



## The CIA's « Phoenix Program » in Vietnam and the « War on Terror »

Review of Doug Valentine's Book

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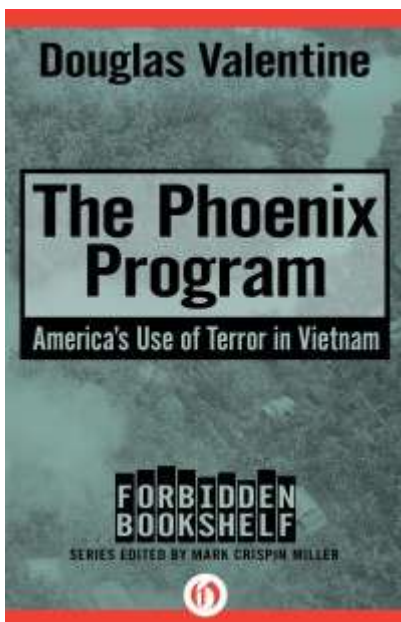
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*The Phoenix Program in Vietnam in many ways provides a blue print for our own times. Assassinations and torture are the essence of the war on terror. As are death squads and false flag terror attacks. As are mass surveillance of the populace.*

*Thanks to the work of Douglas Valentine in his classic book « The Phoenix Program » we have an extremely detailed account of the Phoenix Program exposing a classic example of the brutality of the CIA's counter insurgency wars. By studying the Phoenix program one can gain a great deal of insight into the wars in Afghanistan, Syria and Iraq.*

How the book came to be written is an interesting story in it's own right. Doug Valentine had written a novel about his fathers experiences in a prisoner of war camp during World War 2 called « Hotel Tacloban. »



He decided his next book would be on Vietnam and he decided to focus on the CIA role since little had been written on the topic. He approached former CIA Director William Colby for help. He sent him a copy of his book and the former CIA director decided that Valentine was a man who understood the harsh realities of war and agreed to meet with him. Valentine cut his hair, bought a suit and tie met with Colby and managed to gain his confidence. Colby believed Valentine would write a sympathetic account. After all the CIA is used to working with journalists who censor the truth in exchange for inside information. Colby arranged for him to meet hundreds of former agents.

Valentine had managed to penetrate the inner world of the CIA. Amazingly it took years for the CIA to suspect that Valentine had no intention of writing a sympathetic account of their crimes in Vietnam. By then it was too late he already had hundreds of hours of taped interviews. He wrote his book one of the most detailed accounts of a CIA program ever. However the CIA used its influence with the New York Times to kill the book with a bad review. The book was buried in obscurity. Valentine was forced to give up writing and became a private investigator but fortunately one of the contacts he made while writing Phoenix Program helped him find an even more scandalous story and he went on to write « The Strength of the Wolf » and the « Strength of the Pack » which expose in great detail the phony nature of America's decades long war on drugs. Doug Valentine is one of the most fearless researchers alive today his works are required reading for anyone interested in the CIA, Organized Crime, and America's corrupt establishment.

What was the Phoenix Program?

From the perspective of a Bureaucrat like Bill Colby it was merely an attempt to coordinate a number of pre-existing programs. Sort of like the Department of Homeland Security or more precisely its fusion centers where military, police, and intelligence agencies pool information on their enemies the American people. Phoenix sought to provide cooperation between various Vietnamese and American agencies so that they could coordinate their war on the Vietnamese people. What was the Phoenix program? A massive campaign of torture and assassination aimed at destroying what the CIA called the VCI the Viet Cong Infrastructure. Amusingly this term was as confusing to Vietnamese as it probably is to you.

They had to hold a massive conference to attempt a translation and the word they ended up using only further confused the Vietnamese. By infrastructure the Americans meant not roads and bridges but the civilian Shadow government the Communist revolutionaries had set up across the country. In many places they were the ones in real control on the local level and they used their power to fight for land reform on behalf of the peasants. America's South Vietnamese allies however were a corrupt class of elitists who supported the land lords against the peasants and were hated by the majority of the populace. For the Vietnamese the Vietnam war was a revolution aimed at land reform and re-uniting the country.

Since they had popular support the National Liberation Front had hoped at first to win power peacefully. However the American's had Installed Ngo Dinh Diem as dictator and he ruthlessly crushed all opposition attacking not just the Communist National Liberation Front but all competitors for power including Buddhists and fellow nationalists. His power was narrowly based in Vietnam's catholic minority and he relied on a massive network of corruption to maintain loyalty. After tens of thousands of their supporters had been killed the National Liberation Front appealed to the north for help. When Vietnam was split thousands of South Vietnamese had moved north not wishing to live under Diem's regime. In North Vietnam they had been trained in political organization and Guerrilla warfare. They were sent south to help organize the revolution. They formed what were known as armed propaganda teams. They would enter villages at night administer some revolutionary justice by executing a corrupt local official in front of the whole village and then would explain the goals of the revolution, educate the village about the crimes of the regime, even stage plays and read poems.

The NLF expanded their control over the countryside and set up their own system of

government. This system extended from the local level of small committees to the top level COSVN which planned the strategy for the war. It was this system that the CIA targeted with the Phoenix program.

Interestingly the Phoenix program had its roots in an attempt to mimic the tactics of the Viet Cong Vietnam was quite literally a giant laboratory to study counter insurgency tactics. In the early days of the CIA presence there various CIA province chiefs were allowed to experiment with different ways to combat the growing revolution. Ralph Johnson decided to create the Mountain scouts to imitate the tactics of the armed propaganda teams. Recruiting hardened criminals, Viet Cong defectors, and various ethnic minorities like the hmong, and Montagnards the CIA formed brutal death squads highly trained in methods of covert war. They would sneak into a village at night and brutally slaughter someone they suspected of working with the NLF along with their families and any witnesses and hope the attack would be blamed on the Viet Cong themselves.

They called the tactic counter terror ironically since what they were doing was terrorism. In fact throughout the Vietnam war the CIA staged false flag terror attacks even bombing theaters and blamed them on Viet Cong « Terrorists » it's surprising that this aspect of the war is little mentioned given its special relevance today. However the primary purpose of the death squad commandos was to sneak into NLF controlled territory and kidnap and kill some target. In contrast to most such forces like the contras in Nicaragua in the 80's (trained by people from the Phoenix program) or the Fascist volunteer battalions in Ukraine today who are often poor fighters only effective at terrorizing unarmed civilians The PRU (Provincial Reconnaissance Units) as the CIA's Vietnamese death squads were renamed were the most effective fighting force in south Vietnam. They would form one of the primary elements in the Phoenix Program. Along with the Field Police they would be the enforcers.

The next element of the Phoenix program was the Province Interrogation Centers or PICs. Using a CIA front company Pacific Architects and Engineers the CIA built prisons all over the country to be used to torture political prisoners. They are exact forerunners of today's CIA black sites which now dot the world aiming to torture people to produce real or fabricated intelligence, recruit double agents, break people's spirits and terrify the rest of the planet into submission. Vietnam was covered with these torture sites often the only modern building that was built in a village. At first the Viet Cong made freeing the prisoners a major goal and they staged a number of successful attacks until the PICs were redesigned to make them more secure from outside attack. Inside the prisoners were subjected to horrific tortures, starvation, beatings, electric shock, rape.

Through a special program USAID the infamous CIA front that pretends to dole out charity sent out telephone generators across the world used by the CIA trained secret police around the world to torture their people. Vietnam was only one example. People would be held for months and there were few survivors. These PICs in return would obtain names for further targets who would be either killed or sent to the PICs to be tortured to generate even more names. An endless cycle of horror. Many who ended up there were not even part of the resistance. Instead many were the victims of extortion who failed to pay the proper bribes and whose names were fed into the system. Others were set up by their personal enemies. Others were enemies of the VC. The VC managed to infiltrate all aspects of the South Vietnamese government they were masters of espionage and managed to feed the names of their enemies into the system.

The third aspect of the Phoenix program was intelligence collection. The CIA maintained a

network of spies throughout the country and it attempted to assemble a master list of all the NLF members in south Vietnam. They set up ICEX in an attempt to coordinate intelligence from the CIA the Vietnamese Special Branch which ran the high level NLF infiltrations, the Field Police, the PRU and US military intelligence. However in reality this proved impossible since the South Vietnamese were always plotting against each other and jealously guarded their secrets. The various agencies were tools of the various factions in South Vietnam's Machiavellian political struggles. After the fall of Diem Vietnam experienced a long string of coups as South Vietnam's generals battled each other for control. In addition every sought to use their positions to get rich Drug Dealing, embezzlement, Prostitution and protection rackets were how the CIA's allies mainly occupied themselves hunting down the NLF was only a minor concern. Of course many US Contractors, Military officers and CIA Officers also managed to earn fortunes in various corrupt schemes.

The whole war after was partly undertaken to simply to enrich the Corporate elite back home. The Military and the CIA also were in competition with the CIA unwilling to share information. The military often re-assigned people to intelligence with no prior experience or training giving them a short training course before making them case officers. Thus for obvious reasons the CIA considered them amateurs. However despite the difficulties they did manage to set up a massive database of names of people they believed made up the NLF. In addition to gathering intelligence the massive network of agents was a means for the CIA to buy loyalty and the CIA paid more in bribes to agents than USAID's whole development budget for South Vietnam. As mentioned the Phoenix Program was a further attempt to coordinate these various elements into a program to eliminate what they called the VCI or Viet Cong Infrastructure.

The Phoenix program was thus a massive program to capture and Kill the VCI with the captured being tortured to reveal more names. It was also a massive psychological operation. Psychological operations aim at the mind of the enemy. They can range from Propaganda to terrorism and both were prominent features of the Phoenix Program. Edward Landsdale former advertising executive turned CIA counter insurgency expert was an important pioneer in these tactics. In the Philippines he had played on local superstitions about vampires in one famous example. He had used his agents to spread rumors that vampires were infesting the area the local guerrillas were camped.

Then when enough time had passed his Commandos grabbed a guerrilla bringing up the rear of a column drained his body of blood and then left it along the trail to be found the next day. The trick worked and the Guerrillas fled the area. Another favorite tactic was to paint an eye facing the front door of those they suspected of supporting the guerrillas as a threat before later kidnapping killing and torturing them. Thus whenever they painted one of these eyes they were sure to terrify their target and let them know they were being watched. Landsdale called it the eye of God.

In Vietnam the CIA would use variations of both these tactics. They played on Vietnamese beliefs about the afterlife to add additional horror to their murders. The Vietnamese believed the liver and the third eye were important to reaching heaven. The CIA would have the PRU cut out their victims pineal gland and even have them eat their liver. Thus their victims would not only be killed but denied an afterlife. They left the eye of god painted on corpses. They would also use variations of the eye of God technique. They would fly over their targets addressing the guerrillas by name and telling them to surrender now before it was to late. They Put up wanted posters to keep NLF cadres from being able to travel freely.

They even issued comic books explaining the benefits of being an informant. They dropped billions of propaganda leaflets throughout the country. These often backfired showing a cruel disregard for the populace by constantly threatening them with death and destruction. They had programs to indoctrinate their allies and they employed an eccentric South Vietnamese army officer named Be who was an expert in vietnamese mythology to concoct an elaborate ideology to indoctrinate their own « revolutionary » development cadres in another attempt to imitate the NLF. They forced Vietnam's peasants to form local militias to combat the VC. These RF/PF militias would suffer the highest casualty rate of all the forces fighting in the war.

Another element of the Phoenix Program involved what were called census grievance teams. In every village the CIA appointed an official who was responsible for interviewing the head of each household every month. Initially the idea was that he would then use some of this information to root out corruption and improve the lives of the people. However since he was invariably a member of the corrupt elite who generally despised the peasants his real function was to discover who was dissatisfied and turn them in as suspected NLF.

Also involved in the Phoenix Program were US special operations forces. They acted as advisers sometimes training the PRU teams. Often advisers were sent to PRU Units that were already well trained and highly experienced in the ways of covert war. They also lead them on their snatch and grab missions and provided valuable equipment. One fascinating part of the book recounts the early misadventures of the Navy Seals who had been training for many years but who had never been in combat before. They made a disastrous series of mistakes in their first months in country due to faulty intelligence and general ignorance about Vietnam. It was after teaming up with the PRU and their CIA adviser that they found their role in the war dressed as vietcong hiding during the day and traveling at night and kidnapping or killing their CIA provided targets. In today's world special forces are CIA foot soldiers involved in a secret war in 140 countries. There is no telling how many people they have assassinated.

However all these efforts the enemies lists, torture centers, Psychological operations and Death Squads would in the end prove futile. They rarely managed to capture high level NLF members although they often targeted completely innocent people. They failed to regain control of the countryside. In part this was because the whole program was misconceived they attempted to adopt the Viet Cong tactics while ignoring their goals. The VC were offering land while the government was attempting to force people off their land into new villages that were little more than prison camps. The VC were acting in Vietnam's two thousand year tradition of battling for national liberation. Throughout the centuries they had suffered repeated conquest by the Chinese and had also successfully fought for their independence repeatedly throwing off Chinese domination.

More recently the struggle against the french had lasted almost a hundred years. They had fought the Japanese during World War 2. America was merely the latest foreign invader no amount of propaganda could hide this fact. Another factor in Vietnamese society that made the effort futile was our corrupt allies. Instead of using the program to hunt for communists they used it as a giant extortion racket. In addition they knew that if they targeted the high level NLF members they themselves might be targeted in revenge. They often already knew who the top leaders were but they kept the information from the CIA for fear of the reprisals that might result. In actuality there was often a sort of secret truce in place the NLF would allow the South Vietnamese government the illusion of control in an area in return the government wouldn't interfere with their activities. Often the government ruled by day while

at night the NLF ruled. While 40,000 people were killed by the Phoenix Program the CIA failed to destroy the VCI instead it was the South Vietnamese government which would in the end collapse.

The legacy of the Phoenix program is a legacy of terror, torture, and death. With all the carnage of the Vietnam War it was little noticed although there was a brief scandal about it when the UN declared the US had a responsibility to insure South Vietnam adhered to the Geneva Convention on treatment of prisoners, since the US had designed and funded their prison system, one of the worst in the world. Colby was called before congress where he denied that the Phoenix program was an assassination program merely an effort to coordinate intelligence gathering. He admitted 20,000 people had been killed but that was merely a byproduct. The Phoenix program became just another brief scandal. Andre Vltchek estimates that 8 million people died as a result of America's wars in Thailand, Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam.

The Phoenix program did not end with those wars just as in a sense it did not begin with them. The tactics of Phoenix are common to all counter-insurgency campaigns and One can read accounts of American actions in the Philippines at the beginning of the 20th century that involve many of the exact same tactics. However the connection between the Phoenix program and later events is far more concrete and Doug Valentine ends his book with America's dirty war in El Salvador. The US sent the exact same people involved in the Phoenix program to advise El Salvador on how to wage war on it's own peasants. In Nicaragua there was another infamous example Felix Rodriguez was a PRU adviser in the Phoenix program.

He was an infamous figure a Cuban exile he was involved in the bay of pigs, the murder of Che Guevara in Bolivia, then went to Vietnam to serve in the Phoenix Program. After the war He and some of his exile friends did work as hit teams for Miami drug dealers before being sent to advise and train the contras while helping with their drugs and gun smuggling. Drug dealing had been a major element in the Vietnam War as well (a topic I touched on in my March 2015 Article Wars in Korea and Vietnam) It was so prevalent in South Vietnam that the CIA often paid their informants in heroin as well as cash. The highest levels of the vietnamese government were involved in the drug trade.

In Nearby Laos much of the war centered over a battle for the Opium poppy fields in the plain of jars and many of the coups actually centered around how to divide the profits from the drug trade. The CIA ran a front airline CAT later renamed Air America that smuggled in guns and smuggled out drugs to finance their massive « Secret Army. » In Nicaragua personal friend of then Vice President George H.W. Bush Felix Rodriguez was involved in a very similar scheme flying in guns and flying out drugs to fund the contras. The Contras then terrorized the populace in a horrific manner in exactly the same way the original CIA counter terror teams did. Thus in Central America Phoenix was able to live up to it's name rising from the ashes of Vietnam. In El Salvador and Guatemala they advised the government in a massive program of torture and assassination.

Death Squads made up a major element in these programs. In Nicaragua they trained the contras to engage in terror and assassination that often targeted Nicaraguan health workers and teachers or any government member they could get their hands on doubtless in an attempt to eliminate the Sandinista « Infrastructure » Of course they also terrorized anyone else who fell into their hands men, women and children. The Phoenix program would rise once again after the wars in central America ended this time in Iraq and Afghanistan.

In Iraq they explicitly called it the El Salvador solution and they sent people who had helped El Salvador wage it's reign of terror to Iraq to train the Shiite Badr brigades. They would use these to wage a massive campaign of kidnapping and torture aimed at destroying the Sunni insurgency. In Syria they would train Wahhabi death squads in an attempt to overthrow the government in a manner similar to the way they used the contras in Nicaragua only even worse. Again Syria's infrastructure has been targeted quite literally as the CIA backed death squads attempt to destroy food production, Hospitals schools, water, electricity and power, even cultural sites. Of course they also try to kill as many people as possible. Like the death squads of the phoenix program they frequently commit false flag attacks most famously using chemical weapons in attempt to frame the Assad government. Perhaps the latest site for the rebirth of the Phoenix program is Ukraine where Fascist Death Squads have been unleashed to terrorize the populace although after a recent power struggle the government plans to bring them into the regular army. Most ominous for Americans the entire war on terror apparatus mimics the phoenix program and fusion centers have already been set up to share intelligence on the American population itself as Doug Valentine himself explained in a brilliant series of articles. The Phoenix program has spread terror across the planet. It will doubtless continue to be reborn again and again so long as America and it's allies long war against the planet continues.

## Sources

I relied on Doug Valentine's « The Phoenix Program. » A masterpiece made up of hundreds of first hand accounts analyzing every aspect of the Phoenix Program in depth. It is highly recommended for anyone interested in the Vietnam War, The CIA, and the wars in Central America and the Middle East. I've Just started his next book « The Strength of the Wolf » but I can already highly recommend it to anyone wanting to understand the Mafia, the War On Drugs, and the corrupt American Ruling class. His Next book is « Strength of the Pack » which continues the story. For More on Vietnam I highly recommend « The Perfect war » by James William Gibson which will be the topic of a future article. There is a great movie inspired by Graham Greene's classic Novel « The Quiet American » that was actually based on Ed Landsdale.

Many Doug Valentine interviews and articles are available online. He has made all the recordings of the interviews he made on The Phoenix Program available to the public here is is website

<http://www.douglasvalentine.com>

A link to an interview he did and an article he wrote on Daniel Ellsberg who shockingly was involved in the phoenix program.

<https://www.corbettreport.com/interview-709-douglas-valentine-on-ellsberg-and-the-cia/>

Doug Valentine on what's really going on in Mexico where 100,000 people have died as a result of the war on drugs. Plus a great discussion of the phoenix program

<http://tracesofreality.com/2013/08/08/demanufacturing-consent-beyond-dirty-wars-douglas-valentine-on-the-phoenix-program-and-modern-day-terror-in-latin-america/>

Doug Valentine on the coup in Ukraine

<http://www.ancreport.com/podcast/doug-valentine-on-the-cias-relations-to-ngos-involved-in-ukraine/>

Doug Valentine on the history of the war on drugs

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