

# U.S. Armed Forces Radio Stations in Postwar **Japan** and **Korea**

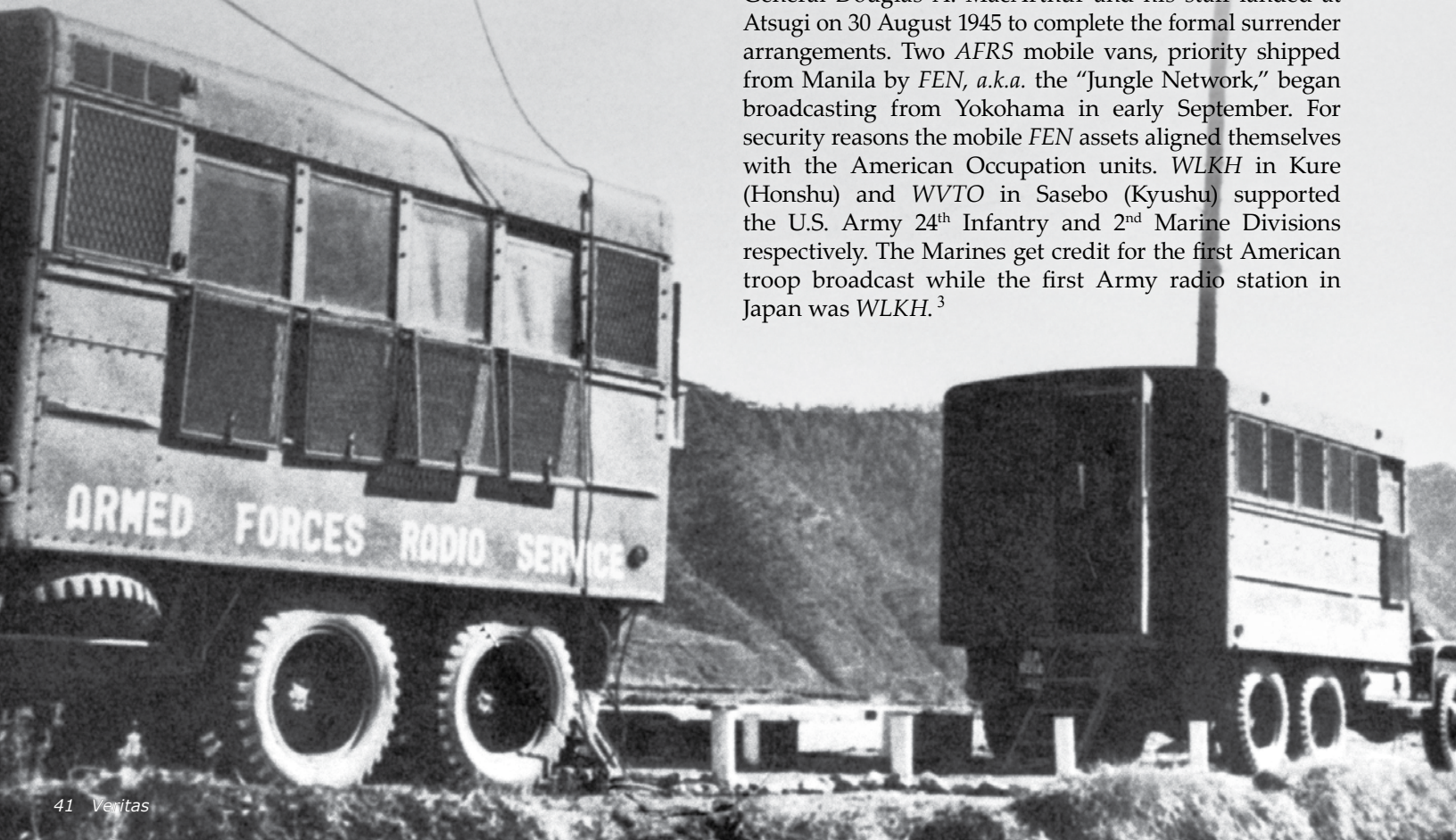
by Charles H. Briscoe

The broadcast van of AFKN Station "Gypsy" (below, left) near Hwach'on contained two short-wave receivers, two dual-speed turntables, an amplifier for live broadcasts, a transmitter, console, microphone, tape recorder, record library of 35,000 popular music hits, and an antenna support. Note the directional "clothesline" antenna.

Psywar did not fill a void in radio broadcasting in Korea during the war. The American military occupation commands had taken control of all media in Japan and Korea. The *Armed Forces Radio Service (AFRS)* followed U.S. forces assigned occupation duty. *AFRS* employed mobile radio vans and commandeered Japanese stations on the mainland, Korea, the Marianas, and the Ryukyus. When Far East Command (FECOM) G-2 Psywar broadcast to Korea from Japan after the war broke out, it was done on the *Far East Network (FEN)* headquartered in the *Radio Tokyo* building.<sup>1</sup>

The 4<sup>th</sup> Mobile Radio Broadcasting Company (MRBC), 1<sup>st</sup> Radio Broadcasting and Leaflet Group (RB&L) team was sent to Pusan in August 1951 to take charge of the *Korean Broadcasting System (KBS)* station in the port and to coordinate its refurbishment in order to serve as the "Voice of South Korea." While this was a cooperative U.S.-Korea venture, the American military was clearly in charge, paying reconstruction and equipment replacement costs, and training *KBS* personnel.<sup>2</sup> U.S. radio operations in Japan began after August 1945.

American radio broadcasting started shortly after General Douglas A. MacArthur and his staff landed at Atsugi on 30 August 1945 to complete the formal surrender arrangements. Two *AFRS* mobile vans, priority shipped from Manila by *FEN*, a.k.a. the "Jungle Network," began broadcasting from Yokohama in early September. For security reasons the mobile *FEN* assets aligned themselves with the American Occupation units. *WLKH* in Kure (Honshu) and *WVTO* in Sasebo (Kyushu) supported the U.S. Army 24<sup>th</sup> Infantry and 2<sup>nd</sup> Marine Divisions respectively. The Marines get credit for the first American troop broadcast while the first Army radio station in Japan was *WLKH*.<sup>3</sup>





Aerial view of the Pusan waterfront, ca. 1953.  
4th Mobile Radio Broadcasting Company (MRBC) personnel sent to Pusan in August 1951 took over the *Korean Broadcasting System (KBS)* station in the port.

NHK (*Nippon Hoso Kyokai*) or the *Japan Broadcasting System*, ceased operations on 10 September 1945 after Emperor Hirohito announced the end of the war to citizens abroad from *Radio Tokyo*.<sup>4</sup> Less than two weeks later, *Radio Tokyo No. 2* began broadcasts from the building as *FEN* troop station *WVTR*. *FEN Tokyo* established administrative offices on the second floor. Eleven *AFRS-FEN* stations covered Japan, the Marianas, the Ryukyus, and Korea when *WVTP Seoul* was operationally transferred to the Korea Military Advisory Group (K MAG) on 30 June 1949, less than a year before the North Koreans invaded the South.<sup>5</sup>

After hastily deployed U.S. troops and South Korean forces established a final defensive perimeter around the port of Pusan, *AFRS-FEN* shipped WWII-era mobile radio vans to Korea. They became the spearhead of *Armed Forces Korea Network (AFKN)*. *AFRS Seoul* was the first of nine stations established by *AFKN* by the end of 1954. It and three others were semi-permanent and five were 6 x 6 truck-mounted stations. Instead of using radio call letters, the mobile stations chose codenames like “Vagabond,” “Gypsy,” and “Homesteader.” Most *AFKN* stations broadcast 18 hours a day, seven days a week; 50 percent was locally-produced programs and the rest came pre-packaged from *AFRS Pacific* in Los Angeles, CA.<sup>6</sup>

Koreans who understood English preferred to listen to the lively *AFRS* radio programs broadcast for the U.S.

military personnel. They were light, listening entertainment instead of “canned” *Psywar*, *U.S. Information Service (USIS)*, and *Radio Free Asia* programs broadcast in Korean. Despite the proliferation of radio broadcasting in Korea, there was little coordination between the armed services, Department of State, and the quasi-private entities.<sup>7</sup> The *FECOM* Public Information Officer (PIO) supervised *FEN*, hence the recruitment of Second Lieutenant (2LT) William F. Brown, II, 1<sup>st</sup> RB&L to serve as the *Psywar* liaison officer effectively linked the two elements.<sup>8</sup>

It was a little different in Korea. 4<sup>th</sup> MRBC radio detachments oversaw all programming emanating from the *Korean Broadcasting System (KBS)* stations.<sup>9</sup> The end of Allied Occupation in Japan on 28 April 1952 meant the U.S. had to pay for radio air time and studio leases. That did not happen in Korea until after the Armistice in 1953. ♣

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*Charles H. Briscoe has been the USASOC Command Historian since 2000. A graduate of The Citadel, this retired Army special operations officer earned his PhD from the University of South Carolina. Current research interests include Army special operations during the Korean War, in El Salvador, and the Lodge Act.*

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## Endnotes

- 1 H. Jordan Roscoe, “A Brief History of the FAR EAST NETWORK,” at <http://jg3.com/fen/histgory.shtml> accessed 9/14/2011.
- 2 1<sup>st</sup> Radio Broadcasting & Leaflet Group. Radio Operations Division. APO 500, Japan. Report on *Psywar* Radio Operations in conjunction with THE KOREAN BROADCASTING SYSTEM August 1951 – March 1952 with Special Section on *Psywar* Coverage of UNCAK Activities in South Korea. USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.
- 3 Roscoe, “A Brief History of the FAR EAST NETWORK.”
- 4 “History of NHK International Broadcasting: Overseas Broadcasts in the Prewar and Wartime Period” at <http://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/english/info/history.html> accessed 9/14/2011.
- 5 Roscoe, “A Brief History of the FAR EAST NETWORK.”
- 6 Roscoe, “A Brief History of the FAR EAST NETWORK.”
- 7 Paul M.A. Linebarger, *Psychological Warfare* (Washington, DC: Combat Forces Press, 1954): 272.
- 8 William F. Brown, II, interview by Dr. Charles H. Briscoe, 27 September 2010, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC; Roscoe, “A Brief History of the FAR EAST NETWORK.”
- 9 Retired LTC Eddie Deerfield, interviews by Dr. Charles H. Briscoe, 16 September 2010 and 15 September 2011, USASOC History Office Classified Files, Fort Bragg, NC.



The cavernous *Radio Tokyo* building was on the edge of Hibaya Park where 1<sup>st</sup> RB&L soldiers sometimes did field training.