

American Forces Vietnam Network Fact Sheet

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The first six pages of this document are a narrative history of AFVN, starting with its founding on August 15, 1962 and ended with the publication of this fact sheet on or about April 14, 1968. AFVN continued operating through March 1973 and then the name was changed to American Radio Service and it became a civilian-operated radio station in Saigon only.

The last two pages are a chronological dating of important events in AFVN History through that same period.

AMERICAN FORCES VIETNAM NETWORK



Fact Sheet



Armed Forces Radio in Vietnam commenced operation on August 15, 1962 from studios located in the Rex Hotel, 1h5/1h7 Nguyen Hue, Saigon. On this day General Paul D. Harkins, USA, Commander U.S. Military Assistance Command, Vietnam, made the following remarks:

When the Armed Forces Radio Service was created in 1942, it was a boon to the morale of our fighting men in World War II. Today, many American servicemen are again far from their homes and families in many locations throughout the world. The need for Armed Forces Radio therefore continues and is perhaps even more important in light of the complexities of today's world.

That Armed Forces Radio, Saigon, is on the air today is a tribute to the fine work and splendid cooperation of many agencies and individuals, both Vietnamese and American. It is tangible evidence of the teamwork which characterizes our joint effort here. My personal thanks and gratitude go to all whose efforts have helped to establish this station.

It is my sincere wish that AFRS Saigon will uphold and enhance the outstanding reputation which the Armed Forces Radio Service enjoys throughout the world and that it will be a most successful medium of information, education and entertainment.

General Harkins thus highlighted the sole purpose for the existence of Armed Forces Radio and Television Service facilities anywhere in the world: "information, education and entertainment."

In the beginning, almost all audio, transmitter and broadcasting equipment 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 obtained from COMUSMACV personnel resources. 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 here. 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% 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.

Overall mission accomplishment and effectiveness in support of the Commander's Information, Education and Entertainment program are excellent in the Saigon area. AFRT Saigon is an essential command tool in reaching personnel. The effectiveness of AFRT radio broadcasts to personnel stationed outside of the Saigon coverage area is greatly reduced by technical deficiencies of the equipment available.

At the time of this staff visit, the personnel complement at AFRT Vietnam was 17, including 6 local national employees.

Early Christmas Eve, 1964, the streets of Saigon were crowded with both American and Vietnamese shoppers. The weather was hot and sticky. Armed Forces Radio was airing Christmas music when suddenly the carols stopped. A brown cloud of debris mushroomed several hundred feet above the Brink Hotel and the following concussion shattered windows for a mile. As the dull boom echoed across Saigon, an unnatural stillness followed. The Viet Cong had set off 250 pounds of plastic at the downtown BOQ killing two and injuring scores of Americans. AFRT, inside the hotel, was partially destroyed. The shaken staff managed to set up a temporary station, and within a few hours was back on the air with holiday carols. But now, from time to time, the music was interrupted with announcements asking for blood donors to report to the Navy hospital.

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 programming during afternoon and evening hours was another step toward expanded service. The biggest step made during this period, however, was made on March 24, 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.

In 1965 the U.S. Navy's Oceanographic Air Survey Unit operating out of Patuxent River, Maryland, was given a special assignment in connection with Armed Forces Radio and Television in Vietnam. The Joint Chiefs of Staff directed that certain C-121 Super Constellation aircraft operated by the Navy unit be equipped with AM, FM and television transmitters for "research and other special projects." These aircraft were named Blue Eagle. In May, 1965, work was begun on Blue Eagle One for configuration as a high power communications and radio relay station. When completed, the aircraft was deployed to Vietnam

to broadcast over AM and short wave, through relay, the 1965 Baseball World Series to servicemen in Vietnam and to ships at sea in the Pacific. The system proved to be very effective and popular.

By this time it had been determined that television would significantly contribute to the U.S. policy objectives of rural pacification, urban stability, national unity, free world support and U.S. presence in Vietnam. In August 1965 special modifications were begun on Blue Eagle Two and Three. Their new configuration would enable them to broadcast television programming on two channels, as well as have various radio communications capabilities. These aircraft were deployed to Vietnam in January 1966. Each had two television transmitters (200 watts each), AM (10,000 watts), FM (1000 watts) and short wave/single sideband with a four channel teletype hook up (10,000 watts, all simultaneously, if required). Also, each aircraft was equipped with two video tape recorders, six audio tape recorders, two 16mm film projectors, and a small, live studio.

Television made its debut in Vietnam on 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.

As the Blue Eagle flights continued, construction commenced on permanent ground station facilities at 9 Hong Thap Tu in Saigon. By this time plans for a television network in Vietnam, greatly improved radio broadcast facilities, and the resultant increase in AFRT personnel requirements were in an advanced stage. Contracts had been let for seven television vans.

On April 13, 1966, the VC attacked Tan Son Nhut air base with mortars, and all Blue Eagle aircraft were damaged, one extensively. Blue Eagle Two sustained two direct hits during the attack. Navy inspectors were flown to Vietnam to survey the damage. They decided that the aircraft could be repaired, but that it would take from 9 to 13 weeks.

With only one aircraft available, TV programming was reduced to five days a week. Meanwhile, the remaining available crew members got down to the business of making Blue Eagle Two flyable again. They enlisted the aid of two American civilian technicians and three Air Force maintenance men from the heavy maintenance squadron at Tan Son Nhut. They dismantled and inspected the damaged areas, requisitioned replacement parts, and pitched in with an average 14 to 16 hours per man per day until the work was completed. Blue Eagle Two resumed flying with its regular TV programming on May 11, exactly 28 days after the VC mortar attack, and at least 5 weeks ahead of the predicted repair time.

The first TV van that arrived in country was placed on Vung Chua hill in Qui Nhon, and this station became operational on September 25, 1966. Within a month, on October 21, the second van went on the air from Monkey Mountain in Da Nang. Four days later, on October 25, the ground station facilities in

Saigon were complete enough to commence broadcasting both U.S. and Vietnamese programs, thus relieving Blue Eagle of responsibilities for providing television to Saigon and surrounding areas. Blue Eagle continued to fly, however, going far to the south of Saigon to service the heavily populated delta region with Vietnamese programming only.

Official opening ceremony for the new Saigon station was held on 31 October. On this occasion Premier Nguyen Cao Ky and General W. C. Westmoreland participated in opening day ceremonies. They simultaneously cut a ribbon (video tape) stretched between the main studio building and the transmitter building. Also on this occasion the cornerstone was laid for the new Vietnamese TV studio building. However, actual construction on this building did not begin until late May, 1967.

AFRT Vietnam network personnel moved into the new Saigon station building during the first days of operation, but the radio and news sections remained at the Brink BOQ until radio equipment could be installed in the new facility. On the evening of December 23, the station held its Christmas Party in the new building. A few hours after the party, early Christmas Eve, the station was brought under a small arms attack. This was two years to the day after the attack on the Brink Hotel, but this time there were no friendly casualties. One bullet went through the MP's helmet liner which was on the sand bags surrounding the sentry post, one bullet hit the relay box placed near the water pump, and several bullets hit the sentry post sand bags, the base of the AFRT studio building, and the windows of the AFRT building. The MP returned the fire and radioed for help. Shortly after the other MPs arrived, the enemy dispersed.

The move of the radio and news sections from the Brink to the new station commenced on January 2, 1967, and was completed on January 6. Programming for AM radio originating at 9 Hong Thap Tu began at 9:00 a.m. on the 6th. There was no loss of air time during this change. However, FM programming was suspended until January 13 when installation of the FM control studio was completed.

The personnel buildup during this period was rapid and dramatic, and usually outpaced the receipt and installation of equipment. Until the buildup started, the AFRT Vietnam personnel complement was 16 officers and enlisted. In a year's time, by the end of 1966, AFRT Vietnam had expanded to more than 150 troops, and the total network authorized personnel strength of 161 officers and enlisted was reached early in 1967.

The main studio building sustained light damage at approximately 10:45 p.m. on February 8, 1967, when a .38 or .45 caliber bullet came through the roof. The bullet had apparently been fired into the air during Tet celebrations, and entered the building directly over the newsroom. After piercing the ceiling, it went through two pages of news copy which were held by the duty newsman and impacted on his typewriter. There were no personnel casualties, and the bullet was retrieved as a war trophy. The "bullet-riddled" news copy was posted on the wall for all to see.

The third television van to arrive in Vietnam was installed on Dragon Mountain in Pleiku. This van became operational on February 1, 1967. Not long after, Van #4 arrived and was installed on Hon Tre Island, near Nha Trang. This van was located on the island so that its beam could serve both Nha Trang and

Cam Rahn Bay. It commenced broadcasting on March 13, 1967. The three remaining vans arrived in country within a short space of time. Van #5 was installed within the city of Hue, and began broadcasting on May 15, 1967. Van #6 was sent to Tuy Hoa, where it went on the air on May 26, 1967. Van #7 was placed within the AFRT compound in Saigon to serve as a training unit for personnel assigned as replacements for the other vans. However, this van will be located eventually in an area of heavy U.S. troop concentration.

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 increases the power output of the transmitters by an approximate factor of 10, giving an effective radiated power of 240,000 watts in the Saigon and surrounding areas.

As the television network buildup 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 .5 millivolts for the remaining area. This minimum signal is considered 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.

As these efforts were being made to install and improve the AFVN physical plant facilities, equal efforts were put into improving programming content, both for radio and television. Following the move to the new facility at 9 Hong Thap Tu, several additions were made to AFRT Vietnam news services. The UPI press wire was replaced by the UPI "rip-n-read" radio wire, a contract was signed for obtaining ABC Television News film, another for the AP radiophoto service, and yet another for the AP Library Photo Service. ABC Television News service provides approximately 2000 feet of TV newsfilm monthly. The AP radiophoto service provides from 10 to 15 news photos daily, and the AP Library Photo Service provides 40 photographs of leading world personalities each month. All of these services are reproduced by the key Saigon station and sent to the van stations within hours after receipt.

The frustrations of many delays, caused by such things as real estate problems, construction priorities, and supply problems did not discourage those involved in the rapid network buildup of the American Forces Vietnam Network. A great deal was accomplished in a relatively short period of time. Growing pains and adjustments were a daily fact of life, but the passage of time carried with it an increasing stability of operations.

The hope expressed by General Harkins on August 15, 1962, for Armed Forces Radio Vietnam is now a reality for both radio and television. This reality is exemplified by the announcer who reminds his listeners daily that American Forces Vietnam Network is "...continually striving to bring the best in information, education and entertainment."

END

CHRONOLOGY

- Aug 15, 1962 - Armed Forces Radio Vietnam commenced operation.
- Autumn, 1964 - AFRS Vietnam moved from Rex Hotel to Brink BOQ.
- Dec 24, 1964 - VC exploded 250 pounds of plastic in Brink BOQ, partially destroying AFRS Vietnam facilities.
- Feb, 1965 - AFRS Vietnam expanded programming from 18 to 24 hours daily.
- Feb 7, 1966 - First regularly scheduled television program in Vietnam broadcast from Blue Eagle aircraft.
- Mar 24, 1966 - Two-way Pacific link made between Saigon and AFRTS Los Angeles by underwater cable.
- Apr 13, 1966 - VC attacked Tan Son Nhut air base with mortars, damaging all Blue Eagle aircraft, one extensively. TV programming reduced to five days weekly.
- May 11, 1966 - Blue Eagle repairs completed. Full TV schedule resumed.
- Sep 25, 1966 - First television van station in Vietnam became operational in Qui Nhon.
- Oct 21, 1966 - Second television van station in Vietnam became operational in Da Nang.
- Oct 25, 1966 - Ground station TV facilities in Saigon became operational, thus relieving Blue Eagle aircraft of broadcasting U.S. and Vietnamese programming in the Saigon area.
- Dec 24, 1966 - VC stage small arms attack on new AFRT facilities at 9 Hong Thap Tu in Saigon. Station sustained light damage.
- Jan 2, 1967 - Move of radio and news sections from the Brink BOQ to new AFRT facilities at 9 Hong Thap Tu commenced.
- Jan 6, 1967 - Move of radio and news sections completed. Radio programming originating from new station commenced at 9:00 a.m. this date.
- Feb 1, 1967 - Third television van station in Vietnam became operational in Pleiku.
- Mar 13, 1967 - Fourth television van station in Vietnam became operational in Nha Trang.
- May 15, 1967 - Fifth television van station in Vietnam became operational in Hue.
- May 26, 1967 - Sixth television van station in Vietnam became operational in Tuy Hoa.
- Jun 1, 1967 - First 10,000-watt radio transmitter for AFRT became operational in Da Nang.
- Jul 1, 1967 - Use of AFRT designation dropped. Commenced use of AFVN (American Forces Vietnam Network) designation.

- Sep 24, 1967 - Da Nang Radio changed from long line to tower antenna system (Omni-Directional).
- Oct 22, 1967 - Phan Rang AB TV translator (Channel 78) became operational.
- Nov 20, 1967 - 100,000 watt Saigon FM transmitter became operational.
- Nov 24, 1967 - First 50,000 watt transmitter, AM radio became operational (Cat Lo, Saigon's key station).
- Dec 11, 1967 - Det #4 under VC mortar attack; no damage to AFVN facility.
- Jan 7, 1968 - Da Nang, Det #2, AM radio transmitter site at Red Beach taken NVA/VC 122mm rocket hits. Transmission line repaired in two hours.
- Jan 20, 1968 - 10,000 watt AM radio transmitter became operational Det #3, Pleiku.
- Feb 4, 1968 - Det #5, Hue, overrun by NVA/VC during Lunar Tet Offensive. One USMC officer, four enlisted (3 Army-1 USMC) captured; one USMC Sergeant killed in action.
- Feb 11, 1968 - 10,000 watt AM radio transmitter became operational Det #1, Qui Nhon.
- Apr 14, 1968 - 10,000 watt AM radio transmitter became operational Det #4, Cam Ranh Bay.