

A Little Bit of Home

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II Field Force-10



Imagine a remote outpost in Vietnam. There is respite from enemy shells, mortars and perhaps a ground attack thrown in for good measure. The troops are beginning to settle down and assess the damage the enemy has done.

After the wounded have been evacuated and the perimeter of defense set up, there is nothing to do but grab a smoke, maybe clean your weapon or just stretch out in the mud or dust and catch a few winks. Boredom plays a larger part in frontline Army life than most of us think.

Then someone remembers his transistor radio, neatly

wrapped in waterproof material and stuck into one of the big pockets of his combat fatigues. He takes it out, turns it on and immediately is soothed by the aura of relaxation and fine entertainment usually associated with life in the States.

The task of providing this daily contact with American culture falls to Armed Forces Vietnam Network (AFVN).

AFVN began operation on Aug. 15, 1962, from studios located in downtown Saigon. At that time almost all audio, transmitter and broadcasting equipment was bor-

Air Force Staff Sergeant James R. Linberg cues up a video tape (below). Broadcasters David Heller, Rickey A. Fredericksen and Ray Williams (left to right) make final copy checks before going on the air (bottom).



rowed from U.S. and Vietnamese military and civilian agencies. Spare parts and supplies were obtained from various military resources and all military personnel operating the station were obtained from combined service 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 daily. Around-the-clock programming began in February 1965. Eventually, radio repeater transmitters were installed and additional radio sites established at Qui Nhon, Da Nang, Pleiku and Cam Ranh Bay. The latest was established at Quang Tri in 1968.

The personnel of AFVN have changed many times due to the 12-month-rotation system in effect now. "We have a real fine group here at AFVN," says Master Sergeant Raymond John Banks Jr., who is in charge of network radio. "I program 21 hours of material a day to all of the stations while each station programs 3 hours of local material," the sergeant said.

In Vietnam, war has no boundary lines, therefore AFVN has been the object of attack by the Viet Cong. On Christmas Eve in 1964, terrorists set off a 200-pound plastic explosive charge at the Brinks Hotel and damaged a large section of the building. The station was forced off-the-air temporarily, but was broadcasting again in a matter of hours. Out of the wreckage, AFVN was sending out Christmas Carols interspersed with calls for blood donations, for those wounded in the explosion.

In 1966, a new concept in broadcasting was brought to Vietnam. Three C-121 "Super Constellation" aircraft were outfitted with broadcast and telecast equipment and brought over to supplement the AFRT transmitter. These "Blue Eagle" aircraft, as they were called, brought increased range by flying over the country sending out radio signals. These flying studios also brought television to Vietnam. Announcers and production workers flew several hours a night providing information and entertainment to most of the Republic of Vietnam.



But on April 13, 1966, tragedy struck again. The Viet Cong mortared Tan Son Nhut Air Base and all three "Blue Eagles" were victims. Navy inspectors rushed in to assess the damage and concluded it would be nine to 3 weeks before any of the planes could be repaired. However, the same resourcefulness that got the Saigon station back on-the-air after the 1964 bombing came to the fore again. By enlisting the aid of American civilian technicians and Air Force maintenance men, AFVN had one of the "Blue Eagles" flying in 28 days.

By October 1966, ground station facilities in Saigon were complete enough to start broadcasting both Vietnamese and U.S. programs. This relieved "Blue Eagle" of TV responsibility for the Saigon area. The C-121 continued to operate, however, flying far to the south to furnish the heavily populated Delta region with Vietnamese programming.

Official opening ceremonies for the Saigon station were held Oct. 31, 1966. General William C. Westmoreland and former Premier Nguyen Cao Ky attended the ceremonies. They simultaneously cut a ribbon stretching from the main studio building to the transmitter facility.

Most of the television program material consists of film and videotape copies of programs presented on the television networks in the United States. These programs are shipped from the network main station to the affiliate stations in a package that provides an entire week of program material. This circuit is supplemented by yet another direct shipment from the Armed Forces Radio and Television Service (AFRTS)-Los Angeles which provides each station with current film coverage of important news and sports events. In addition to these program

materials, the affiliate stations broadcast locally produced daily news reports, musical reviews featuring entertainers visiting Vietnam and special information programs.

The AFVN News Branch, located at the Saigon key station, provides coverage of U.S., international, Vietnam and sports news for both radio and television. It uses material from Associated Press, United Press International and the Armed Forces News Bureau. Direct teletype and audio communication with AFRTS-Washington permits the live radio broadcast of major news events from the United States. Television newsfilm services are provided by ABC-TV and CBS-TV to the Saigon station. Affiliate stations receive copies of the newsfilm and other visual material along with teletype copy from the major press services to assist them in preparing their TV newscast.

Running a radio/television station that serves the taste and needs of more than 500,000 American servicemen, many civilians and the English speaking Vietnamese is a fulltime job. Technically, the transmitters and other electronic equipment must be kept in peak shape. The signal must go out. When AFVN radio/television leaves the air for any reason, the number of phone calls reflects the high listenership and interest that this source of entertainment commands among U.S. personnel.

AFVN means morale, entertainment and information designed to bridge the 14-thousand-mile gap between more than half-a-million Americans and their home. It is an organization that deals solely in service and support. AFVN provides facts that dispel doubts and strengthen convictions; features that entertain and enlighten and music that takes every serviceman a little closer to home.

Lance Corporal Stephen F. Ruff hosts AFVN-produced radio program at studios in Saigon.

