

Radio Viet-Nam Is Comedy; Stars Change but Jokes Go On

One of a Series

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SAIGON, Viet-Nam—Settle back, take a grip on your chair and we'll take up the magnificent goof known as "Radio Viet-Nam."

This story includes just about everything that is wrong with our American aid setup in Viet-Nam.

I have pieced this story together from many reliable sources. You will not find it in public records. On phony grounds of "security," much of it has been tucked away in the secret files of the United States Operations Mission, which is what they call the economic aid agency here.

Friendly Americans swarmed into Viet-Nam in 1955, intent on conquering poverty, uplifting the masses and keeping communism at bay.

Naturally, their attention soon turned to Radio Viet-Nam.

This was the small three-station radio chain the newborn nation had inherited from its former French rulers.

The director of Radio Viet-Nam was one Maj. Doan Van Cuu, a veterinarian whose specialty was the intestinal disorders of elephants.

The three "chief technicians" were non-engineers whose qualifications were that they had friends or relatives at the Presidential Palace.

Then there were the girls—dozens of small-boned, soft-lipped, gently-curved, laughing, trilling beauties with which Viet-Nam is so happily endowed—and all of them hired and thrust behind microphone or control panel after a couple hours' "training" by the admiring Cuu.



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The 7 a.m. news often came on at 1 p.m. Saturday night's serial frequently was postponed to Tuesday morning because the leading lady, one of Cuu's little birds, was "busy" Saturday night.

Then came the American experts.

Each Had Theories

Unhappily, each brought to this bedlam his own theories on the salvation of Radio Viet-Nam. Each had his pet idea on how to revamp the station's news broadcast operation. Each at various times

today has, not one, but three put his plan in action.

As a result, Radio Viet-Nam costly teletype "reperforating" devices it never has used.

Radio Viet-Nam Director Cuu, the specialist in elephant bellyaches, finally overreached his privileges. A horde of police, acting on information received about Cuu's unique bookkeeping, which never had been open to American inspection, swooped down one day, a trifle late.

Maj. Cuu had just burned his books in the alley. Some \$446,000 of the money entrusted to him remains to be accounted for today.

Maj. Cuu's successor is Bao Tho. Qualifications: ex-private secretary to President Diem, and former Viet-Nam fisheries chief.

Liked Lots of Jam

Tho brought to his job a built-in obsession. He wanted equipment that would jam the Red radio at Hanoi—and not merely make it unintelligible in Viet-Nam but all over Asia. This is impossible.

However, morale got a great boost soon after Tho took over. The Viet-Namese were unhappy about not getting a powerful 100,000 watt transmitter to sway Viet Minh and Americans.

Then came Abbott Washburn of Washington, D. C., deputy director of the entire Voice of America program, swinging through Saigon to see how things were getting

along.

The problem of the transmitter impasse reached his ears. Why, said Washburn, the Voice of America happens to have a 50,000-watt transmitter it's not doing anything with just now. We'll give it to Free Viet Nam.

The Viet-Namese were delighted.

Later, after Washburn had zoomed back to Washington, it was discovered that American law prohibits even him from giving away Voice of America equipment to foreign nations.

This threw foreign aid officials into a fizzy American "face" was at stake. Above all, the boat must not be rocked. So, the 50,000-watt \$100,000 transmitter was quietly sandwiched into the USOM budget for Viet-Nam.

NEXT—"It is not considered a compliment to call a Viet-Namese pro-American these days."

U. S. Is Probing Use of Funds

WASHINGTON — (UPI) — The State Department said it has already begun investigating allegations of widespread misuse of U. S. foreign aid funds in Viet Nam.

The charges are appearing in a series of articles by Albert M. Colegrove, a writer for the Scripps-Howard Newspapers and the Press.

Department Press Officer Joseph Reap made the statement when asked whether the department had any comment on a demand by Sen. Mike Mansfield (D., Mont.) that the charges be looked into.

"If Congress feels that the

information contained in Mr. Colegrove's articles warrants an investigation," Reap said, "we will be glad to cooperate fully in such a review." He added that the articles "are being studied now with a view towards gathering necessary information."

Mansfield wrote Acting Secretary of State C. Douglas Dillon calling attention to the first of Colegrove's dispatches.