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THE FUTURE APPLICABILITY OF THE PHOENIX PROGRAM

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THE FUTURE APPLICABILITY OF THE PHOENIX PROGRAM

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ABSTRACT

Various authorities in the field of counterinsurgency have continually emphasized the need to identify, locate, and neutralize the politico-military leadership controlling insurgent forces. This study discusses the strengths and weaknesses of one such attempt—the Phoenix Program. The study describes the components of the Phoenix Program so that they may be modified or deleted from future counterinsurgency programs constructed by the departments and agencies of the United States government. Considerable stress is given to inherent bureaucratic constraints which may have resulted in less than optimum performance of the program. The author concludes that while certain aspects of Phoenix were extremely successful in reducing Viet Cong influence, the entire Phoenix concept requires modification in order to build a model for future counterinsurgency operations.
PREFACE

This study investigates the efforts made by the United States and the Republic of Vietnam to build an effective program in South Vietnam to neutralize the communist leadership—the Viet Cong Infrastructure—in that country. It was undertaken because of the author's strong belief that insurgency situations will continue unabated throughout the world and that the United States must, of necessity, be prepared to participate to some degree, in accordance with the Nixon Doctrine, in assisting afflicted nations. Additionally, the writer spent nearly three years in South Vietnam involved in various counterinsurgency programs. His last tour was spent as a Phoenix Officer in Quang Tri Province where he lived and worked among the South Vietnamese people for 14 months. Subsequently, he was assigned to the Regional Phoenix Headquarters in Danang to complete the remaining six months of his 20-month tour. Having worked for and with many civilian agencies in South Vietnam, the author has gained an unusual insight into the problems and complexities of mixing military and civilian departments.
in an insurgency setting.

The writer would like to express his sincere appreciation to Mr. William E. Colby, Director of the Central Intelligence Agency; Ambassador Robert W. Komer, President Johnson's Special Assistant for Pacification Matters and Chief of CORDS; and Major General Edward G. Lansdale, USAF, Ret., a selfless giant with a lifetime of insurgency experience. All of these individuals took time from their busy schedules to assist the author in analyzing and philosophizing on the monumental effort made in South Vietnam in pursuit of an ideal.
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

From British Guiana to Vietnam, security forces have been waging a relentless war against insurgent elements; and there seems to be no end in sight. In fact it has been suggested that this is the Third World War, and that this will be the pattern of international conflict for at least a generation to come. (12:7)

Statement of the Problem

As the above quotation implies, the problem of insurgency may be the most nettlesome situation facing the US in the years to come. As such, this paper will investigate the Phoenix Program, as implemented in the Republic of Vietnam (RVN) between 1965-1969, in terms of its usefulness as a model for future counterinsurgency operations.

Objectives of the Study

The purpose of this research effort is to analyze the joint US-Government of Vietnam (GVN) effort to construct and implement a single counterinsurgency program--
the Phoenix Program. The principal objectives are to:
(1) describe the circumstances leading to the establishment of Phoenix, (2) isolate the strengths and weaknesses of the Phoenix concept, (3) discuss the various roles of the US-GVN participants in terms of how their action or inaction impacted on the program, and (4) examine the role of bureaucracy in a specific insurgency situation.

Significance of the Study

The importance of studying the Phoenix Program as a model for future counterinsurgency operations cannot be overemphasized. President Nixon, speaking of the conditions throughout the world, said in the 4 June 1973 Department of State Bulletin, *U.S. Foreign Policy for the 1970's Shaping a Durable Peace*:

... we cannot ignore the negative trends that persist. Even though Vietnam is entering a new phase, conflict remains in Indochina and ferment persists in other key areas of the world. ... Modern weapons are still being delivered to areas of great instability. (40:807)

As detente becomes a household word and discussions about the life or death of the Cold War persist, the likelihood of dealing with insurgency becomes ever greater. The nuclear parity thought to exist between the Soviet Union and the US may negate the value of strategic
weapons, thus increasing the potential for lesser forms of violence. The combination of the Nixon Doctrine (40:722) and US efforts to normalize relations with Russia, China, and Eastern Europe further demand the formulation of viable programs to counter insurgency.

While the US has found many areas of common interest to broaden relations with communist countries, the lifeblood of insurgency—the weapons, the tactics, and the technology—continue to flow from these countries to the nations of the Third World. (47) The same ideological differences existing between the US and communist countries at the height of the Vietnam War exist today. (48) Since current US policies minimize the possibility of US forces being employed as they were in the RVN, the choices facing US policymakers seem clear: isolationism or continued participation in counterinsurgency situations. The fact that the US is publicly obligated to honor its commitments and cannot exist as a "fortress America" in a highly interdependent world are factors pushing for continued participation in world affairs. (40:722) The Phoenix concept could be a vehicle for continued participation consistent with current doctrine and objectives in those nations requiring and requesting
US assistance. As an additional option for US policymakers, the attractiveness of a modified Phoenix concept is its flexibility, comparatively low cost, and its ability to accomplish certain limited objectives without a very visible US profile.

Limitations

This study is confined to the counterinsurgency activities known as Phoenix which comprised a part of the overall Pacification Program. The primary reason for limiting the study to the 1965-1969 period is the fact that this period evidenced the growth of the insurgency through various stages culminating in a conventional war situation. (49) Although much material has been written about insurgency and counterinsurgency in the RVN, only unclassified sources of information have been used. This limitation was imposed in order to insure wider use of the study should it be of interest to the Air Force, other government agencies, or individuals. The author found that much classified information on counterinsurgency tended to be biased in numerous ways and for varying reasons. Perhaps this limitation is best explained by LtCol J. J. McCuen, USA, in his book, The Art of Counter-Revolutionary War.
I have, of course, been very careful to avoid any classified or sensitive information. Nevertheless, I have found that this use of unclassified sources is no bar to factual and complete discussion of either revolutionary or counter-revolutionary strategy. Although it is not always immediately available, almost everything worth knowing is in the public domain. As a matter of fact, in many instances such material is far more complete and accurate than in official documents, which often - particularly in this type of warfare - give the picture from only one side of the hill. (emphasis added) (11:20)

Additionally, very little effort will be expended to compare insurgency and counterinsurgency programs in the RVN with other uprisings throughout history. The Maylayan and Philippine experience will only be touched upon when necessary to make or support a particular point relating to the RVN. Purely military aspects of the war in Southeast Asia will be addressed only to underscore how they may have helped or hindered the counterinsurgency effort. Finally, the origins of the insurgent movement will not be addressed in any detail as this aspect has been studied in great detail by many authors.

**Basic Assumptions**

The fundamental assumption of this study is that subversive insurgency is a very real and continuing problem for US policymakers. The author presupposes some degree
CHAPTER III

THE PHOENIX PROGRAM

The underground is the insurgent's covert political apparatus that lives among the population and that has as its primary objective obtaining the people's complicity. In the Republic of Vietnam, the Viet Cong communist underground is referred to as the infrastructure.

Revolutionary development, variously called clear and hold operations, consolidation operations, rural reconstruction, and pacification, is the focus of the internal defense development in the Republic of Vietnam. . . . the concept . . . encompasses all civilian, military, and police actions to eliminate organized Viet Cong military activity, detect and eliminate the overt and covert Viet Cong political apparatus, and nurture economic, political, and social development of a viable economy. (32:28)

The term "Phoenix" refers to the mythical bird of beauty which destroyed itself by fire and then rose from its ashes as a young and fresh spirit to relive another life cycle. (2:911) By late 1965, the Republic of Vietnam had been very nearly consumed by mankind's fire-producing instruments of warfare. The so-called big unit war was gathering momentum and the United States felt it
of awareness of the causes of insurgency on the part of the reader as well as basic understanding of frequently used military terms.

Research Approach

The Pacification Program was many things to different people. Everything the US and the GVN did to bring the war to a conclusion was conceivably a part of the Pacification Program. Such events as multi-battalion "search and destroy" operations and efforts to improve the RVN's agricultural output indicate the immense parameters of the effort. However, those actions to identify, locate, neutralize, or eliminate the politico-military Viet Cong Infrastructure (VCI) in the RVN were collectively known as the Phoenix Program. (43:5415)

This study undertakes to analyze those elements which made up the Phoenix Program. As a minor departure from classical research approaches, emphasis has been placed on the observations and conclusions of various officials and other actual participants who played significant roles in managing the Phoenix Program or who were in the RVN during the period of time covered by the study. Many of these individuals were in high policymaking positions and were thus able to provide information not
otherwise available. On the other end of the continuum, certain officers, including the author, who worked, lived, and implemented the Phoenix concept in the districts, villages, provinces, and regions of the RVN have also provided information upon which this study is based. Because of this approach, a great deal of information has been obtained by interviews or from articles and periodicals. The author recognizes the risk inherent in such an approach; however, it may be the only method of actually determining the value of Phoenix in the future. At times, much of this information may seem contradictory, and therein lies the entire problem of evaluating any program in the emotional context of Vietnam. The gaps in the continuum have been filled with information from books, official documents, and unpublished materials.

Due to the highly controversial nature of the Phoenix Program and the fact that the author was so intimately involved with it, the analyzing of collected data represents an effort at objectivity--much will depend on the frame of reference of the reader and attitudes and preconceived notions he brings to this paper.

Organization of the Study

Chapter II describes the geographical and demographical
aspects of the RVN. This information is presented as a base line or point of departure which many participants did not fully understand.

Chapter III examines the early origins of the Phoenix concept to provide the reader with an understanding of how and why the program came into being.

Chapter IV analyzes some of the major activities of the Phoenix Program as a prelude to a description of a typical Phoenix operation described in Chapter V.

Chapter VI contains a detailed evaluation of how the various US and GVN participants actually did their jobs and how well Phoenix attained its objectives.

Chapter VII is the author's conclusions and recommendation.
CHAPTER II

THE ARENA

Despite the opportunities for insurgent gains through disaffected minorities, the heart of the insurgency problem is found in the Vietnamese majority itself. The most significant prize of the present conflict is the support and control of the ethnic Vietnamese rural population. . . . (46:9)

By 1965, the RVN was a cauldron containing all the requisite ingredients of an extensively developed insurgency. Not only were geographical and demographical conditions favorable to the insurgents, but they also were faced with an unorganized and uncoordinated counter-insurgency force. (3:19) As the US became more and more involved with the situation in the RVN, understanding on the part of newly-arrived Americans of both the arena they were to work in, and the people they were to work for, became critical. (49)

Geography

South Vietnam is a country of contrasts. The southern-most portion, known as the Mekong Delta, is primarily a flat, fertile plain. It is the so-called "rice bowl"
of Vietnam and quite possibly all of Southeast Asia. Moving northward, the land begins to undulate in rolling foothills away from the South China Sea. Going further away from the sea and to the north, the land turns into rugged mountains and sometimes impenetrable triple-canopied jungle. It is the perfect arena for insurgent operations. (46:6)

The fact that the RVN is bordered on the north by the Ben Hai River and the unmarked Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) bisecting the 17th Parallel is of tremendous importance to the insurgent and his supporters since ingress and egress problems are minimal. The western flanks of the RVN present an additional paradise for the insurgent and a multitude of problems for the government. The mountains, valleys, and jungles which serve to separate Laos, Cambodia, and the RVN are virtually uninhabited and probably cannot be secured. The insurgent has been afforded the opportunity to move back and forth across these boundaries at will. On the other hand, the counter-insurgent forces have oftentimes been constrained, by international law or politics, from violating the boundaries of bordering nations. All of these factors have served to benefit the insurgent and multiply the problems
of the government. (47)

The People

The list of factors which comprise a nation's power is seemingly without end. Lumping these factors into general categories, such as land, labor, and capital, serves to emphasize the interdependent nature of these factors. But a central ingredient in any list of power factors emerges upon closer scrutiny. That factor is the people. In the final analysis, the people determine the outcome of how a nation views and struggles with the problems with which it is beset. In an insurgency situation, an understanding of the people is particularly important. (50) To a larger degree, the people of the RVN determined the success or failure of counterinsurgency programs in that nation. This situation made an understanding of who the Vietnamese people are, what their attitudes and beliefs consisted of, and their concept of nationalism exceedingly important for US advisory personnel.

One indication of widespread misunderstanding of the South Vietnamese people was the American tendency to consider the 18 million inhabitants of the RVN to be homogeneous. (18:33) Far from homogeneous, the population
of the RVN is composed of five basic groups: ethnic Vietnamese, Chinese, Montagnards, Chams, and Khmers.

**Ethnic Vietnamese**

The largest group in the RVN is the ethnic Vietnamese who number over 80% of the population. (38:61) The Vietnamese are not unlike the Chinese in that they both derive from common Mongolian extraction. The Vietnamese dominate all spheres of life in the RVN, setting traditions, customs, and mores. The majority of the Vietnamese are rice farmers and have settled in the fertile lowlands of the Mekong Delta and the river valleys and coastal plains of the Central Highlands. (38:62) They are xenophbic in nature, considering other internal and external cultures to be inferior. (16:403) This attitude has resulted in both harsh treatment and repression of the RVN's minority groups and has also impacted to some extent on the ability of US personnel to achieve required rapport in developing counterinsurgency programs.

**The Chinese**

Of all the minorities in the RVN, the Chinese are the largest group. Numbering over 1.5 million, the Chinese are predominantly city dwellers and nearly two-thirds of them live in the Saigon-Cholon complex. (46:9)
Entrepreneurial in nature, the Chinese have monopolized rice trading, milling, real estate, and other forms of commerce including money-lending. Recognizing and fearing the strong hold the Chinese have on the economy, the Vietnamese have made numerous attempts to limit Chinese influence and to assimilate them into the larger culture of the country. Most of these efforts have failed, and the Chinese continue to maintain their traditionally separate identity. They have not exploited their strong economic position for fear of increased efforts by the Vietnamese to legislatively weaken their position. (38:62) Since any insurgent situation necessitates both monetary and materiel support, the role of the Chinese in the Vietnamese insurgency was critical. Considering the vast amount of resources controlled by the Chinese, the possibility of it being diverted to insurgent elements for a profit cannot be easily dismissed. The fact that the South Vietnamese were not particularly successful in enlisting Chinese support for the GVN adds to that possibility. (3)

The Montagnards

The one million Montagnards, or mountain people, comprise the RVN's second largest minority group. They are
a loosely knit group composed of over 30 tribes, many having distinct social customs, dialects, and interests. Their primary occupation is slash-and-burn farming, hunting, and wood-cutting. The Vietnamese made many attempts to improve the living standards of the Montagnards in order to gain their support against the Viet Cong insurgents. The Montagnards are a highly individualistic breed, not dissimilar to the American Indians, who are more tightly bound to the Montagnard nation than to the nation of South Vietnam. The fact that they primarily occupy the strategic highlands and border areas of the country meant that they were significant to the GVN, the Viet Cong, and the North Vietnamese Army (NVA). Because of the Montagnard nationalism, neither side was more than temporarily successful in winning these rugged people to their side.

The Chams and Khmers

The last two minority groups in the RVN, the Chams and Khmers (Cambodians), are lumped together since they number less than a half-million people. The Chams and Khmers found themselves territorially within the RVN's boundaries after the signing of the 1954 Geneva Accords. They are the only significant minority groups in the
RVN which have either been almost totally integrated into the larger society or submerged. As a result, they have lost much of their separate identities and heritages. (38:62-63)

Although the RVN is composed of these distinctly diverse groups, certain patterns of attitudes and beliefs seemed to transcend ethnic and racial barriers and could be described as national character. Perhaps the one word most descriptive of this national character is harmony.

**Attitudes and Beliefs**

The idea of getting along with others is a concept which derives from similar Confucian and Buddhist beliefs. The philosophy of "bending like the bamboo" is apparent in all activities undertaken by the people of the RVN. (38:194) Of primary concern is the avoidance of injury and emphasis is placed on the ability to compromise. To these people, violence shatters harmony and unorganized or informal forms of violence are strongly disapproved. On the other hand, institutional violence, such as that used by the Viet Cong, is understood and recognized as a valid instrument of warfare. (25:28)

The subtlety of this difference often eluded Americans.
involved in counterinsurgency efforts. The pervasive nature of maintaining harmony is also apparent in all interpersonal relationships of the people of the RVN.

Harmony often manifests itself in the form of telling "pleasant little lies" rather than to offend by telling the truth. Another manifestation is in the area of maintaining the status quo since any disruption of the status quo negatively effects the balance of harmony. The people of the RVN will go to great lengths to avoid making decisions, not because they are indecisive by nature, but because they have learned that by not making decisions the problem often disappears. (25:28) They are stoics who place tremendous importance in accepting one's fate. Thus the problem of superimposing any form of change in such an environment, such as the Phoenix Program, assumed immense proportions. The Western concept of change is normally related to a specific time period for the change to occur. Americans become nervous and agitated if proposed changes drag on. To the people of South Vietnam, the passage of time is significantly less important.

Time in the RVN is again related to harmony. What is not done today can be done tomorrow, or even in the
next life if necessary. Being on time in the RVN was a rarity, and, although a cause of frustration to Americans, was seldom a reason for anger or frustration among the Vietnamese. They learned to use American impatience, to their advantage. They learned that by delaying or not deciding, which maintained their inner harmony, that impatience often forced Americans to do the job for them. (25:29) Understanding who the Vietnamese are and on what their attitudes and beliefs are grounded leads to a final key factor: understanding their concept of nationalism.

**Nationalism**

Nationalism can either be the glue that cements a nation together or the catalyst which tears it apart. In looking at nationalism in the RVN, emphasis must be placed on its rural characteristics since the majority of the inhabitants of that nation are rural in both habitat and outlook. (50)

To the average rural Vietnamese the idea of democracy, with its representative form of government and associated political processes, is a foreign concept. For many of these people the only contact with the government has been through corrupt provincial administrations, tradi-
tionally composed of elitist functionaries. Still concerned with occupying the harmonious middle path, the war has proven that the government and its allies oftentimes could not, or would not, provide them with security. (24:33) The rural Vietnamese often took this situation for granted, and, in order to survive, he freely changed sides as the balance of power in his village-world changed. This should not be construed to mean that the rural peoples cannot distinguish between the relative merits of communism or democracy. They are a pragmatic people who most of all want to live in peace regardless of which regime happens to be in power in far off Saigon. Experience has dramatically proven that a premature commitment to one side or the other often has a disastrous personal impact. (25:31)

Chapter III describes how the Phoenix Program came into being and provides further insight into why the understanding of the arena and its people facilitated or hindered the progress of the program.
necessary to begin the massive infusion of combat troops which was to eventually exceed the half-million mark and cost over $150 billion. (41:7) From the ashes of over 25 years of war, the idea came into being that if there was any hope of preserving the Republic of Vietnam, merely destroying the enemy's armed elements and his military machine would not be an adequate or sufficient response. (36:4) The politico-military leadership of the enemy had to be identified, located, and somehow neutralized. (50)

The insurgency that was taking place in South Vietnam was quite different from other insurgencies in recent history. (41:1) Merely applying the methods and lessons of the Maylayan or Philippine experience seemed fruitless. The mistakes made by the communists in those countries were not to be repeated in the RVN. (13:59) As early as 1961, Major General Edward G. Lansdale had reported that this "was a new kind of war, a people's war, developed by Mao Tse Tung and being refined in South Vietnam." (50) Yet it took until 1965 to translate the understanding of what was going on in the RVN into some kind of program. It became common knowledge that there were two wars in Vietnam—the military war and the "other
to fight in the unconventional arena of the RVN. Because of this situation, Mr. Komer looked to the CIA to bridge the gaps in intelligence collection and exploitation. (49)

ICEX is Formed

By 1967, General Westmoreland had agreed to the establishment of a US advisory program aimed at improving US intelligence collection programs. Initially termed the Intelligence Collection and Exploitation (ICEX) Program, its goal was to bring all the US military and civilian intelligence agencies into alignment, reduce duplication of effort, and, most importantly, focus intelligence resources on identifying and neutralizing the VCI. (44:60) A secondary goal of ICEX was to demonstrate to the GVN how the Americans could work together in intelligence collection and exploitation. (49)

Phoenix/Phung Hoang Emerges

The ICEX concept was established throughout the RVN during 1967 and enjoyed a moderate amount of success in those provinces which were fortunate enough to have strong and competent senior US leadership. While the participants were getting used to the joint intelligence
concept at the province level, US officials in Saigon soon realized that more responsibility and effort had to be shifted to the Vietnamese. The CORDS organization was primarily an advisory program to aid and assist the Vietnamese. Thus the idea of Americans actually doing the work shifted to a philosophy of impressing on the Vietnamese the importance of their being responsible for neutralizing the VCI. As the first year's statistics from the ICEX Program filtered into CORDS in Saigon, US officials began an intensive effort to get the GVN to accept responsibility for the program. This responsibility was finally accepted by the GVN in 1968 and the program emerged with a new name--Phung Hoang--which translated from the Vietnamese into the word Phoenix. (49)

Chapter IV describes the various elements which comprised the Phoenix/Phung Hoang Program as well as some of their good and bad points.
CHAPTER IV

COMPOSITION OF THE PHOENIX PROGRAM

Intelligence

... intelligence is gathered by aerial and ground reconnaissance, captured documents, interrogation of prisoners, and espionage. But in South Vietnam, by far the most important sources of information are the farmers, cafe owners, pedicab drivers, rice-mill hands, traveling vendors - the people among whom the war is being fought and who regularly rub shoulders with the Viet Cong. (23:38)

The central element of any counterinsurgency program is intelligence. (50) Who is the enemy, what are his habits, where does he live, how does he travel, and what are his vulnerabilities are just some of the questions which must be answered. (47) The objective of the Phoenix/Phung Hoang Program was to learn as much as possible about the VCI in each province and to take action to "neutralize" them. (44:328) Mr. William E. Colby describes the Phoenix Program as "... an intelligence program to identify the members of the VCI, an operational program to apprehend them, a legal program to restrain
them and a detention program to confine them." (44:182)

Obtaining the intelligence necessary to minimize or eliminate VCI influence can be considered one of the biggest problems of the counterinsurgency effort in the RVN.

(20:31) The Hamlet Informant Program, the Province Interrogation Program, and the Provincial Reconnaissance Unit Program were the primary components of Phoenix/Phung Hoang charged with this responsibility. Before discussing each of these components in detail, the Phoenix/Phung Hoang organization at the province and district levels should be understood.

Province and District Organization

Knowing that a great deal of information concerning the VCI was available in each province, some method had to be designed in order to bring all of the intelligence gathering agencies together to share and analyze this information. Prior to Phoenix/Phung Hoang, most of the American and Vietnamese intelligence organizations collected, analyzed, and took action on information concerning the VCI in relative isolation. (49) Information was shared or exchanged on an ad hoc basis depending on personal relationships established between these organi-
zations. (50) The result was often hit-or-miss random activity as well as a great deal of duplicated effort.

At the Province Level

To bring some degree of order into this state of near chaos, a Phoenix/Phung Hoang office was set up in each province. Known as the Province Intelligence Operations Coordinating Center (PIOCC), each had the mission of collecting intelligence from all sources available in the province. (44:182) Representatives of all intelligence and security agencies on the GVN side, such as the Military Security Service, the Police Special Branch, and the ARVN S-2, were required to participate. On the American side, all intelligence gathering agencies were to coordinate with the PIOCC. The PIOCCs were advised by Americans. (44:184) The primary purpose of the PIOCC was to break down the ad hoc nature of intelligence gathering in the provinces and establish formal relationships between these traditionally uncommunicative agencies in order to insure that everyone profited from the "intelligence take." (49) The concept varied in success from province to province depending on the individual personalities involved as well as the leadership abilities of senior American and Vietnamese officials.
in these provinces. (47) In actuality, the primary participants at the province centers were the National Police Special Branch and their US advisors. (44:60)

At the District Level

In theory, each district in the RVN was to have a District Intelligence Operations Coordinating Center (DIOCC). (44:333) In practice, many districts set up DIOCCs in name only due to the fact that available personnel to man such centers were primarily involved in other activities and DIOCC matters were often considered additional duties. Additionally, the further one got from Saigon, the likelihood of finding Vietnamese officials with real ability and drive decreased. This phenomenon also existed in relation to province versus district officials and district versus village officials. (49) As a result, most DIOCCs were headed by ARVN S-2 officers and advised by US Army officers who were part of the MACV district advisory team. This situation resulted in most Phoenix/Phung Hoang planning taking place at the province level where full-time Vietnamese and American personnel could devote their undivided attention to learning about their elusive opponent—the VCI. (47)
Because the overwhelming majority of Phoenix/Phung Hoang participants were either representatives of Vietnamese or US military organizations, much of the information filtering into the PIOCCs and DIOCCs was of a military nature. This was useful information, since it gave a good indication of impending attacks by either Viet Cong or NVA units, but it did not meet the requirements of the Phoenix/Phung Hoang charter to identify the VCI. (44:329) This type of information was to be expected, but it fell to the Police Special Branch to collect most of the information of a useful nature about the VCI.

The Police Special Branch

Just as intelligence is the key element in countering insurgency, the police are the key organizations in collecting this intelligence. (50) This point is further emphasized by Frank E. Armbruster and Raymond D. Gastil in their book, Can We Win in Vietnam?, when they state that "... solutions to (guerrilla wars) ... usually consist in large part of offensive military operations and police activity." (1:227) In the RVN, the Police Special Branch is the primary intelligence branch of
The Police Special Branch is nominally a part of the National Police structure in the RVN, but rather than having typical police functions, the Special Branch conduct intelligence operations. Similar to special branches in the French and British systems, the South Vietnamese Special Branch is similar to the US Federal Bureau of Investigation's Internal Security Division. Composed of elite members, the Special Branch was advised by CORDS officials as opposed to US Agency for International Development (USAID) personnel. This situation resulted in a bifurcation of advisory responsibility since the National Police received advisory support from the Public Safety Division of USAID. In effect, each province had two separate and distinct advisors to the police: USAID officials for strictly police matters and CORDS officials for intelligence matters. The problems this relationship caused will be discussed in later chapters.

The Hamlet Informant Program

The "bread and butter" activities of the Special Branch centered on the Hamlet Informant Program (HIP).
The basic concept of the HIP was to gain information from the people who lived in the rural hamlets, the lowest administrative unit in South Vietnam. (46:9) The theory of the HIP was that the VCI had to live, move, and survive in the hamlets. (50) Knowing that hamlet residents possessed this information about the VCI, the problem was in recruiting informants in as many hamlets as possible.

In order to recruit informants in the hamlets, it became necessary to do detailed studies of various motivational factors. The Special Branch kept records of people who had been victims of Viet Cong atrocities and acts of terrorism, of people who had been unreasonably taxed by the Viet Cong, of families which had had sons and husbands impressed into Viet Cong guerrilla bands, and those people who, for differing reasons, disliked or distrusted the Viet Cong. Depending on the incentive, be it patriotism or monetary gain, many hamlet residents were desirous of providing information on the activities of the local VCI. (44:225) The Special Branch then constructed sometimes elaborate, sometimes simple, plans to either bring these potential informants into province or district towns or to send undercover agents to the
hamlets to interview them on a regular basis. The HIP produced a great deal of information, but was just one of the Special Branch intelligence gathering programs. (26:5-7) The other primary intelligence producing program was the Province Interrogation Program.

The Province Interrogation Program

Early in 1966, the fact became known that numerous prisoners were cluttering the RVN's jails and very little was being done to exploit these potentially useful sources of information. To improve this situation, responsible US agencies began a program to construct Province Interrogation Centers (PICs) in each of the RVN's 44 provinces. (44:214) The objective of these centers, which were built by Vietnamese contractors and funded directly by the US, was to place Viet Cong prisoners into a carefully controlled environment conducive to interrogation where their information could be rapidly exploited. (44: 197) In addition to interrogation centers in the provinces, two national interrogation centers were constructed in Saigon. By mid-1967, all of the interrogation centers were constructed and in some stage of operation.

Prisoners in the interrogation centers were to come
from a variety of sources. Captured military prisoners of war, Viet Cong captured as a result of intelligence operations, and, in some cases, ralliers (Hoi Chanh) were sent to the PICs if their initial interviews indicated that they possessed information concerning the VCI. That was the theory. In practice, a far different pattern emerged in many of the PICs in the RVN. (44:197)

As indicated earlier, support for the Special Branch was given directly to them by their advisors. Support for the National Police came through a labyrinthine system which began in Saigon with the transfer of US funds and commodities to the National Police Directorate. Such funds and commodities were then put in the National Police system to be channeled to the provinces. This system fostered the illusion that National Police support was a Vietnamese affair, an illusion intentionally perpetuated by USAID. (49) Because of this system, advisors to the National Police had little monetary control while Special Branch advisors enjoyed immense control of Special Branch activities. This situation impacted on all areas of police activity, but the interrogation program suffered directly because of it.

While the PICs were manned and operated by the
Special Branch, the National Police controlled who would actually be placed in the PICs or released from them. Although a great deal of effort was expended by Special Branch advisors to improve the capabilities of the PIC interrogators, in the hope of improving the quality of the resultant interrogation reports, many of the PICs often stood virtually empty for weeks on end. (49) Interestingly, when a prisoner of some known importance in the Viet Cong apparatus was captured in a province and placed in the PIC, the word of this capture soon spread to the regional or corps headquarters and then on to Saigon. Knowing the "take" from the PICs was so sparse, PICs at regional or national levels often arbitrarily ordered the removal of valuable province prisoners so that they could be exploited at the higher level center. (23:38-39) The idea behind these actions was that the higher level centers possessed better interrogators and could thus produce interrogation reports of superior quality. This may have been true, but in the author's experience, interrogation reports resulting from such situations did not filter back to the province where the prisoner originated until months later. Far too much time elapsed for the interrogation report to be
useful in identifying other VCI and mounting operations to neutralize them.

Although the PICs did not live up to their expectations, they did produce interrogation reports of activities, names, and supposed locations of numerous local, low-level VCI. (44:226) All of the information from the PICs and the HIP was fed into the PIOCCs. Although PIOCCs oftentimes laboriously and meticulously analyzed the information collected, the value of that information was only as good as the number of VCI which were captured, killed, or otherwise neutralized as a result of it. (44:225) Translating information into action presented problems of a completely different nature. All of the agencies and organizations represented in the PIOCCs possessed some type of reaction force which could be called on to take action on the collected and analyzed intelligence, but this did not necessarily mean that these agencies would, in fact, take the required action. (49) Because of this situation, Provincial Reconnaissance Units (PRUs) were organized and formed.

The Provincial Reconnaissance Units

To defeat the guerrilla, we must become guerrillas. Every insurgent tactic must be
employed against the insurgent. Using the guerrilla's time-tested and proven techniques... we can... make these "cheap little wars" too expensive for the communists. (21:61)

As information concerning the VCI came into province and district Phoenix/Phung Hoang centers, the question of who should use this information and how it should be used became critical. Although Phoenix/Phung Hoang was a formal program, there was no central direction or command structure which could take available information and order operations based on it. Often the US and GVN agencies represented in the PIOCCs and DIOCCs would view the available information in terms of the risk involved in attempting to go after selected members of the infrastructure as opposed to the possible rewards a successful operation might net. Since most of the Phoenix/Phung Hoang agencies were military in nature and mission, the idea of going out after one particular individual was generally not very appealing since even if the individual were captured, the headlines would not be very impressive in terms of body counts, weapons captured, or some other measure of success. (49) The inference should not be drawn that these agencies did not recognize the value of capturing a particular member of the
VCI and interrogating him. They certainly did. The problem was that careers were at stake, this was the only war going on, and impressive results were expected. This "skewed incentive pattern" is very aptly described by Ambassador Robert W. Komer in his Rand Corporation Report, *Bureaucracy Does its Thing: Institutional Constraints on U.S.-GVN Performance in Vietnam*. (41:69-70)

To overcome this situation, small units of paramilitary forces were recruited and trained to operate exclusively against the VCI. Known as Provincial Reconnaissance Units (PRU), their function is described by Mr. William E. Colby as follows:

> The Provincial reconnaissance units (sic) . . . operate on mission orders signed by Province chiefs specifically naming personalities who appear on the Phoenix lists of VCI leaders or cadre. The missions are covert small unit operations emphasizing the capture wherever possible of such VCI to exploit their knowledge of other VCI personalities, installations and organizations. The PRU collect intelligence as well as conduct these paramilitary operations against the VCI. The PRU are a separate unit from the Phoenix center at District or Province level, that center being responsible for the collation of VCI intelligence and the coordination of the various military, police and other (that is, information) operations against the VCI. The PRU contribute intelligence to the Phoenix center and coordinate operations with other forces through Phoenix. (44:230)
Evolution of the PRU

The exact date that the Provincial Reconnaissance Unit strategy was born is not known; however, their predecessor organizations probably date back to the 1964-1965 period. (47) These teams were then known as Counter Terror Teams and were composed of mercenaries of Vietnamese and Chinese origin. (44:190) As their name implies, their purpose was to counter Viet Cong terror with their own brand of terror; assassination was also employed on occasion. The subject of whether or not the US sponsored bands of mercenaries which engaged in assassination as a matter of policy has been hotly debated in various public and private forums. As late as 1973, Mr. William E. Colby was questioned during his confirmation hearings as the nominee to assume directorship of the Central Intelligence Agency about the assassination activities of the PRUs and its fore-runner organizations. (47) It should be noted that while assassinations did, in fact, occur in the early years of the program, such activities did not occur as a matter of policy. (44:189) Vietnam was somewhat like the wild west of America in the 1800's, the government was weak, and the enemy was making striking gains.
Many things happened which should not have happened. Something had to be done to keep the Viet Cong from taking over the provinces and the PRU concept came into being. (44:190)

PRU Methods

One of the primary methods used by both US and GVN units in South Vietnam to reduce the influence of the communists was the ambush. (28:23-24) The ambush was also a primary method of operation used by Viet Cong units. (1:230) Since the PRUs adopted many of the insurgent's methods to counter him, the ambush became their primary weapon. (11:17) Although many PRU operations resulted in fire fights and death, the PRUs were in the business of trying to capture VCI which could be exploited at a later date. Using intelligence provided by province or district Phoenix centers, the PRUs took this information and tested it. These tests often included staking out trails which were used by VCI cadres when moving from one village to another. When a degree of reliability was achieved, operations to ambush or capture these Viet Cong were planned and implemented. (44:230)

As more and more PRU operations were mounted, the
effect was to reduce VCI influence by applying the tool of terror against the enemy who had long used this tool with abandon. (6:10) In many cases, the use of terror by the Viet Cong increased where PRU operations were minimal since they did not fear being caught at their own game. (5:94) As PRU operations increased, terrorism rates fell and the insurgents activity was severely curtailed since they were now blending into the environment just to survive. (27:48)

Occasionally, the enemy had his day. This occurred when PRU operations were based on good intelligence, but not enough intelligence. When intelligence reports on a particular area promised a high probability of VCI activity, PRU operations were mounted without waiting for a more complete picture. This often resulted in a PRU element actually attacking a fortified Viet Cong village, believing that only a few VCI might be present. Because of the importance of the VCI in these villages, the protecting Viet Cong units went to great lengths to prevent their capture. Their defenses were thorough and the enemy was tenacious in holding their ground. (22:8)

The PRU enjoyed successes more often than they suffered defeats. This was due to the fact that they
were operating much like their enemy. They could pick
the time and place to attack, were lightly equipped and
extremely mobile, and had a profit motive as an incen-
tive. Perhaps the PRUs were more successful than their
more conventional US and GVN counterparts because they
did not depend on heavy equipment and supplies, knew how
to live off the land, and after using the enemy's tac-
tics against him, began to think like the VCI they so
ruthlessly tracked. (30:46) The PRUs, like the other
components of the Phoenix/Phung Hoang Program, were ad-
vised and supported by Americans. The role of these key
individuals had a critical impact on the effectiveness
of these programs.

Phoenix/Phung Hoang Advisors

The United States through CORDS had pro-
vided advice and assistance to the Phoenix
program. This currently includes approxi-
mately 637 U.S. military personnel working
with the Phoenix centers at the district,
province, region, and national levels. It
also includes a very few U.S. civilian per-
sonnel. Of course advisors with the mili-
tary units, the national police, the Chieu
Hoi program, et cetera, advise and assist
their respective service in its normal
role, which includes support of the Phoenix
program. (44:184)

Advisors were drawn from all walks of life and from
such diverse agencies as the Department of State, the Agency for International Development, the Central Intelligence Agency, and the United States Information Agency. Personnel from all the military departments were also used. (41:114) By any stretch of the imagination, the total advisory effort in South Vietnam was unprecedented. (41:122) Army officers who were to assume positions in district and province Phoenix centers were given six months training at Fort Holabird, Maryland, prior to assignment to the Phoenix Program. (44:341) Individuals from other agencies or departments sometimes did not receive any training before assignment to Phoenix. The results of this haphazard situation soon became evident when these individuals assumed their responsibilities in the RVN.

Most US Phoenix personnel lived at the province or district level, oftentimes in close proximity to their Vietnamese counterparts. The language barrier soon became a serious obstacle. Not being able to speak Vietnamese and knowing little about the people they were to help, many advisors were at a distinct disadvantage. (44:341) The intricacies and subtleties of the Vietnamese mind and culture often caused friction and
alienation among advisors and counterparts. The role of the advisor was multifaceted: he was at once a teacher, a counsellor, a supporter, and most importantly, a friend. (11:67) Phoenix advisors worked with the Vietnamese, Chinese, Montagnards, and the Chams and Khmers depending on their province of assignment. In numerous cases, the attitudes and beliefs and the concepts of nationalism possessed by the advisor's counterpart were not known. The differences between the various ethnic groups in the RVN, as described in Chapter II, often became barriers to effective working relationships. (49) Major General Edward G. Lansdale recognized this trait and tried to improve it. He made many recommendations for improving not only the Phoenix advisory effort, but the entire advisory effort in South Vietnam. Perhaps his most significant recommendation in this area was to suggest that the Vietnamese themselves select Americans who they respected and knew they could work with. General Lansdale further recommended that these selected Americans come to the RVN and remain for as long as necessary. (50) However, this suggestion was not implemented and the quality of the advisory staff was mediocre at best. (49)
Perhaps the biggest deficiency in the advisory program was the lack of an "institutional memory." Phoenix advisors did not know the history of their provinces, what had transpired there in the recent past, and how the insurgents operated there. (50) Nothing was done to improve the situation. Not knowing very much about the history of their provinces, not being able to speak the language of their counterparts, and knowing they were only going to stay in Vietnam for a relatively short period of time, most advisors tended to neglect the political and social aspects of the situation in which they found themselves. (41:63) Unable to cope with, or accept, the people of the RVN, many advisors became ineffective and the overall result was a degradation of the Phoenix/Phung Hoang Program. (50)

Having described the arena, the origin of the Phoenix/Phung Hoang Program, and how the components of this program operated, Chapter V portrays how the total concept was employed in a typical operation.
CHAPTER V

THUONGXA VILLAGE - A PHOENIX OPERATION (51)

The Setting

Thuong Xa Village lays just south of Quang Tri City, approximately 14 miles below the DMZ. Bifurcated by
Highway 1, Thuong Xa spreads out along Quang Tri Province's rolling foothills to the west and reaches to the
South China Sea on the east. Because of its relatively large size, virtually every example of Vietnamese topogra-
phy is evident in Thuong Xa. On the west side of Highway 1, Thuong Xa is a thickly forested jungle, while the
jungle on the east side slowly gives way to light underbrush and finally turns into undulating sand dunes as
the coast is approached. Somewhere between the coast and Highway 1 runs the Street Without Joy, the history
of which has been described by Bernard Fall. (7)

In mid-1967, there were approximately 5,000 inhabitants in Thuong Xa. The overwhelming majority of these
people were rice farmers (38:62) and a substantial percentage of Quang Tri Province's arable land was in, or

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near, Thuong Xa. Although the village produced a significant amount of rice, its primary significance to both the GVN and the Viet Cong was the fact that it straddled a major line of communication (Highway 1) which connected the province capital, Quang Tri City, with the important district of Hy Lang. All north-south traffic between the district and province capital had to pass through Thuong Xa.

Historically, Thuong Xa had been communist controlled. The communists had established excellent networks of trails running from Laos through the mountains into the west side of Thuong Xa. The Viet Minh traditionally used Thuong Xa as both a staging area for operations against the French as well as a supply point and recruitment area. The Street Without Joy was also a major north-south line of communication for the communists. The Viet Cong continued to use Thuong Xa in the same manner as their predecessors.

Due to the almost total control which the communists exercised over Thuong Xa, very few US or GVN operations had been undertaken in the village. Those operations which had been mounted were only minimally successful since the village's topography presented many easy
avenues of escape. The communists blended with the routine and were difficult to identify. (27:48) They controlled the population which made intelligence gathering difficult. (5:94) The people were afraid to offer information since they feared Viet Cong reprisals. (35:41-43) Villagers were considered primarily neutral; they supported the Viet Cong only because of the power they exerted in the village. As the Phoenix concept became a reality and techniques were improved, the idea of an operation to bring Thuong Xa under the control of the GVN began to emerge. While the remainder of the inhabited villages in Quang Tri were slowly being pacified, Thuong Xa stood out like a sore thumb on virtually all progress charts. An attempt to wrest control of the village from the communists had to be made.

The Planning Stage

The decision to mount a Phoenix operation of massive proportions against Thuong Xa was arrived at by the Quang Tri Province Security Council. (44:332) The Province Senior Advisor, Robert Brewer, played a key role in the planning and implementation of the operation. Recognizing that many past operations had only minimally
attained objectives, very careful attention was given to security of the operation. Knowing that the Vietnamese would have to play a key role in the operation, only the barest essential information was given to the various Vietnamese agencies in Quang Tri. The fact that some Vietnamese officials had either been co-opted by the Viet Cong or had arrived at a modus vivendi with the Viet Cong under the threat of assassination, added a degree of difficulty to the planning process. (9:114) The actual name of the target village was not released to the Vietnamese until the day before the operation.

All of the Phoenix resources in Quang Tri were slowly aimed at Thuong Xa. Assets of the Hamlet Informant Program were given the names of six villages on which to collect information about the VCI; one of the villages was Thuong Xa. Prisoners and suspects in the Province Interrogation Center were re-interrogated to obtain more information about Thuong Xa. As this information was fed into the district and province Phoenix centers, a distinct pattern of trends and habits of the VCI began to develop. Ralliers in the province Chieu Hoi center (44:221) were also questioned about the VCI who were suspected of using Thuong Xa as either a headquarters.
or staging area. Of course, other villages and hamlets were named as possible interest areas to minimize the possibility of Thuong Xa becoming known as the main area of interest.

As the names and descriptions of the VCI began to pile up in the PIOCC and DIOCC, attempts were made to cross check the available information. Name lists were sent to other provinces and to Saigon to be corroborated against master Phoenix lists. Some names were withdrawn from the black lists as a result of this procedure. As the list became more meaningful, PRU surveillance operations were directed on a small scale to improve the available intelligence concerning what to expect in Thuong Xa.

The results of the PRU surveillance and the collated intelligence from the DIOCC indicated that larger forces would be needed since the movements of the VCI were always made when these individuals were accompanied by heavily armed guerrilla protection units. Additionally, the main escape routes along the coast and through the jungle to the mountains would have to be sealed. The Province Senior Advisor personally arranged for requisite elements of the Army and Marine Corps who were located in Quang Tri to assume this important supporting role.
The operation was ready for implementation.

The Operation Begins

The actual beginning of the operation was scheduled to begin before dawn on a day when the Phoenix-analyzed intelligence indicated that movements of guerrilla bands and their accompanying VCI would be completed. Since the main Phoenix objective was to capture selected province and district level communist party cadre, the assumption was made that these individuals were already in the village.

At dawn, the village was virtually sealed off by US Army elements. Once these forces were in place, a light psychological warfare aircraft began circling the village making periodic announcements that anyone with a weapon or information about the Viet Cong should turn himself in at a check point along Highway 1. The fact that the village was surrounded, all escape routes were sealed, and reaction forces were standing by to enter the village, was also announced. Leaflets were dropped indicating the location where insurgents could turn themselves in and that they would receive rallier treatment if they voluntarily surrendered. Additionally, leaflets offered
rewards for information concerning communists known to be in Thuong Xa. These activities continued until 10:00 AM.

When the first phase of psychological operations ended, a radio check of all checkpoints made it clear that not a single individual had turned himself in or had offered any information. Nothing moved in Thuong Xa. Although American and Vietnamese planners did not expect very much to occur through these means, some individuals or information had been expected.

Using previously prepared plans which divided Thuong Xa into grid squares, 25-man elements of the PRU began entering the village. Their objective was to search every house and compare the names and descriptions on their black lists with every man, woman, and child in Thuong Xa. The PRU were accompanied by units from Quang Tri's Special Branch as well as Phoenix advisors. Before the second element entered the village, sporadic gunfire could be heard throughout Thuong Xa.

As each square of Thuong Xa was searched, the inhabitants were moved to previously cleared areas. Inhabitants who had satisfactorily passed all screening points were given a medical checkup, food, and told to
sit in specified areas. (44:235) Men and women were segregated. Drama teams from the Province's Revolutionary Development Units entertained the detainees. (32:28-31) As the people settled down into the routine of the operation, their homes were searched. Numerous weapons and booby traps were discovered, sometimes at the cost of American and Vietnamese lives. By late afternoon, the search pattern of Thuong Xa inexorably pushed toward the northeast corner of the village. Those insurgents within the hamlet who realized what was happening began futile attempts to break through the "ring of steel" surrounding the village. Conventional warfare broke out along the coastal perimeter. The operation ended on the following morning.

**The Results**

When the final tallies were in, the Phoenix operation in Thuong Xa was considered a success by Province officials. This judgment was made on the basis of body-counts, weapons captured or destroyed, food caches uncovered, and suspects detained. But for the purposes of neutralizing the VCI in the village, only two VCI of importance had been captured. One was the chief of the district party committee and the other the chief of the
farmer's association. Both of these individuals were eventually placed in the PIC, but were later moved to the regional PIC in Danang. A number of insurgents with weapons did rally to the government side when their situation appeared hopeless, but these individuals were not considered valuable sources of information which could be used to plan other operations against the infrastructure. On the basis of prior intelligence, at least eight members of the VCI had been either killed or had somehow managed to escape.

Conclusions

The operation at Thuong Xa required nearly three months of planning time of the province Phoenix staff. Virtually all of Quang Tri's resources had been directed toward this one operation. Recognizing that the village could be pacified on the day of the operation and yet fall back into the hands of the communists the next day, two 59-man Revolutionary Development Teams were inserted into the village in order to maintain a GVN presence there. (36:4-11) Within a month these teams had to be withdrawn since they had not achieved any of their goals and had been forced to assume a total posture of survival and defense. Thuong Xa soon reverted back
to communist control.

Although this is one example of an elaborately planned and implemented Phoenix operation, it embodied all of the elements of the Phoenix concept. Other Phoenix operations throughout I Corps and the Republic of Vietnam rarely, if ever, achieved the coordination the Phoenix concept required. (49) Even with this unusual amount of coordination, the fact that the village reverted to communist control and known members of the VCI escaped strongly suggests that the operation failed as future model for counterinsurgency operations.

Chapter VI is an evaluation of the principal components of the Phoenix Program.
CHAPTER VI

PROGRAM EVALUATION

... to fight guerrillas then, one must know them. This implies a deep degree of personal involvement or total immersion in an insurgency situation. In a psychological sense, most Americans seldom go beyond getting their feet wet. This is particularly true of the draftee in Vietnam, but it also applies to the professional... Both men know that they are serving a limited amount of time and that their lives are not bound to the people with whom they are working. (30:53)

The need to have the very best people involved in a counterinsurgency situation is certainly not a new idea or concept. The French were confronted with the same problem when they became bogged down in Indochina years before the height of the American involvement. Clarence M. Sonne, Jr., writing in the Military Review, describes the results of a French general's efforts as follows:

What de Lattre had proven during his brief tenure in Indochina was, first of all, that countering the insurgents required nothing less than the ablest of fighting men imbued with the will to win. (31:78)
The Phoenix Program, like all programs in the RVN, suffered and succeeded as a result of the interest, knowledge, understanding, and motivation Americans brought to them. (49) Many of the strengths and weaknesses which follow are directly attributable to this important factor.

The Hamlet Informant Program

The need for intelligence about the habits, locations, and activities of the VCI has been previously described. In actual performance, the HIP produced too much information and too little hard intelligence. In many cases, province Phoenix officers were not trained intelligence experts and were unable to provide detailed direction to their Special Branch counterparts concerning intelligence tradecraft. This resulted in informants being recruited who either did not have the requisite access to information about the VCI or who clearly fabricated information which they thought their Special Branch case officers wanted to hear. Since informants were being paid by the Special Branch with funds provided by the Phoenix advisors, all parties on the Vietnamese side were satisfied. (44:225) When this information reached the inexperienced Phoenix advisor, he
had little ability to evaluate it. Instead of acting in
the capacity of intelligence advisor, he became an ad-
ministrator by default. Success was often measured by
numbers of reports rather than the quality of informa-
tion procured. When this information was compiled and
produced in the form of black lists, a distinct possi-
bility existed that the names on such lists had little
relation to actual persons or that the people so named
were not, in fact, members of the VCI. (44:207)

Many Phoenix advisors could not adjust to the Viet-
namese culture and way of doing things. Advisors ex-
pected their Special Branch counterparts to be on time,
to be efficient, and to be honest. Applying his western
standards of morality to an oriental situation often re-
sulted in impasses in relationships which should have
been dynamic. The situation became so bad that both
the GVN and CORDS devised subtle procedures to get
counterparts replaced. (49) Some Phoenix advisors sim-
ply gave up when they realized that they were not going
to remake their Special Branch counterparts into west-
ern images. In such cases, the HIP became an exercise
in futility.

In those cases where the Phoenix advisor got to

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really know his Special Branch counterpart, to understand him and his environment, and achieved the ability to converse without the aid of an interpreter, results were often spectacular. If the Phoenix advisor possessed a measure of intelligence expertise, real progress was made in reducing VCI influence. Such synergistic relationships did exist in the Phoenix program, but were the exception rather than the rule.

The Province Interrogation Centers

The province interrogation program has been cloaked in a good deal of secrecy, much of it more imagined than real. When the PICs were first constructed, some reports existed that the PICs themselves were secret installations. (44:216) Most of the PICs were either constructed by renovating existing facilities or building completely new structures. The secrecy surrounding this program detracted from its potential.

When the program first got off the ground in 1967, responsible officials were faced with the problem of deciding what methods of interrogation to use. Phoenix advisors who took an interest in PIC operations normally attempted to improve the quality of interrogation techniques by carefully going over reports and pointing out
leads that were missed and other items which should have
been explored in greater detail. While the brutalization
of prisoners did occur, interested Phoenix personnel
could curtail support for the PIC unless such unauthorized
activities ceased. (49) Since most advisors were neither
intelligence nor interrogation experts, the tendency ex-
isted to provide passive support and not to try and im-
prove PIC operations.

The biggest problem facing the interrogation program
was obtaining promising prisoners. When prisoners of
high position in the VCI were removed from local PICs
for exploitation at other levels, morale of PIC personnel
decreased. Often the result was that the PICs became
auxiliary jails and were used to house common criminals.

When Phoenix advisors were successful in obtaining
full-time assistants to monitor PIC operations, the
quality of PIC reports improved. One source of capable
assistants was the various US military intelligence
teams which operated in the provinces. These teams
often had officers and enlisted personnel who were
fluent in Vietnamese; however, convincing commanding
officers to assign such personnel to the Phoenix staff
was a difficult job.
The Provincial Reconnaissance Units

Of all the components of the Phoenix Program, the PRUs were probably the most successful in reducing VCI influence. (47) They were also the most controversial element of the program. By turning the tools of insurgency against the insurgent, the PRUs were able to raise the stakes of Viet Cong action beyond what the communists were able to accept. Although many writers in the field of insurgency stress the need to win popular support to successfully counter insurgents, Charles Wolf poses the thesis that all measures taken should be judged by how they increase the cost and difficulties of insurgent operations rather than whether they gain popular support. (42:23)

The PRU concept was successful primarily because few arbitrary constraints were placed in its way. Often accused of using unlawful practices and techniques, most PRUs were carefully advised and controlled by American military personnel under the direction of the Phoenix advisor. Those abuses that did occur should be considered the "normal" aberrations which result in any form of warfare. (49)

As the character of the war changed between the
1965-1969 period, so did the character and effectiveness of PRU operations. By 1968, most provinces in the RVN had large contingents of US military units. These units traditionally divided up their provinces into areas of responsibility. In order to run PRU operations in these areas of responsibility, such operations had to be planned and coordinated with US military personnel. The effect was to decrease spontaneity of such operations and subject them to possible compromise. By the time US forces had reached the half-million mark, the PRU concept had virtually out-lived its usefulness. (47)

Perhaps the greatest weakness of the PRU program was the fact that they were not under the actual control of GVN officials. The idea of using mercenary soldiers produced much conflict in both the RVN and the US. (47) The conflict over the roles and missions of the PRU, together with its concept of operation, severely limited the PRUs ability to locate, identify, and neutralize the VCI.

Having described all the aspects of the Phoenix/Phung Hoang Program, Chapter VII contains the author's conclusions and recommendation.
CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATION

... the historical nature of the Vietnam conflict and the realities of the political and military situation in that country make it most difficult to assess our counterinsurgency concept, doctrine, and organization. (26:5)

Conclusions

The data presented in this study underline the paramount importance of organization in counterinsurgency programs. The Phoenix Program was the first known attempt in the RVN to consolidate all the various participants who had counterinsurgency missions. These military and civilian agencies often duplicated each other's efforts and did not coordinate as a matter of policy. The results of independent activity in an insurgency environment, such as that found in the RVN during the period of this report, are misdirected intelligence collection and misuse of intelligence products. While the Phoenix Program attempted to rectify this situation, by the time the program was formalized the events in the
RVN had passed the point of a blossoming insurgency and had progressed to the limited war stage. (49) This indicates that counterinsurgency activities must be implemented at the earliest possible time in affected nations and must have central direction and control.

Maj Gen Edward G. Lansdale has had the opportunity to observe counterinsurgency efforts in many countries and was a first-hand witness to the evolution of various counterinsurgency programs in the RVN. He characterizes all US counterinsurgency efforts, Phoenix included, as suffering from amateurism. Focusing on advisors in particular, he feels that the transitory nature of the advisory job prevented many individuals from learning enough about the country, the people, and the enemy. (50) The author fully agrees with this conclusion and feels that where Phoenix was successful, competent advisors were the key element. Although some attempts were made to improve the capabilities of Phoenix advisors, most of these attempts were of short duration and were poorly administered. In future counterinsurgency programs, the training, capabilities, and aptitude of advisors must be stressed to a higher degree than that found among Phoenix advisors.
Interestingly, Mr. William E. Colby considers the Phoenix Program to have been a success. Mr. Colby's only basis for this position is that the objective of the program was to prevent the RVN from being overrun by the North Vietnamese. While conceding some abuses and failures in the program, Mr. Colby feels that those attributable to Phoenix could occur in any counterinsurgency situation. (47) The author disagrees with Mr. Colby's overly simplistic criterion for success on the basis that Phoenix had neither the forces nor capabilities to prevent an invasion by the NVA. Perhaps Mr. Colby's conclusion should be construed to mean that the Phoenix Program was one element of a much larger effort in the RVN which did, in fact, prevent the country from being overrun. Like Mr. Colby, the author feels the methods used in the Phoenix Program may be applicable only to the Vietnamese experience. The program underscored the need to collect superior intelligence and to have the necessary reaction forces to take required measures against communist leadership. Perhaps the most important conclusion to be drawn from the Phoenix experience was that those departments and agencies of the US government that entered the conflict with preplanned doctrines, organi-
zations, roles, and missions were least capable of adapting to the rapidly changing insurgent situation in the RVN.

The Phoenix Program was most successful when innovative ideas were applied by professional personnel who believed in what they were doing. Such personnel took the time to know the arena, its people, and its problems. By fitting counterinsurgency programs into the existing environment rather than trying to change the environment, some successes were achieved. This would seem to be a universal lesson for future counterinsurgency planners.

The value of the Phoenix concept as a model for future counterinsurgency operations lies in the strengths and weaknesses which the program brought to the surface. The concept, as it was applied in the RVN, could not be superimposed over an insurgency situation in another country without specifically tailoring the program to the peculiarities of the affected nation. However, the basic ideas of identifying, locating, and neutralizing the insurgent's politico-military leadership must endure as the central elements of any counterinsurgency program. Indeed, the means devised thus become just as
important as achieving these ends. If anything, the Phoenix Program emphasized the fact that standing forces, armed with standing doctrines and procedures, will be severely limited in combating insurgent forces.

**Recommendation**

As this study is completed, the conflict in the RVN continues. The communist infrastructure in the RVN continues to survive and direct the activities of insurgents in that country. The problem of combating insurgencies has not been solved and will present policymakers with difficult choices in the future. All of this indicates that more informal and formal study of the nature of insurgency, and the means to prevent or preclude them, must be undertaken.
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51. Thuong Xa Operation. This Phoenix operation was reconstructed from numerous sources of information. The author's own impressions and reports, as a participant in the planning and implementation of the operation, were used extensively. Additionally, the comments of the Quang Tri Province Senior Advisor, Mr. Robert Brewer, were also used.