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The enclosed article by Peter Osnos headlined "U.S. Plan Fails to Wipe Out VC Cadre" appeared in December 14 Washington Post.

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Copy of news article as stated above.

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CIA-5558

By Peter Osnos
Washington Post Foreign Service

SAIGON, Dec. 13 — The Phoenix program, devised four years ago by the CIA as the way to wipe out the Vietcong's political infrastructure, remains today one of the most notable failures of the war.

This is the view expressed by many senior members of the U.S. establishment here, sometimes in the boldest possible terms. "It's a lousy failure," one top-echelon American said loudly at a reception the other night.

Despite the recognized importance to the Saigon government's future of eliminating the Vietcong's clandestine political apparatus, it is apparently no longer considered an achievable goal.

The Vietcong infrastructure consists of enemy agents responsible for recruiting, collecting taxes, spreading propaganda, infiltrating legitimate groups and generally undermining government influence. The cadre of about 70,000 called VCIs are homegrown and deeply rooted.

This summer the U.S. and South Vietnamese officials decided to offer bounties as high as $11,000 for high-ranking VCIs. The plan was never carried out, sources said, because it was realized that it wouldn't work.

"The Vietnamese are never going to turn their own people in," said an American with many years of experience in Vietnam, "and they certainly won't take sides politically until the outcome of the war is absolutely clear."

"Survival (in South Vietnam) has often meant and largely still means sitting on the fence," explained one young official.

Advisers Withdrawn

For some months now, American military advisers to the program have been gradually withdrawn, officially as part of the overall phaseout. A small complement of men from the Central Intelligence Agency will remain.

But considering the importance attached to Phoenix as recently as a year ago and the fact that only a few hundred Americans were involved even at the peak, the pullout at this stage is seen by many observers as an admission that there is simply very little more that can be done.

"The military didn't know how to advise the program and the Vietnamese didn't want to learn," said an American civilian who has watched Phoenix closely.

Official Vietnamization figures show that about 20,000 agents are "neutralized" (killed, captured or rallied to the government side) each year. But Americans acknowledge that practically all of this probably inflated figure were low-level village and hamlet operatives and the basic leadership still remains.

A very small percentage of even these are killed or captured because Phoenix intelligence ferreted them out. What usually happens is that persons rounded up in routine military operations are subsequently listed as VCIs.

"Statistics show that for every one neutralization of a previously identified VCI we are neutralizing four that were not previously identified," the senior American adviser in Binhduong Province wrote recently.

Phoenix (known properly by its Vietnamese name, Phung Hoang, the mythical bird) has been in trouble from the start. It was drawn up by the CIA as a "systematic effort at intelligence coordination and exploitation" — a way to prevent clumsy overlap. It was turned over to the Vietnamese in 1968.

Agents were to be identified, apprehended and punished by local authorities.

War critics in the United States promptly attacked Phoenix as a counterterror organization, utilizing assassination and torture as its principal tools. Periodically, there were reports on such abuses.

These reports, along with the cloak and dagger aura of CIA involvement and specially trained and paid Vietnamese agents known as PRU (provincial reconnaissance units), gave the program a sinister reputation that overshadowed its continuing inability to accomplish the job it had been assigned.

"The most important thing about Phoenix," one official commented early in 1970, "is that it is not working."

Reason For Trouble . .

One reason frequently offered for Phoenix's troubles is that it involves an extraordinarily complex meshing of information and personnel from any number of Vietnamese military, paramilitary and civilian groups.

Leadership is nominally vested in the national police and its elite special branch. In fact, the military often predominates. The interest and personality of the province chiefs and their principal aides are also instrumental.

Information is gleaned from a variety of sources, including armed sources ganda teams, revolutionary development cadre and plain villagers. The data is collected and maintained at district and province intelligence and interrogation centers.

Raids are entrusted to the PRU, the CIA-sponsored squads who are the action arm of Phoenix. Sometimes militia units and the police are also involved. American helicopters are used frequently to ferry the PRU.

'Undisciplined Country'

In cases where wanted VCIs are apprehended, trials are conducted by provincial security councils, made up of the province chief, various police and [illegible] ever the province chief selects.

In practice, all this turns out to be a haphazard business. Among other things, officials said, suspects frequently bribe their way out, province and police officials misuse their authority to settle grievances and innocent people are jailed or worse.

In Angiang, the country's most pacified province, a man was recently truncheoned to death before it was discovered that he had been picked up by mistake. The killer was an enlisted man in the militia assigned to the local intelligence unit.

The case was reported in the Vietnamese press and informed U.S. sources said a sergeant had acted on his own without authority and would be tried later.

How many of these incidents go undiscovered is anybody's guess. "This is an undisciplined country at war," said a high-ranking U.S. pacification official, "and Phoenix is about what you'd have to expect."

Okla. Man Sentenced in Child 'Sale'

JACKSONVILLE, Fla., Dec. 13 (UPI)—An Oklahoma Boy Scout leader was sentenced to 15 months in prison today after pleading guilty to charges of attempting to sell two young children for $7,000 and a used car last month.

William O'Hara, 37, of Oklahoma City, pleaded guilty before Criminal Court Judge Everett Richardson. The maximum sentence for attempted child selling is five years.

O'Hara was arrested Nov. 17 after he attempted to sell the children to a Jacksonville couple who notified police. The children, Teresa Cox, 3, and her 2-year-old brother, Robert, have remained in a state juvenile facility here since O'Hara was arrested.

Mrs. Dorothy Mae Cox, the children's mother, contended she allowed O'Hara and another man, Robert Westenhaver, 22, of Oklahoma City, to take the children on a trip but said she [illegible]



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