

The View from Saigon

American Forces Vietnam Network Coverage of the 1968 Presidential Election

By Ralph Lombardi

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[Re-typed because the original is faint.]

As we predicted twice in this column the new American president is Nixon--by a nose. Rounding the three-quarter turn Humphrey took over for a while but in the homestretch Nixon pushed ahead again. Why some of the returns came in so late is a mystery. I wonder if the large absentee vote [over 1 million] had something to do with it?

The AFVN boys had been preparing for the contest for three weeks and some of them got very little sleep recently. The large television studio at 9 Hong Thap Tu was a fascinating scene of orderly confusion Wednesday morning before they started telecasting at 9 a.m. Over 50 staff members of AFVN's 208 were working together in the control room and the studio to keep their Vietnam audience completely informed of the elections returns as they came in all day long.

A large board was covered with cards mentioning the constantly changing voting percentages held by the three major candidates in all 50 states. In the center was a running tally of the popular vote and electoral vote. Another large board had a huge map of the U.S. with stick-on boards declaring the victorious senators, representatives, and governors as that information came in. Behind anchormen Carl Carter and Mike Maxwell were huge caricatures of the principal candidates. At the opposite end of the studio were Kim Peterson and Nicholas Palladino, reporting the congressional and gubernatorial returns. The two big cameras were constantly swinging around to take in various aspects of this three-sided scene. On the fourth side was a table with Captain Randall J. Moody [News Chief] directing these operations and keeping in touch with the control room at the same time. He coordinated the multitude of simultaneous operations admirably and coolly while Tony Brooks [Ralph to his mother] assisted the Captain and edited news stories [as] they came in.

Also behind Carter and Maxwell were three teletype machines that kept clicking away, supervised by Arthur Borland who had been up since 7 a.m. the previous day to make sure his temperamental machines would work all right. Edward <<Chuck>> Waddell supervised the cameras. Others pitching in included Wayne Matheson, in charge of news, Radio Chief James Wentz and an unknown number of technicians.

Carter had been up since midnight, preparing his script, and is soon off to Tokyo for 30 days where he will be able to pick up more of his favorite makeup, Max Factor pancake 2, without it he has 10 o'clock shadow on TV.

The line of girls outside the studios, waiting for Tony Brooks to come out finally had to give up, for the program went on all day long and by mid-afternoon everyone was bleary-eyed, a little shaky, and acting like it was only a dream.

Most impressive was how men of all ranks and all services blended harmoniously together to produce a complicated show, requiring long hours of hard work, without acrimony, jealousy or frayed tempers. Let's hope the new American Administration can to work half as well.

[Thanks to Randall Moody for sharing the clipping.]