmitter, and a generator building which has three 200,000-watt sync generators which provide power for the entire facility.

An 80-foot television antenna, specially designed to radiate signals on both channel 9 and channel 11, is mounted atop a 300-foot steel tripod tower. The design of this antenna gives an effective radiated power of 240,000-watts in the Saigon and surrounding areas.

As the television network build-up proceeded, plans for improving the radio signal in the country were moving toward fruition. Although the number of radio repeater transmitters had increased to at least 22, there were still areas of the country where an adequate radio signal could not be received. To solve this problem, plans were formulated for the installation of five large radio transmitters throughout the country. Three of these are 50,000-watt transmitters to be located at Cat Lo (for the Saigon and delta area), Pleiku and Cam Rahn Bay. The remaining two are 10,000-watt transmitters to be located at Qui Nhon and Da Nang. Once operating, these transmitters will provide a 5 millivolt signal throughout most of South Vietnam, and a minimum signal of adequate for the average small transistor radio.

On June 1, 1967, the 10,000-watt radio transmitter at Da Nang became operational, thus making Armed Forces Radio and Television, Vietnam a true network operation. Consequently, on July 1, 1967, the name, "American Forces Vietnam Network" was adopted.

The network's Officer in Charge, Army Lt. Colonel James E. Adams commented that, "Automated broadcasting systems have been proven successful in the States and we think they will prove equally valuable here in Vietnam. The machines will enable us to provide more and better programming to our listeners with a smaller staff."

Initially the automated Saigon FM system began broadcasting stereo music six hours daily from 6 p.m. to midnight. Plans are underway to extend the FM broadcast day in Saigon from its present 15 hours to a full 24 hours with the machine assuming much of the additional burden.



Fig. 2 Air Force S/Sgt. George Goldstein giving "PFC Gates" a daily inspection.