

Twentieth Century history is that of rapid technological change and World War II was possibly the zenith of this growth and change. Following a strike by the AFM (American Federation Of Musicians), demanding royalties for musicians who had lost work due to the rise of pre-recorded music, the amount of new music recorded dropped and, with the advent of war, many musicians were then conscripted.

Demand was, however, still high, especially among the homesick troops. As a result special 12 and 16 inch radio transcription records playing at 33 1/3 were shipped to special army DJs and POWs in order to boost morale. They contained both important troop information and top hits of the day, often recorded free of charge by big artists such as Glenn Miller and the Andrews Sisters. These "V-discs" (V for Victory or Robert Vincent who introduced the concept) faced several large problems. The discs, made from shellac, were brittle and often arrived cracked or broken, and as Japan invaded Asia the source of shellac, the Lac beetle of South Asia, became scarce. Added to this was the recurring problem of shellac as a medium. It had to be stored very carefully or, as an organic compound it would deteriorate and was also easily scratched. As it was, the amount of playing time even on larger discs was limited to 10 minutes per side. On shellac, increasing the number of grooves beyond 80-100 per inch risked the groove walls collapsing, and making the discs larger than 16 inches was, frankly, unfeasible. A new medium was needed. Enter a versatile compound discovered (twice!) over twenty years before - Polyvinyl Chloride, PVC or Vinyl for short.

## *V-Disc Armed Forces Program*

At the beginning of World War II, the War department, through the Army Services Forces — Special Services Division, distributed thousands of shellac phonograph records (V DISCS) to Army Forces throughout the world. Shortly after the Army's program started, the U.S. Navy became involved in the program, appointing E.P. DiGiannantonio to run the Navy, Marine and Coast Guard programs.

These historic recordings were the only music recorded during the 1940's American Federation of Musicians (AFM) recording ban. As their contribution to the war effort, AFM President James C. Petrillo, as well as all the movie and recording studios, issued a carte blanche strike clearance to the War Department for the sole purpose of producing and distributing "music from back home" as a morale booster to American troops overseas. This clearance allowed many musical stars, who were under contract to different studios, to perform together for the first, and in some cases, the only time.

Thanks to the thousands of musicians, vocalists, movie and record company executives, and other individuals who contributed their time to this program, more than eight million V DISCS were produced and distributed from 1943 to 1949. Most of the top musical talents of the time, including Perry Como, Glenn Miller, Artie Shaw, Bing Crosby, Fats Waller, Joe Stafford, The Three Suns, Duke Ellington, Lionel Hampton, and many others, gave freely of their time in special recording sessions held in studios, concert halls, sound stages, military bases, and nightclubs from coast to coast. The sessions occurred at any time of day or night, based on the availability of the performers. Many of these sessions began at 2:00 A.M. or 3:00 A.M. after nightclub and concert performances.

One problem to overcome in the production and distribution of V DISCS was the extremely high rate of breakage of the shellac records during trans-shipment. Research in this error eventually led to the development of phonographic record pressings made from a vinylite process which solved the breakage problem. However, use of vinylite was soon prohibited because the material was also used extensively by the military for electrical insulation , life rafts etc. . . and was classified for urgent military purposes only. After a lengthy search for non-critical materials, Formvar was discovered. A Canadian polyvinyl acetyl resin developed in early 1943, Formvar was not only as flexible as vinylite, it resulted in higher fidelity records which to this day have not deteriorated in sound quality.

V DISCS were shipped to military units around the world on a monthly basis, throughout the life of the program. Each V DISC kit contained 100 Duotone or Microphonic steel needles and 20 records with about 45 to 40 tunes.

Approval has been granted to E.P. "Digi" DiGiannantonio, the Navy Lieutenant who was in charge of the Navy V DISC program, to publicly release the V DISC recordings in celebration of the 50th Anniversary of World War II. For more than four decades, Digi has housed the original V DISCS in his record library awaiting the appropriate time to share these historic recordings with the public.

The sound heard on the V DISC is the unaltered recording of 78 RPM acetates. These recordings have not been artificially enhanced nor rechanneled for stereo effect. Even with the most advanced technology, occasional imperfections will be noted by the listener. The imperfections remain as a result of the producer's conviction that historical reissues must strive to duplicate the sound of the original recordings made during this period.

# VICTORY MUSIC: THE STORY OF THE V-DISC RECORD LABEL (1943-1949)

By Chuck Miller

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Corporal George Simon took a deep breath, as the brothers approached the microphone.

For the first time in over fifteen years, Tommy Dorsey's orchestra would share the same recording studio with his brother Jimmy Dorsey's band, a special performance in New York's Liederkrantz Hall on March 15, 1945. In order to make sure both orchestras' sounds were properly recorded, Simon had the respective brass sections set up at one side of the studio, the reed section on the other side, and the rhythm sections in the middle. The feed to the mastering studio had to go through two different radio network hookups just to get to the recording plant. "This resulted in somewhat diminished fidelity," wrote Simon, "but the feeling came through."

For any big band devotee, this would be a historical recording, replete with newspaper stories and radio announcements. The track should have been saved and reissued on hundreds of Dorsey greatest hits packages. But Simon was recording this for V-Disc Records, a government-created music company. For him, this was just another recording session - albeit a historical one - and the two tracks produced today would end up in a box of 78's that were shipped overseas to GI's and gunners and specialists and ensigns and generals and captains for free - recordings that were not sold in Stateside record stores.

Radio personality Bill Goodwin introduced the festivities.

"Well fellows, we have two bands making this V-Disc for you. One of them is led by the former boss of my present boss, a fellow named Tom Dorsey."

"Yeah, that's right, but tell me, who's this other character leading this other band?"

"Don't know him," said Goodwin.

"Wait a minute, I'm your brother Jimmy."

"Oh."

"Remember, we used to play together in the same band when we were kids?"

The trio continue to banter about old times, then discuss Bill Goodwin's involvement with his "new boss," Frank Sinatra. Simon smiles. He knows this introduction will mesh well with whatever song the Dorseys perform.

Goodwin continues.

"Well fellows, how about cutting out the talk and making a little music here for the lads, huh?"

"That's solid with me."

"That's solid with me, 'T' - let's go."

With that, both bands begin to play "More Than You Know" (*V-Disc 451, Navy V-Disc 231*), and Tommy Dorsey's trombone and Jimmy Dorsey's clarinet blended like magic.

Such recording sessions are the hallmark of V-Disc Records, a label whose seven-year existence in the 1940's produced a treasure trove of rare jazz and big band tunes, patriotic marching music and world-class classical orchestral performances. For a few years, thanks to a series of musician's union strikes, V-Disc was the only company able to produce new releases of popular songs. American servicemen throughout the theater of war, from the Italian Alps to the North African deserts, received a shipment of V-Discs every month, filled with a wide variety of music from every different genre. Nine hundred 12-inch 78's, encompassing over 2700 songs. A few years later, many of these discs were confiscated and destroyed by those same armed forces - but today, the records have survived, and the songs on those old 78's are resurfacing on compact disc.

The V-Disc program actually began in June 1941, six months before the United States' involvement in World War II, when Captain Howard Bronson was assigned to the Army's Recreation and Welfare Section as a musical advisor. Bronson, whose previous musical experience included a stint in John Philip Sousa's marching band, suggested the troops might appreciate a series of records featuring military band music, inspirational records that could motivate soldiers and improve morale.

Bronson's original idea showed promise, and by 1942 the Armed Forces Radio Service (AFRS) sent 16-inch, 33 rpm shellac transcription discs to the troops, mostly radio shows with the commercials edited out. The troops had no say in what they received - the transcription disc could have a concert on it, or some big band music, or a symphony orchestra. And even then, at least they arrived safely - as opposed to the shellac records their mothers and girlfriends sent them (over 80% of shellac 78's became jigsaw puzzles by the time they reached the soldiers).

Meanwhile, the American Federation of Musicians, under the leadership of James Caesar Petrillo, were upset. Petrillo argued that every time a record was played on the radio or in a jukebox, his union members received neither compensation nor remuneration. With that in mind, Petrillo told the four major record companies (RCA Victor, Decca, Columbia and Capitol) that unless AFM members received a higher royalty payment to compensate for those losses, the union would not produce any more records after July 31, 1942. The



companies initially refused to pay the increased royalty, and instead stockpiled performances and concerts, hoping that the strike would be short.

It lasted for two years.

During the strike, musicians would give concerts and radio broadcasts, but made no recorded music (a cappella groups were exempt from the ban, as were groups like the Harmonicats, whose harmonicas were not considered "instruments" by Petrillo). The record companies quickly ran out of pre-strike unreleased material, and the demand for new songs was increasing dramatically (Decca, for example, had the rights to release the soundtrack to the popular show "Oklahoma!" - but no musicians would cross the picket line to record the album). And as the war raged on, soldiers wanted to hear new songs and new singers, not the same pre-1942 recordings they heard before they shipped off to the foxholes.

Now Lieutenant George Robert Vincent enters the picture. Vincent had a long association with both the armed forces and recorded music. He fought in World War I as a 17-year old lieutenant. He later worked with Thomas Edison, designing improvements to the phonograph. By 1942, he rejoined the Army and was assigned to the Armed Forces Radio Service as a technical officer, and worked with Bronson's 16-inch transcription discs.

Vincent knew the soldiers wanted to hear new music, so he asked his supervisors if a special recording project could be undertaken that would provide new songs to the platoons. In July 1943, Vincent discussed the project with Major Bronson. Bronson okayed it, but told Vincent that there was no money in the Army budget to start a record company. Undaunted, Vincent met with the Army's fiscal officer, Major Howard Haycraft, who immediately allocated one million dollars to Vincent's new project.

With money in hand, Vincent devoted all his time to the music program. He recruited Steve Sholes, a former A&R man at RCA Victor who supervised jazz recordings by Sidney Bechet and Jelly Roll Morton, to assist him. Vincent's record company now had a name - "V-Discs," a sobriquet coined by Vincent's secretary. It also acquired a logo - a red-white-and-blue graphic designed by a staff artist at *Yank* magazine on a \$5 retainer.

The first problem was trying to find a suitable substitute for shellac, the main component for records. Four out of every five transcription discs sent overseas arrived in pieces. And when the Japanese took over French Indochina, America lost its supply of imported shellac. Although shellac could be recycled and reused (and many Americans donated their old 78's in scrap drives for war materials), the music was drowned out by the loud surface noise on recycled shellac discs.

After much testing, Vincent's team found that Vinylite, a Union Carbide product, could be used as a viable substitute for shellac. Because the Army also used Vinylite for insulation and life rafts, V-Discs used a second resin - Formvar, a Canadian-invented

polyvinyl - in conjunction with Vinylite (one of the companies that pressed records for V-Disc, Columbia, refused to use either compound, instead making V-Discs out of whatever shellac they could allocate).

After Steve Sholes joined the V-Disc project, two other enlisted men signed on - Morty "Perfect Pitch" Palitz, who spent his civilian life with Decca, Brunswick and Columbia records; and Walt Heebner, a former RCA sales department employee. Heebner's assignment was to convince the AFM and Petrillo to grant a special waiver to record V-Discs for the Army.

On October 27, 1943, Petrillo wrote Heebner back with this letter:

"This will acknowledge receipt of your letter of October 25<sup>th</sup> containing request for permission for our members to make records in connection with your V-DISC project ... This is to advise you that the American Federation of Musicians interposes no objections to the making and use of these recordings ... This letter also carries with it permission for those members of the American Federation of Musicians, who are desirous of so doing, to volunteer their services for the making of such recordings."

There were some conditions, though. Because of the AFM strike, Petrillo asked that the recordings not be used for any commercial purposes; that the records not be sold; and that all V-Discs were to be destroyed after the war. From that moment on, artists who wanted to record now had an outlet for their productivity - as well as a guaranteed, receptive, enthusiastic worldwide audience of soldiers and sailors.

Another key person, Sgt. Tony Janak, joined the project, and would stay with V-Disc throughout its existence. Janak, a former recording engineer for Columbia Records, produced special V-Disc "remote" recording sessions, setting up 400 pounds of "portable" recording equipment wherever artists played - in concert halls, in jazz clubs, in apartments. "In the beginning," wrote Janak, "we chose material from broadcasts and the files of the record companies that were contracting on the project. Then we got into doing live sessions of our own: [we] were always dreaming up new recording dates. We recorded at Columbia Records, RCA Victor, NBC, World, and Carnegie Hall with Louis Armstrong, Tommy Dorsey, and Duke Ellington; jazz at the Metropolitan Opera House and Stuyvesant Casino; at West Point with the Military Academy Band."

"Hello fellows, this is Spike Jones. Special Services has asked us to do a record session for you, so we couldn't get here fast enough, really. Here's some relaxation at 78 rpm."

-Spike Jones, introducing "Minka" and "McNamara's Band" (*V-Disc 570*)

The V-Discs were an instant hit overseas. Soldiers who were tired of hearing the same old recordings were treated to new and special releases from the top bands of the day. And such a varied selection - big band hits, some swing music, classical performances from the top symphonies, a little jazz here and there, even some marching music to keep Major Bronson happy. Glenn Miller's orchestra even recorded a march version of W.C. Handy's "St. Louis Blues" (*V-Disc 65, Navy V-Disc 114*) to make sure there was at least one march disc in the monthly shipments. And unlike the bulky 16-inch AFRS transcription discs, the 12-inch V-Discs were perfect for listening pleasure in the mess hall, at the Officer's Club, even piped over loudspeakers during recreation time.

Music for V-Disc came from almost everywhere. Radio networks sent airchecks and live feeds to V-Disc headquarters in New York. Some movie studios sent rehearsal feeds from the latest Hollywood motion pictures to V-Disc. Artists gathered at several V-Disc recording sessions in theaters around New York and Los Angeles, including CBS Playhouse No. 3 (currently the Ed Sullivan Theater), NBC Studio 8H (the current home of "Saturday Night Live"), and CBS Playhouse No. 4 (reborn in the 1970's as "Studio 54").

In 1943, *Life* commissioned a story on V-Discs, and photographer Gjon Mili hosted an all-night jam session in his apartment. Tony Janak and newly-promoted Captain Vincent were there to record an all-star V-Disc combo. On horns - Wild Bill Davison, Bobby Hackett, Lou McGarity, Benny Morton, Miff Mole, Irving Fazola, and Ed Hall. Duke Ellington sat at piano, and was joined by Jess Stacy, Mary Lou Williams, James P. Johnson, and Teddy Wilson. Sid Catlett and Cozy Cole played drums, and Josh White joined Eddie Condon on guitar. Singing for this group were Josh White, Lee Wiley, and Billie Holiday. Although the music was as spectacular as those combined artists could create, the acoustics in Mili's apartment were so harsh that none of the songs recorded could be issued. The photographer, however, did get some nice shots of this V-Disc All-Star band for *Life* (October 11, 1943).

"This is Arturo Toscanini, conducting the NBC Symphony Orchestra. We are pleased to be able to convey to you through the medium of this V-Disc the stirring *Garibaldi's Hymn*, which represents the free spirit of the Italian people." (*V-Disc 31*)

In June 1944, the Navy joined the V-Disc program, under the tutelage of Lieutenant Ed DiGiannantonio, known to friends as "DiGi." A talented recorder and ham operator in his youth, DiGi used to record the Artie Shaw and Glenn Miller bands in his Boston hometown, then play his homemade discs over his ham radio. While in the Navy, he fought at the battles of Wake Island and the Coral Sea, and was on the heavy cruiser *Vincennes* when it sank near Guadalcanal. "When I got out of the hospital, I was assigned to a naval station in Bayonne, New Jersey, as a technical liaison officer. About a year in that job, I got a call from a general in New York, he said, 'DiGi, I looked at your



Disc program.' I said, don't know what that is. My and I'd rather get on a new and fight again.' So they there, they told me what it the recording of all classes classical, semi-classical, hillbilly, religious, and you. At first, I was reluctant, but nevertheless, upon the urging of my commanding officer, I went up there and took the assignment as the naval officer in charge of the V-Disc program in New York City."



background, and we would like you to join the V-General, I ship was sunk, ship and go invited me up involved was of music, from jazz, swing, what have

Every month, a V-Disc kit of 30 records was sent from the RCA plant in Camden, to ports of call and bases around the European and Pacific theaters of operations. Inside the kit, along with the V-Discs, was an assortment of steel needles for the phonograph, a set of lyric sheets, and a questionnaire that the soldiers could fill out and return, asking what they liked the best, what they liked the least, and what they wanted to hear in the future. Four female soldiers - two Army WAC's and two Navy WAVE's - tabulated the thousands of letters that came back from the front. Among all requests, Bing Crosby's "White Christmas" was the most popular song. As for non-holiday fare, the soldiers all wanted to hear "Stardust." V-Disc obliged the request, and gave the soldiers "Stardust" as done by Artie Shaw (*V-Disc 45*), Glenn Miller (*V-Disc 65*), Marie Greene (*V-Disc 407*, *Navy V-Disc 187*), Artie Shaw again (*V-Disc 560*), Edgar Haynes (*V-Disc 681*), and even a performance by the song's writer, Hoagy Carmichael (*V-Disc 536*).

"We might get 4000 requests to hear Frank Sinatra sing 'That Old Black Magic,'" said DiGi. "We'd go out to the coast, get in touch with Frank, and we'd arrange a session, usually at one of the soundstages or one of the radio studios. And instead of doing just the one tune, we would do perhaps 12 or 15 different songs, and having those Sinatra songs in the bank for future releases."

"Hiya men, this is Frank Sinatra. I hope you like these tunes that I've chosen to do for you on these very wonderful V-Discs. And I hope you get as much of a kick out of hearing them as I do out of singing them for you."  
- Frank Sinatra, introducing "That Old Black Magic" (*V-Disc 722*)

"The first session I was ever involved with," said DiGi, "was a Sinatra session in Hollywood. What got me was the fact that no one else in the band was playing the melody, and Frank was up there singing the whole melody by himself - of course, he had perfect pitch - and he was in a way like Toscanini, if a guy in the band made a mistake, he could pick it up. The guy at the time was very friendly, very cooperative, he never





turned us down for any session we did. No one ever gave Frank Sinatra credit for all his contributions during World War II. He made close to 70 recordings, all at the request of GI's."

Because the 12-inch V-Discs could hold up to six minutes of music per side, it allowed more flexibility and longer jams from jazz artists and big bands. "When a lot of these guys recorded in the studio," said DiGi, "they did it under a very staid condition. When they did V-Discs, some of them already had a couple of shots and were warmed up. It was

very informal, and the things just rocked. If they wanted to jam for six minutes, we could do it."

Sometimes the atmosphere was *too* loose. The songs and lyrics on V-Discs had to be so clean as to not offend a general (or his wife). Even words like *hell* and *damn* were excised from V-Discs. Only half of Fats Waller's V-Disc recording sessions ever reached pressing stage - "Ain't Misbehavin'" got pressed, but not "You're A Viper (The Reefer Song)." "We did the session with Fats Waller," said DiGi, "we did about 22 selections. When he first got to the studio, he demanded a bottle of VAT-69, which is not hair tonic. And he started playing the piano, and he was okay for a while. Then he consumed the second bottle, and out of the 22 songs, we only used about 8 or 9 of them, because he got very sloppy and started using a few words you shouldn't use. The last records Fats Waller ever made were V-Discs. Then he went out to California, and on the way back from Los Angeles he died on the Super Chief train. So we have those final records of Fats Waller."

Even the introductions had to be carefully monitored. One unreleased Glenn Miller introduction was interrupted by a falling sheet music stand (and Miller's response: "Jesus Christ, what was that..."). DiGi recalls one session where Bing Crosby, the epitome of cool, let down his guard in a rare public display of earthiness. "There was one particular session where we're doing it with Bing Crosby, and one of the most famous guitar players in the world was a guy named Tony Mottola. And he started playing the introduction to one of Bing's songs, and he missed a note. And Bing said, 'Tony, take your #@\*! gloves off!' And no one knew Bing had said that, and when we played it back, of course the place was in an uproar for a couple of minutes - here was a genius making a flub that doesn't happen that often."

"Hello men. This is Donald Mills. My brothers and I are here in the studio making a few V-Discs for all of you. And we want you to know that we sure hope you have as much fun listening to them as we have in making them for you ... Good luck to all of you."  
- introduction to "You Tell Me Your Dreams," (*V-Disc 452, Navy V-Disc 232*)



By 1944, Captain Vincent found a new way to make the public aware of the V-Disc project - as well as make new recordings for the servicemen at the same time. "For The Record," a program broadcast on New York's WEA and simulcast through the NBC network, had a rotating orchestra, master of ceremonies and vocalists throughout its seventeen-week summer run. Overseeing this new project was a new member of the V-Disc project, Cpl. George Simon, a music writer for *Metronome* magazine who had played drums for the Glenn Miller Orchestra in the 1930's, and who knew almost every jazz musician and band member on a first-name basis.

"During my fifteen or so months on the V-Disc job," wrote Simon, "I contacted and recorded Benny Goodman, Woody Herman, Count Basie several times, Louis Armstrong and a bunch of all-stars, and, at a session that turned out to be the most exciting of all my V-Disc ventures, the combined bands of Jimmy and Tommy Dorsey ... Ella Fitzgerald with a backup group that included Buddy Rich (when, for the first time that I know of, she scatted a chorus, at her suggestion) ... I did have the privilege of directing that Monday night 'For The Record' NBC radio series, for which I contacted many of the artists."

While most record companies frowned upon the "sharing" of artists on record, the AFM strike had an unexpected benefit to the V-Disc project - it allowed artists who hadn't worked together in years to combine their talents in a special release for the boys overseas, without being shackled by the restrictive contracts of their respective record companies. Such one-of-a-kind performances that were captured on V-Disc include:

- Tommy Dorsey performing "Somewhere Over The Rainbow", with guest vocalist Judy Garland (*V-Disc 335; Navy V-Disc 159*).
- Ella Fitzgerald scatting with Buddy Rich's orchestra on a version of "Blue Skies," where both Fitzgerald and Rich scat through whatever lyrics they didn't remember (*V-Disc 775*).
- Fats Waller teasing Paul Robeson, suggesting that the famed actor/singer make some V-Discs for the troops (on "Too Sleepy People," *V-Disc 32*), not realizing that Robeson had included two gospel recordings in the very same V-Disc kit ("Deep River" and "I'm Going To Tell God All My Troubles," on *V-Disc 51*).
- Abbott and Costello doing "Who's On First," on a V-Disc packaged with Brooklyn Dodgers organist Gladys Gooding playing a baseball medley (*V-Disc 741*).
- An all-star jazz session, sponsored by *Esquire* magazine, that created the greatest jazz combo of its day - Louis Armstrong, Roy Eldridge, Jack Teagarden, Coleman Hawkins, Art Tatum, Red Norvo, Lionel Hampton, Big Sid Catlett, Oscar Pettiford, Al Casey and Barney Bigard ("Mop Mop"

and "Rose Room," *V-Disc 152*).

V-Disc received other jazz performances from Mildred Bailey's CBS radio shows, "Mildred Bailey and Company," and "Music Till Midnight." Sunday afternoon concerts of the New York Philharmonic were sent by line from WABC to the V-Disc studios. In November 1944, Captain Vincent organized a special "V-Disc Treasury All-Star Performance" at Constitution Hall, and sold over \$3 million in War Bonds - and garnered a few new tracks for V-Disc's archives.

During the first week of the V-Disc project, 1,780 boxes of 30 V-Discs and assorted needles were shipped to Ports of Embarkation, and from there to the troops. Within a year, production of the V-Discs tripled, so that the Navy, Air Force, Marines and Coast Guard would have enough V-Discs of their own. By 1945, more than 4 million records had been shipped from the Camden plant (along with 125,000 spring-wound V-Disc brand phonographs, and billions of steel needles). Even the Office of War Information and Office of Inter-American Affairs wanted V-Discs - they were used by shortwave operators as propaganda materials to Latin American and European countries; a counterbalance to Axis Sally and Tokyo Rose.

As the war reached a close, so too did the AFM union strike - the four major record companies capitulated to Petrillo's demands, and increased their royalty payments to the AFM rank and file. But AFM members continued to record for V-Disc, as part of their patriotic duty to the soldiers and seamen.

Glenn Miller and his orchestra was part of that patriotic duty. The first V-Disc kit had Glenn Miller recordings in it, taken from RCA Victor and Bluebird sessions recorded before the AFM strike. After accepting a commission from Major Bronson of the Music Division, he later formed the 418<sup>th</sup> Army Air Force Training Command Orchestra, and began a series of broadcasts from Yale University over CBS's network. The program, "I Sustain The Wings," caught the attention of V-Disc officer Ed DiGiannantonio, who had recorded Miller in the 1930's for DiGi's ham radio broadcasts.

"I built a recorder, and I bought little aluminum discs, they were about 8 inches in diameter, made by Presto. And the reason why I made the recordings in the first place, was as a ham, when you got on the air, you used to call CQ, CQ, meaning you want to talk to someone. I got a little lazy, so I made a recording. I would play the record, then take it off and talk to someone in Europe or what have you. So I thought, why not record the bands? I really didn't expect anything to happen, but I got a good reaction from guys like Artie Shaw and Glenn Miller and Benny Goodman. I paid 90 cents for the blank, and I sold the records to those guys for two and a half bucks. I still have here one of the records I made for Glenn Miller in April 1937. So I walked into his studio while he was recording for 'I Sustain The Wings,' and he looked at me, he said, 'DiGi, what are you doing here?' I said 'Glenn, I'm a naval officer in charge of the V-Disc program.' So we recorded Glenn Miller's V-Disc sessions between the three hour gap for the east coast and west coast broadcasts, and we became very dear friends."

"This is Captain Glenn Miller, speaking for the Army Air Force Training Command Orchestra, and we hope that you soldiers of the Allied Forces enjoy these V-Discs that we're making just for you."

- Glenn Miller, introducing "Stardust" (V-Disc 65)

During one session in October 1944, the Glenn Miller band traveled to the RCA Victor studios in New York for a special V-Disc recording session. The session was memorable



to another V-Disc officer - after one of the recordings, Private Steve Sholes informed Miller that the orchestra's first trumpet was flat. *Captain Miller* was not amused. "Naturally, he really burned me to a cinder," wrote Sholes.

Still, Miller and his orchestra recorded over 60 tracks for V-Disc, culled from special sessions and from his radio broadcasts.

When Glenn Miller died in a plane crash in December 1944, the music world lost one of its great bandleaders - and the V-Disc program lost one of its most ardent supporters.

When the war ended in 1945, some of the V-Disc officers drifted away from the original project. DiGiannantonio was promoted to the Entertainment Section of the Navy's Liaison Unit, and oversaw not only V-Discs, but also the USO shows. Steve Sholes went back to RCA after his discharge, recording and producing Dizzy Gillespie and Coleman Hawkins, signing Chet Atkins as his assistant, and recommending that RCA sign this kid from Tennessee named Elvis Presley.

Walter Heebner also returned to RCA Victor, working in its Hollywood division. He later created his own record label and tape cartridge division, and assisted in a project where 19<sup>th</sup>-century player piano rolls were transferred to records. George Simon returned to *Metronome* magazine, worked with the Newport Jazz Festival, and became Executive Secretary of NARAS.

As for Captain Vincent, he was promoted to Major and received the Legion of Merit award for his services with the V-Disc project. He later designed the vast multilingual translation complex for the Nuremberg War Crimes trials, and installed a similar electronic multilingual translation system into the new United Nations building.

Sergeant Tony Janak remained with V-Disc - Major Bronson and the Army felt V-Discs was too important to the close down just yet. Even after his discharge in 1946, Janak kept producing and recording V-Discs throughout the latter half of the decade, as the Marshall Plan kept soldiers stationed in faraway lands. He still supervised specialized recording

sessions for V-Discs, and contracted with various radio networks for dress-rehearsal feeds. He created a special radio program on New York's WNEW, the "WNEW Saturday Swing Show," that would provide new swing and jazz tunes for the V-Discs.

"This is Colonel Bronson, Chief of the Music Branch. We know what a great many of you will think when you see the Christmas



appearance of this package of V-Discs, because a lot of us have been overseas too. We have included Christmas selections in this seemingly early release because, in past years, some outfits received them a little late. This year we want to make sure that every one of you, all the way out to the end of the line, have them for the holiday season ...

The men who make V-Discs: Sergeant Janak, Sergeant Reed, Private Brenner, Frank Bruno and all of us here in the Music Branch join your buddies and the grateful citizens of our beloved country in

wishing you a sincere, very Merry Christmas. And now, Nelson Eddy, with Robert Armbruster's orchestra and chorus, will perform *The Twelve Days of Christmas.*" (V-Disc 651)

But as the years wore on, V-Discs became more expensive to produce. The original 30-disc kit became a 20-disc kit in February 1944, but that was so the Army could send more boxes overseas. In September 1945, the kit content was reduced from twenty discs to fifteen. One year later, the kits were reduced to ten records apiece, and were sent on a "request-only" basis. In November 1947, the monthly shipments were decreased to every other month.

And to make things more difficult, the record companies who originally pressed records for V-Disc now treated it like a competitor. During the war, RCA and Columbia opened their musical libraries and archives for V-Disc. Now, Tony Janak had to fill the V-Disc kits with more live recordings and radio feeds, just to get today's top hits. By using these outlets, wrote Janek, V-Disc "could get new, up-to-the-minute popular songs - [we] obviously couldn't get them from the commercial companies with whom [we] essentially were in competition."

In May 1949, the final kits - a box of ten discs containing tracks from Sarah Vaughan, Tex Ritter, Buddy Rich, Duke Ellington, Frank Sinatra and Leopold Stokowski - were the final records ever released by V-Disc.

After the V-Disc program ended in 1949, the Armed Services set out to honor the original AFM request that the records not be used for commercial purposes. Original masters and stampers were destroyed. Leftover V-Discs at bases and on ships were discarded. On some occasions, the FBI and the Provost Marshal's Office confiscated and destroyed V-Discs that servicemen had smuggled home. An employee at a Los Angeles record company even did some jail time - his crime was the illegal possession of over 2500 V-Discs.

But some clear heads surfaced above the madness. The Library of Congress has a complete set of V-Discs, and the National Archives did save some of the metal stampers. Another nearly complete set of V-Discs was gathered through the work of Lieutenant DiGiannantonio. "I reported to a captain, he said to me, 'DiGi, I want you to keep a copy of every one of these Navy records, and in case anything happens, we've got a copy.' So I said 'Yes sir.' So I had these special cabinets made, and I put them in shelves and in dust-proof containers. After the V-Disc program ended, and I got reassigned, I asked, 'Captain, what do you want me to do with these things?' He said, 'I don't know, take them home.' So I took them home."

Those custom-made shelves and dust-proof containers saved DiGi's collection in 1954, when Hurricane Carol tore through the New England coast. DiGi's basement was flooded with eight feet of water, and priceless artifacts of the V-Disc project - photos of him with the various artists, meticulous notes about performers and recording studios - were washed into the Charles River. But the record cabinets withstood the hurricane, protecting his V-Discs to this day.

In 1978, Ed DiGiannantonio began a new odyssey, talking to military and musical organizations in an effort to legally re-release the V-Discs to American listeners (some bootleg albums with scratchy V-Disc transcriptions appeared in the early 1970's, mostly from Europe). It took him twelve years of calls and redirects, but by 1990 he was able to release a three-cassette series of popular V-Disc recordings, many with the original introductions, all mastered from his original 78's. "Now the big question that has never been resolved, is whether or not some of these artists are due royalties. I've set up an escrow fund just in case, but since they volunteered their services, and the record companies volunteer their services, I've never had anybody ask for money. But in case they do, I can say if I owe you a dime a record, I'll do it. I've been completely honest and completely above board in every single thing I've done in this project."

Today, DiGi supervises a line of V-Disc compact discs, distributed through the Collector's Choice music catalog. Those artists who gave their time and talent - Benny Goodman, Tommy Dorsey, the Andrews Sisters, The Three Suns - now have their patriotic recordings available on CD. "I knew a guy in Richmond, a fellow named Walt Smith, and he called me about a V-Disc - he heard about me on radio talking about them. He told another guy in South Carolina about me, and this guy called Richard Perlman, who was president of Movie Play USA, a subsidiary of a worldwide distribution company. And the next thing I knew, I got a call from Richard Perlman, who talked to me and said 'DiGi, I want to do a V-Disc program with you.' We put out two volumes, and

we're about to put out the third volume, as well as compilations of various artists on V-Disc."

And DiGiannantonio has one final mission in life - as the last surviving officer of the V-Disc project, he would like to make sure both the musicians who gave their time and talents to the V-Disc project, and the servicemen in the Music Division who recorded, produced, gathered and released the titles to soldiers and seamen around the world, receive the recognition and honor they are due. "Right now, I don't know when I'm going to die, but the last thing I would like to do is give some publicity to the musicians and the record companies and everybody else for their contributions that they gave during World War II for this music. No one has ever said, 'Hey guys, you did a fantastic job, and the country thanks you.' It's long overdue. There's not that many of these guys that are still alive. No one has ever thanked any of the artists who contributed their talents, and with these releases, I would like very much to be able to do that."

"Hello fellows. I'm awfully glad we got to make these records for you. And ... I'm the one who's doing the ravioli. So hurry on home, will you?"

- Lily Ann Carol, introducing Louis Prima's "I'll Walk Alone" (*V-Disc 525*)