

AFVN Engineering

This is an effort to identify and create a record of some of the less known happenings involving AFVN engineering during the time I was assigned there (i.e., Sept 71 - May 72). I arrived about September 1st, of 1971 to replace MSG George Elliot and work under CWO Seeger. MSG Elliot left shortly after my arrival and CWO Seeger left in several weeks. CWO Seeger's replacement was CWO Gilbert MacDonald one of the few television warrant officers, he held MOS 285A. Without hyperbole it is easy to state that working with Gilbert MacDonald was the most pleasurable superior/subordinate relationship I have ever had. Facilitating this was the fact that we pretty much shared the same values and approaches to both life and problem solving. This was a situation never again repeated, to that degree, in my Army or civilian careers.

One of the more interesting and unsung jobs of the engineers was setting-up the Pentagon audio feed for the daily press conference hosted by MACV at the National Press Center near, if I remember correctly, the long, white JUSPAO building. Daily, the entire Saigon press establishment would be found there for the MACV briefing. Prior to the start of the briefing AFVN engineers hooked-up and tested the circuit used for the feed. Following the briefing, the engineers would take down the circuit prior to going off duty. This story is second hand: one day the press corps decided to test the system and challenge the "no camera/photos" rule. One person (CBS I think) came in to the briefing with an obvious, but prohibited, camera. The MACV briefer made a terse observation of the presence of the camera and terminated the briefing. The media had next to nothing to file that day.

Can-Tho Television. I don't know when the Can Tho translator was pulled down but it was certainly defunct and unmanned at the beginning of November '71. Gil MacDonald wanted to re-establish TV service for the remaining DRAC area troops so we went down, with the antenna team (all Vietnamese), and put up a fairly high tower with a high gain receiving antenna. After getting the antenna/tower up, we brought the antenna team back to Saigon. One must bear in mind that good reception for the Can Tho translator would require 400' towers at both ends of the transmission with no serious obstacles. Predictably the operation was marginal. So, shortly after the returning to Saigon I went back alone to Can Tho with test equipment and tweaked up the translator the best that I could and then drove around the greater Can Tho area, both day and night, with a Hitachi (D cell powered) TV resting on the Jeep passenger seat, satisfying myself that Can Tho again had TV (translator) service. The Translator site was located in the corner of the Can Tho Air Base not far from the POW compound (although on the other side of the wire). Shortly thereafter we assigned an Army SSG (Barclay maybe?) to Can Tho to keep the translator in operation. Service, at best, was doomed by the geography to be marginal.

Bob Hope Christmas Special. In many respects this was the prima engineering event of the year. CWO MacDonald and myself attended the advance party briefing at USARV Hqs (Long Binh) about a month prior. Posted at the entrance to the auditorium where the briefing was to be held was a large sign: "No Guns Allowed Inside" or something to that effect. Gil MacDonald looked at me with that "you're not going to turn over your (under the shirt) 45, are you?" He got back a "do I really look that stupid" expression.

I had been pretty excited about the Hope Show but was quickly disillusioned by the briefing. The advance man introduced himself as having been with Mr. Hope for an incredibly long time which I don't exactly remember, but think he said some twenty years; he clearly stated that he was putting out the definitive rules for Mr. Hope's show. Most notable of the rules/guidelines (bear in mind the attendees were mostly USARV commissioned officers) were: "Mr Hope does not wish to meet with the troops but will accept gifts such as hats, vests, and the like from them - he gets a kick out of such things. However, Mr Hope does enjoy meeting with general officers, particularly in a club environment". "This is a multi-million dollar production and we do not want anyone taking either amateur or professional motion pictures of the performances! (AFVN was excluded, of course)" This last point was really accentuated to the degree that today's federal alphabet agency video movie copyright warnings seem like a friendly greeting. He reiterated that this tour was a multi-million dollar production that they did not wish compromised by amateur movies. I am sorry but the overall attitude was such that I had no desire to be part of the Hope show.

Essential to a really professional production of the Hope Show would be use of the THVN's mobile Hitachi van which had a much greater mobile capability than we could fabricate with our on-hand equipment (Remember Sony's wonderful beta-max based one-man mobile unit was new and not in the AFRTS inventory). The THVN Director was under strict orders that the van would not leave its garage without the personal approval of President Thieu. We met in the THVN director's office and elicited his support; shortly thereafter President Thieu approved the loan. One must remember that without the van the production would have been many times more difficult and probably far less successful. The television engineering brains behind the actual production was, as always, SFC Harry West. I opted out of the Hope show and joined my family in Taiwan (they were command sponsored) for Christmas. The AFVN production was a success although the Hope tour itself was far less successful, leaving Vietnam prior to its completion.

1972 Ali-Foster fight. Broadcast ops came up with the idea that they would send a sportscaster to Tokyo for the fight if we (engineering) could get a live circuit from the ring to Saigon. Given the troop pulldown, obtaining a low priority circuit (yes, AFRTS circuits are not a Defense Communications System priority) on an emergency basis was a distinct possibility. DCA-SAM (located at Tan Son Nhut), assured me the TSR (telecommunications service request) would be priority processed and the TSO (telecom service order) would be forthcoming in plenty of

time for the match. The circuit was up with time to spare and Vietnam had live coverage of the fight by an AFVN (AF) S/Sgt whose name I do not remember.

Backing up in time a little bit. The troop reductions which began somewhat slowly in the summer of 1971 were the death knell for a continued extensive AFRTS presence in the Republic of Vietnam. Fall brought significant troop reductions and increased emphasis on Vietnamization. My movement to AFVN from USARV had been a direct result of the U.S. pulldown (I transferred after acceptance by AFVN).

Much of the engineering mission during my tour would be focused on turning over AFVN facilities and equipment to others. For the most part, the others, would be the government of Vietnam (GOV) but CORDS/JUSPAO would have some interest in using surplus equipment and facilities for PSYOP/PSYWAR. To this end we (engineering staff) were tasked to facilitate the turnover of some facilities, to relocate some equipment and associated capabilities, and to coordinate with Ministry of Information representatives. It should be noted that the Lodge Treaty between the U.S. and GVN allowed the U.S. to undertake broadcasting in country, but mandated that all broadcasting equipment brought into the country would be subject to a GVN option to retain it when we no longer used it. In short, GVN could have all AFVN equipment if they wanted it.

On a coordination/evaluation trip to various locations including, Da Nang, Nha Trang, Pleiku, Hue, we (MacDonald/Turner/LaMonica) met in Nha Trang with Jerry or Gerry Novick (John Paul Van's deputy) and Gary Morley (the PPA). Mr. Novick had us over to his beautiful home in which he, his wife and mother-in-law resided. Later that evening we all (except the very elderly mother-in-law) dined at a local restaurant (Le Frigette?). The most interesting occurrence of the trip was at the restaurant: the Ambassador grade (FSOI-1*) Cords Deputy (Novick), after considerable "spirits" ingestion, bellowed loudly: "look at the Paks wolfing down all that chow, the heroin business must have been great this week" - diplomacy isn't always smooth. Cords had hopes of having an unmanned FM satellite station installed, but it did not materialize due to potential interference with their existing operational radio communications and lack of an alternative location.

Sometime in early 1972 we (MacDonald and I) had a coordination meeting one evening with President Thieu's legal counsel at the Continental Palace Hotel Restaurant. At that evening meeting it was arranged that President Thieu would personally sign travel orders for our Vietnamese antenna team thus greatly facilitating the team's travel which was usually quite difficult (in-country travel was very, very different for a Vietnamese, even when employed by Americans, when compared to U.S. Forces). We agreed to install a small TV broadcast facility in a Presidential Palace closet for contingency use. During our conversation a USA military police sergeant and a Vietnamese policeman approached our table and asked if we were military; this was, no doubt, due to the fact we were in civilian clothes. Chief MacDonald and I produced our AFVN IDs that had a civilian



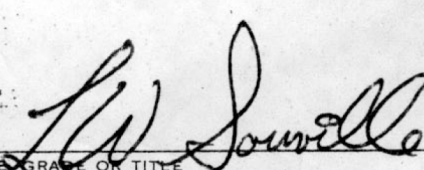
clothing duty wear authorization on the back which elicited a challenge from the MP that “you are not on duty so are not authorized civilian clothes wear”. At the same time the GVN policeman (aka bleached rodent) was frantically trying to get the MP’s attention by literally pulling on his sleeve telling him that the Vietnamese with us has a “palace pass” - it was almost comic. Eventually, the Vietnamese policeman prevailed and the MP gave up the pursuit, so to speak. Sometime thereafter an economy TV studio with both audio and video input to a modified TV Translator (Ch 96 perhaps?) was installed in a Presidential Palace closet by CWO MacDonald and SFC Harry West. Possibly we forgot to get command permission for the installation. There was a rumor from Saigon after the fall that a very serious ARVN officer, probably a Lieutenant Lam from THVN, drove the NVA crazy broadcasting from a palace closet for over 24 hours asking for the civilian population to raise up against the invaders. Courage, pointless or not, is always admired by soldiers.

I’m sure that my aged memory has warped a date or detail somewhere above, but certainly not intentionally. Ron Turner

*FSO followed by a number is the grade of a foreign service officer. The lower the number, the higher the rank. At one time an FSO-0 was ambassador rank, but (probably as the result of jokes: “FSO nothing/zero”) was rescaled to FSO-1. An I following FSO indicates (at that time) a USIA/USIS rating. Many of the FSO ratings in RVN, particularly those found outside the formal State Department apparatus, were restricted to Vietnam and adjacent area service only.

REQUEST AND AUTHORIZATION FOR MILITARY PERSONNEL TDY TRAVEL

(AR 310-10)

1. TYPE OF TRAVEL ORDERS <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> TDY. UCMR PROPER STA. <input type="checkbox"/> CONFIRMATORY ORDERS <input type="checkbox"/> VERBAL ORDERS DATE CONFIRMED _____				
2. NAME OF REQUESTING OFFICE American Forces Vietnam Network, APO 96309			3. TELEPHONE EXT. T4130	4. DATE 12Dec71
5. FIRST NAME - MIDDLE INITIAL - LAST NAME	GRADE	SERVICE NO. / SOCIAL SECURITY ACCT NO.	ARM OR SERVICE	SECURITY CLEARANCE
GILBERT L. MACDONALD	CW3		A	SECRET
SAMUEL E. WALLER	CW4		A	SECRET
RONALD L. TURNER	SFC		A	SECRET
6. ORGANIZATION AND STATION AFVN, APO 96309		9. ITINERARY <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> CIPAP SGN-CRB-QNH-DNG-HUE-DNG-SGN		
7. TO PROCEED O/A 13Dec71	8. APPROXIMATE NUMBER OF DAYS 7			
10. PURPOSE OF TEMPORARY DUTY Emergency Re-location and Engineering of AFVN Facilities				
11. TRANSPORTATION AUTHORIZED <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> COMMON CARRIER <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> AIR <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> SURFACE <input type="checkbox"/> WATER <input type="checkbox"/> AS DETERMINED BY TRANSPORTATION OFFICER <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> GOVERNMENT OWNED <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> VEHICLE <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> AIRCRAFT <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> VESSEL <input type="checkbox"/> TRAVEL BY PRIVATE AUTOMOBILE AUTHORIZED AS MORE ADVANTAGEOUS TO THE GOVERNMENT				
12. QUOTA SOURCE CODE FOR ATTENDANCE AT SERVICE SCHOOLS				
13. REMARKS (Use this space for special requirements, delay, authority for issuance; names of dependents, designation as courier, superior accommodations, excess baggage, etc.) <p>2A Travel Priority is authorized</p> <p>Use of government messing facilities in the Qui Nhon areas is detrimental to mission performance.</p>				
14. ADMINISTRATIVE APPROVAL		FOR USE OF APPROVING OFFICE ONLY		
 R. H. LAFRANCE, CPT, USA, Admin Officer (Name, grade or title)		16. AGENCY AFVN, APO 96309		18. DATE 12Dec71
15. FISCAL APPROVAL (Chargeable to)		17. ORDER NUMBER/REFERENCE MACV LO 11-1442, 11-1278, 1022433		18. DATE 12Dec71
2122020 80-001006.10000 S92118 (NOOE. 2110.01) OA 12-72-MV-003  NAME, GRADE OR TITLE R. H. LAFRANCE, CPT, USA, Admin Officer		19. APPROVED, TRAVEL TO BE PERFORMED IS NECESSARY IN THE PUBLIC SERVICE, WP.  NAME, GRADE OR TITLE LW SOUVILLE, LTC, USA, OIC		