



Army Public Affairs Hall of Fame Induction Ceremony for the Members of AFVN Det 5, Hue (Date unknown)

By Herb Glover AFNE, 1960-2003

I was honored this past year to share the platform at the induction ceremony for the Army Public Affairs Hall of Fame, with the surviving members of [AVN] Det 5 and family members of those who didn't survive. It was an emotional event for many reasons and it was the first time most of those former POW's had seen one another since their release. Sergeant Major Mark Van Treuren, who nominated the group for the honor, commented that the story was relatively unknown and the recognition was long overdue. In a nutshell, from the event program, here are their names and their story:

As 1967 came to an end Detachment 5 of the American Forces Vietnam Network began settling in and broadcasting TV in the area of Hue, South Vietnam. The new commander, Marine 1st Lt. Jim Bernardo, had just been welcomed by the NCO-In-Charge, SFC John Anderson, and Army engineers SFC Donat Goin and SP5 Harry Entmuller. The station's audience included the 1st Cav. Division, the 101st Airborne Division, elements of I Corps, and a large contingent of Marines.

Hue, the ancient Imperial capital of Vietnam, was located over 50 miles from the DMZ and considered relatively safe from enemy attack.

In January 1968, the station began transitioning to a full Class A operation by adding radio broadcasting. Four men arrived to begin the radio mission: Marine Staff Sgt. John Deering to serve as program director, Marine Sgt. Tom Young attached as a broadcaster, and Army broadcasters SP5 Steve Stroub and SP4 John Bagwell attached from 1st Cav. Public Affairs.

They would never spin records or play command information at the AFVN station.





In the early morning of Jan 31, 1968, Communist forces in South Vietnam launched what came to be known as the Tet Offensive, a series of nationwide attacks on urban areas seeking to foment a general uprising against the Republic of Vietnam government. That day, a division-sized force of North Vietnamese Army troops and Viet Cong guerrillas moved on Hue.

The Hue attack was the strongest and best coordinated of the North Vietnamese assaults during the Tet Offensive, and only attack on a large city that resulted in any measurable success. Communist forces held most of Hue's center, what is known as the "Old City," and were seeking to expand their perimeter into the rest of the city against stubborn resistance by RVN forces. They soon faced a strong counter-attack by elements of the 1st and 5th Marine Regiments, later joined by the Army's 7th and 12th Cav. Regiments.

When the men of Det 5 began taking mortar rounds and sniper fire on 31 January, they ceased all broadcast operations and took cover in the house they used as living quarters. They fought bravely for their station, holding off North Vietnamese attacks for five days until a full scale assault began on the night of 4 February.

Sgt. Young was killed by a hail of bullets amid heavy bursts of small arms and died. Sp5 Entmuller recalls their last conversation being about religion. Young's widow would say that all he ever wanted to do was work in radio and television, and he planned to apply to the University of Missouri Journalism School after his tour.

By the morning of 5 February they had used all of their ammunition, eventually running out of food and water as well. Several men worked to make the station unusable to the North Vietnamese. After a series of enemy rocket-propelled grenades set fire to their house, they were forced to flee through a nearby rice paddy towards the MACV compound one mile away. They would not make it to their destination.

The men had been assisted by NBC International engineer, Mr. Courtney Niles, 37, a decorated 10-year Army vet who covered the war from Hue, shared quarters with them, and helped defend the station with the rifle of an Airman on R&R leave. Niles fought with all the bravery of a Soldier and helped save lives by killing several NVA. While escaping the house, he was hit by small arms fire and killed instantly.



SP4 John Bagwell managed to evade capture and was given sanctuary by local Catholic priests, at great risk to their own safety. Six others were taken captive; one of them, SP5 Stroub, 20, was summarily executed while being led away, gunned down in the street in front of his comrades. He had fought with absolute valor throughout the firefight and was weakened by an open fracture wound and shrapnel wounds.

The five remaining members of Det 5 were each wounded and didn't know if they would survive the day. Drawing on unknown stores of personal strength, they survived 5 February and every subsequent day for the next five years as prisoners of war in North Vietnam, suffering unspeakable torture and deprivations at the hands of their captors. They were finally released on 3 March 1973.

The men of Det 5, AFVN Hue established an unparalleled legacy and fought desperately to defend their broadcast station and their brothers-in-arms. Through the entire ordeal, Harry Entmuller carried a detachment flag hidden on his person and presented the tattered flag and his prison sandals to the Army Chief of Public Affairs to be displayed in the Pentagon...

