



History of AFN

Fact Sheet

The mission of the American Forces Network (AFN) is to provide U.S. radio and television news, information, and entertainment programming to active, guard, and Reserve military service members, Department of Defense (DoD) civilians and contract employees, and their families overseas, on board Navy and Coast Guard ships, and other authorized users.

Early records show a number of radio stations were started by troops in Panama, the Philippines and Alaska in 1940. The early success of enhancing the morale of the forces stationed far from home became even more important following America's entry into World War II. The successes of the early stations paved the way for the formation of the Armed Forces Radio Service (AFRS).

On January 1, 1942, KODK at Fort Greely, then on the island of Kodiak, Alaska, began full-time operations and on May 26, 1942, the War Department officially established AFRS with the mission of providing programming, shortwave service and broadcast equipment for U.S. military locations overseas. The main purpose of AFRS was to give service members a "touch of home" and combat "Axis Sally and Tokyo Rose." Los Angeles was selected as the first headquarters for AFRS and broadcasting executive Thomas H. A. Lewis was selected as the first commander. With the overwhelming support of the entertainment industry and dedicated military members, he quickly turned AFRS into a professional broadcast unit. Many young radio entertainers got their start with AFRS during WWII.

In early 1945, at the height of WWII, there were about 300 AFRS radio stations worldwide. The end of the war brought considerable reductions to the AFRS system. By 1949, only 60 AFRS stations remained in operation. When war broke out in Korea, AFRS followed the troops in and established stations.

Armed Forces Television began at Limestone AFB, Maine, in 1953 as an experimental station. In 1954, the television mission was officially recognized and AFRS became AFRTS: the Armed Forces Radio and Television Service. AFRTS continued to provide radio and television service to U.S. combat forces overseas, quickly expanding during the Vietnam conflict.

AFRTS began using satellites to provide live news and sporting events in 1969 and introduced color television in the early 1970s. Satellite transmitted radio replaced the shortwave system in 1988, expanding the quality and coverage of worldwide radio services.

AFRTS personnel deployed to Somalia, Haiti, Croatia, Bosnia, Hungary, Macedonia, Albania, Kosovo, East Timor and Central America with U.S. troops. AFRTS provided an extensive radio network and a limited television service to troops deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan, providing them with familiar American news, sports and entertainment programming, as well as force protection, command information and military news.

AFRTS was officially re-designated as the American Forces Network on 1 October 2017. AFN uses satellite technology and digital compression to provide eight television, 12 radio and nine streaming Internet radio services to military audiences in 168 countries and U.S. Navy ships at sea around the world.