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"Voice of Morale" [The AFVN Story]

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*This story was forwarded to the AFVN internet pages
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"From the Delta to the DMZ"*



"The American
Armed Forces Vietnam Radio and
Television Network
is an important morale booster for combat
troops." [Apr 70]

MARINES have charged with fixed bayonets, stomachs growling a battle cry from hunger. They've humped without water, lips cracked, tongues thick and throats seared from the suffocating heat. What keeps them going?

Maybe it's that grungy bit about "esprit de Corps." A sincere belief in what they're doing probably helps, and prayers have provided miracles on more than one battlefield.

The underlying factor in many military successes is morale. It might be a cold beer at just the right moment, or the right word from a grunt in a tight situation. It could be R&R or releasing tensions in an intramural sports contest.

In Vietnam, one of the biggest morale factors fits into a pocket, plugs into an ear and runs on transistors.

A fire support base might not have a volleyball court, but it will receive the news and music of the American Armed Forces Vietnam Radio and Television Network, (AFVN). It is the largest in the world today and it is received by 95 percent of the American and allied forces serving in the Republic of Vietnam.

The network began broadcasting in August 1962 from inside the Rex Hotel in Saigon.

Equipment was begged, borrowed or scrounged by American and Vietnamese military and civilian agencies, and the five crewmen and announcers were all volunteers. In 1964, they moved into larger, better-

equipped studio in the Brinks Hotel. Programs originating from the studio facilities were rebroadcast by 11 relay outlets throughout the Republic of Vietnam. The station's staff "swelled" to 17.



Capt. Mike Pitts is Office in Charge of the Da Nang AFVN Detachment on Monkey Mountain. The unit's mascot is, naturally, a monkey name "Peaches."



Radio programming was expanded in 1965 from 18 to 24 hours a day, and FM equipment was installed. In 1966, a direct cable communications link was established between Washington and Saigon.

Television made its debut in Vietnam in February 1968 [sic, the correct year is 1966], with an assist from three C-121 Super Constellation aircraft, containing both television and radio broadcast capabilities.

Construction began for permanent ground station facilities and the first of seven television broadcast vans made its appearance. These were to be spread throughout the country to provide the widest television transmission possible.

As units of the Third Marine Division were perfecting their mobility concept around the Demilitarized Zone, AFVN units were also on the move. As individuals of the Triad Division were aiming their missiles at enemy objectives, AFVN aimed their transmissions at friendly targets. Marines on Lancaster and Scotland II were making body counts while AFVN was contributing to the morale of allied listeners.

Strength of the network increased to 13 officers and 163 enlisted operating eight TV stations, six AM radio and five FM radio stations.

Da Nang and Saigon have stereo FM capabilities.

Personnel attached to AFVN are scattered throughout Vietnam, including Quang Tri, Da Nang, Chu Lai, Pleiku, Hon Tre, Qui Nhon, Tuy Hoa and Cat Lo.

Of the 176 American military personnel assigned to AFVN, 90 remain in the key station, Saigon, providing 21 hours of AM broadcasting daily.

Capt. Louis A. Chatelle, Jr. of the Quang Tri Detachment radioing to the AFVN Headquarters in Saigon.

The remaining three hours of broadcast time are originated by the local commands.

FM stations can originate as much material as they desire, or as much as their personnel can handle.

Shipping television film from Saigon to the various detachments is referred to as "bicycling."

"That's because we kind of pedal the film around Vietnam," groaned Capt. Ty W. McCoy (Gainesville, Fla.) Operations Officer of AFVN. "Actually, it isn't the sick joke it appears to be," he added.

Each week, six crates of film are forwarded from the Armed Forces Radio and Television Station, Los Angeles, Calif. The films arrive in Saigon for use and distribution.

The six boxes of film are shown in Saigon before being shipped by courier to outlying detachments. In turn, upon receipt of a new shipment, the detachment mails out the previous week's film.

LtCol. James E. Adams (Springfield, Va.), a member of the Army's Signal Corps, is the Commanding Officer of AFVN. He is a veteran of 15 years' service with the Armed Forces



Navy ETN3 Bill Nicholas threaded a videotape machine at the Da Nang AFVN studio.

Radio and Television Services . Besides his command in Saigon, LtCol. Adams is responsible for AFVN's scattered units. SSgt Norm L. Garrett (Lincoln, Neb.) is NCOIC of Network News in Saigon. "We receive news clips from ABC and CBS," Garrett explains, "and from these we select what might be of interest to the majority of TV viewers in the Saigon area. "We also copy them and make kines [kinescopes and video tapes to send to the seven detachments daily."

Garrett edits incoming films for morning, afternoon and evening

news "shots." These are transmitted from Saigon and received by the other detachments for simultaneous airing.

Garrett is also responsible for the quality control of all film. We preview the news film to make sure that the audio and visual (sight and sound) portions of the film are in good shape. If the visual is poor, he may cut or edit.

*Sgt Chuck Royal is an announcer for the Da Nang AFVN Detachment
Each day the station beams 24 hours of radio and 18 hours of TV
programs.*

If audio is poor, he may cut another sound track. "I've never worked radio and TV before," Garrett admits, "but I've learned so much, you wouldn't believe it.

"And, Saigon! The liberty's great if you've got a lot of money. But," he added, "We have a 10 p.m. curfew...."

"Most of us here at the Saigon station live at the Plaza or Ky Son Hotel," Garrett explained. "Staff and above are assigned two men to a room. Sergeants and below are a little more crowded, with three or four to a room.

"Chow at the hotel is generally very good," Garrett concluded. "We've got Vietnamese cooks who have been Army trained."

Some appreciate the duty in Saigon; some don't. MSgt Jim G. Kyser (Woodbridge, Va.) was initially assigned to AFVN, but after a few months, he requested transfer. "And here I am," he grinned. "Here" is Detachment-6 at Tuy Hoa.

There is no officer assigned to Det-6; "Nine and me," Kyser stated while pointing out that the 10 men responsible for 13 hours of TV at Tuy Hoa are all enlisted. They contribute to the morale of the approximately 9,000 Americans serving in and around the Phu Hiep Air Force Base.

"Saigon has some advantages." Kyser reflected, "but up here we are about 1000 yards from the China Sea, so we get our entertainment from surfing and fishing instead of sightseeing. Besides, while those in Saigon wear their summer tropics, we wear the jungle utilities.

"We're not so much for display as we are for work, and that's why I enjoy it here so much. We put in 13 hours a day; more on weekends, and the feeling of accomplishment makes our tours in Vietnam actually enjoyable.

Duty with a detachment is not for "sandbaggers." Loafers might linger for a while, but when it becomes obvious that a new replacement isn't inclined to tote his share of the load, a transfer is fast





Sgt Timothy Nichols, Quang Tri engineer, timed a precision processor with Army Spec/5 Paul Baldrige.

coming. There are many other talented radio/television personnel in the armed forces, and there's a long list of those who want duty with AFVN.

It isn't all air conditioned coffee drinking and golden voices at AFVN, however. Many detachments provide their own security. Concertina wire, bunkers and fields of fire are maintained by AFVN personnel.

When GySgt Seth Johnson was NCOIC of the Pleiku (Detachment 3) station, he had a mini-gun mounted on the back of a three quarter ton-truck. Nobody, but nobody, messed with Johnson and his gun, which chattered away at 4,000 rounds sustained fire per minute!

Detachment-5 at Quang Tri was hit by enemy small arms and automatic weapons fire several times last year and rockets and mortar fire screamed over their compound, landing in the Army's area nearby.

Under the command of Capt. Louis A. Chatelle, Jr., Detachment-5 is the only AFVN unit, which built their own station, starting with a 50-watt transmitter in September 1968.

Presently located at Camp Red Devil (1st Infantry, Fifth Division, U.S. Army, Mechanized) Detachment 5 members pooled their talent and

repaired available equipment in order to broadcast radio news and music.

In December, using a 1,000-watt transmitter, the detachment was reaching all Allied units in the northernmost area of I Corps. That same month, using a 30 foot tower, TV went out to a limited area.

Station personnel began construction their own 300-foot tower. Others poured cement for the TV van, constructed a shower, built bunkers and repaired station equipment. They built their own living quarters and sectioned them off, allowing two men per section.



SSgt John Deemer, Navy ETN3 Bill Nicholas and Air Force MSgt Robert Wagoner, (Chief Engineer and NCOIC of the Da Nang Detachment) operate the Engineering shop.



Personnel attached to the Da Nang AFVN station relax in their club during off-duty hours.

"Sleep here is ridiculous," explained Capt. Chatelle. "The hours are so weird that when one man is going to bed his roommate is getting up."

"We put in a lot of hours," agreed GySgt Dave L. Mossman, NCOIC of the Detachment, which splits a dozen members equally between the Army and Marines.

Actually, the Army station members have the edge since a male nurse, Sp6 Scott Stocker, a Clinical Specialist with the Army's First Brigade, volunteered to work at the station as a sportscaster.

Detachment 5 provides 24 hours of radio; 21 hours from Saigon and three from the Quang Tri station. (One country and western show, the Quang Tri "Morning Request Show" and the "Million Dollar Golden Records" are local broadcasts.)

Reminders and spot announcements are also beamed to those serving in the northernmost province. Television is provided by the detachment seven days a week from noon to 0100, and the programs reach from the Demilitarized Zone to Camp Evens, about five miles north of Hue.

Television is aired from the mobile van, which, at one time, was also "home" for a family of snakes. "We had an agreement going," Mossman said. "We didn't mess with them and they didn't mess with us." The Marines of Detachment 5 are a select group.

Capt. Chatelle is on his second tour in Vietnam. He served with the First Wing in 1966-67. A former enlisted man, he attained the rank of sergeant, and was a drill instructor at Parris Island when selected for Limited Duty Officer. He is one of two Marine officers serving with AFVN.

"The duty is fabulous," Capt. Chatelle explained. "We act as a liaison with all the other units; airborne, Navy, Marines and the Vietnamese. The survival of this station depends on good, smooth working relations with the units serving in this area.

"Army Colonel R. L. Michaels, the base coordinator here, and the Seabees [MCBU-301] help us out whenever possible. All of the units, in fact, have helped us in one way or another when we needed assistance," the captain said.



Cpl Tom McMichaels and Cpl John Hackett (with their sentry dogs) provide security for the isolated Da Nang AFVN Detachment.

Sgt. Timothy Nichols, the television engineer for the detachment, is serving his third tour in Vietnam. He served 13 months with the 1st Force Recon in Na Trang in 1965-66, and was with the First Wing in late 1966 when he was wounded and evacuated out of Vietnam.

SSgt Ralph J. Dowling, assistant chief engineer, spent 1965-66, with the 3d Bn., Third Marine Regiment, and the 1st Bn., Ninth Marines.

SSgt Frank Segreto, Jr., now chief announcer and the NCOIC of the radio section, served in Vietnam in 1966 with the 3d Anti-Tank Bn., near Da Nang.

SSgt Carroll H. Parlor, a radio engineer, was wounded while with the 1st LAAM Bn., near Da Nang, during his first Vietnam tour.

Only Mossman is serving his first tour in Vietnam, but he has requested a six-month extension. "Duty here is good, and the experience unbelievable," explained Segreto. "You couldn't get this kind of experience as a civilian.

We know each other's jobs and the responsibilities, and we can take over for each other if we have to. You couldn't do that in most civilian stations.

"The time passes swiftly, and although we don't have the great chow the men do in Saigon—and the beer isn't as cold and the recreational facilities are lacking—we get the satisfaction of knowing that we are appreciated, and are contributing something."

"We've spent time in the field as grunts," added Nichols, "and we know how important it is to hear Stateside music and the news from home.

"That little transistor radio or the portable television set is one of the most important pieces of equipment a man has over here, next to a loaded weapon and a full canteen!"

Probably the most isolated detachment in Vietnam is located atop Monkey Mountain. The unit is headed by Capt. Mike Pitts, who served with the Third Marine Division's Information Services Office in Vietnam in 1966 as a gunnery sergeant. He returned to Vietnam in July 1969 for his present assignment.

His staff consists of 14 military (six Marines, four soldiers, two airmen and two sailors).

The station programs 24 hours of radio per day, and sends out 18 hours of TV for Americans in the Da Nang area, as far south as Chu Lai.

"We have something here that no other detachment in Vietnam has," said Capt. Pitts. "Dig the view. Sunrise, sunset and many hours in between we catch the entire view from Camp Tien Sha all the way to Chu Lai. 'Course," he admitted, "we get fogged in quite often, and then we can't see our boot laces...."



Capt Louis Chatelle, Officer in Charge, Quang Tri Detachment, and Mr. Albert Sen, Tower Crew Supervisor, inspected the site of a new television antenna.

Monkey Mountain's detachment is so isolated that a team of sentry dogs and handlers is assigned for security. Farther up the mountain, a Marine patrol sweeps up and down, back and forth.

The Marines aren't alone. Monkeys, rats, deer, snakes and wild boar also roam the mountain. The troops also claim they've spotted tiger tracks. No one disputed it.

The Da Nang detachment has one of two FM stereo capabilities; the other is in Saigon. Both transmit on 99.9 MC frequency.

The Marines in Da Nang, like those at Quang Tri, haven't always enjoyed the duty in Vietnam. But now they have their own bar, a ping-pong table and basketball hoop. They go to China Beach once in a while for a swim or simply to run along the beach and relax.

Regardless of a man's assignment in Vietnam, he will hear Stateside music. Four FM stations are presently in operation. There is a 100,000-watt station in Saigon and 25,000-watt stations in Pleiku, Da Nang and the Cam Ranh Bay area.

AFVN operates two 50,000-watt AM transmitters in Cat Lo and Pleiku, providing service to Saigon, the Delta areas and the Central Highlands. A 50KW transmitter is at Nha Trang/Cam Ranh. Qui Nhon, Da Nang, and Nha Trang all have 10,000-watt AM stations, and the 1,000 watt station serves Quang Tri.

The music format for AM radio is contemporary, but local stations may change the format, depending on the desires of their audiences.

The American Forces Vietnam Television Network has VHF-TV stations operating on channel 11 in Saigon, Bui Nhon, Da Nang Pleiku, Nha Trang/Cam Ranh Bar, Tuy Hoa and Quang Tri. TV at Chu Lai is on channel 13.

During World War II, the morale of the troops depended on mail, hot chow, an occasional shower and copies of YANK, Stars and Stripes, and, (of course) "Leatherneck Magazine," which also had a Pacific edition.

Today, besides mail, hot chow, an occasional shower, the "Stars and Stripes" and the "Leatherneck," morale is also something which fits into a pocket, plugs into an ear and runs on tiny batteries and transistors, announcing, "This is your Armed Forces Vietnam Radio Network...."