

Anderson Accuses U.S. Of Viet 'Fact-Twisting'

By Jack Anderson
Washington

The secret cables from Saigon show that United States officials have been talking

out of both sides of their mouths about their campaign to wipe out the Viet Cong infrastructure.

The idea was to kill, cap-

ture or convert the key people who operate the Viet Cong underground inside South Vietnam. This grim missionary effort is known delicately as Operation Phoenix, named after a mythical bird which rises from its own ashes.

But the Phoenix program, according to the classified cable traffic, hasn't gotten off the ground. Ellsworth Bunker, the American ambassador in Saigon, has reported to Secretary of State William Rogers that the operation "has not appeared to have significantly weakened" the Viet Cong infrastructure.

Bunker's cable is dated Aug. 30, 1971. The date is significant. For a few days earlier, Ambassador William Colby and Assistant Defense Secretary G. Warren Nutter made public statements saying exactly the opposite.

Colby, who headed the pacification program in Vietnam, testified on July 19 before the House Foreign Operations Subcommittee. Suave and solemn as an undertaker, he praised the Phoenix program.

It "has reduced the power of the VCI (Viet Cong infrastructure)," he said, and "is an essential part of the government of Vietnam's defense." American support, he declared, "is fully warranted."

The VCI, he said, "oper-
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ates under considerable limitations" and has been reduced in some areas "to skeleton status." As statistical evidence, he reported that 9331 Viet Cong were "neutralized during the first five months of 1971." This included 3650 killed, he said.

DIFFERENT

Bunker's secret August 30 cable, however, tells a dismayingly different story. Although the Phoenix program "routinely exceeds its goals of neutralizations (deaths and arrests)," confided Bunker, it "has not appeared to have significantly weakened the VCI."

Giving the classified statistics on VCI strength, he reported: "June strength (of) 61,994 was down 341 from May. The drop in strength for the first half of 1971 is about 10 percent. Even if this figure is reliable, it is not a significant decrease in view of the urgent GVN (government of Vietnam) efforts directed against the VCI in 1971.

* "Sixty thousand members of an underground organization in a population of 18 million represents one VCI for each 300 people. This has apparently been adequate to keep the VCI viable and enable them to make their presence felt."

REPORT

A few weeks before Colby bragged to Congress about the success of the Phoenix program, his top aide in Gia Dinh province, David McKillop, reported grimly: "We have not scratched the surface of the urban VCI network of the shadow supply system."

In a confidential report from Binh Duong Province, Lieutenant Colonel** Gerald Chikalla informed Colby that

Operation Phoenix was killing off the little fish but missing the sharks.

"There has developed the tendency to place more importance on volume rather than on quality neutralizations," Chikalla reported. "Much of this can be attributed to U.S. guidance and influence and quotas."

Another reason for Phoenix's failure was the unwillingness of the Vietnamese to turn in their sons and fathers to the Saigon government.

REASONS

As Lieutenant Colonel Jack Cantrell put it in a classified report from Binh Tuy province:

"The major reasons for lack of success include: The inherent distaste of the people to indict (inform on) relatives, friends or personnel with political implications . . . (Phoenix) is a U.S. innovation that has been bought officially by the Vietnamese but which does not get the priority attention in action at any level that it gets on paper."

Similar admissions of failure came from Lieutenant Colonel Gerald Bartlett in Hau Nghia Province.

Yet Colby suppressed these unfavorable reports and gave Congress a fabricated, favorable account of the Phoenix program. He was supported by the Pentagon's G. Warren Nutter, who wrote a similarly glowing letter about Operation Phoenix to House Foreign Affairs Chairman Thomas Morgan (Dem-Pa.), on August 21.

Once again, we have caught government officials in a flagrant deception. They twisted the facts, apparently, in order to win congressional support.

N.O. States-Item 21 Jan 72, filed CIA:

* Six thousand ... **Lt. Gerald Chikalla