

THE ALLIED EXPEDITIONARY FORCES PROGRAMME



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Cover: Maj. Glenn Miller and Dinah Shore, Abbey Road Studios, September 1944

“The real enjoyment comes from the moments inside our work. Once we heard the happy sound of a music hungry bunch of servicemen, yelling for more whatever we had to offer, we knew that we could never enjoy a more satisfying pay off in our lives”. -
-- Major Glenn Miller, September 14, 1944

Establishing the American Forces Network (AFN) in Britain

Until June 7, 1944, radio programming for the allied armed forces based in the United Kingdom was provided by distinct British and American services. The American radio operation was the American Forces Network (AFN). American personnel stationed in the United Kingdom did not enjoy or appreciate the programming of the BBC, which they found dull and stiff. The answer was to create a radio network specifically for the Americans; many thousands of whom, the BBC realized, would soon arrive in their nation. Before the Americans began to arrive during 1942, the BBC had created a separate radio service for its own forces, the General Forces Programme (GFP); realizing that service personnel serving at home and abroad would require different radio programs than the civilian population. British and Commonwealth forces also wanted to hear American popular music and variety programming.

As Americans arrived, the BBC felt obliged to help establish an American radio presence. The BBC GFP had organized features aimed specifically at Commonwealth personnel, including recordings of American popular music and variety content. American content was delivered at first via shortwave from the United States, but that method was unreliable and the audio quality was unacceptable. However, the programs were a success with the British and Commonwealth forces, and the British civilian population, who could hear the broadcasts. A more reliable method of program delivery was used by 1942. Recordings were flown across the Atlantic via U. S. Army Air Force (AAF) bomber aircraft that were being ferried from North America to Britain for use as combat aircraft. This method would be replaced by regularly scheduled AAF Force Air Transport Command military transport aircraft.

British and American authorities were appropriately concerned about morale, and anticipated the need to establish a separate American broadcasting service. The Americans were already establishing a European branch of their Office of War Information (OWI) overseas broadcasting service in Britain. This service was broadcasting directly from the United States by shortwave, including programs in dozens of languages for foreign audiences. The European branch would be called the American Broadcasting Station in Europe (ABSIE), and it would broadcast using local transmitter sites.

The mission of ABSIE was not to provide programs for American military personnel. The ABSIE offices were located at 2 Sharaton Street, Soho, London, and the ABSIE studio was located around the corner at Film House, Wardour Street.

The initial tasks in setting up the American radio services in Britain were technical. BBC engineering personnel began to explore the considerable requirements of setting up receiving stations for shortwave broadcasts, telephone landlines, studios and transmitters. There was much to do and many considerations that led to controversies. One challenge was that the BBC had a radio monopoly, which could be compromised by a foreign forces station broadcasting even to a limited and targeted audience. From a certain perspective, the BBC was being required to help establish a de-facto competitor. By late 1942, there were even statements and arguments on the floor of the House of Commons about the prospects of establishing American broadcasting services in Britain. Everyone realized that Anglo-American cooperation was essential to winning the war. The dilemma for the BBC was that it had to cooperate even if it did not really want the future American forces service to exist.

The Role of the U. S. Office of War Information (OWI)

The OWI ABSIE service did not pose a problem, per-se, for the BBC because it would not broadcast in the English language. ABSIE was aimed at Continental audiences and not deemed to be any threat to the BBC. The BBC summarized its concerns to both governments, which were certainly cultural, and arguably defensive from a programming perspective, but quite well founded from an engineering perspective. The BBC was short of equipment, facilities and personnel. Being asked to accommodate an American forces service was beyond their capability. There were also only so many available radio frequencies and the BBC would be asked to transfer some of them to a new American forces service.

There was also the problem of other Allied governments, many of whom were in exile in Britain. They had not received separate radio accommodations from the BBC. In addition, Canada had several hundred thousand personnel in Britain and only a very few programs available over the BBC. On the other hand, the Americans had the immediate ability to provide funds, personnel and equipment to build and staff a new service, which other nations could not offer. In addition, the prominence of the United States in the war effort gave the fledgling AFN very powerful leverage.

The OWI and its Chief of Broadcasting, Brewster Morgan (a former top CBS executive), handled the American role in the set up of AFN, providing the funding and equipment. Morton was sent to Britain, listened to all concerned, gathered information and on November 1, 1942 submitted a plan, which was approved by General Dwight D. Eisenhower. Morton proposed terms that were agreeable to both British and American interests. In addition to the programming and engineering concerns expressed by the BBC, the British Home Office was concerned about security (censorship) and copyright. The Americans agreed to abide by the same restrictions as the BBC. All commercials contained on original programs from the United States were to be omitted. Low-power transmitters were to be erected by the U. S. Army. The BBC would provide a studio facility, landlines, frequencies and engineering staff. On June 21, 1943, the plans were agreed. A formal operating agreement was signed by the OWI and the BBC. It was determined that the new service would be named the American Forces Network (AFN), which would go on the air July 4, 1943. The British Wireless Telegraphy Board (the equivalent of the U. S. Federal Communications Commission) gave its authority for AFN to use the frequencies that it had been allotted.

Capt. John S. Hayes of European Theatre HQ in London was given the task of starting the service from scratch because of his experience as a radio broadcaster at WOR, New York (Mutual Network). He would emphasize that AFN was not a “competitor” for the BBC, but rather an auxiliary service. He publicly stated that the mission of AFN was to (a.) broadcast American entertainment; (b.) assist the American forces with training and education; and (c.) to assist American personnel in adjusting themselves to the United Kingdom, and to foster goodwill between the American and British forces.

AFN “On The Air” In The United Kingdom

Although the OWI supplied the funding, equipment and some personnel to AFN, Capt. Hayes insisted that the AFN staff control all commentary, news and news analysis so that the AFN would not be confused with ABSIE, which was the voice of the government and was in the business of broadcasting the policies of the U. S. government to foreign audiences. Capt. Lloyd Sigman, formerly of KMPC, Los Angeles, and his team of U. S. broadcast engineers installed the transmitters. They set up a network of low-power transmitters that were placed in close proximity to where the greatest number of American personnel would be based. They also hard-wired numerous locations to receive the AFN signal, including service clubs such as the Rainbow Corner in Piccadilly, London, and air bases across Britain. The first AFN studio was 11 Carlos Place, just off Grosvenor Square and near the U. S. Embassy. In May 1944, AFN would move to larger quarters provided by the BBC at 80 Portland Place.

For programming, AFN could select any available American program being produced or transcribed by the Special Service Division (SSD), which would soon be rebranded as the Armed Forces Radio Service (AFRS). These included the programs produced exclusively for service personnel overseas such as "Command Performance" (please see the GMA report, "The Story of AFRS"), as well as network programs with the commercials edited out. BBC programmes were also made available to AFN. The first voice that was heard on AFN as it signed on July 4, 1943, following "The Star Spangled Banner" was Brewster Morgan of the OWI, who credited the BBC for their co-operation. Within a year, AFN would have fifty transmitters broadcasting in the United Kingdom. There would eventually be five frequencies; at first, 1402kc and 1420kc (AM), or 213.9 and 211.3 meters. Later, 1375kc, 1411kc and 1447kc (AM); or, 218.1, 212.6 and 207.3 meters were added. Many civilians outside London could receive the signals, and the AFN programs became very popular, especially with British teenagers.

As part of the agreement to allow AFN, the BBC received the right to broadcast their choice of American programs and entertainers. There were inevitable issues, particularly with performance rights, which both sides worked to ease. British listeners were especially interested in documentaries about America and its people. Concerns arose at the BBC, when it became apparent that AFN was giving over 25% of its schedule to British programming, as opposed to the 50% that the parties had projected when AFN was conceived. American military personnel wanted American programs, while British military and civilian audiences enjoyed both British and American programs. At the same time, AFN was able to carry baseball and football broadcasts live because of the BBC's big shortwave receivers. AFN wanted to stay on the air past midnight. BBC domestic services closed down at midnight. BBC engineers stayed on duty to handle AFN because its signals were routed through Broadcasting House. There were issues with news. AFN carried BBC news bulletins at 6:00 p.m. and 9:00 p.m., but also offered their own news programs and bulletins. The frequency and reasons for bulletins, the pace of news presentation and other matters of style at AFN irritated the BBC, which was arguably the best news service in the world. The BBC was greatly respected by Gen. Eisenhower. In the end, the BBC came to accept that AFN was writing and presenting a different style of news for a different audience and they would have to live with it. Whatever issues existed, AFN staff followed the lead of their chief, Maj. Hayes (who by May 1944 had been promoted); always being ready to smooth things over with the BBC with gestures of appreciation, since AFN could not exist without the cooperation of the BBC.

SHAEF Proposes an Allied Radio Service



Gen. Dwight D. Eisenhower, Supreme Commander, Allied Expeditionary Forces
American Red Cross Club in London, 1943

During the spring of 1944, Gen. Eisenhower tasked his deputy Gen. Ray Barker (Assistant Chief of Staff) to explore the concept of a combined allied radio service under the auspices of the Supreme Headquarters, Allied Expeditionary Force (SHAEF). Gen. Eisenhower felt that allied unity was of paramount importance. His view was that a combined service, which became known as the Allied Expeditionary Forces Programme (AEFP), would help eliminate nationalistic rivalries and build team spirit among the forces. AFN, and AFRS in Los Angeles, believed that each nation should provide independent radio services. The BBC shared their point of view.

When Gen. Barker approached AFN and the BBC about the idea, he met with negative reactions. In the end, SHAEF felt that they could simply order AFN and AFRS to drop their objections and agree, but the BBC was another matter. The BBC would have to be persuaded. The first formal meeting was held at Broadcasting House on March 30, 1944. Although Maj. John Hayes had accompanied Gen. Barker to the meeting, AFN was worried that if the AEFP came into existence, they might disappear, which greatly concerned AFRS and their chief, Col. Thomas Lewis in Los Angeles. Lewis was so upset that he flew to London to join the discussions. SHAEF assured AFN that the AEFP would not replace it, but would need access to AFRS and AFN programs, to which Maj. Hayes readily agreed.

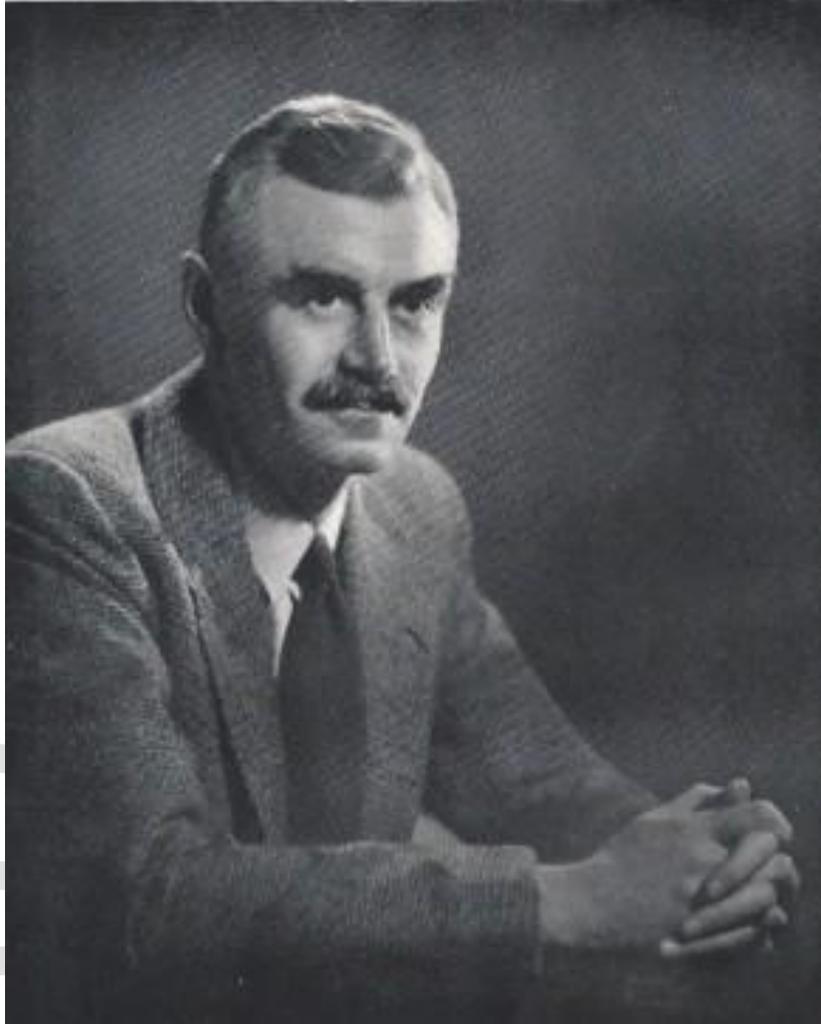
SHAEF assured the BBC that the AEFP would require the continuity of BBC news programming, but that SHAEF should be in charge of the AEFP. The BBC disagreed; if they were to put out the news programs, provide engineering support and host the service, they felt that they should be responsible. The “informal” talks went on for several weeks. Meanwhile, SHAEF had brought over Col. Edward Kirby from Washington to serve as their chief of broadcasting. Kirby developed a strong dislike of BBC management during his first months in London.

On April 28, 1944, a formal proposal was circulated by SHAEF. The AEFP would broadcast as a medium wave (AM) service with programming reflecting the relative size of the American, British and Canadian forces. The BBC would run the service. The BBC and AFN remained unenthusiastic. The professional broadcasters in each organization believed that sharing programming for audiences with different tastes would be problematic, which they had already experienced. The conversations between Gen. Barker and Col. Lewis of AFRS in London became very unpleasant. Lewis felt that AFN should receive one of the new transmission frequencies and towers being proposed, and the BBC GFP should receive the other, and that the concept of the AEFP should be set aside. Lewis failed to persuade Barker. Next, the BBC Board of Governors met, and they rejected the SHAEF proposal, sincerely believing the plan to be wrong, as had Lewis. They submitted a counter-proposal that was similar to the plan that had been proposed by Lewis. Both sides had made sound professional arguments.

A frustrated but determined Gen. Eisenhower sent a letter to Prime Minister Winston Churchill, dated May 11, 1944, asking for intercession by Mr. Churchill. On May 27, 1944, following meetings at Churchill’s direction between Minister of Information Brendan Bracken, Gen. Barker and BBC director-general William Haley, Churchill replied to Gen. Eisenhower that the government and the BBC would agree to the AEFP, notwithstanding their concerns. The Service would be known as “the Allied Expeditionary Forces Programme of the BBC”, which would continually irritate many American officials.

“This is the Allied Expeditionary Forces Programme”

After resolving the formation of the AEFP, the BBC appointed the man to run the service, which was projected to go on the air on D-Day +1, or as it turned out, June 7, 1944. The man chosen for this formidable task was ideal for the job. He was Maurice Gorham, a veteran BBC executive, who had been head of the BBC North American Service, and experience working with Americans and Canadians. William Haley appointed Maurice Gorham on May 23, 1944.



Maurice Gorham, BBC, Director of the AEF

Within forty-eight hours, Gorham had put together a working plan. BBC engineers selected a transmitter at Start Point on the Devon Coast for the AEF. The AEF would transmit at 1050kc (AM) or 285 meters. This was later switched to 583kc (AM) or 514 meters. The transmission footprint of the AEF was strong, approximately 300 miles in any direction from London. When the Allied armies later advanced east across France and away from the main transmitter, army field stations would broadcast on other frequencies for better reception.

Gorham had to quickly commandeer an office, studio, personnel, equipment, and transmission facilities. Col. Edward Kirby was assigned to be his executive officer. Lt. Col. John David Niven was assigned as Kirby's deputy. Lt. Col. Niven wished no publicity and was upset that he had been transferred from a commando unit, with which he had seen combat. Broadcasting House had wished to publicize that a Hollywood film star was working in their midst.

Lt. Col. Niven would assert himself in a very competent manner to Gorham, who in October 1944 promoted Niven to succeed Kirby when the latter was transferred back to the United States.

The fourth floor of Broadcasting House became their offices. Their activities were secret, so military police were assigned to guard them. By May 25, 1944, they had program, production and engineering staff beginning to work. The staff included top BBC entertainment producer Cecil Madden, as head of production. Decisions were rapidly forthcoming. BBC engineering allotted the AEFP a color to avoid confusion over scripts and studios. It would be internally known as BBC Violet. It was decided that the announcers would include a team of lively young women. The tune of a traditional English rhyme, "Oranges and Lemons", played on a nova-chord, became the AEFP station identification.

The AEFP went on the air at 5:55 a.m. British Double Summer Time, June 7, 1944. After being introduced by Capt. Franklin Engelmann, a prayer by an American Army chaplain and a BBC news bulletin, "Oranges and Lemons" and then the first AEFP program, "Rise and Shine" debuted. The two-hour morning disc-jockey show was hosted by Sgt. Dick Dudley of AFN and A/C2 Ronnie Waldman of the BBC GFP. It would prove to be a major success.

AFN would continue to operate its own service although many of its programs would be broadcast simultaneously over the AEFP. Because of the AEFP signal, listeners in London could now receive AFN programming. During its first two weeks of operation, the AEFP made an immediate impression upon its listeners. The American, British and Canadian team worked out glitches and embarked on a mixed schedule of original AEFP-produced programs and content provided by AFN and the BBC.

"Oranges and Lemons"

Although entertainment programming made up most of the AEFP schedule, serious and innovative programs were presented by the service. "Combat Diary" was produced by Capt. Royston Morley. It was a fifteen-minute series of actualities from the field by American, British and Canadian correspondents. One nationality reported on the other. The reports were authentic, sober and heard within hours of being recorded. "Mark Up the Map" told troops every day where the front line was and kept the forces informed and current about what was happening. These were exactly the honest and timely communication that Gen. Eisenhower wanted from the AEFP. The original entertainment programs remained the most welcome among the forces, with their favorites, including in addition to "Rise and Shine", DJ-hosted shows such as "Duffle Bag" and "On the Record".

The Queensberry All Services Club in London became the center for a series of programs with musical and variety artists who were performing in Britain. Cecil Madden was given priority to call upon all the American entertainers touring with USO shows and otherwise, including Bing Crosby, Dinah Shore, Marlene Dietrich and many others. The Soho club was a former theatre which was set up for AEFB broadcasts. It was founded by the Marquess of Queensberry and a group of six businessmen including Sir Simon Marks and J. Arthur Rank. The club was managed by Jack Harding. Admission was free for service personnel. 3,000 people could be accommodated and the club was always packed to overflowing. The Saturday night AEFB feature from the Queensberry was the "AEF Special". Cecil Madden was already hosting a weekly trans-Atlantic BBC and Mutual program from the Rainbow Corner Red Cross Club called "The American Eagle in Britain". During the shows, American service personnel were interviewed and could say hello to family and friends at home. Another weekly trans-Atlantic BBC and NBC variety program during this period was "Atlantic Spotlight", featuring celebrities simulcasting from London and New York.



AEFB Production Chief Cecil Madden reviews a script with ABAEF Producers Sgt. George Voutsas and Sgt. Paul Dudley, 1944

Although the AEF greatly benefitted from the wealth of recorded American programs which were available to it, and the complete BBC programme schedule, the service wanted to fill as much of its schedule as possible with original programming. The disc jockey record programs and the variety shows from the Queensberry were very important and substantial. However, what would become the highlight of the service were three incredible “house orchestras”.



Capt. Bob Farnon conducts the Canadian Band of the AEF
"The Canada Show' AEF, October 1944

The AEF orchestras would become the cornerstone of the service, providing many hours of original content, and would become the most popular AEF feature. It was decided that there would be American, British and Canadian orchestras. They were identified with then generic title “of the AEF” to identify them as being part of the AEF. The American Band of the AEF was directed by Maj. Glenn Miller. The British Band of the AEF was directed by RSM George Melachrino. The Canadian Band of the AEF was directed by Capt. Bob Farnon. Each had sub-units of performers with a series of programs that were broadcast or recorded for broadcast.

Visiting celebrities and famous British entertainers appeared with each of the three orchestras. The American and Canadian orchestras toured military bases in Britain. The contribution of the Canadian unit was disproportionate to their numbers. Their programs, including "The Canada Show", displayed a special enthusiasm. The British unit offered a rich and lush backdrop for dozens of guest artists. Many other orchestras would appear on the AEF. The U. S. Navy Dance Band directed by M1C Sam Donahue was prominent among them.



A "British Band of the AEF" broadcast
Announcer Ronnie Waldman, Marlene Dietrich and RSM George Melachrino

Major Glenn Miller and the AEF

Col. Edward Kirby had become acquainted with then-Capt. Glenn Miller before he was transferred to SHAEF. As the AEF was being set up, Kirby and the SHAEF staff felt that the Army Air Force Orchestra directed by Capt. Miller was the obvious choice to be the American Band of the AEF. Gen. Eisenhower sent a cable to Washington requesting the Miller unit for the AEF as a "top priority". Although the Miller unit had become a key recruiting and bond raising asset for the Army Air Forces, broadcasting the top-rated NBC program "I Sustain the Wings" from New York, and undertaking other important radio and recording activities, Gen. H. H. Arnold, chief of the AAF, approved the request, under the condition that the orchestra would be returned to the AAF upon completion of its mission. The AAF Orchestra made their final appearance June 10, 1944 in Chicago. By July 1944, Miller and the orchestra had arrived in the United Kingdom to begin their AEF broadcasting and personal appearance schedule.

Although, as Cecil Madden would observe, all three AEFP orchestras were the best in the world, it was the Miller orchestra that eclipsed the others in popularity and fame. It was the first American band that the British forces and public had heard in their own country for years. They were charmed. The orchestra was especially important for the American forces. As stated by Gen. James Doolittle, Commander of the Eighth Air Force, “next to a letter from home, Capt. Miller, your organization is the greatest morale booster in the European Theatre of Operations”.



Lt. Col. David Niven announcing as Capt. Glenn Miller listens
AEFP, Corn Exchange, Bedford, July 1944

There were misunderstandings between soon-to-be Maj. Glenn Miller, the AEFP and BBC management that were ultimately smoothed over. Matters improved when Col. Kirby returned to Washington and Lt. Col. Niven became Maurice Gorham’s number two man. Kirby tended to confront BBC officials and probably encouraged Miller to do so as well; whereas Niven had a more collegial manner and guided Miller in that direction. Miller was a very confident, successful and important figure, who realized the value of his brilliant orchestra.

He was confronted right away with BBC audio engineering practices and

requirements that he did not agree with. BBC engineers asked that the orchestra play at a constant volume, which Miller refused to do. A British trade journal erroneously reported that the BBC was therefore going to remove the Miller unit from the BBC GFP and Home Service simulcasts of AEF broadcasts, and Miller exploded. Gorham, initially concerned about Miller, would come to respect him and also worked in good faith to get beyond any misunderstandings.



"Variety Bandbox", July 30, 1944, Capt. Glenn Miller and British star Margaret Lockwood

The ABAEF broadcast or recorded for broadcast a series of programs every week. The full orchestra appeared on "The American Band of the AEF", or "Moonlight Serenade". A dance orchestra led by Sgt. Ray McKinley appeared on "The Swing Shift", or "American Dance Band". The string section led by Sgt. George Ockner played light classics on "Strings with Wings". Sgt. Mel Powell led a jazz combo on "The Uptown Hall", or "Swing Sextet". Sgt. Johnny Desmond sang on his own program, "A Soldier and a Song", later known as "Songs by Sgt. Johnny Desmond". As we describe in the GMA "Portrait of Glenn Miller", it was agreed to send the ABAEF to Paris, France on or about mid-December, 1944, for a proposed six-week deployment. Serious concerns of the BBC engineering staff regarding the integrity and reliability of broadcasts from France were resolved, as the orchestra recorded six-weeks of programming in November and early December for backup. Maj. Miller flew ahead to handle arrangements on December 15, 1944, and his aircraft disappeared.

“The Best Entertainment Program Ever”

As days passed without any word of Maj. Glenn Miller's missing aircraft, the recorded broadcasts with his voice were going out over the air. SHAEF did not publicly announce his disappearance until December 24, 1944. His voice was then edited out of the recorded programs and replaced with AFN announcer Sgt. Keith Jameson's voice. The loss of Maj. Miller was felt terribly by the AEF. However, the ABAEF continued under the leadership of Sgts. Jerry Gray and Ray McKinley. As it turned out, the ABAEF was able to reliably broadcast from Paris, so they remained on the Continent. The United States would award Maj. Miller; his executive officer Lt. (later Capt.) Donald Haynes, Sgts. Gray and McKinley the Bronze Star. The ABAEF would complete over 500 broadcasts and 350 personal appearances in the European Theatre of Operations.

The BBAEF and the CBAEF continued their broadcasts from London, and the AEF moved forward into 1945 with their strong programming lineup. Hostilities would cease on May 7, 1945, and AFN would set up their headquarters in Frankfurt. The OWI ABSIE service was shut down July 4, 1945 as its signature "Yankee Doodle" was played for the final time before the immediate sign-on of the "Voice of America" European Service, which succeeded ABSIE.

The Allied Expeditionary Forces Programme was closed down on July 28, 1945, or D-Day plus 417. It existed for fourteen months. In a farewell broadcast, Gen. Eisenhower emphasized that the AEF had exemplified a spirit of allied teamwork. The United States awarded Lt. Col. Niven the Legion of Merit; Capt. Engelmann and Capt. Morley the Bronze Star. Col. Hayes of AFN (again promoted) received the Bronze Star and the French Croix de Guerre.

It would be observed that the AEF had been "the best entertainment program ever". A team from three different nations, American, British and Canadian, had worked well together, despite their differences in perspective and methods. They did not always please everyone. The AEF was the product of a "shotgun marriage" that the neither AFN, AFRS nor the BBC had wanted. However, as Gen. Eisenhower had foreseen, the AEF did bring entertainment and information to the allied forces in a unity of purpose. Great credit must be given to Maurice Gorham, who although not always understood, especially by his American colleagues, did a superb job with the thankless task of balancing competing national interests. Recognition is also fitting for Lt. Col. Niven, Cecil Madden and the very talented AEF team, for "getting it right."

The AEFB Sign-Off

The final AEFB Broadcast was made Saturday evening, July 28, 1945. At midnight July 29, 1945 announcer Margaret Hubble signed AEFB off for the last time and the BBC Light Programme succeeded the BBC Violet Network (AEFB).

GMA Preservation of the AEFB Legacy

Following hostilities, the BBC ordered that the considerable number of recordings of AEFB programs be destroyed, according to the agreements by which the AEFB was created. Their principal concern was that the non-commercial musical programs featuring military personnel, in particular, not be used for commercial purposes. A few programs were preserved by the BBC, along with many photographs and a vast number of scripts, radio reports, logs, etc. The GMA preserves the limited number of AEFB program recordings that survive from the BBC as well as a larger number that have been gathered and donated from other sources. Many of the original discs were saved by AFN and individuals involved in the AEFB, including musicians and producers. The GMA is honored to be the repository for these recordings. The GMA has also been entrusted with copies of the scripts, radio reports, logs, etc., as well as a complete set of the BBC "Radio Times" bi-monthly magazine, which promoted the AEFB and its schedule in their "AEF Edition".

The Glenn Miller Archive's Eric Monteith Hamilton and Christopher Way Collections constitute perhaps the most important source of the AEFB history in the world.

The history of the AEFB is detailed in *Glenn Miller Declassified* by Dennis M. Spragg, © 2017, Potomac Books-University of Nebraska Press.

Acknowledgments

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