

NBC to Help Set Up Four Viet TV Stations

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By ED FRANCIS

No one knows at this moment how the Vietnam problem will be resolved, but something important is taking place that hardly anyone has noticed. The National Broadcasting Co. has signed a contract to assist the South Vietnamese establish a four-station TV network.

Working with the U. S. Information Agency and RCA, its parent corporation, NBC will provide equipment, mechanical, technical and engineering services. The first station, in Saigon, will begin operation October 15, and the second, at Can Tho, southwest of Saigon, will be broadcasting in December.

Two more stations will begin operations next year at locations not yet announced.

This is an important strategic

move on the part of the U. S. The pen and spoken word are still mightier than guns and bombs. And as the Down-East Yankees say, "He who teaches and entertains is likely to rule."

Although there has been no official announcement as yet, the U. S. also is planning to send thousands of TV sets and small power generating stations to Vietnam so that outlying villages can get the TV broadcasts.

Significantly, the project will cost only \$5 million dollars, a fraction of the cost of bombs, guns, planes and troop support.

RCA will be paid \$250,000 for its service during the first year. Equipment and installation costs for the TV stations will be paid by AID. The government of South Vietnam will

control the broadcasts. U. S. defense and Armed Forces programs will use the same transmitters but broadcast on different channels.

The key to the success of this venture, obviously, will be in the quality of broadcasting and the number of South Vietnamese people able to receive the broadcasts. Communications has been a problem, particularly in outlying areas with a high level of illiteracy. But nearly everyone can see, hear and understand the spoken word.

Some obvious dangers exist. The whole idea could go sour if someone makes the mistake of showing old cowboy and Indian movies in Vietnam. To the people of Southeast Asia, the Indians would be the heroes.

Perhaps Hollywood should conjure up some Vietnamese spectacles using Southeast Asia talent. There's no telling how much a couple of Asian comics might be able to improve the psychological, emotional climate of the area.

Actually, TV already exists in Vietnam. An American controlled system using airborne transmitters has been operating since February.

This system broadcasts four hours of Armed Forces Network programs each day and an hour of Vietnamese material.

Under the new system, the Armed Services Network will be able to expand its operations and coverage on a separate basis from Vietnamese programming.