

Thesis on Music and AFVN

NB: With apologies, I am unable to determine who the name of the author as well as do not know the title, date, etc. I changed the format to an extent so that the titles listed in the Table of Contents and in the body of the paper would match. Finally, in testing some of the links while working on this paper (in April 2011) I discovered that some of them no longer appear to be valid.

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I. Introduction

Through the Soldiers' Ears: What Americans Fighting in Vietnam Heard & Its Effects

The Vietnam War and music have always been closely linked in popular thought. The 1960's were a time of change and upheaval in the United States. Much of this upheaval was expressed in the music of musicians like Bob Dylan, Jefferson Airplane, and Edwin Starr. The Animals, "We Gotta Get Out of This Place," which was one of the most popular songs amongst US troops in Vietnam, saw its true meaning changed to fit the political views of many Americans, as well as the desperate longings of many of its soldiers (Edelman, 235). Thus, Vietnam, in the eyes of many, was a "Rock 'n Roll War" and has been portrayed in that capacity in books and movies.

A. Why is Vietnam Unique Musically?

This image of Vietnam being unique in its relationship with American popular music is, in many ways, justified. Not only did American participation in Vietnam result in the composition of many popular songs of the time, but Vietnam was also the first American war where GI's actually listened to war protest music while they were fighting overseas (Fasanaro, 458). Not only did soldiers in Vietnam have music provided by AFVN (Armed Forces Vietnam Network), which had also been provided to American soldiers in World War II, but they had access to tape recorders with which they could play whatever music they desired.

B. Why was Music Important in the Vietnam War?

But why is this connection between American popular music and the Vietnam War important? Perhaps the easiest and most direct response is that the music was important to American soldiers. During the "Rock 'n Roll War," musical terms quickly replaced traditional military slang. For example, *Rock 'n Roll* quickly replaced the term *lock and load* (Fasanaro, 458). Not only did music affect changes like this, but lyrics and titles of songs were often used in everyday conversation. A prime example of this is a gunship, which was often seen in harbor by American soldiers near the coast. The soldiers soon began to refer to it as *Puff the Magic Dragon*, obviously in reference to the folk hit sung by Peter, Paul, and Mary.

In order to take the question a step further, one must ask exactly what types of music Vietnam soldiers were exposed to and what impacts it had on them. What did popular music have to say about the Vietnam War? What were American troops allowed to hear by the military command structure? What did they hear that they weren't supposed to hear? Upon answering these questions, the bigger questions can then be addressed. How did music affect the morale of the American soldier in Vietnam? How did it affect the relationships and camaraderie between GI's? How did it affect relationships between enlisted men and officers? In confronting these questions, matters of great historical significance can be analyzed. There are those today that maintain that war protests damaged the morale of the American soldier and, in fact, may have contributed to the "loss" of the Vietnam War. If this is, in fact, the case, perhaps the American military should have done more to prevent certain kinds of music from reaching the ears of our fighting men in Vietnam.

II. Background of Popular War Music

A. Roots

In order to assess the effects of popular music in Vietnam, one must first look at what popular music was at the time. As related to Vietnam, two types of music were of primary importance. The first of these, obviously, was rock & roll. Rock music in itself was a very controversial form of music in the 1960's and early 1970's. Many Americans believed that Rock 'n Roll was immoral, as was obvious in the problems many Americans had with objective correlative acts like Little Richard (Borus). However, rock achieved a new level of controversy as it related to Vietnam.

B. Negative Music

Rock 'n' Roll. It does not take much effort to find anti-war rock music. Rock music became a haven of lyrical calls for peace and an end to the conflict in Vietnam. Perhaps the most blatant example of anti-war rock music is Edwin Starr's "War," which was released in 1970. With its extremely direct lyrics,

War! / Huh! Yeah / What is it good for / Absolutely nothing
War, it ain't nothin' but a heartbreaker
Friend only to the undertaker
War is an enemy to all mankind
The thought of war blown my mind
War has caused unrest within the younger generation
Induction, then destruction--who wants to die

<http://www.gentleman-jim.com/vnsong06.htm>

and biting rock sound, "War" encapsulates in one song the general message that so many rock artist were trying to convey.

Though slightly less popular, "I-Feel-Like-I'm-Fixin'-to-Die Rag," recorded by Country Joe and the Fish in 1965 (5 years before "War") made a similar statement.

And it's one two three
What are we fighting for
Don't ask me, I don't give a damn
Next stop is Vietnam
And it's five six seven
Open up the Pearly Gates
There ain't no time to wonder why
Whoopie--we're all gonna die

<http://www.gentleman-jim.com/vnsong03.htm>

Kenny Rogers & the First Edition attempted to make the same statement with a more subtle rock/country approach. Their song, "Ruby Don't Take Your Love To Town" tells the story of a paralyzed Vietnam War vet who laments "It wasn't me that started that old crazy Asian war / But I was proud to go and do my patriotic chore," as his wife leaves to find love in the arms of a younger,

healthier man. While not a direct indictment of war, “Ruby Don't Take Your Love To Town” is a reminder of the horrifying realities of war and prompts the listener to rethink how necessary war truly is.

While many rock artists protested the war in general, some were more specific in their protest music and took on specific issues about the war. Perhaps the best example of such a song is “Fortunate Son,” sung by Creedence Clearwater Revival, written by their lead-singer, John Fogerty, and released as a single in 1969 (Hillstrom, 111). In “Fortunate Son,” Fogerty asserts that the Vietnam War was fought disproportionately by the middle class and not by, “Senators' sons.”

Yeh, some folks inherit star spangled eyes,
ooh, they send you down to war, Lord,
And when you ask them, how much should we give,
oh, they only answer, more, more, more, you

<http://users.aol.com/drumnoise/lyrics/fortunat.txt>

Bruce Springsteen would emulate this approach in 1984 when he recorded “Born in the U.S.A.” Springsteen's rock anthem spoke about the difficulties Vietnam veterans faced coming home and the lack of respect they received from many Americans (Hillstrom, 47). These are just a few of the examples of anti-war messages which found a popular voice in rock music.

Folk. Rock 'n Roll were not the only kind of music, which became intimately linked with the Vietnam War. Much of Vietnam music was an outcropping of the folk-ballad revival of the 1960's that created acts like the Peter, Paul, and Mary, and Bob Dylan (Cleveland, 134). There is no better example of the importance of folk music to the anti-war movement than “Masters of War,” which Dylan recorded in 1963. Through his folk lyrics, Dylan attacked those who prosecuted the war from the safety of their own homes when he wrote, “You hide in your mansion / As young people's blood / Flows out of their bodies / And is buried in the mud” (Hillstrom, 194, 199).

C. Positive Music

However, folk music provided something to the war music of the era that rock music did not. After all, not all of the music written about the Vietnam War was negative. Much of the music written in support of the American soldiers in Vietnam was country-western (Cleveland, 129). Much of country-western had roots in folk music. One of the most popular of these songs is Barry Sadler's “The Ballad of the Green Berets (1964),” in which he writes

Back at home a young wife waits
Her Green Beret has met his fate
He has died for those oppressed
Leaving her his last request
Put silver wings on my son's chest
Make him one of America's best
He'll be a man they'll test one day
Have him win The Green Beret.

<http://www.gentleman-jim.com/vnsong05.htm>

Merle Haggard followed “The Ballad of the Green Berets” in 1969 with his own popular hit, “Okie from Muskogee.” This country hit gave “hippie-haters” a voice and is another example, which shows that not all American popular music of the Vietnam era carried an anti-war theme (Hillstrom, 219).

The popular music, however, were not the only contribution folk made to Vietnam War music. The folk revival prompted the mass production of quality guitars by Japanese and American industries. This increased production of guitars meant that there were more GI's in Vietnam with the ability to play music and access to the needed instruments (Cleveland, 134).

III. Music in Vietnam

These are just small samples of the types and content of music that was made concerning the Vietnam War in the 1950's and '60's. However, this does not mean that these various types of music were all available to American soldiers in Vietnam. To determine what was heard by these men and women, it is important to examine the means by which soldiers listened to music. There were three main sources of music available to American soldiers, Armed Forces Vietnam Network, unauthorized broadcasting within Vietnam and Laos, and tape recorders.

A. AFVN

1. Purpose and Background

The Armed Forces Vietnam Network (AFVN) was created by the US Armed Forces with the goal of entertaining American troops. AFVN had several stations “...from the Delta to the DMZ” and had standard procedures regarding how music came to be played on them (AFVN). First, all types of music (rock, jazz, classical, etc.) were played. For this reason, former AFVN members like Garry Lyons, take some degree of exception to any effort to label AFVN as a rock & roll station.

...even though the makeup of our audience was weighed heavily toward the youthful side, therefore, the Top-40 side, there were programs for several other types of music in any given 24 hour period. I think it would be unfair and not a little inaccurate to put a single label on the music GI's listened to in Nam. (AFVN)

This assertion was confirmed by at least one anonymous GI, who referred to the music on AFVN as, "The world's shittiest, small-town Midwest old-woman right-wing plastic useless propagandizing bumper unturned-on controlled low-fidelity non-stereo," and so on (Fasanaro, 458). While certainly not representative of the opinions of all GI's, this individual's opinion certainly does support the notion that AFVN was not a "rock network."

2. The Music

a. How was it selected?

The fact that many kinds of music were played on AFVN indicates that, in some way, the options had to be narrowed. An AFVN DJ named Adrian Cronauer recounts the procedure that companies had to go through (and still go through on Armed Forces Radio today) to get their songs played on AFVN.

If a company wants their record played on AFRS¹, they sign the appropriate paperwork and give a master tape to AFRS in Los Angeles where it is re-cut on the AFRS label... These are the only records allowed on the premises and, therefore, the only ones you could use on the air. (AFVN)

Cronauer went on to say that there were no pre-set play lists at AFVN. A DJ would simply show up at the station, pick some records from the station, and play as many songs as could be fit into the timeslot. Live DJ's, however, weren't the only shows on AFVN. There were, according to former AFVN DJ Bob Mays, many pre-recorded songs that were delivered to AFVN from the States. These, two, ranged in their content from talk shows, to rock, to big-band (AFVN). This recollection is confirmed by Doug Jennings, a DJ in Saigon from 1970-1971. Jennings, in his position as a DJ, often saw the contents of the shipments sent to AFVN from the United States. According to Jennings, these

Included... various programs, i.e. Bob Kingsley, Chris Noel, etc., plus a couple of LP's with the Top-40 songs or wannabe Top-40 songs... To my knowledge, these were the only songs "authorized" to be played, not only at AFVN, but around the world. (AFVN)

These pre-recorded shows, obviously, allowed AFRTS-LA a great deal more direct control over what was heard by US troops in Vietnam than did shows that were done live, by live DJ's in Vietnam.

b. A sample of AFVN music

If these are the steps that went into determining what songs were played on AFVN, what songs made the cut? Perhaps the best way to get an idea of what songs were played on Armed Forces radio without trying to make an enormous, exhaustive list, is to look at a sample of an AFVN radio program. This particular AFVN sample was of a rock 'n roll show DJ'd by 1LT Bruce Wahl. The fifty-five minute part of the show preserved on the internet consists of seventeen songs. The titles are "This Magic Moment," (Jay & the Americans) "Teach," (Crosby, Stills, Nash & Young) "I Started A Joke," (The Beegees) "White Room With Black Curtains," (Cream) "Traces of Love," () "Solitary Man," (Neil Diamond) "Renee," (The Left Banke) "Ohio," (Crosby, Stills, Nash & Young) "Today is Your Birthday," (The Beatles) "Bang, Bang Maxwell," (The Beatles) "Cherish," (David Cassidy) "Here Comes the Sun," (The Beatles) "Both Sides Now," (Judy Collins) "Some Velvet Morning," (Nancy Sinatra & Lee Hazelwood) "Magic Carpet Ride," (Steppenwolf) "How Can I Be Sure?," (?) and "Love is Blue" (Paul Doria) (AFVN).

There is definitely a variety of music within this sample. A couple of songs, "Love is Blue" and "Some Velvet Morning," stand out as not fitting the rock 'n roll genre. "Ohio," however, stands out for a different reason. This hit by Crosby, Stills, Nash & Young is the only song in this list that could be considered protest music. This begs the question of whether or not there was music censorship by the military at AFVN. "Ohio" itself was a unique protest song in that American soldiers may have put their own twist on it more so than other protest songs. "Ohio" was about the four college students who

were killed at Kent State in 1970. These students represented the type of young American that many GI's resented for not only not fighting in Vietnam, but protesting the war while many Americans died and they themselves stayed safe in college. This attitude may be best summed up in a joke one of Bob Morecook's buddies told him several times during his time in Vietnam.

He would hold up two fingers and ask us what that meant and us college guys would holler "Peace." Then he'd hold up three and ask us what that meant and we'd be silent, except me being an old Hoosier would say, "Wiedemann's Beer." Then he'd hold up four fingers and ask us what that meant. Now, of course, we'd all be quiet and he'd get this sly grin on his face and then he'd say [chorus, hold up laughter card] Ohio National Guard 4, Kent State nothing! (AFVN)

This joke, while it may seem cruel to some people today, expresses a resentment that many American soldiers felt toward American men attending college during the Vietnam War. In this way, "Ohio" may not have been as demoralizing to Vietnam troops as some today may hypothesize.

3. Censorship

a. Time period differences

While this anecdote may explain the presence of this particular song in the above sample, this does not answer the question of whether or not there were constraints on the songs that could be played for Vietnam soldiers over AFVN. The best way to determine if AFVN DJ's were censored in what they could play is to talk to those DJ's themselves. However, when one asks these former soldiers about censorship, one finds that different individuals had different experiences regarding this issue.

Adrian Cronauer was involved in radio in Vietnam in 1965-66. This was when AFVN was still only one station in Saigon with the acronym AFRS. When asked about the censorship of music at AFRS during this time period, Cronauer is adamant in his response.

There was news censorship at that time but no music censorship. Each DJ could pull and play whatever records he wanted. That is, within the context of his show—if you were doing a country & western show, for example, you weren't going to play progressive jazz. Beyond that, though, we had a very extensive library and if it was a major label, a major artist, we had it and were completely free to play it. (AFVN)

While Cronauer is positive that there was no censorship at AFRS during this time, this is a unique response from an AFVN DJ. There is one thing, however, that makes Cronauer unique from the other individuals who responded to questions about censorship. All of the other respondents were involved with AFVN years after Cronauer's involvement. The majority of popular Vietnam protest songs were written after 1966. For example, songs like "Fortunate Son" and "War" were not released until 1969 and 1970, respectively. It is very likely that this fact contributed to the lack of censorship that took place at AFRS during the years in which Cronauer was a disc jockey.³

b. De jure censorship

The one thing that the rest of the AFVN respondents have in common, other than having been involved with AFVN after Cronauer, is that they all recall some kind of censorship of music having taken place. This would seem logical. After all, as former AFVN member Garry Lyons points out,

Does anyone really think that they could work in any civilian broadcast station and play music outside the station's format, or play anything that insulted one of the sponsors, or, for that matter, do anything that violated station's policies? I think not! (AFVN)

The censorship, which took place at AFVN, can be divided into two categories. The first of these, *de jure* censorship, involves the open and intentional banning of certain songs from the airwaves.⁴ The second type of censorship, *de facto*, was not an open banning of a particular song, but was merely the song being left out of the AFVN libraries by virtue of the way in which songs were selected by AFRTS-LA.²

As the former members of AFVN remember it, *de jure* censorship took several different forms. In some cases, songs were banned before they even reached Vietnam. Bob Morecook recalls that some songs were censored at headquarters back in the states before they could even be sent to AFVN. "My memory is that drug songs were censored at the AFTRS level," Morecook maintains. "Thus, they never got onto the 'labels' used at military radio stations" (AFVN). This might help explain why "Lucy In the Sky With Diamonds" wasn't one of the three Beatles' songs Bruce Wahl played in the fifty-five minute sample of songs available on the AFVN website.

Jim Beard remembers that some songs were not banned outright, but were not recommended for play by the superiors to which the disc jockeys were responsible. "When I was at AFRTS-AFVN," according to Beard, "there were songs, if not censored, highly not recommended for play. Two I can think of... were 'Where Have All the Flowers Gone' and 'I'll Be Home For Christmas'" (AFVN). The sad nature of these songs, especially as it would relate to GI's in the field, makes the desire to keep them off of the airwaves in Vietnam understandable.

Not everyone remembers censorship in the same way Beard does, however. Bob Mays recalls a more intense banning of certain songs.

There were three songs banned while I was on the air at AFVN in Saigon during June 1970- February 1971: a. the... Animals' song ["We Gotta Get Out of This Place"], b. "War" by Edwin Starr... and c. "Ruby, Don't Take Your Love to Town" by Kenny Rogers & the 1st Edition. (AFVN)⁵

There are two facts, which are very important in this statement by Bob Mays. First, Mays worked between 1970 and 1971. This may explain why his recollection is different from Adrian Cronauer, who maintains that "We Gotta Get Out of This Place" was not banned at AFRTS. Second, Mays specifies that he was stationed at AFVN in Saigon. Not only is this the same station in which Cronauer was assigned, making these two individuals particularly comparable, but it reminds us that censorship may have worked differently at different stations throughout Vietnam once AFRTS became a network. This fact may explain why different individuals remember the issue of censorship differently.

While AFVN disc jockeys reveal the general censorship of certain songs, there was also censorship of individual DJ's due to the content of their shows. One of the most famous, or infamous, depending on who one asks, of these disc jockeys was Paul Harvey. According to Doug Jennings,

The biggest problem that arose during [his] tenure was when Paul Harvey gave his commentary against the war. That went right to MACV HQ (Headquarters) for review. I believe it was aired, rather than appear the military was censoring him. (AFVN)

While Harvey's commentary may have been aired with the rest of his show in this instance, this was not the case throughout the war. Bob Mays recalls that he saw Paul Harvey censored openly.

Actually, Paul Harvey was censored quite frequently. For a while they would edit out his opinion of "The dead-end War," as he called it. And then, they just wouldn't run his 15-minute news and commentary at all. That was the situation when I left in early '71. (AFVN)

This is an example of how not only news and music, but the disc jockey of AFVN themselves, were censored and their opinions suppressed.⁶

These first-person accounts from former AFVN members are compelling. However, one may wonder if there was anything in writing concerning censorship at AFVN. According to Charles P. Barker, who was an Affiliate Relations Customer Service Officer at the AFRTS Broadcast Center, there was, in fact, a written military regulation during the Vietnam War that was directly related to censorship.

Thus it was written (in DP-1)... today it is called DOD Regulation 5120.20 Appendix R, that if you had a "host country sensitivity" on a certain program... we had to drop the entire broadcast.... The same applied to music... One edited song was... from "My Fair Lady." (AFVN)

The term "home country sensitivity" would certainly explain why "We Gotta Get Out of This Place" was censored. While the song was not even written about Vietnam, its title and refrain could definitely be applied to the situation in which US soldiers found themselves.⁷ DP-1 would also explain why Mays saw Paul Harvey's entire 15-minute news and commentary cut in 1971.

c. De facto censorship

These are all examples of *de jure* censorship in the Armed Forces Vietnam Network. However, this was not the only type of censorship experienced in Vietnam radio. *De facto* censorship also took place, though it is not as obvious as the *de jure* censorship. As Bruce Wahl points out, "...all music we played came to us on vinyl transcriptions that AFRTS made. I don't recall that there was much missing from the Billboard Hot 100" (AFVN). Doug Jennings adds to this observation by noting that, "...these were the only songs 'authorized' to be played, not only on AFVN, but around the world" (AFVN).

If one puts these two statements together, one can see where *de facto* censorship took place. It is common knowledge that a majority of the protest music written about the Vietnam War did not

frequent the Billboard Hot 100. Therefore, if these were the songs sent to AFVN by AFRTS-LA, and these were, in turn, the only songs authorized to be played on AFVN, it would be the case that protest songs as a genre would not be sent to Vietnam in any significant amount. This begs the question of whether or not such censorship was done intentionally. Did this just happen, or did the men and women working at AFRTS-LA realize that these songs would be left of albums heading to Vietnam if they selected their music based on this criteria? The true answer to this question may never be known.

4. Dodging Censorship

As a result of speaking to former disc jockeys from AFVN, it can be safely assumed that there were, at various times, efforts to place constraints on the music that was played over the Armed Forces Vietnam Network. However, this does not mean that disc jockeys always abided by these constraints. Previous research on this question indicates that military command was unable to control the mass media to screen out protest sounds (Cleveland, 130). AFVN was not immune to this problem. .

There were two key problems, which faced AFVN disc jockeys in playing music that was censored. The first of these was that many of these songs were not available in AFVN's collection. This problem, however, proved to be only temporary. As AFVN veteran Robert Mays explains,

The easiest way for the DJ's to get around the legal issues was to have someone from home mail them a 45 rpm copy of a song they wanted to play. I'm guessing that's how Edwin Starr and Kenny Rogers kept showing up on the air. I still remember how tense it got when someone would air an unauthorized... and forbidden... song. (AFVN)

As Mays says, a disc jockey could simply get the cut he wanted through the mail and bring it into the station himself. The tension Mays notes indicates that DJ's could face repercussions for violating restrictions that the military had placed on what could be played over its airwaves. However, the fact that many disc jockeys continued this practice brings into question exactly how severe these repercussions were.

The consequences of violating station policies were a symptom of the second problem DJ's faced in playing censored music. The disc jockeys, after all, were not the only people in the station during the shows. Officers were often there to enforce station restrictions. The only way DJ's could get around this problem was to depend on the sympathy of the officers themselves . A great example of this is given by Jerry Spector.

I was a newscaster... My roommate was ordered by a 23-year-old lieutenant night news officer to stop playing, "Ruby, don't Take Your Love to Town." [by Kenny Rogers & the First Edition] This was Saigon, 1971. Muncie [the roommate] refused or objected. End result: the lieutenant was advised by Lt. Col. L. Seville to stay out of the broadcast studio. (AFVN)

Restrictions placed on music at a radio station are useless unless someone is there to enforce them. Sympathetic officers like Lt. Col. Seville could effectively nullify any danger to the DJ in playing restricted cuts. In this way, the second obstacle disc jockeys faced in playing censored music could be dodged.

B. Unauthorized Broadcasting

In spite of the ability of disc jockeys to dodge restrictions, AFVN was not the biggest problem facing the military in Vietnam when it tried to restrict what its soldiers heard over the radio. While the military had some control at the Armed Forces Vietnam Network, it had little to no control over unauthorized broadcasts and the private collections of soldiers “in country.” Through these channels, US soldiers in Vietnam could hear almost anything, as could anyone else in Vietnam.

While Paul Harvey pushed the envelope on AFVN, DJ's throughout Vietnam voiced their opinions and their music through unauthorized broadcasting. Former AFVN disc jockey Steve Robbins recalls how this was possible.

In some instances, GI's used to rig tape players, mikes, or even platter players to field radio systems and do unauthorized broadcasts. These were only broadcast over short distances and... these stations were generally short-lived. (AFVN)

Despite the short duration of most of these stations, some unauthorized DJ's gained much notoriety in Vietnam. One such individual called himself "Dave Rabbit." Dave Rabbit was a disc jockey for an unauthorized radio station in Saigon. On his show, Dave Rabbit would play acid rock, announce the opening of new brothels in the city, and use aphorisms like "Army sucks" and "XXXX it before it XXXXs you" (Cleveland, 141).

The impact this type of show had, not only on morale, but on the moral practices of soldiers as it related to drug use and prostitutes, would have concerned many officers in Vietnam at the time.⁸

C. Private Music Collections

Another problem the military had with censoring music was that it was virtually impossible to censor soldiers' private collections. Previous research done regarding this question indicates that many GI's brought music into the war zone from home. For many soldiers, a tape recorder was seen as a status symbol (Fasanaro, 458). The music soldiers listened to on these tape recorders often consisted of songs that the military would like to have kept out of Vietnam. This is one venue through which songs of peace and psychedelic drugs became popular. Some soldiers, while exposed to these forms of music, became interested in such topics as flower-power and escapist fantasy (Cleveland, 130). One example of this is from Khe Sanh where the Marines loved to listen to the Beatle's “Magical Mystery Tour” and ascribe their own meanings to lines like, “Coming to take you away, dying to take you away” (Fasanaro, 458).

Not only were tape recorders valuable, but record players were valuable to soldiers who were stationed in a fixed location. This is mentioned by W. D. Ehrert in his book, *Vietnam- Perkasio: A Combat Marine Memoir*. At one point, Ehrert notes that whatever one of the GI's wanted on the record player, it seemed that someone there had it. The music they listened to ranged from rock 'n' roll, to blues, to jazz, to soul and country, and often served to bring the men together and raise spirits (216). However, Ehrert also notes a time when music became decisive when, one day, a new arrival came to Ehrert's unit. This new arrival immediately began playing songs by groups like the Doors and Iron Butterfly. When Ehrert asked for some Beatles, Rolling Stones, or Supremes, he was surprised at the

young man's response that those artists were no longer new back in the States. It didn't take long for Ehrert to decide that he didn't like the new guy (Ehrert, 48-49).

IV. The Impact of Music in Vietnam

The impact of music in Vietnam is difficult to measure. It has been almost thirty years since the end of the war, and, as a result, interviews with Vietnam Veterans today are often impeded by an understandable loss of memory.⁹ In addition, there has been little previous research on the topic. However, enough information is available to form reasonable hypotheses as to how music really impacted American soldiers during Vietnam.

A. Previous Research

As stated, previous research on the impact of music on Vietnam Veterans is limited. While the film *Good Morning Vietnam* romanticizes and dramatizes the life of a DJ in Vietnam, it is hardly reliable as a source without further written documentation. There is, as well, a scene involving music in Oliver Stone's *Platoon*. This scene is based on Stone's personal memories about the conflict.¹⁰ However, since this scene is also dramatized, previous written documentation and original interviews seem better sources off which to work.

1. Four types of GI's theory

Some of the most intriguing of this previous work was done by John Helmer in his book, *Bringing the War Home*. Helmer's research led him to divide American GI's into four groups, *lifers*, *brownnosers*, *juicers*, and *heads*. Lifers had been in Vietnam a minimum of three years. Most of them had achieved an NCO rank with little or no hope of advancement. Brownnosers, as the name suggests, were suck-ups to the officers and NCOs (Helmer, 184). Juicers were GI's who preferred beer and supported the war effort. Juicers heavily contrasted the final group, known as heads. Heads preferred a smoke to a beer and were in opposition to the war effort (Helmer, 200). These men, according to Helmer, fought two wars: the *real* one against the communist Vietnamese, and their own personal war against military authority.

According to Helmer, music became an important part of the divisions between these groups. Specifically, it became very important to the heads. Along with their strong anti-war feelings came a strong attachment to rock 'n' roll. These men spent much of their free time listening to acts like Jimi Hendrix, F. Zappa, The Mothers, Wilson Pickett, The Grateful Dead, and the Doors. Helmer quotes Michael Herr, who wrote a first hand account of the war called *Dispatches*, when he writes about these men, "Sounds were as precious as water." Helmer maintains that the songs these men listened to contained the group's ideology (Helmer, 195-196). It is not difficult to imagine how, in this context music could have had a major impact on morale. Not only would it have served as a unifying force for the heads, but it would also have further divided them from the juicers, who supported the war effort.

2. Front vs. Rear

Some research others have done on this topic also indicates an important difference that some may overlook. In *Dark Laughter: War in Song and Popular Culture*, Les Cleveland maintains that, outside the perimeter, it was too risky for GI's to listen to music. One account documented in Cleveland's book is that of a front-line platoon leader named Lanning. Lanning wrote that REMF's could listen to radio and watch TV, but that this couldn't be done in the field for fear of alerting the enemy to American positions (Cleveland, 141).¹¹

Lanning's point-of-view is shared by 1LT Robert Salerni. When commenting on music in Vietnam, Salerni notes that GI's could get, "the same disc jockeys and the same predominantly rock 'n' roll music [that] you'd get on an American station." However, Salerni also emphasizes that this statement was only true as it referred to soldiers in the rear.

3. Officers vs. Enlisted Men

Previous research also raises questions regarding whether or not officers and enlisted men differed in their musical tastes. Fasanaro maintains that most American officers in Vietnam preferred classical types of music. This was often in sharp contrast to the rock 'n' roll most enlisted men enjoyed (Fasanaro, 458). Such a difference would not have helped relationships between the two groups, which, as Helmer maintained, were often strained from the very beginning.

Endnotes

¹. AFRS (Armed Forces Radio Station) refers to AFVN before it became a network. AFVN started as a single station in Saigon before it expanded to several stations throughout Vietnam.

². AFRTS was the headquarters, which directed the activities of AFVN and was located stateside in Los Angeles, California.

³. Cronauer does note, however, that the news broadcasts were censored in 1965-66. While one would not necessarily be surprised by this, it does serve as an indication that music censorship was not completely out of the realm of possibilities at that time.

⁴. This type of music censorship on armed forces radio did not begin in Vietnam, according to Victor Sage. Sage was assigned to AFN-Europe in 1970. While there, he stumbled across a list of records from the World War II era, which weren't to be aired during the fighting in Europe. These included "Drinkin' Rum and Coca-Cola" by the Andrews Sisters. Sage, upon inquiring, found that the restrictions were for real. He further discovered that, "many of the restricted cuts on the old discs had been scratched with a nail of some such thing, thus assuring compliance." According to Sage, these records have since disappeared into the Library of Congress.

⁵. This statement supports an assertion made in previous work on this topic by Fasanaro, who maintained that "We Gotta Get Out of This Place" was not allowed on the airways. Fasanaro maintained that this was done at the request of the South Vietnamese Government, who placed certain restrictions on the music that could be played within their country.

⁶. In fact, Mays was personally affected by this censorship. When Harvey's program was cut, Mays' sports show was changed from five minutes to fifteen minutes. In order to get some rest by the pool, Mays had pre-taped his five-minute show. As a result, he was promptly demoted to the night shift.

⁷. "We Gotta Get Out of This Place" by the Animals was extremely important and meaningful to soldiers in Vietnam. In fact, it is now the official anthem of the annual DMZ to Delta Dance in Washington DC over Veteran's Day. According to Nancy Smoyer, "...those of us who were there know very well all the levels of the words of the title."

⁸. Steve Robbins also noted, however, that the US Armed Forces made attempts to use unauthorized broadcasts to their advantage. The overall benefits of these attempts, however, are questionable. "The fact that these stations existed," according to Robbins, "was used by the CIA/SOG/USIA as a cover for some of their PSYOPS broadcast operations to the VC and NVA..." The word was spread that these stations were, in fact, run by anti-war groups/rogue GI's and were used to broadcast anti-war propaganda. The idea being, of course, that if the VC thought these were anti-war stations, they would leave them alone. I was never sure if Charlie bought the rouse, but a whole lot of Americans sure as heck did." Robbins went on to mention that many of these facts had been highly classified and have just been released within the last year.

⁹. The thirty or so years is not the only hindrance to such research. As may be expected, music was not the most important thing on many soldiers' minds while in Vietnam. Staying alive was the priority. In addition, many men and women do not wish to talk about their experiences in Vietnam. Even talking about music can bring back unpleasant memories that many veterans would rather not relive. A less common reaction is that asking about music trivializes the greater political and moral issues surrounding the Vietnam War. While this point-of-view is not necessarily verbalized, it does eliminate any information such an individual would have from the interview process.

¹⁰. Oliver Stone also released a CD. Part of this CD was a personal narrative about his musical experiences in Vietnam. Unfortunately, this CD has been discontinued and a copy of it could not be found for use in the writing of this paper.

¹¹. The term REMF is short for "Rear-echelon Mother XXXXers." This was a term front-line soldiers used to describe American GI's who spent their time in Vietnam in the rear. This term serves to illustrate some of the resentment many front-line Americans felt toward their counterparts stationed in places like Saigon. A couple of GI's I spoke to noted some measure of resentment of this term, noting that there was nowhere in Vietnam that could be considered a safe zone.