

# AFN EUROPE

TRANSMITTING  
AMERICAN INFORMATION AND  
CULTURE ACROSS THE CONTINENT



BY MASTER SGT. ANTONY M.C. JOSEPH

**C**hocolate, chewing gum, McDonald's, Coca-Cola and the American Forces Network have one thing in common: They are all unofficial ambassadors for the United States in an effort to win the hearts and minds (and stomachs, in some cases) of people around the world.

Chocolate and chewing gum have long been favorite giveaways by U.S. Soldiers during their sojourns in different countries around the world. There are many iconic, era-defining images that portray the joy on the faces of children and adults alike as they receive gifts of candy while welcoming U.S. troops into their war-torn countries — from the two world wars to the current conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan. One of Coke's campaign slogans says, "Have a Coke and a smile," and the golden arches of McDonald's can be found in nearly every country around the world, hopefully showing people the fun, life-loving side of American culture.

AFN, with its unique and often humorous delivery of stories of American life through its radio and television broadcasts, can proudly take its place among these and other stalwarts of Americana.

Headquartered in Mannheim, Germany, AFN Europe has been at the forefront of information dissemination for nearly seven decades.

According to Command Sgt. Major John Brenci, command sergeant major of AFN Europe, "Our first transmission was a radio broadcast from the BBC Studios in London." The signal was sent via telephone lines to five regional transmitters to troops in the United Kingdom. Since then, however, AFN Europe has grown considerably with a significant presence in all modes of communication, to include the Internet, radio and television.

"Though our primary audience is U.S. Department of Defense personnel (uniformed, civilian personnel and families), we have a vast local fol-

lowing — people who have been following our broadcasts from the early 1940s," Brenci said.

Brenci mentioned an encounter with a local college intern who said that her German family has been listening to the broadcasts their whole lives. She is now an ardent fan.

"AFN has introduced hip hop, pop, rock, jazz and shows such as *The Simpsons* and *Dallas* to the European populace, making a very marked public and community relations impact that helps people better understand American culture," Brenci said.

The personnel working at AFN Europe and other AFN operations around the world become part of the community, said George Smith, the operations manager and public affairs officer for AFN Europe.

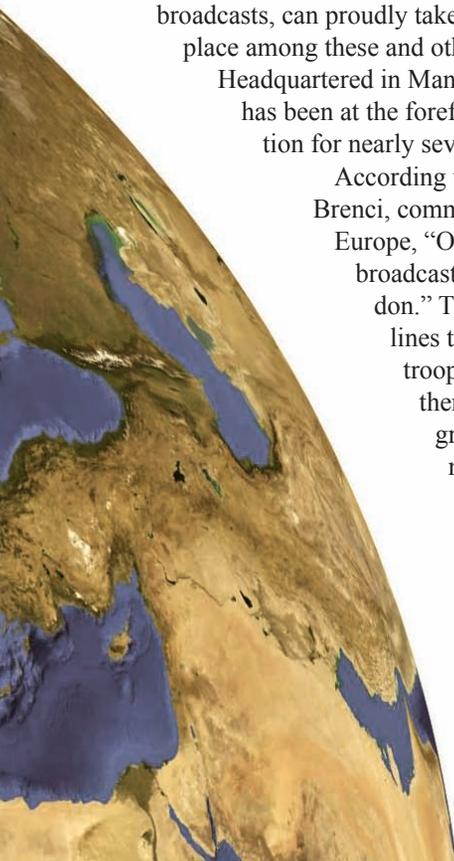
"With face, name and voice recognition, these broadcasters become minisuperstars. They get instant feedback on their programs (via e-mail and at community events) on how effective they are at reaching the community."

"They make a real difference in people's lives. We changed out an NCO on the morning show to give him some time in the afternoon slot and were inundated with phone calls and e-mails asking for his return to the morning show as he was the voice they were used to hearing on their way to work or at breakfast,"



Photo by Staff Sgt. Mitchell "Flash" Miller

Staff Sgt. Victor Gardner, AFN Europe radio NCO in charge, broadcasts the morning news live in one of the five radio studios at AFN Europe headquarters in Mannheim, Germany.



Top: Sgt. Natalie Woughter, right, AFN Europe broadcast NCO, shoots live video of the Department of Defense Dependent Schools-Europe High School Basketball Championships, which was broadcast live throughout Europe and Southwest Asia.

Photo courtesy AFN Europe

Bottom: Spc. Jennifer Dolsen, AFN Europe lead anchor, delivers the daily newscast from the television studio at AFN Europe headquarters in Mannheim.

Photo by Staff Sgt. Mitchell "Flash" Miller



## BECOMING AN AFN BROADCASTER

Any NCO wishing to re-class into the broadcast field should contact their unit re-enlistment NCO. The broadcast journalism MOS is 46R and is taught along with 46Q (print journalist), 25M (multimedia illustrator), 25R (visual information equipment operator/maintainer) and 25V (combat documentation/production specialist) at the Defense Information School located at Fort Meade, Md.

Smith said.

Another, more serious episode of on-air impact was of a captain — a psychologist — who was helping Soldiers who had contemplated suicide and had become affected by those thoughts herself. She sought help and won her battle.

“We approached her and her command and asked her to tell her story on air,” Smith said. “After the story aired, we got a call from a Soldier who said that he had been feeling like committing suicide. But, after seeing the broadcast, he was encouraged to seek help. ‘You saved my life,’ he said.”

“We broadcast to more than 500,000 people. Our broadcasts reach 56 different countries on three continents; we also broadcast to deployed troops in Afghanistan and Iraq via satellite,” Smith said. He added that in Europe, the radio broadcasts can be tuned in to by anyone. But the TV signal, apart from one free, over-the-air channel that can only be heard in Schweinfurt, Germany, requires a decoder.

The AFN stations, which are scattered throughout Germany, along with one



each in Belgium, Spain, Turkey, Greece and Portugal, are staffed with Soldiers, sailors, airmen and civilian personnel with backgrounds in broadcasting and the technical support specialties required to keep the equipment in good working order. AFN personnel also continually deploy to Afghanistan, Iraq and other flashpoints around the world.

Staff Sgt. Chris Meadows, known as “Moose” by his audience, is the radio section NCO in charge at AFN Benelux, located on Caserne Daumerie in Chièvres, Belgium. His broadcast, a music show intermingled with command information

and public service announcements, is heard not only by the Americans, but also the Belgian and Dutch communities.

“I get a lot of feedback via phone calls and even through Facebook, and the locals enjoy the programs every bit as much as the U.S. personnel. I feel privileged to provide my listeners with information on what is going on around the world and also right here in their own backyards.

“It is an honor not only to be able to keep service members and their families plugged in to America while they are away from their families and home, but to also provide the local populace with a taste of



Top: Staff Sgt. Mitchell "Flash" Miller, AFN Europe technical director, operates the Echolab switcher during the recording of the daily 15-minute newscast.

Photo by Spc. Ethan Anderson

Bottom: Staff Sgt. Lashaundra Shaw-Rankin, AFN Heidelberg operations NCO, shoots video of Afghan children on their way to school in Bagram, Afghanistan.

Photo courtesy AFN Europe



American culture," Meadows said.

Meadows has also been deployed to Afghanistan where he worked for AFN Afghanistan as a news chief with two broadcast journalists who went "outside the wire" in search of stories showing how U.S. military personnel were fighting the war on terrorism.

"There are very few MOSs (military occupational specialties) in which you get

to see and experience what everybody in the Army does," Brenci said. "We are able to tell the world the story of American service members and the duties they perform. The uncensored information we provide impacts hundreds of thousands of people, and in some cases, helps save lives." 📺

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— Staff Sgt. Chris "Moose" Meadows