

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this work is to report the major and selected events which are viewed by the writer to have influenced the development of the American Forces Vietnam Network (AFVN) from its inception in August, 1962, until January, 1972. The overall study is organized into six principal parts, or chapters. This chapter is devoted to the introduction of research.

The second chapter deals with an identification of the American Forces Radio and Television Service (AFRTS). Since the network and outlets system serving American military personnel in the Republic of Vietnam is an affiliate of the world-wide AFRTS, an introduction to the parent organization has been included for reader orientation.

The third and fourth chapters present, in a basically chronological fashion, the history of the development of facilities and programming at AFVN. Divided into appropriate sections relating to the Vietnam service's growth, the writer traces the historical development from an initial one-station radio outlet and a series of rebroadcasting transmitters--in Chapter III--to a large, country-wide AM and FM radio and television network--in Chapter

IV--serving half a million American servicemen; probably the largest audience ever assembled of any single AFRT network or outlet.

The fifth chapter is devoted to a separate presentation and analysis of the events of the news censorship controversy which occurred at AFVN during the autumn of 1969, and again in early 1970. This step has been taken because the controversy generated national press attention and discussions of the problem make up the majority of material presently available on AFVN outside U. S. military sources. It should not necessarily be viewed as the major event in the history of the American Forces Vietnam Network.

The concluding chapter presents the writer's summary of the events in AFVN's historical development and analyzes the several periods of growth and the brief period of controversy in terms of the service as a broadcasting facility and in terms of a military radio and television network.

Approach

The approach in this study has been to record information which was made available as a result of investigative research regarding the historical aspects of one of the most important network and outlet systems since the United States first employed broadcasting media to bring command information, news, and entertainment to American

service men and women and their dependents overseas.¹

The writer noted during the initial stages of this investigation that the preponderance of material available through library research was inadequate for a comprehensive account of the events which might have influenced AFVN's historical development. With few exceptions, information generally available in major newspapers and other periodicals provided a limited source of general development information and tended to be concentrated coverage during two periods of AFVN's history: the establishment of initial television facilities and the news censorship controversy, mentioned above. Correspondence was initiated with the network headquarters in Saigon, Republic of Vietnam, and with AFRTS activities in Washington, D. C., to discover the availability of information from primary and official sources. As a result of correspondence and several personal visits to the Office of Information for the Armed Forces, data deemed appropriate to this study were acquired.

Although the writer acknowledges U. S. Department of Defense cooperation and assistance in the preparation of this study, the Defense Department has neither endorsed nor approved all or any part of this thesis.

¹This generalization is supported in Chapters III and IV with respect to audience size and seat-of-government attention. It is substantiated in interviews and correspondence, cited below, and through exposure to official documents, most of which the writer has been permitted to cite.

Previous Studies

There are several brief, historical summaries available on AFVN which have appeared in both military and trade journals, and periodical publications; however, the writer was unable to locate a comprehensive history resulting from academic research. Two studies regarding the news censorship controversy, addressed in Chapter V, have been completed at Texas Technological University and Ohio Wesleyan University, respectively. Regarding the parent organization of AFVN, the American Forces Radio and Television Service has not been the subject of a history in graduate level academic scholarship since 1951, covering the period to 1946.²

Sources

The majority of information collected for this study was discovered as a result of contact with various activities of the Department of Defense. Personal correspondence and interviews with present and former AFVN principals serve

²Office of Information for the Armed Forces, Department of Defense, "A Partial Index of Studies and Surveys Pertaining to Mass Communications Conducted for or by the . . . Department of Defense, 1942-1970," comp. Major Dave L. Stanley, USA, 1971. The assumption is made that IAF would have knowledge of all military studies and major academic studies dealing with AFRTS. During the course of systematic research it was discovered that Larry Miller of Iowa State University was preparing a thesis on AFRTS in general which would be completed in May, 1972. The author and Mr. Miller exchanged correspondence regarding references available through library research on AFRTS. Donald R. Browne, "The World in the Pentagon's Shadow," Educational Broadcasting Review, V (April, 1971), 31-48, discusses the international scope of AFRTS and the American Forces Network, Europe.

to supplement data acquired from official sources. Of particular significance in the information gathered was the acquisition, from the Officer in Charge of AFVN, of a narrative of events pertaining to the network; and from the Editor-in-Chief of the Stars & Stripes (Pacific), of a collection of articles written of the network throughout its history. The latter source was valuable in verifying primary source documents. In addition, the writer took steps to interview and correspond with eleven individuals who served at AFVN, and to correspond with most of the authors of articles who have written regarding the network's history in journals related to the field of mass communications.

Limitations

Although most of the material dealing with AFVN was acquired through Department of Defense sources, the writer has attempted to balance this material with other sources as they were available. Although the cooperation of Defense Department personnel was unanimously sincere, certain sensitive, "for official use only," and all classified sources were barred to this independent investigator. In this regard it should be noted that there was never any attempt perceived which might be construed as deliberate concealment of releasable information on AFVN. The decision not to release the information requested was made by the Department of Defense.

There are numerous military unit publications produced for U. S. servicemen in Vietnam. Although most of the major volumes are available at the Army Library in the Pentagon, lack of indexes and time limitations prevented the researcher from covering this source. It is not likely, however, that the information on AFVN contained in these publications would be significant to the data acquired from other sources.

All departments and certain components of the U. S. military service are required to maintain a chronological record (classified and unclassified versions) of major and selected events pertaining to a given unit. While it is not known that the chronology of events acquired on AFVN duplicates that unit's official record, the writer has found no evidence to indicate that the entries are inaccurate.

Finally, a truly comprehensive history of the topic would necessitate visiting the seat of the network in Saigon, Republic of Vietnam for access to sundry files; it should also include contact with as many as possible present and former key staff members of AFVN. This the researcher was clearly unable to accomplish because of time and expense limitations.

Investigator Bias

The previous relationship of the writer to the topic under investigation was that of a listener and viewer during a 12-month period beginning in May, 1970. The writer was a

commissioned officer serving with the U. S. Navy, stationed in Saigon, Republic of Vietnam. As a student of broadcasting, the writer appreciated programming impact and production quality at AFVN and reacted favorably to the network as a vehicle for the area commander for morale building and maintenance of morale.

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