PHOENIX PROGRAM

The Phoenix Program consists of the organization and operation in South Vietnam of information or intelligence coordination committees from the national level down to the district level with responsibilities for intelligence coordination and exploitation to neutralize what is known as the Viet Cong Infrastructure.

Historically, by the fall of 1966, large military actions were well established and it had become apparent that military action by itself was not the means to accomplish a peaceful solution in South Vietnam. Therefore, an extensive program of pacification was inaugurated; however, its success was limited since the pacification program became a prime target of the Viet Cong. They recognized this movement as a mortal attack on their methods of subversion.

It had become obvious that the Viet Cong had a massive political organization spread throughout the country and it was through this organization that the Viet Cong military forces were supplied their indispensable requirements; namely, food, intelligence and recruits. This Viet Cong organization was structured as a shadow government to the legitimate Government of South Vietnam and extended from hamlet through village, district, province and region to Saigon. This

shadow government, however, existed on a completely covert basis in those areas controlled by the Government of South Vietnam. The critical function of the Viet Cong Infrastructure was obvious since without this organization the Viet Cong could not maintain the guerrilla war and without food, intelligence or recruits, the burden of the war would have fallen on the North Vietnam Army, whose supply lines were very long and would not be able to fight as guerrillas because the troops had no local knowledge or support. If the North Vietnam Army chose to fight, it would be on conventional terms in which case the superior air and fire power of the Free World Military Assistance Forces (FWMAF) would quickly eliminate them. This situation demonstrated a critical need for a highly concentrated attack on the organization known as the Viet Cong Infrastructure.

In June 1967, Ambassador Bunker and General William Westmore-land, as Commander U. S. Military Assistance Command Vietnam (COMUSMACV), approved the concept for mounting a stepped-up coordinated attack on the Viet Cong Infrastructure. 'On 9 July 1967, the Military Assistance Command Vietnam (MACV) issued a directive (#381-41), titled "Intelligence Coordination and Exploitation for Attack on Viet Cong Infrastructure," with a short title of ICEX. The proposal adopted by MACV established joint civilian and military activities

to be carried out through ICEX. In September 1967, U. S. personnel were assigned as ICEX advisors at corps, province and district levels. As the U. S. efforts proceeded in setting up the ICEX program in the field, the Government of South Vietnam was being encouraged to establish their own framework for the program. The South Vietnamese program was established on 20 December 1967 by a decree of the Prime Minister under the code name Phung Hoang and it was at this point in time that the U. S. changed ICEX as the name of its support activity to that of Phoenix, which is the literal translation of the Vietnamese term.

The Viet Cong Tet Offensive in January and February 1968 and its aftermath resulted in operational delay by the Vietnamese in the Phoenix Program implementation and formalization from Saigon until July 1968. On 1 July 1968, the President of the Republic of Vietnam promulgated decree number 280-A/TT/SL to establish the Phung Hoang plan. The President made it clear that the attack on the Viet Cong Infrastructure was equally as important as the elimination of enemy military units. The principal operational element within the Phung Hoang organization was the National Police. The military forces were responsible for providing support to the National Police until the latter had sufficient capability to perform their missions.

The Special Police Branch and the Police Field Force were the two components charged with eliminating the Viet Cong Infrastructure and when necessary could receive support from other forces and resources.

As the Vietnamese Phung Hoang plan developed, the U.S. personnel established a Phoenix staff. The U.S. Phoenix staff was tasked with the mission to establish and maintain close liaison with designated South Vietnamese counterparts. The Special Police constitute the intelligence collection arm of the National Police with the specific mission of collecting and processing Viet Cong Infrastructure and political intelligence. The Police Field Force is a compact paramilitary organization trained and tasked to react in a timely fashion to intelligence gathered by the Special Police. All other programs with either an intelligence or reaction capability in the field are included in the Phung Hoang program. These include the Provincial Reconnaissance Units (PRU), Regional Forces, Popular Forces, Revolutionary Development Cadre (RDC), Military Security Service, Census Grievance, Civilian Irregular Defense Group (CIDG), and the Chieu Hoi program (defector program). The basic approach used in the Phoenix Program is the collection of operational information on members of the Viet Cong Infrastructure at each of the Phoenix

centers, beginning with the District Operations and Intelligence
Coordinating Center (DOICC). The exploitation of that information
is carried out by one of the following means:

- (1) Recruitment or Defection in Place: This is the ideal method -- get someone at ground level who can furnish information on VC/VCI personnel, plans, and operations.
- (2) Outright Defection: This method is highly profitable due to the fact that the Hoi Chanh or rallier is ready, willing, and able to provide the program with all the information he possesses and further can be enlisted as a guide for reaction operations.
- (3) Capture and Exploitation: When a VCI is captured, he is thoroughly interrogated to obtain all his information. Experience has shown that the hard-core captured VCI will resist interrogation, but usually some worthwhile information is obtained.
- (4) In the event of resistance which makes (1), (2), and (3) impossible, armed combat will result with the possibility of the capture, injury, or death of the VCI.
- (5) Compromise or Discreditation: This is accomplished by creating suspicion among the VC that one of their own has

betrayed them. Compromise or discreditation is effected by conducting whisper campaigns, planting incriminating evidence to reflect his dishonesty, immorality, or the pursuit for his own personal gain.

It should be noted that both U. S. and ARVN military forces have played an active role in the Phoenix Program whenever it has been appropriate, such as in cordon and search operations involving whole hamlets. It had been determined that in previous cordon and search operations military forces expended large amounts of materiel and man-power but that relatively few Viet Cong were being detected, captured or killed as a result of these operations. A lack of good intelligence appeared to be the principal reason for these results. In particular, there had been a reluctance to exploit available sources of information in the hamlet, village or district. It was, therefore, suggested that effective cordon and search operations must rely on all locally available intelligence in order to deprive the Viet Cong of a sanctuary among the population. It was in this context that carefully prepared blacklists were made. The blacklists were furnished to assist the Allied operational units in searching for specifically identified people and in screening captives or local personnel held for questioning. The information for the blacklists was prepared by the

Police Special Branch in conjunction with intelligence collected from the Provincial Interrogation Centers.

The effectiveness of the Phoenix Program is indicated by the following figures. The 1968 goal was the neutralization of 12,000 VCI members out of the estimated total of 85,000 VCI in South Vietnam. Fifteen thousand, seven hundred, seventy-six VCI identified by name and position were neutralized. Of these, 11,291 were captured; 2,230 rallied; and 2,255 were killed. Of the total, 13% (2,050) served in positions at district level or higher. The 1969 goal was for neutralization of 21,600 VCI or 1,800 per month. The criteria were established to concentrate on quality versus quantity in the program. In 1969, a total of 19,534 VCI were neutralized. Of these, 8,515 were captured; 4,832 had defected; and 6,187 were killed.

From the above explanation, it is hoped that the true mission of the Phoenix Program can be understood; namely, that it was a coordinated military and civilian effort composed of U. S. and Vietnamese organizations. The mission of the Phoenix Program was to identify and neutralize the Viet Cong Infrastructure, the life-line of the enemy's war in South Vietnam. Furthermore, Phoenix was a support effort on the American side designed to complement and assist the Phung Hoang program of the South Vietnamese Government.