

VU2ZW / C-B-I

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Although it gave birth to world-famous fighting forces like “Merrill’s Marauder’s” and Col. Claire Chennault’s Flying Tigers, the China-Burma-India theater (“C-B-I”) never had the same visibility as many of the other combat venues of World War II. The principal Allied mission in the C-B-I was to strengthen Chinese forces fighting against Japan by providing a back door supply route to replace the links that had been blocked by the Japanese. This was accomplished overland from India (through Burma), and by air “over The Hump” (the Himalayas). In addition, Britain wanted to protect the empire’s crown jewel, India, from further Japanese incursions. (Japan had captured Hong Kong in December 1941 and Singapore in February 1942, and had installed a puppet government in Burma in August 1943.) Fighting in the C-B-I lasted for the duration of the war. Within India, there were major battles at northeast locations familiar to DXers, such as Imphal and Kohima.

As American troops arrived, the Armed Forces Radio Service (AFRS), formed in 1942, arrived as well, in the form of about a dozen low-power mediumwave stations. There is a list of these stations (plus those in China and Burma) in a Radio Heritage Foundation entry, [“AFRS China-Burma-India.”](#) The origin of the list is unclear. It is not from the several sources quoted in the article, but it is similar to a list that appeared in a 1951 Ph.D. dissertation by Theodore Stuart DeLay, Jr. titled *An Historical Study of the Armed Forces Radio Service to 1946* (see General Resources, below). All of the stations are shown there as 50 watts, except Calcutta and Chabua, which were 1 kw.

The stations developed late in the war. Of those whose life spans were known, one (Chabua, probably a relatively “impromptu” setup) went on the air in November 1943, but the rest came on at various times throughout 1944 (and before the AFRS stations in China). All closed in 1945, or by April 1946 at the latest. (There were still 113 AFRS stations on the air worldwide in January 1946.)

At the time, All India Radio was the only licensed broadcaster in the country. Early in 1944, the American military sought official permission from the Indian government to operate the AFRS stations, but it was slow in coming. General Joseph Stilwell, Deputy Allied Commander in China, ordered the stations to take to the air anyway, whereupon, in March, New Delhi started operating. Indian permission came soon thereafter, with specific assignments of call letters, frequencies and power, hence the “VU2” call letters used by the stations.

The main AFRS outlet in India was VU2ZU in Calcutta. It too started out at 50 watts in the summer of 1944, but on September 7 it went to 1 kw., and it also expanded broadcast hours from nine to 11-1/2 hours per day (0630-0900 and 1400-2300).

One of the Indian stations was located at Agra, Uttar Pradesh state, in north central India, about 125 miles southeast of New Delhi (Agra is the location of the Taj Mahal). This was VU2ZW, and it was a surprise to come across a program schedule from the station on eBay (see below). Although both the Radio Heritage list and the DeLay list show VU2ZW as being on

WEEK BEGINNING JUNE 11th

ARMED FORCES RADIO SERVICE

MONDAY

- 1130 Just Music
- 1145 Home & AEF News
- 1200 Ginny Simms
- 1215 *GI Jive*
- 1230 News; Music
- 1245 Spotlight Band
- 1400 Musical Encores
- 1500 Odditorium
- 1515 *GI Jive*
- 1530 News; Music
- 1545 Remember
- 1600 Music We Love
- 1630 Cocktail Time
- 1700 Supper Club
- 1715 *Melody Round-up*
- 1730 Jam For Dinner
- 1830 Waltz Time
- 1900 *Mail Call*
- 1930 Guy Lombardo
- 2000 At Ease
- 2015 News Summary
- 2030 NBC Symphony
- 2130 Information Please
- 2200 Mystery Playhouse
- 2230 Our Foreign Policy
- 2300 Relax & Listen
- 2315 News-Words with Music

TUESDAY

- 1130 Just Music
- 1145 Home & AEF News
- 1200 Lena Horn
- 1215 *GI Jive*
- 1230 News; Music
- 1245 Spotlight Band
- 1400 Musical Encores
- 1500 Odditorium
- 1515 *GI Jive*
- 1530 News; Music
- 1545 Remember
- 1600 Concert Hall
- 1630 Cocktail Time
- 1700 Supper Club
- 1715 *Melody Round-up*
- 1730 Red Cross Hour
- 1830 Alan Young
- 1900 McGee & Molly
- 1930 Down Beat
- 2000 The Changing World
- 2015 News Summary
- 2030 Globe Theatre
- 2100 Music America Loves
- 2130 Village Store
- 2200 Jill's Juke Box
- 2230 Bob Hope
- 2300 Relax & Listen
- 2315 News-Words with Music

WEDNESDAY

- 1130 Just Music
- 1145 Home & AEF News
- 1200 Bing Crosby
- 1215 *GI Jive*
- 1230 News; Music
- 1245 Spotlight Band
- 1400 Musical Encores
- 1500 Odditorium
- 1515 *GI Jive*
- 1530 News; Music
- 1545 Remember

WEDNESDAY

- 1600 Band Wagon
- 1615 Hymns From Home
- 1630 Cocktail Time
- 1700 Symphonette
- 1715 *Melody Round-up*
- 1730 Jam For Dinner
- 1830 Jack Carson
- 1900 Heard At Home
- 1930 Kate Smith
- 2000 Yank Band Stand
- 2015 News Summary
- 2030 Boston Symphony
- 2130 Show Time
- 2200 Mystery Playhouse
- 2230 Music Hall
- 2300 Relax & Listen
- 2315 News-Words with Music

THURSDAY

- 1130 Just Music
- 1145 Home & AEF News
- 1200 Martha Mears
- 1215 *GI Jive*
- 1230 News; Music
- 1245 Spotlight Band
- 1400 Musical Encores
- 1500 Odditorium
- 1515 *GI Jive*
- 1530 News; Music
- 1545 Remember
- 1600 Music For Worship
- 1630 Cocktail Time
- 1700 Supper Club
- 1715 *Melody Round-up*

THURSDAY

- 1730 Red Cross Hour
- 1830 Dinah Shore
- 1900 James Melton
- 1930 Hildegard
- 2000 At Ease
- 2015 News Summary
- 2030 Aldrich Family
- 2100 Music From America
- 2130 Frank Morgan
- 2200 Kay Kyser Kollege
- 2230 Eddie Condon
- 2300 Relax & Listen
- 2315 News-Words with Music

FRIDAY

- 1130 Just Music
- 1145 Home & AEF News
- 1200 Raymond Scott
- 1215 *GI Jive*
- 1230 News; Music
- 1245 Spotlight Band
- 1400 Musical Encores
- 1500 Odditorium
- 1515 *GI Jive*
- 1530 News; Music
- 1545 Remember
- 1600 Amos & Andy
- 1630 Cocktail Time
- 1700 Supper Club
- 1715 *Melody Round-up*
- 1730 Jam For Dinner
- 1830 Duffy's Tavern
- 1900 Danny Kaye
- 1930 Here's to Romance

FRIDAY

- 2000 Yank Band Stand
- 2015 News Summary
- 2030 Globe Theatre
- 2100 Moments in Music
- 2130 Burns & Allen
- 2200 Melody Hour
- 2230 *GI Journal*
- 2300 Relax & Listen
- 2315 News-Words with Music

SATURDAY

- 1130 Starlight Serenade
- 1200 Raymond Scott
- 1215 *GI Jive*
- 1230 News; Music
- 1245 Spotlight Band
- 1400 Met Opera
- 1500 Odditorium
- 1515 *GI Jive*
- 1530 News; Music
- 1545 Remember
- 1600 Swingtime
- 1615 Lynn Murray
- 1630 Cocktail Time
- 1700 Symphonette
- 1715 *Melody Round-up*
- 1730 Sportscope
- 1745 What's Your Problem
- 1800 Jubilee
- 1830 Nat'l Barn Dance
- 1900 Hit Parade
- 1930 Sat Nite Serenade
- 2000 "Howdy Fella's"
- 2015 News Summary
- 2030 Your Radio Theater
- 2130 Eddie Stone's Orch
- 2200 Bobby Sherwood's Orch
- 2230 *Command Performance*
- 2300 *Repeat Performance*
- 2330 Carlos Molina's Orch

SUNDAY

- 1130 Music For Sunday
- 1200 Fred Waring
- 1230 News; Music
- 1245 Serenade for Strings
- 1300 Gildersleeve
- 1330 Family Hour
- 1400 Science Air Magazine
- 1430 Sunday Serenade
- 1500 Blondie
- 1530 Melodic Moments
- 1600 NY Philharmonic
- 1700 Nelson Eddy
- 1730 It Pays To Be Ignorant
- 1800 J. C. Thomas
- 1830 Charlie McCarthy
- 1900 Jack Benny
- 1930 American Album
- 2000 Hymns from Home
- 2015 News Summary
- 2030 This is the Story
- 2100 Comedy Caravan
- 2130 Hour of Charm
- 2200 Suspense
- 2230 Inter Mezzo
- 2300 Relax & Listen
- 2315 News Words With Music

presents

Mail Call



Here's popular Dixie Falkenburg, who won the heart of every GI in the I-B Theater during her recent USO tour. She'll renew our acquaintance on Mail Call in the near future.

Tune in 1305 KC, U.S. Army Radio Station

VU2ZW

The finest in Radio Entertainment

1355 kc., the schedule gives the frequency as 1305 kc. The programs are for the "Week Beginning June 11th," and since the first day of the week that is shown is a Monday, the schedule must be from 1945, when June 11 was a Monday. According to DeLay, VU2ZW was on the air from the summer of 1944 to April 1, 1946.

There are some brief references to the station in a few issues of [C-B-I Roundup](#), a theater newspaper. In the issue for January 10, 1946, a description of the construction of the Central India Air Depot that followed the arrival of the U.S. troops in Agra in July 1942 noted that "[a] radio station was christened VU2ZW, an instrument of pleasure for GI's and a constant source of interest to the tastes of Indian personnel." In the June 28, 1945 issue it was observed that "[y]ou can now swim in waltz time at the G.I. pool in Agra, thanks to a loud speaker system installed by local VU2ZW radio station wallahs." And the August 16, 1945 number [Thursday] relates this story about the end of the war.

PEACE - IT'S WONDERFUL!

AGRA - Red faces were many here last Saturday morning [August 11] when U.S. Army personnel awakened to discover the "victory celebration" they had observed the night previous was slightly premature. Agra monitored the radio station at Chungking, China [probably XGOY], and when it was understood that the Chinese capital was celebrating the surrender of the Japs, this base decided to join the jubilation. Col. I. G. Siemens, base commander, announced the "surrender" on VU2ZW, local G.I. radio station. Officials at Agra coughed embarrassedly the following day and mumbled something about "Hell, it could happen to anybody." So it [did] at Chungking, Okinawa, and London. Scattered celebrations were held in Times Square, New York City. (While there was no official recognition of surrender at Delhi, many excited officers and G.I.'s learned from various "pipelines" that the Japs had quit and touched off scattered celebrations.) [Japan did not announce its formal surrender until noon Japan time on Wednesday, August 15.]

VU2ZW's engineer, for at least part of its life, was 22 year old Armond (Monte) Lamont of Watsonville, California, who would later become KD6DRY. He was the amateur of the month in the newsletter of the Fresno Amateur Radio Club in [August 2009](#) (pg. 5).

The exact origin of the AFRS schedule shown above is not entirely clear. The frequency and call letters at the bottom are unambiguous (although VU2ZW was supposedly authorized to broadcast on 1355 kc., not 1305 kc.). But could a 50-watt station have the resources to produce a professional looking 11 x 14" weekly schedule showing its daily programs in 15-minute blocks? In those days all but locally-produced programming was by way of transcriptions, i.e. records, and so the station would know what programs it had on hand. Or did all the stations in the theater have a common program schedule, printed up by AFRS Calcutta and then distributed to the others, which added their individual frequency and call letters? It seems unlikely. However, the schedule does have a look and feel similar to a VU2ZU (Calcutta) program schedule that appeared in [The Command Post](#), a Calcutta military newspaper, on May 26, 1944 ("VU2ZU

Daily Radio Programs”).

There was some administrative structure for radio above the local level, for it was the C-B-I “theater” radio team that produced a regular program called “Yanks in the Orient” which was sent stateside on transcription for broadcast on the ABC network. It began in April 1944, and covered doings throughout the theater. It also produced GI interviews for broadcast over local stations in the United States. Noted one of the production team, complaining about the unreliability of local power supplies, “Now we have an excellent gadget called a wire recorder which can be carried with some facility and is considerably more flexible for use in the field.” One of the radio team members was roving interviewer Lt. Bert Parks, who apparently was stationed in Delhi at the time.

The Radio Heritage list includes one AFRS shortwave outlet in India, and that is VU2ZZ, Calcutta, on 14983 kc. Adrian Peterson refers to it in *Wavescan*, [No. N281](#), July 13, 2014. VU2ZZ was the sister mediumwave outlet of VU2ZU. VU2ZZ was short lived, operating from August 1945 to January 1946.

General Resources:

Trent Christman, *Brass Button Broadcasters* (Paducah, KY: Turner, 1992).

Theodore Stuart DeLay, Jr., *An Historical Study of the Armed Forces Radio Service to 1946*, Ph.D. dissertation (Los Angeles: Univ. of Southern California, 1951) [microfilm].

Edward M. Kirby & Jack W. Harris, *Star-Spangled Radio* (Chicago, IL: Ziff-Davis, 1948).

Bradley G. Shope, *American Popular Music in Britain's Raj* (Rochester, NY: Univ. of Rochester Press, 2016)).

[China-Burma-India – Remembering the Forgotten Theater of World War II.](#)

[The Command Post](#) [Calcutta military newspaper], September 8, 1944.

“Focus on Asia: The Calcutta Story-4 – American Radio Stations in Calcutta,” *Wavescan*, [No. N281](#), July 13, 2014.