

More U.S. lies are exposed in secret Vietnam cables

WASHINGTON— The secret cables from Saigon show that U.S. 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, capture or convert the key people who operate the Viet Cong underground inside South Vietnam. This

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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 Bill Rogers that the operation "has not appeared to have significantly weakened" the Viet Cong infrastructure.

Bunker's cable is dated August 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 (sic)."

The VCI, he said, "operates under considerable limitations" and has been reduced in some areas "to skeleton status." As statistical evidence, he reported that 9,331 VCI were "neutralized during the first five months of 1971." This included 3,650 killed, he said.

Secret reports

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 per cent. 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.

"Six thousand* members of an underground organization in a population of eight-

een 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.

'Not scratched the surface'

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, Lt. 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," reported Chikalla. "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. As Lt. Col. Jack Cantrell put it in a classified report from Binh Tuy province:

"The major reasons for lack of success include: (a) 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 Lt. Col. 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, D-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.

GIFT FROM AGNEW

Vice President Agnew is a man often accused of a lack of sympathy for the black and the poor. But you'd have a hard time convincing Ray May, the rugged outside linebacker of the Baltimore Colts.

May has adopted three teen-aged black youths and plans to convert his Kansas ranch into a home for disadvantaged city boys.

Not long ago, May received a handwritten note from the vice president. "Ray, congratulations," it said. "Perhaps this will help a little." Enclosed was a crisp \$100 bill.

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* Sixty thousand . . .

** Lieutenant Colonel

Gerald Chikalla . . .