Through the Soldiers' Ears:

What Americans Fighting in Vietnam Heard and Its Effects

A Study of Former AFVN Members and Rochester, New York Veterans

"Everybody's story is different."
-Lieutenant Paul Womack

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Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to the brave men and women who served in Vietnam, especially my father, Charles E. Sabis, and those who took the time to discuss their experiences with me. These people sacrificed a great deal for their country, and some paid the ultimate price. I wish to take a moment to express my deepest respect for these individuals and convey my undying thanks to them for their service, not only to the United States of America, but to myself and my generation. We will follow in your footsteps and continue to build on this great nation's history. We will never forget what you have done and the honor with which you conducted yourselves, and we will never fail to learn from your experiences.

As I write these words, there is no memorial at the University of Rochester *specifically* intended to honor its sons and daughters who gave their lives in the Vietnam War. I believe this to be a gross injustice. It often comes to pass that those in the present are distracted from honoring those who have preceded them by current events and concerns. I believe that University of Rochester Alumni who fought in Vietnam deserve to be brought to the forefront of thought at this institution. Memorial plaques for alumni who bravely served their country in other wars are currently situated in Wilson Commons and the Residential Quadrangle. It is my sincere hope that a memorial to the University's Vietnam Veterans will soon take its proper place amongst these monuments to our most honored predecessors.

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

In the eyes of many, Vietnam was a rock 'n' roll war, in that rock was the dominant music of American troops. Movies such as *Good Morning Vietnam*, *Apocalypse Now*, and *Platoon* have portrayed Vietnam in this context. The role of music in Vietnam is also seen as unique due largely to its content and availability. This image of Vietnam as 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 soldiers actually listened to war protest music while they were fighting overseas.[1] Soldiers in Vietnam had music provided by AFVN (Armed Forces Vietnam Network) and also had access to tape recorders with which they could play whatever music they desired.

Importance of Music in Vietnam

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. This is evident in that musical terms quickly replaced traditional military slang. For example, *rock 'n' roll* quickly replaced the term *lock and load.*[2] In addition, lyrics and titles of songs were often used in everyday conversation, as in the case of a gun ship that was often seen in harbor by American soldiers near the coast. The soldiers, probably due to the ship's giant smoke stacks, soon began to refer to it as *Puff the Magic Dragon*, 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 effects it had on them. What did popular music have to say about the Vietnam War? What did the military command structure allow American troops

[1] Charles N. Fasanaro, "Music and the Vietnam War." *Vietnam War Encyclopedia.* (1998) 458.
[2] Fasanaro, 458.

to hear? This is extremely important. After all, soldiers in Vietnam would not have felt any impact from the popular music of the time if they were not exposed to it. If there were songs that the military censored, did U.S. troops hear anything that they were not supposed to hear?

The answers to these questions can be used to address larger issues, including how music affected the morale of the American soldier in Vietnam. After all, men with good morale fight better than men who are miserable. One can also ask how music affected the camaraderie between soldiers. Historically, one of the most important motivations for men at war has been not letting down the men with whom they serve. If music had an impact on the relationships amongst soldiers, this most definitely would have affected the war as a whole. Taking the question a step further, how did music affect relationships between enlisted men and officers? It is very possible, after all, that tension between officers and enlisted men, regardless of its source, could lead to insubordination.

One could make the argument that war protests and the music that grew out of the anti-war movement damaged the morale of the American soldier and may have contributed to the "loss" of the Vietnam War. For that matter, the outlook may turn out to be grimmer. If mere differences in musical preference caused tension amongst soldiers based solely on the genre of the music, this presents a greater problem to military forces as music becomes more accessible and portable with improved technology. In analyzing Vietnam, a war where music was in the forefront more than ever before, one can judge the impact of music on soldiers in combat and non-combat roles. The conclusions one reaches when addressing these questions can be of great significance.

BACKGROUND OF POPULAR WAR MUSIC OF THE 1960'S

In order to assess the effects of popular music in Vietnam, one must first look at the popular music of that time. As related to Vietnam, two types of music were of paramount

importance, rock and folk. 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 due to its musical content and lyrics. However, these issues were magnified when examined in the light of the Vietnam War and how immorality could affect the lives and performance of American soldiers.

Protest 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. The first example of this was Barry McGuire's "Eve of Destruction," which was released in 1965. In its first stanza, the song not only speaks of the horrors of war, but criticizes the drafting of young men into the military who, at the time, were not even eligible to vote.

> The Eastern world it is exploding, violence flaring and bullets loading,
> You're old enough to kill, but not for voting,
> You don't believe in war, but's what's that gun you're toting?
> And even the Jordan River has bodies floating
> And you tell me, over and over and over again my friend,
> Ah, you don't believe we're on the Eve of Destruction.[3]

This was promptly followed by the less popular, "I-Feel-Like-I'm-Fixin'-to-Die Rag," recorded by Country Joe and the Fish in 1965, which 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.[4]

Songs like these became more common as the 1960's passed. Perhaps the most overt example of

[3] D. Lidström, (1998). http://home1.swipnet.se/~w-74092/musik/eve.txt.
[4] E. Penman, (1997). http://www.gentleman-jim.com/vnsong03.htm.

Songs like these became more common as the 1960's passed. Perhaps the most overt example of anti-war rock music is Edwin Starr's "War," which was released in 1970. With its extremely direct lyrics and biting rock sound, "War" encapsulates in one song the message that so many rock artist were trying to convey.

> War! / Hunh! 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.[5]

While it may speak in more general terms than the "I-Feel-Like-I'm-Fixin'-to-Die Rag" in that its references to Vietnam are indirect, it is remembered by so many, in part, because its lyrics constitute an easily understood inditement of war in general.

While many rock artists protested the war in general, some were more specific in their music and took on specific issues about the war. One example of such a song is "Fortunate Son," sung by Credence Clearwater Revival, written by their lead-singer, John Fogerty, and released as a single in 1969.[6] In "Fortunate Son," Fogerty asserts that the Vietnam War was fought disproportionately by the working class and not by "Senators' sons." As Fogerty sees it, the working class is the foundation on which the United States is built. Yet, when war comes, this group of people is burdened with fighting it while college students stay in their classes.

> 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, yoh.[7]

[5] E. Penman, (1997). http://www.gentleman-jim.com/vnsong06.htm
[6] Kevin Hillstrom and Laurie Collier Hillstrom. *The Vietnam Experience: A Concise Encyclopedia of American Literature, Songs, and Films*. (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1998) 111.
[7] http://users.aol.com/drumnoise/lyrics/fortunat.txt. User did not specify a name, but I wish to give credit to the site for confirming the lyrics to this song.

The use of the word *inherit* is important. It conveys Fogerty's belief that many upper class citizens and politicians have not even earned their places in society, but have inherited them from their fathers. These are just a few of the examples of anti-war messages which found a popular voice in rock music.

Rock 'n' roll, however, did not have to contain references to Vietnam to frighten some authority figures. Many people feared rock 'n' roll for its inherent defiance of authority. Rock music often took rebellious, countercultural topics like sexual liberation and drug use and incorporated them into its sound. These qualities, especially rock's references to drug use, made many rock 'n' roll songs that contained no references to Vietnam a threat to the military structure. After all, the military is a hierarchical system. If a rock 'n' roll song encouraged drug use counter to the wishes of that hierarchy, the song could be looked at as a direct threat to the proper workings of the armed forces. Drug use amongst soldiers could seriously affect the performance of soldiers in both the field and the rear. Rock also had inherent civil rights repercussions. Rock music, especially its sexual nature, was based on African-American music of the 1940's and 1950's. As one looks at the interviews of the Rochester-area veterans done in this study, one will see how African-American music styles such as rock (and even jazz) could affect the atmosphere in Vietnam regardless of lyrical content.

Folk. Rock 'n' roll was not the only kind of music which became intimately linked with the Vietnam War. Much of Vietnam-era music was an outcropping of the folk-ballad revival of the 1960's that produced acts like Peter, Paul, and Mary and Bob Dylan.[8] 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 criticized those who prosecuted

[8] Cleveland, Les. *Dark Laughter: War In Song and Popular Culture.* (Westport: Praeger Publishers, 1994) p.134. This revival had its roots in the 1930's with acts like Woody Guthrie, who served as Bob Dylan's greatest inspiration. One can find out more about this revival by reading books like *Woody Guthrie: A Life*, by Joe Klein and *Bob Dylan*, by Anthony Scaduto

the war (though he never mentioned Vietnam directly) 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."[9]

Songs of Support

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 and western.[10] Country and 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.[11]

Merle Haggard followed "The Ballad of the Green Berets" with his own popular hit, "Okie from Muskogee" in 1969. This country hit gave "hippie-haters" a voice and is another example that shows that not all American popular music of the Vietnam era carried an anti-war theme.[12]

> We don't smoke marijuana in Muskogee,
> We don't take our trips on LSD;
> We don't burn our draft cards down on Main Street,
> We like livin' right and bein' free.
> We don't make a party out of lovin',
> We like holdin' hands and pitchin' woo;
> We don't let our hair grow long and shaggy,

[9] Hillstrom, 194, 199.
[10] Cleveland, 129.
[11] E. Penman, (1997). http://www.gentleman-jim.com/vnsong05.htm.
[12] Hillstrom, 219. The popular music, however, was 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).

Like the hippies out in San Francisco do.
I'm proud to be an Okie from Muskogee,
A place where even squares can have a ball;
We still wave Old Glory down at the courthouse,
And white lightnin's still the biggest thrill of all.

While the stance against the hippie-culture alone is significant, the third line of the song is particularly relevant. Burning draft cards was a popular form of protest and was in direct defiance of the war effort. Arguably, Haggard's work makes an even bigger statement than Sadler's, seeing as it came near the peak of the anti-war movement. Haggard's work is in direct contrast to anti-war and hippie movements as they were reaching their most influential positions.

The Emotional Is Political[13]

A third set of songs is relevant to Vietnam, not because of its genre or political message, but because of the emotions it could invoke in American troops. These songs, like "I'll Be Home For Christmas," while they did not contain any direct reference to Vietnam or to the counterculture, could be damaging to morale because of what their lyrics meant to men who heard them.

I'm dreaming tonight of a place I love
Even more than I usually do
And although I'm lost, it's a long road back
This I promise you...
Well, I'll be home for Christmas
You can plan on me
So, please have snow and lots of mistletoe
And presents under the tree
Oh, Christmas eve will find me
Where the love light gleams
I'll be home for Christmas
If only in my dreams.[14]

[13] In selecting the title for this section, I used a play off of the popular 1960's phrase, "The personal is political." This phrase was used by certain segments of the women's rights movement.
[14] Scarlet, (1998). http://www.fortunecity.com/oasis/benidorm/173/scarletshome.html.

It is not hard to imagine how a song like "I'll Be Home For Christmas" could tug at the heart-strings of men fighting a war thousands of miles away from their families.[15]

Like, "I'll Be Home for Christmas, "Where Have All the Flowers Gone" also fits this category of songs.

> Where have all the young men gone? - long time passing
> Where have all the young men gone? - long time ago
> Where have all the young men gone? - gone for soldiers every one
> When will they ever learn? When will they ever learn?
> Where have all the soldiers gone? - long time passing
> Where have all the soldiers gone? - long time ago
> Where have all the soldiers gone? - gone to the graveyard every one
> When will they ever learn? When will they ever learn?[16]

While there is no direct inditement of Vietnam in the lyrics, the assertion that all soldiers end up in the graveyard could easily have led American troops to contemplation and, eventually, contributed to depression.

Kenny Rogers and the First Edition fit this genre with their song entitled, "Ruby Don't Take Your Love To Town," which tells the story of a paralyzed veteran 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. "Ruby Don't Take Your Love To Town" is a reminder of the horrifying realities of war and may prompt the listener, particularly a soldier, to rethink how necessary war truly is.

Perhaps the best example of this type of song is the Animals' "We Gotta Get Out of This Place." This song, released in 1966, was written about a poor boy living in England and

[15] It is possible that a song like "I'll Be Home for Christmas" could serve as an inspirational song, encouraging soldiers to keep fighting hard so they could get home for Christmas. However, I do not find this argument to be very compelling. First, given the stalemated-nature of the Vietnam War, it is difficult to believe that fighting hard was going to end the war and, thus, get anyone home sooner. Second, while a song doesn't have to be uplifting to be motivating, the lyrics of "I'll Be Home For Christmas" are particularly depressing. I fail to see this song compelling anyone to fight harder given these circumstances. A later anecdote from an AFVN Veteran will show that the US Military of the time shared my point of view as it pertains to this particular song and, more than likely, many similar to it.

[16] W. Derby, (1995). http://www.trenton.edu/~derby/Where_Have_All_the_Flowers_Gone.txt.

watching his father die. However, the lyrics of the refrain can be applied very easily to the situation of the average GI in Vietnam.

> We gotta get out of this place
> If it's the last thing we ever do
> We gotta get out of this place
> Girl there's a better life for me and you.[17]

If an American soldier didn't get out of Vietnam, it was because fighting in Vietnam was the last thing that soldier ever did. "We Gotta Get Out of This Place" was extremely important and meaningful to American troops 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 Armed Forces Radio veteran Nancy Smoyer, "...those of us who were there know very well all the levels of the words of the title."

MUSIC IN VIETNAM[18]

These are just some samples of the types and content of music that was made in the 1960's and 1970's concerning the Vietnam War. However, this does not mean that all of these types of music were available to American soldiers in Vietnam. To determine what was heard by those 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: the Armed Forces Vietnam Network, unauthorized broadcasting within Vietnam and Laos, and tape recorders.

AFVN

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

[17] S. Ricciardelli, (1998). http://www.again.net/~steve/animal5.html.

[18] Unless otherwise noted, all quotes and facts in the AFVN section came from interviews conducted with former members of the Armed Forces Radio Network. These interviews were done over the World Wide Web via a news group maintained by these Veterans. Questions were posted to the group and anyone who had any information regarding an issue was free to respond via e-mail or via another posting to the group.

DMZ"[19] that played all types of music (rock, jazz, classical, etc.).[20] For this reason, former AFVN members like Garry Lyons, take exception to any effort to label AFVN as a rock 'n' 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 soldiers listened to in 'Nam."

This opinion was seconded 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 bummer unturned-on controlled low-fidelity non-stereo," and so on.[21] While certainly not representative of the opinions of all soldiers, this individual's opinion certainly does support the notion that AFVN was not a "rock network."

How music was selected for AFVN. If music was not selected for AFVN on the basis of genre, then how was it selected? An AFVN disc jockey named Adrian Cronauer (who happens to be the man that the main character of *Good Morning Vietnam* was based on) 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 AFRS[22], they sign the appropriate paperwork and give a master tape to AFRS in Los Angeles where it is recut on the AFRS label... These are the only records allowed on the premises and, therefore, the only ones you could use on the air.

Cronauer went on to say that there were no pre-set play lists at AFVN. A disc jockey would simply show up at the station, pick some records from the station, and play as many songs as

[19] DMZ is an abbreviation for the demilitarized zone.
[20] Armed Forces Vietnam Network. (2000). http://www.geocities.com/Pentagon/Quarters/3102/index.html.
[21] Fasanaro, 458.
[22] AFRS (Armed Forces Radio Station) refers to AFVN before it became a network in the late 1960's. AFVN started as a single station in Saigon before it expanded to several stations throughout Vietnam.

could be fit into the time slot.

Live disc jockeys, however, were not the only shows on AFVN. There were, according to former AFVN sportscaster Bob Mays, many prerecorded shows that were delivered to AFVN from the United States. These, too, ranged in their content from talk shows, to rock, to big-band. This recollection is confirmed by Doug Jennings, a disc jockey in Saigon from 1970-1971. Jennings 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.[23]

These prerecorded shows allowed AFRTS-LA (the headquarters that directed the activities of AFVN and was located in Los Angeles, California) a great deal more direct control over what was heard by US troops in Vietnam than did shows that were done by live disc jockeys in Vietnam.

A Sample of AFVN Music. If these were 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 sample was of a rock 'n' roll show hosted by First Lieutenant Bruce Wahl in 1970. The fifty-five minute part of the show preserved on the internet consists of seventeen songs.[24] The titles are "This Magic Moment," (Jay and the Americans) "Teach," (Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young) "I Started A Joke," (The Bee Gees) "White Room With Black Curtains," (Cream) "Traces of Love," (Classics IV) "Solitary Man," (Neil Diamond) "Walk Away Renee," (The Left Banke) "Ohio," (Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young) "Today is Your Birthday," (The Beatles) "Bang, Bang Maxwell," (The

[23] Bob Kingsley and Chris Noel were disc jockeys in the United States.
[24] This show can be downloaded an heard in its entirety with RealPlayer software from http://www.geocities.com/Pentagon/Quarters/3102/multimedia.html.

Beatles) "Cherish," (The Association) "Here Comes the Sun," (The Beatles) "Both Sides Now," (Judy Collins) "Some Velvet Morning," (Nancy Sinatra and Lee Hazelwood) "Magic Carpet Ride," (Steppenwolf) "How Can I Be Sure?," (Little Anthony and the Imperials) and "Love is Blue" (Paul Mauriat).

There is definitely a variety of music within this sample. Two of the songs, "Love is Blue" and "Some Velvet Morning," though popular songs of the time, stand out as not fitting the rock 'n' roll genre. "Ohio," however, stands out for a different reason. This hit by Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young is the only song in this list that could be considered protest music. This raises 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 1970 Kent State killings. As the student population protested the war in Vietnam, the National Guard was present to keep the peace. Suddenly, during the demonstration, frightened National Guardsmen opened fire on the crowd, killing four students.

> Tin soldiers and Nixon's coming
> We're finally on our own
> This summer I hear the drumming
> Four dead in Ohio
> Gotta get down to it
> Soldiers are gunning us down
> Should have been done long ago
> What if you knew her and
> Found her dead on the ground
> How can you run when you know.[25]

Many soldiers resented college students, not only for not fighting in Vietnam, but demonstrating against the war while many Americans died. This attitude may be best summed up in a joke one of AFVN disc jockey Bob Morecook's buddies told him several times during his tour in Vietnam.

[25] G. Anderson, (1997). http://gunther.simplenet.com/v/data/ohio.htm

> 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!

This joke, while it may seem cruel to some people today, expresses a resentment that many American soldiers felt toward men attending college during the Vietnam War. Many soldiers felt that college students were unjustly protected from fighting in Vietnam. Thus, they felt these students had no right to complain about the present situation and demonstrate against them while they actually fought the war. As a result, "Ohio" may not have been demoralizing to Vietnam troops as one might hypothesize. This argument is supported, not only by Morecook's joke, but by the way the song is introduced on the broadcast. As the music starts, a dark voice comes over the airwaves and says, "Crosby, Stills, Nash, and Young talkin' about Kent State. Count 'em, one, two, three, four." It is not the voice of a man who is upset by the deaths of four young people. "Ohio," far from being demoralizing, may have given soldiers something to laugh about.

Time Period Differences at AFVN. 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 disc jockeys were censored in what they could play is to talk to those jockeys 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 disc jockey could pull and play whatever records he wanted. That is, within the context of his show -- if you were doing a country and 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.

Although Cronauer is positive that there was no censorship at AFRS during this time, this is a unique response from an AFVN disc jockey. There is one thing, however, that makes Cronauer unique among the 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.[26]

De jure Censorship at AFVN. 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 music censorship taking 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!

The censorship which took place at AFVN can be divided into two categories. The first of these, *de jure* censorship, involved the open and intentional banning of certain songs from the airwaves. The second type of censorship, *de facto* censorship, accounts for songs that were missing merely

[26] 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.

because of the methods AFRTS-LA used to select its material.

De jure music censorship on armed forces radio did not begin in Vietnam. Victor Sage was assigned to AFN-Europe in 1970. While there, he stumbled across a list of records from the World War II era which were not 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 serious. He further discovered that, "many of the restricted cuts on the old discs had been scratched with a nail or some such thing, thus assuring compliance." According to Sage, these records, which are direct physical evidence of *de jure* censorship in Europe, have since been stored in the Library of Congress.[27]

As the former members of AFVN remember it, *de jure* censorship took several different forms in Vietnam. 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 [were] never used at military radio stations." This might help explain why "Lucy In the Sky With Diamonds" wasn't one of the three Beatles' songs Wahl played in the fifty-five minute sample of songs available on the AFVN web site.

Jim Beard, another AFVN disc jockey, 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.'"

Not everyone involved remembers censorship in the same way Beard does. Bob Mays recalls a stronger banning of certain songs.

[27] A trip to the Library of Congress may have helped to supplement this section. However, monetary and time constraints prevented this trip from taking place. Finding these items may prove useful and interesting for future research on this topic.

> 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 and the First Edition.[28]

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 AFRS. 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 serves as a reminder that censorship may have worked differently at different stations throughout Vietnam once AFVN became a network. This fact may help to explain why different individuals remember the issue of censorship differently.

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."

The term "home country sensitivity" would certainly explain why "We Gotta Get Out of This Place" was censored. Regardless of what the song was actually written about, there is no doubt that members of the South Vietnamese Government could have found the song very offensive if it

[28] This statement supports an assertion made in previous work on this topic in the *Vietnam War Encyclopedia*, by Charles 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.

were being played by Americans in their country.

De facto Censorship at AFVN. *De jure* censorship in the Armed Forces Vietnam Network was not the only type of censorship experienced in Vietnam radio. Although not as obvious, *de facto* censorship also took place. 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." 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."

If one puts these two statements together, one can see where *de facto* censorship took place. A large amount of the protest songs 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 off albums heading to Vietnam if they selected their music based on this criteria? The true answer to this question may never be known.

Dodging Censorship at AFVN. Former disc jockeys from AFVN indicate that there were, at various times, efforts to place constraints on the music that was played over the Armed Forces Vietnam Network. This does not mean, however, 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.[29] AFVN was not immune to this problem.

There were two key problems that AFVN disc jockeys faced when attempting to play censored music. The first of these was that many of these songs were not available in AFVN's

[29] Cleveland, 130.

collection. This problem, however, proved to be only temporary. As AFVN veteran Robert Mays explains,

> The easiest way for the disc jockeys 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.

As Mays says, a disc jockey could simply get the cut he wanted through the mail and bring it into the station himself.

The second problem was the fact that disc jockeys could face repercussions for violating restrictions that the military had placed on what could be played over its airwaves. 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 disc jockeys could get around this problem was to depend on the sympathy of the officers themselves. Jerry Spector provides us with a great example of this phenomenon.

> 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 and the First Edition] This was Saigon, 1971. Muncie [the roommate] refused or objected. End result: the lieutenant was advised by Lieutenant Colonel L. Seville to stay out of the broadcast studio.

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

Unauthorized Broadcasting

Maverick disc jockeys at AFVN were not the only problem facing the military in Vietnam

when it tried to restrict what American 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 soldiers "in country" had. Through these channels, U.S. soldiers in Vietnam could hear almost anything.

Several individuals 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, soldiers used to rig tape players, mics, 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.

Despite the short duration of most of these stations, some unauthorized disc jockey'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 "Fuck it before it fucks you."[30] The impact this type of show had on morale and on the moral practices of soldiers (with respect to drug use and prostitutes), would have concerned officers in Vietnam at the time. Shows like this, after all, may have played a small role in increasing drug use and, through advocating the use of prostitutes, causing the spread of venereal disease among American soldiers.

Robbins also noted, however, that the United States Armed Forces made attempts to use unauthorized broadcasts to their advantage by using them as screens through which to relay information. The overall benefits of these attempts, however, are questionable. According to Robbins,

> The fact that these stations existed was used by the CIA/SOG/USIA as a cover for some of their PSYOPS broadcast

[30] Cleveland, 141.

> operations to the Viet Cong and NVA... The word was spread that these stations were, in fact, run by anti-war groups/rogue soldiers and were used to broadcast anti-war propaganda. The idea being, of course, that if the Viet Cong 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.

In this way, an American attempt to further the war effort not only fooled the enemy, but fooled American soldiers as well. When these men heard the anti-war messages that were meant as screens for important military information, they took the messengers as genuine. Robbins went on to mention that many of these facts had been highly classified and have just been released within the last year.

Private Collections of American Soldiers

Another problem the military had with controlling music was that it was virtually impossible to monitor soldiers' private collections. Previous research done regarding this question indicates that many soldiers brought music into the war zone from home. For many soldiers, a tape recorder was seen as a status symbol.[31] 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 topics such as flower-power.[32] One example of the influence of private collections is from Khe Sanh where the Marines loved to listen to the Beatles' "Magical Mystery Tour" and ascribe their own meanings to lines like, "Coming to take you away, dying to take you away."[33] Surely, the Marines of Khe Sanh wanted to be anywhere but Vietnam.

Not only were tape recorders valuable, but record players were also valuable to soldiers who were stationed in a fixed location. This is mentioned by Vietnam veteran W. D. Erhart in his

[31] Fasanaro, 458.
[32] Cleveland, 130.
[33] Fasanaro, 458.

book, *Vietnam- Perkasie: A Combat Marine Memoir.* At one point, Erhart notes that whatever one of the soldiers 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.[34]

Erhart also notes a time, however, when music became divisive. One day, a new arrival came to Erhart's unit. This new arrival immediately began playing songs by groups like the Doors and Iron Butterfly. When Erhart 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 did not take long for Erhart to decide that he did not like the new guy.[35] Incidence like this one not only highlighted different musical tastes, but made men like Erhart feel even further away from their homes.

THE IMPACT OF MUSIC IN VIETNAM

The impact of music in Vietnam on American soldiers 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.[36] In addition, there has been little previous research on the topic. Nevertheless, enough information is available to form reasonable hypotheses as to what impact music really had on American soldiers during Vietnam.

Previous Research

As stated, prior work on the impact of music on troops in Vietnam is limited. While the film *Good Morning Vietnam* romanticizes and dramatizes the life of a disc jockey in Vietnam, it is

[34] Erhart, W. D. *Vietnam- Perkasie: A Combat Marine Memoir.* (London: McFarland, 1983) 216.
[35] Erhart, 48-49.
[36] 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.

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.[37] Because this scene is also dramatized, however, previous written documentation and original interviews are better sources from which to work.

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.[38] Such a difference would not have helped relationships between the two groups, which, as Helmer maintained, were often strained from the very beginning. After all, not only could the chain of command serve as a source of tension, but officers were also older than enlisted men, often by ten years or more. This created a generational gap with which men on both sides were forced to cope.

Front vs. Rear. In *Dark Laughter: War in Song and Popular Culture*, Les Cleveland maintains that, outside the perimeter, it was too risky for soldiers 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 television, but that this couldn't be done in the field for fear of alerting the enemy to American positions and because of the burdens of having to carry the necessary equipment.[39] Lanning's point of view is shared by First Lieutenant Robert Salerni. When commenting on music in Vietnam, Salerni notes that soldiers could get "the same disc jockeys and the same predominantly rock 'n' roll music [that] you'd get

[37] Stone also released a compact disc. Part of this compact disc was a personal narrative about his musical experiences in Vietnam. Unfortunately, this compact disc has been discontinued and a copy of it could not be found for use in the writing of this paper.
[38] Fasanaro, 458.
[39] Cleveland, 141. The term REMF is short for "Rear-echelon Mother Fucker." This was a term front-line soldiers used to describe American GI's who spent their time in Vietnam in the rear (well behind the front lines). 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.

on an American station." Salerni also emphasizes, however, that this statement was only true as it referred to soldiers in the rear.

The Four Types of GI Theory. Some of the most intriguing of the previous work in this field was done by John Helmer in his book, *Bringing the War Home* (1974). Helmer's research led him to divide American soldiers 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.[40] Brownnosers were sycophants who did the bidding of the officers and NCO's a little too eagerly for the tastes of many of the other enlisted men.[41] Juicers were soldiers who preferred beer and supported the war effort. Juicers heavily contrasted with the final group, known as heads. Heads preferred a smoke to a beer and were in opposition to the war effort.[42] These men, as Helmer saw it, 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 Hedrix, F. Zappa, The Mothers, Wilson Picket, 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.[43] 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.

[40] NCO is short for Non-commissioned Officer.
[41] Helmer, John. *Bringing the War Home.* (New York: The Free Press, 1974) 184.
[42] Helmer, 200.
[43] Helmer, 195-196.

Findings of This Study[44]

In addition to the background and previous research above, this study includes many first-person interviews. Many of these were done electronically with former disc jockeys at AFVN and have been seen in prior sections of this document. Interviews were also done with Vietnam Veterans from Rochester, New York, who were selected at random. The only criteria several of them have in common that was taken into account in their selection is that they are members of Vietnam Veterans of America.[45] It is through these interviews with Rochester-area Veterans and interviews with AFVN Veterans that the following data was gathered and the conclusions of this study were reached.

The Music. Rochester-area Veterans confirm much of the information former members of AFVN provide. When asked what kind of music he listened to in Vietnam, Buck Sargent Gary Kenyon's response was simple. "Rock 'n' roll," Kenyon replied, "It was basically the same music that was popular back in the states."[46] Kenyon went further to assert that this was typical of the men he served with in Danang from the end of February, 1968, to the end of February, 1969. Former E-5 Fred Elliott, who served in the infantry and armed cavalry in places like Tan An and Chu Lai in 1967 agrees with Kenyon that the rock 'n' roll of Armed Forces Radio was the typical selection of both himself and the men with whom he served. First Lieutenant Paul Womack, who was stationed in Ku Chi (twenty-five miles northwest of Saigon),

[44] Unless otherwise noted, all quotes and information in this section were obtained from interviews with Rochester, New York-Area Veterans of the Vietnam War.

[45] I approached VVA in order to find Veterans willing to interview with me. While more responses would have made my conclusions stronger, I believe that those who volunteered have provided valuable information in which patterns can be found. I believe their membership in VVA has no impact on the information they have given or the conclusions they have allowed me to reach. If anything, the fact that these men were willing to speak with me may have had an impact. Many individuals who had particularly bad experiences in Vietnam may not have been willing to discuss them. In this way, the sample I have obtained may not be completely representative. However, given the topic of this thesis does not deal directly with combat, where most horrible experiences of war take place, it is reasonable to assume that the information provided for this study still has some value, regardless of whether or not it is a pure random sample.

[46] All of the ranks provided with names of soldiers who were interviews for this thesis reflect the highest rank they achieved while in Vietnam during the conflict.

recalls individual songs that seem to fit the general descriptions of Kenyon and Elliott.

> I remember Crosby, Stills, Nash, and Young, and I think the Armed Forces radio played Judy Blue-Eyes... it was about a seven-minute piece and I think they played that every noontime... I remember the stage, rock opera "Age of Aquarius" had come out and my company commander loved the "Age of Aquarius" and he played that a lot... I remember a little Credence Clearwater Revival, "Bad Moon Rising." I think I remember that. I remember "We Gotta Get Out of This Place."

These three men support the assertions of former AFVN members who claim that rock 'n' roll was the primary genre of music played in Vietnam.

It is also true, however, that not everyone listened to rock on AFVN, nor did those who listen to it necessarily enjoy it. Sergeant Eugene Lenyk, who served at Camp J. K. Books, north of Danang, from May, 1967, to August, 1969, was quick to agree with former AFVN disc jockey Garry Lyons that musical tastes of Vietnam soldiers were varied. "I was primarily into Motown stuff," Lenyk says, "I'm not sure anything was 'typical' of guys over there. I heard other guys listening to the whole gamut from country and western to the Beatles to Mantovani." Spec 5 Medic Bruce McDaniel agrees with Lenyk, but is quick to note that his unit in the field was unique.

> The first memory of listening to music I have over there was the people in my unit listening to country music, which was new to me... One thing that was unusual about my unit was that it had come over together... I was a replacement... a lot of them were from Texas.

McDaniel remembers things changing again when he changed units and moved to the rear. "What I remember from that period [the rear]," McDaniel says, "is what we call soul music... we all listened to it." In spite of this, McDaniel remembers that rock 'n' roll did infiltrate his unit. "There might have been some things we listened to that weren't soul... 'Magic Carpet Ride,' I remember."

While almost all of the Rochester-area men interviewed remember AFVN as their primary source of music, there is evidence that this was not true of all who served in Vietnam. Peter M. Galle was a Specialist Fourth Class with the Fourth Corp in the Mekong Delta in 1966. Galle listened to music at Club Starlite, which was at the headquarters for the MACV IV Corp operation area. While he was there, possibly due to the fact that Armed Forces Radio had not fully developed its network by this time, Galle did not have access to AFVN. In fact, all Galle had was one tape of jazz. He soon found that a majority of military personnel hated it and mentioned this to his family. His family promptly sent him four hours of rock 'n' roll on tape.

McDaniel, Womack, and Lenyk also note sources of music other than AFVN. While hearing country and western with his first unit, McDaniel also remembers hearing other types of music. "I have a vague memory of one of the black guys having soul music," McDaniel says. Presumably, this music was on tape. Paul Womack remembers going to a show given by a local band. "I did go to one show one night," Womack remembers, "but I don't remember any of their music- they were pretty bad, a bunch of Filipinos, they were terrible."[47] Finally, Eugene Lenyk remembers the reel-to-reel tapes that he listened to in his hootch. "AFVN was pretty 'white bread' and bland," Lenyk recalls, "It seemed to be pretty much mainstream pop stuff. Obviously, I preferred my own tapes." To some degree, this seems to confirm the opinion of the of the anonymous soldier quoted in an earlier work on this topic by Fasanaro.[48]

If AFVN was pretty "white bread," does this mean that there wasn't any protest music heard over the airwaves in Vietnam? The most common response from Rochester-area Veterans when asked about protest music is that they do not remember hearing any in Vietnam, though they admit that they may have forgotten it. "I don't think it would have been politically correct," Gary Kenyon observes, "...as a matter of fact, I didn't get into that at all until I was

[47] Though he did not remember at first, Womack agreed with the suggestion that this was a band that was trying to play American rock 'n' roll, like the Beatles. Apparently, they were unable to match the real thing.
[48] Refer to page 14 for quote.

home. After I'd been home about a year and a half I discovered Vietnam Veterans Against the War." McDaniel seems fairly confident in his support of Kenyon's position. "I don't remember anything like that at all," McDaniel notes, "I would have found it surprising... I would have remembered, I think." While these stories do not refute the assertions by AFVN disc jockeys that "unauthorized" songs were played over AFVN airwaves, it does bring into perspective how often these songs made the shows.

There was one exception to this lack of recollection. Eugene Lenyk does remember hearing protest music in Vietnam, but not over AFVN.

> Now and then someone new would come in with recent tapes from Stateside or back from *r and r* that could have qualified as "protest music." The accompanying stories about stuff at home that was somehow connected to the music were upsetting... but not the tunes themselves.[49]

The most interesting part of Lenyk's recollection may not be that he heard protest music, but that it was not upsetting. It is interesting to note that the music did not have an adverse affect on Lenyk's morale, at least not to the same extent of the stories that accompanied the music. This indicates that protest music may not have been capable of having as direct an impact on the morale of soldiers as one may think.

Officers vs. Enlisted Men. As mentioned earlier, previous research indicates that music was a main cause of disagreements between officers and enlisted men. However, the interviews that were conducted for this paper provide no support for this assertion. Many respondents stated that they could not provide any information regarding this question. This was due to the fact that they only spent time with enlisted men. When asked about music causing conflict between officers and enlisted men, Eugene Lenyk commented, "I don't really know what our officers listened to beyond the occasional USO shows that toured through our area when we all

[49] *R and r* refers to "rest and relaxation." Soldiers had time off periodically during their tours.

listened and partied together; so, no conflict that I can recall." Bruce McDaniel noted that he, "didn't sense a difference in terms of the NCO's and other people, but the actual officers, it's hard for me to say."[50] Peter Galle remembered how strange he found it that, "There was no music played in NCO or Officers clubs." These observations brings into question whether or not officers cared about music at all, let alone whether it served to separate them from enlisted men.

Two respondents, however, were able to give a little more information regarding this issue. First Lieutenant Paul Womack, when asked about the differences in musical taste between officers and enlisted men, and the impact it had on interaction between the two groups, downplayed the importance of music.

> If there was any difference, it might have been an age difference. The officers in their thirties in those days would have been really old guys. I was only twenty-two and I was three years older than the enlisted me that worked for me... I think there was a generational tension, and there were racial tensions when I was there... The music didn't cause the tension, the music might have reflected some of the other realities that created the tensions.

In other words music, in some cases, may have been one of the symptoms of the disease, but seldom, if ever, was it the disease itself. Being an officer, Womack's own recollections of listening to rock 'n' roll in Vietnam, serve to support the downplaying of its importance as a divisive force between officers and enlisted men.[51]

Gary Kenyon seems to confirm the idea of the generational difference between officers and enlisted men being the most important factor in their relations. Kenyon summed up his memories concerning officers in one sentence. "I didn't hang with any officers." However, upon further thought, Kenyon did recall a time when age was noticeably divisive between the two groups.

[50] NCO stands for Non-Commissioned Officer. The men had roles such as platoon leaders. While these were not true officers, many of them were lifers and had many things in common with officers.
[51] Refer to page twenty-five for quote.

> The juke box would be a mixture of old country and western songs that the lifers liked and newer rock 'n' roll that the younger people liked. So we used to go in and put on Jefferson Airplane like ten times in a row, or "Revolution" by the Beatles ten times in a row, just to dominate the juke box and piss the lifers off.

Kenyon would most likely agree with Womack that the music was more coincidental than anything. Kenyon maintained that, in general, morale as it related to the interactions of American soldiers was a, "funny thing."[52]

Front vs. Rear. A topic that was also raised by previous research was whether Vietnam Veterans who served at the front had been exposed to as much music as those in the rear. The answer to this question would appear to be "no." However, this is not to say that music did not reach front-line soldiers. AFVN Veteran Paul Parker is adamant in his belief that music was important to front-line soldiers.

> ...radio was always playing when possible [in the front lines]- you remember the pocket box portables and some of the larger battery-operated units of the times... they had them inside boats, ships, tanks, APC's, even the amo holder from the M14 was used to keep a radio in. You would give anything to get an earpiece model- so you could listen without Charlie (or the officers) hearing it.

While Parker acknowledges the fear of the music being heard at the front, he maintains that soldiers listened whenever they could.[53] It is also important to remember that people on boats, ships, choppers or in tanks were in very different situations from those on foot in the jungle. A helicopter or tank could be heard coming with or without music playing while an experienced foot

[52] Kenyon told a story about his interactions with other soldiers which illustrates how the role of music as divisive could be considered more coincidental than at the heart of the problem. "There were a lot of young guys like myself. So there was almost a little war going on with career people, ya know. Lifers, we called 'em... I remember I had one boss and he insisted on having shined shoes. 'Not in a war zone, I told him...' There was one huge mud puddle right outside the gate of the compound I worked in and I used to make it a point to walk right up the middle of it."

[53] Parker's beliefs are supported by anecdotal evidence from Jason Mata, a college student who subscribes to the AFVN mailing list through which many of the interviews I conducted were done. Mata volunteered stories he has heard from Vietnam Veterans he knows. "My old boss was in Marine Recon in Vietnam," Mata states, "and he said music was especially important to the guys in the field. Another guy at my work was a door gunner on a Marine SAR helicopter and he told me that they had speakers on the helicopter and when they were flying around they would blast Black Sabbath."

soldier could be very close to the enemy without being spotted.

Perhaps this question was best put into perspective (at least as it relates to the infantry), by Bruce McDaniel. McDaniel, for the sake of simplicity, divided Vietnam into three types of locations, the rear, the field-mobile, and the field-stationary. The rear was any area away from the front lines of fighting. In contrast, the field mobile was at the heart of the fighting where soldiers were constantly on the move. The field stationary was something of a middle ground between the two. If you were in the field, but stationary, this meant that you were near or in the fighting, but you were in one location, like a set of sandbag bunkers, for example.

According to McDaniel, the easiest place to listen to music, was of course, in the rear. "Where I am more aware of hearing music," according to McDaniel, "was when we were rotated back to the rear and we were at an aid station. Some people had their own tape recorders... in the rear you could have that kind of stuff." McDaniel also remembers having heard music at stationary locations out in the field. In fact, this is where McDaniel first remembers hearing country and western music.

McDaniel's memories about being on the move in the field, however, differ from his memories of being in fixed positions.

> I really can't remember people listening to radios or tape recorders or anything when we were really in the field... for one thing, you don't want to carry anything you don't absolutely have to, so, you're gonna leave all your tape recorders and stuff somewhere else. Plus, you don't want a lot of racket going on, certainly at night. I mean, the idea of being on an ambush and turning a radio on would be crazy.

This statement not only differs from McDaniel's memories about stationary field areas, but it also differs from Parker, who recalls no such distinctions about the front in his comments. While both of these men are likely correct in regards to what they saw, these contrasting stories indicate that there was a noticeable difference between soldiers at the front and soldiers at the rear in

regards to their exposure to music. The degree of difference likely depended on the situation of individual units.

Morale. Arguably, the most important question about music in Vietnam is how it affected the morale of American soldiers. Helmer, building upon the work of Michael Herr, attacked this question indirectly when he put forth his theory that American soldiers in Vietnam could be divided into four groups. This model, however, may be very oversimplified, according to former AFVN disc jockey Bob Morecook. "I have heard the division of Vietnam Vets into these groups before," Morecook says, "-and as typologies go, there is a BIT of truth to it- but anytime you deal in types certain elements of truth are omitted." In fact, other than the repeated distaste some had for lifers, none of these terms or distinctions are referred to by any of the veterans interviewed for this study. This is not to say that these observations are incorrect, but that they are over-simplified. It is also the case that Herr focused his research on a particular unit of Marines with which he traveled. This may also have affected their findings when one attempts to look at a broader cross-section of Vietnam Veterans.

As it turns out, the effects of music on American morale vary somewhat. When asked about the effects of music on morale, a couple of Veterans played down its importance. For example, Gary Kenyon maintains that music was merely "recreational." Lieutenant Paul Womack also seemed to think music had little impact on him. "It probably didn't affect me very much one way or the other," Womack says, "It seems to me that the enlisted men had a better sense of camaraderie." Womack seemed to think that music could have played some role in the camaraderie the enlisted men felt.

It would appear that the enlisted men agree with Womack. One common theme that emerges from speaking with Veterans is that music was a morale builder, in that it helped to keep American soldiers connected to "the world." "Music was a morale builder and preserver because

it helped keep us from forgetting the world back home," Fred Elliott maintains, "I think the two most important things about music in Vietnam were that it gave us a common bond and allowed us to be back [home] for a few moments while listening or singing along." Lenyk agrees with Elliott and adds, "...the music helped dull the ache of being so far from home... it was something familiar from home to grab hold of." Though he doubts music's effect on officers, Lieutenant Womack does concur, in part, with Elliot and Lenyk.

> We all felt like something had been taken away from us... I think what the music would have done would have been to connect people roughly the same generation with each other in Vietnam, but it would also have served as a way of connecting them to the people back in the States. A lot of the mail that people got was on cassettes... sometimes there was music on the cassettes. Sometimes people would record their letters with music in the background.

Despite slight differences in perspective, almost everyone seemed to agree that music provided a valuable escape from Vietnam, if only for a short time. Perhaps Bruce McDaniel put it in the simplest way when he noted, "It may have been something other than the war to think about."

In addition to the flight from the war, Womack mentioned briefly that music connected, "people roughly the same generation in Vietnam." This was also a recurring theme in discussions with American Veterans. Elliott noted that, "It was one thing we could all share and have in common." Eugene Lenyk expanded Elliot's observation to include the bridging of racial differences. "The music was a tremendous help in overcoming the loneliness," Lenyk recalled. "In my case the music helped me bond with a lot of the black guys in my outfit."

McDaniel also found music important as it applied to his somewhat unique situation as a medic. While McDaniel's situation may have been unique, his anecdote proves very thought-provoking in many different respects.

> My first thought was that it really didn't make much difference, one way or the other. But when I think about it more, that may not have been true... in the rear I was with other medics... when

> I was in the field, I was one of four medics in the company... I had a very unique role and I tended to relate to people in terms of that role. Then I came back to the rear and everybody was a medic... you relate more to people as individuals... but it seems like the people I was with in the rear, when I was having something more like normal friendships with people, that there was a lot of soul music in the background going on. So, maybe in some subtle way, it did help out with the morale, maybe in a way I didn't appreciate at the time.

Even when music wasn't the topic of conversation, it was around. It served as a medium for people to relate to each other on a personal level. Even if two individuals developed a friendship based around other factors, McDaniel's observation makes one wonder how many of those friendships started because a few guys were sitting around with a radio on. The subtlety McDaniel referred to indicates that music may have been more important to some soldiers than they now recall. His words make one question how many interesting stories about music in Vietnam and the relationships it played a part in may have been forgotten over the last thirty years.

McDaniel's comments also serve to further explain why officers and enlisted men did not interact much. Like McDaniel's men reacted to him as a medic in the field, enlisted men likely related to officers solely in terms of their rank and power over them. This further explains why, regardless of music, personal interactions between officers and enlisted men were limited.

It is clear that music had positive effects on morale in Vietnam. While it served to bring many people together, however, it also seems to have played a role in separating people as well. For example, Eugene Lenyk repented that, in addition to music bringing him closer to the African-American members of his unit, music being was a divisive force as well.

> Some of us would get together and harmonize with the Tams or the Temps or Sam and Dave and just got mellow together. Some of the other guys who crooned along to Grand Ole Opry hits stayed separate. That may have had more to do with other cultural imperatives and the music was coincidental, in my opinion.

Peter Galle also saw music as a consequence of differences amongst individuals and groups when he was in Vietnam in 1966. Galle remembered one particular instance which involved some advisors and a young, black sergeant.

> Most of the people in our headquarters were Military Assistance Command advisors- types of military personnel that spoke Vietnamese and were intelligent and were highly trained and had more education than the average grunt. One day, I was walking passed a group of tables where, suddenly, I was pulled down into a chair where the only music playing was a jazz tape that the black sergeant had- the white soldiers hated jazz- they came in from the field living initially six months in the field with only Vietnamese and later that reduced to three months at a time. The advisors only listened to Vietnamese music and jazz was more of a black type of music. They told me in no uncertain terms the music was terrible and too loud and asked me to get music that they wanted to hear.

Through this story, one sees the tensions, not only between lifers and young guys, but between different races, expressed through differences in musical choice. Galle also noted that, "[Music] caused guys to hate the Vietnamese through not understanding their music." This would seem, once again, to be a case where musical differences were a symptom of an overall cultural or generational gap between different groups of people within the Vietnam landscape.

VIETNAM'S ORIGINAL MUSIC

An examination of popular music is critical in looking at the effects of music in Vietnam. This does not, however, complete such an analysis. It is also important to take a look at the music produced by American soldiers themselves while in Vietnam. While it is true that none of these songs were mentioned by respondents in interviews for this paper, looking at music that grew out of the war itself is helpful in focusing on the role that music played in the lives of soldiers in country.

Methods of Recording and Distribution

Two factors were crucial for the production and distribution of music created by

American troops in Vietnam. The first of these was a stable location at which to work. Such environments were provided by Air Force bases and helicopter unit headquarters. As a result, songs written and performed by fellow soldiers became central in the lives of many pilots, who often made tapes of these songs.[54] Tapes were the second crucial part of the production and distribution of this music. The presence of tape recorders is what permitted this music to spread to the relatively small extent that they did. Some of these bands actually became very popular in certain sections of Vietnam.

Content and Purpose of Songs

The songs that American soldiers wrote and performed served a variety of different functions. Some of these were purely recreational. These songs were often written about daily activities and parts of their lives, such as helicopters and the things they missed from home. Some Americans even wrote songs from the viewpoint of the enemy, such as the drivers who drove on the Ho Chi Minh Trail.[55] One such song was written by a pilot named Toby Hughes in 1968. While thinking about a bombing run, Hughes wrote, "We feel a bit sorry for the folks down below / Of destruction that's coming they surely don't know. / The thought passes quickly; we know a war's on, / As on down we scream toward peaceful Tchepone."[56]

At other times, men wrote songs to lift their spirits and unite soldiers behind a common cause or goal. The following song, entitled "First Cav" is an example of one of those songs.

> First Team, First Cav,
> Black and yellow patch.
> It's the greatest fighting team there is,
> No other one can match.
> First Team, First Cav,
> Always number one.
> No matter what the job may be,
> The Cav will get it done.

[54] Cleveland, 141.
[55] Fish. *In Country: Songs of Americans in the Vietnam War.* (Buffalo:Vietnam Veterans Oral History, 1992) 10-40.
[56] Fish, 19.

This was one of the most popular songs ever recorded by American soldiers in Vietnam; over thirty thousand recordings of it were made and given out to U.S. troops.[57] One can imagine a song like this working in a similar manner to a college fight song. It provided a sense of pride to all of those who were associated with the First Cav and, through that sense of pride, brought the men together.

While these were popular themes of original works by American soldiers, perhaps the most common theme in Vietnam original music was the venting of frustration. This is a need that every soldier in Vietnam had and music allowed these men to vent together. These songs took many forms. Some, like this parody of "I Want a Girl" (1965) expressed a general hatred of the war.

> I want a war, just like the war
> That mutilated dear old Dad;
> It was the war, and the only war
> That Daddy ever had;
> A good old-fashioned war
> That was so cruel,
> But we all abided by Geneva rules
> Hey!
> I want a war, just like the war
> That mutilated dear old Dad.[58]

Other songs expressed frustration at particular aspects of the war. For example, soldiers at the front often sang about their hatred for troops in the rear. One of the most popular of these songs was called, "The Lousy Lance Corporal." One verse of this song reads,

> Now a lousy lance corporal said, "Pardon me please,
> You've mud on your tunic and blood on your sleeve,
> If you don't wipe it off all the people will laugh"
> Said the lousy lance corporal on headquarters' staff.[59]

In fact, the Australians involved in Vietnam liked this song so much, they soon added their own

[57] Fish, 14.
[58] Cleveland, 135.
[59] Cleveland, 111.

lyrics to it.

While these songs may have unified soldiers, this wasn't necessarily done in a positive manner. If these songs had been a part of popular culture, they could easily have been looked upon as protest music. However, the fact that these songs were written by men actually in Vietnam, and not the people at home that those men were told they were fighting for, would likely have placed them in a different light for the men who heard them. With these songs, the men who were complaining had first hand experience regarding what they were complaining about and were the ones doing the work, not the ones reaping the supposed benefits of the war and serving as the soldiers' motivation to do their perilous labor.

A final type of song written by American soldiers were political in nature. These often took issue with the war itself, or the way in which the war was being fought. One of the most popular of these was written by Dolf Droge to the music of the Marines' Hymn.

> From the shores of the Perdisales
> We have come to fight VC.
> But to win you must remember
> Do not burn the banana tree,
> For the farmer leads a wretched life
> Less than fifty bucks a year;
> Your napalm bomb he doesn't like,
> From his life you must remove fear;
> But if you burn huts and shoot buffalo,
> Just remember what it means,
> You are working then for Uncle Ho
> Not United States Marines.[60]

This song points out a huge problem that American forces faced in Vietnam. Since everyone in Vietnam could be a Viet Cong, search and destroy missions often hurt the people that the United States was supposedly there to help. It is no wonder, with its satire of the Marines' Hymn, that this parody was quite popular among U.S. troops.

[60] Cleveland, 140.

CONCLUSIONS

When examining the topic of music in the Vietnam War, one realizes that, as Paul Womack said, "Everybody's story is different." These differences are not limited to the troops at the front versus those at the rear, or officers versus enlisted men. The story of a soldier in one part of the jungle of Vietnam can differ completely from the story of a soldier in another part of the jungle, despite the fact that both are at the front. In many places, there were no real lines in Vietnam; it was a country consumed by war. Soldiers at the rear were often separated by unsecured areas which kept them from moving back and forth on a regular basis. These characteristics make the Vietnam War unique.

Interviews with Vietnam Veterans, from both AFVN and the Rochester-area, nevertheless, do yield patterns. These patterns are useful in discerning the overall impact of music on American troops in Vietnam. Not only are these findings interesting to the historian, but they may be of interest to nations who wage war in the future, and will be forced to deal with media such as music, either by clarifying a problem the United States had or leaving a fear of problems that could arise.

Officers vs. Enlisted Men

It may, in fact, be the case that the majority of officers did not listen to the same predominantly rock 'n' roll music that enlisted men did, as previous research suggests. However, it is an overstatement to maintain that music divided officers and enlisted men. Officers and enlisted men did not form tight relations in Vietnam regardless of the music to which they listened. This is mostly a result of a generational gap between the thirty-something officers and the young enlisted men who belonged to the "rock 'n' roll generation, as it was termed by Gary Kenyon. The fact that they were forced to relate to each other as officers and enlisted men, and not just people (as they could within their own groups), likely added to the tension created by

the age difference. This can be deducted from Bruce McDaniel's story about his relations to other members of his unit when he was a medic.[61]

Musical differences may have been a result of this generational difference, but they were hardly the root of the problem. It is not even clear that it was a problem at all in the rear, where both officers and enlisted men partied at USO shows. There are some indications that it may have been a problem on the front, both in this study and in previous research. However, it is unclear whether this is because of the genre of the music or the mere fact that officers did not like men listening to music in the field.

Front vs. Rear

McDaniel's breakdown of the war into three different "zones" helps to explain why veterans from the front may tell contradictory stories. Measuring the musical influence on soldiers at the front versus at the rear is the best illustration of how soldiers in similar situations can have different stories. The fact that many men shared time at both the front and the rear during their tours of duty may play a role in further confusing the memories of these individuals in regards to where, specifically, they were exposed to certain types of music.

It is clear, however, that men at the front did not receive the same level of exposure to music as those in the rear. This may further explain the resentment that many front-line soldiers felt for their rear echelon counterparts. The fact that music and television were so readily available in the rear relative to the front must have made the rear look like a vacation spot to the men out in the jungle. While this image may not have been accurate, it would have seemed rational enough to men who could not even listen to the radio for fear of death at the hand of the enemy.

[61] Refer to pages thirty-two and thirty-three for McDaniel's story.

Morale

Overall Effects of Music. Any contention that music damaged the morale of the American soldier in Vietnam and, in some way, contributed to the "loss" of the war is not supported by the evidence. The impact of music on the morale U.S. troops in Vietnam was overwhelmingly positive. Music gave the soldiers a direct tie to home. It also provided them a medium with which to interact with other solders from different states, races, and socioeconomic backgrounds on a personal, rather than a professional level. Music provided a recreational environment and served to both relieve boredom and calm nerves.

It can be further concluded that the negative impact of any protest music soldiers heard was minimal. It is interesting to note that the one individual from the Rochester area who did recall hearing protest music in Vietnam wasn't affected as much by the music itself as by the stories from home that he heard with it. This fact, coupled with the joke Bob Morecook tells about the Kent State killings (in reference to the song "Ohio") indicates that even the small amount of protest music that American troops did hear in Vietnam had no measurable derogatory effect on American soldiers. In fact, some of this protest music may have provided enjoyment for the troops.[62]

The Four Types of GI Theory. The theory put forth by John Helmer, in which music served as a divisive force between juicers and heads does not hold up under this analysis. Not only are the categories he puts forth oversimplified, but there is no evidence that music created rifts between the average American soldier in Vietnam and his counterparts to the extent that Helmer maintains. This is an indication that his sample was not representative of Vietnam Veterans as a whole.

In some cases, music did have a negative impact on the collective morale of American

[62] Refer to pages twenty-seven and thirteen, respectively, for these quotes.

soldiers. As with officers and enlisted men, however, music was only a symptom of greater problems. American culture has many different components. There was no way that every group of American soldiers was going to get along with every other group of American soldiers in Vietnam. Musical taste was just one difference that divided groups such as blacks and whites, and southerners and northerners.

The absence of music in Vietnam would have damaged morale far more than it possibly could have helped. Soldiers were better off having music to unite them with some of their peers at the cost of facilitating their separation from others than they would have been having no music to help bind them to any of their comrades. The price the military paid for soldiers having ready access to music was far outweighed by the benefits that music brought into the ranks.

Soldiers' Original Music

The presence and content of American soldiers' original music serves to further prove the points made in the rest of this analysis. It is logical to assume that American troops in Vietnam would not write songs that would depress them. There was, after all, plenty to be depressed about in Vietnam without adding music. It may surprise some, then, that many of these songs could be classified as protest music, had they been written by civilians.

Then again, maybe that should be exactly what we expect. Interviews show that music helped to build the morale of American troops. However, the evidence also shows that very little of the music heard by the average Vietnam soldier was protest music. This left soldiers who were unhappy in Vietnam with few musical outlets for their frustration. One of these outlets, as it turns out, was the lyrical work of their fellow troops.

Does this mean that the Armed Forces were wrong to try to filter out popular protest music? Probably not. After all, the sources of popular protest music and original soldiers' protest music are very different. As Eugene Lenyk pointed out, while the music may

not have been upsetting, the stories that accompanied the music were. If popular protest music spread through Vietnam as it spread through the United States, it is reasonable to believe that it would have facilitated the spread of these stories from home as well. Protest music that originated with American soldiers, however, came from a source that knew the true horrors of war; it came from a fellow soldier. A soldier would be better able to identify with the motivations of one of their comrades writing an anti-war song than those of a civilian. A civilian, after all, should have been grateful for the service American boys were providing and not trying to undermine their efforts, as many felt war protesters did. For this reason, protest music that originated with soldiers in country was not the same as popular protest music.

FINAL THOUGHTS

There is still much more research that can be done on this topic. A large scale project including many more interviews and a trip to the Library of Congress could reveal a great deal more detail and more patterns to the musical experiences of American troops in Vietnam. As time goes by, this information becomes more difficult to find. Memories fade, and veterans pass on. On the other hand, more classified documents also become available on such topics as censorship and unauthorized broadcasting. Further work on this topic could yield fascinating results, and enable us to better understand the experiences of the men who fought for their country in the Vietnam War.

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