

Phoenix

(part II)

Spy net engulfs all S. Vietnam's citizens

by Stewart Kellerman
in Saigon

LINH is a poor farmer. He grows rice on an acre of land near the South China Sea. He lives with his wife and three children in a cramped hut made of straw and mud.

Linh—like millions of other—has been forced by the South Vietnamese Government to spy on his own family for the Phoenix programme, a controversial allied drive using torture and assassination to destroy the Communist political leadership in South Vietnam.

"I don't want to get into trouble," Linh said through a translator. "That's why I tell the government what they want. I don't tell them everything, of course. Just as much as I have to."

The Phoenix programme has tried to get a *gia truong* (family head) like Linh to spy in every hut, house and shanty in South Vietnam. They're the lowest rungs on a massive intelligence apparatus providing reports on suspected leaders of the Communist National Liberation Front (NLF).

The *gia truongs* don't get any money for their information—just prosecution as suspected Communists if they fail to report accurately on the actions of their families.

Allied sources said the Phoenix programme also employs a large network of paid informers—national police undercover men, civilian secret agents, army intelligence experts and gang

of gunmen organised by the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA).

The reports from informers move up through channels to hundreds of District Intelligence Operations Commands (DIOCs), the hubs of the Phoenix programme. Each DIOC is manned by South Vietnamese soldiers, police and psychological warfare specialists as well as an unofficial member from the U.S. army, American sources said.

U.S. intelligence officers said the DIOCs use the reports to prepare "target folders" on suspected political leaders of the Vietcong, the Saigon government's name for the NLF.

The officials said green sheets of paper in the folders are used to list such items as physical descriptions, friends and visiting habits of suspects. Pink sheets are used for copies of all agent reports on suspects.

South Vietnamese Phoenix officials said informants are graded on a scale ranging from A (completely reliable) to F (reliability cannot be judged). They said information provided by agents is grade from 1 (confirmed) to 6 (truth cannot be judged).

DIOC members—after deciding a suspect is likely to be a Communist leader—meet to decide how he should be "neutralised." The suspect can be assassinated, arrested or talked into switching sides.

A former U.S. Phoenix coordinator (adviser) said most DIOCs require at least a C3 rating—agent fairly reliable, information possibly true—before "targeting" a suspect for as-

The field police, strike arm of the national police, are usually used for arrests. CIA-financed PKU's, members of Province Reconnaissance Units, are used to kill suspects, according to allied intelligence sources.

But in Vietnam, no operation is water-tight. Allied intelligence officers said most Communist political leaders find out—through information leakage—that they've been targeted for assassination or arrest and go into hiding before the government can get to them.

They said the Phoenix programme then issues wanted posters showing mug shots and offering small rewards for information about the whereabouts of suspects.

The programme recently began a trial project in a few provinces offering bounties euphemistically called "maximum incentive awards" of several thousand dollars for really high Communist leaders—dead or alive.

After a suspect is arrested, the next step is a trip to a Province Interrogation Centre (PIC) also organised by the CIA, according to allied sources.

A former U.S. Phoenix adviser said torture is used at all PICs although interrogators usually use psychological rather than physical techniques. A couple of favorites are:

Cover a suspect's face with a wet washcloth. Pour soapy water over the cloth each time he refuses to answer a question. The water isn't supposed to hurt him, but it gives the suspect the impression he's drowning.

● Tie a suspect to a chair and attach wires to a 12-volt car battery. Shock the suspect every time he refuses to answer a question. If he's really a tough customer, apply the wires to the genitals.

When the questioning is over, the suspect is brought before a province security committee headed by the local province chief.

The committee has the power to sentence a suspect in secret trials to a maximum of two years in prison. The sentence, however, is renewable indefinitely as long as Vietnam is at war.

U.S. sources said the suspect cannot question his accusers or even find out who they are. "It's pretty much up to the province chief," one American official said. "If he's a good man there'll be a fair trial. If he's not, there won't."

"I think it's safe to say that when it's all over not many people get off," one current Phoenix adviser said. "Just about everybody who makes the whole route winds up in jail."

STATOTHR

Ex-Beret Says He Killed Agent on Orders of C.I.A.

By JOHN DARNTON

Robert F. Marasco, one of the eight Green Berets who were charged but never tried in the slaying two years ago of a South Vietnamese suspected to have been a double agent, says that he shot and killed the man on "oblique yet very, very clear orders" from the Central Intelligence Agency.

"He was my agent and it was my responsibility to eliminate him with extreme prejudice," Mr. Marasco said in an interview Friday. "Eliminate with extreme prejudice" is the Special Forces' euphemism for a killing.

The "elimination" was approved "up and down our chain of command," the former Army captain added. Although he corroborated details of the slaying, he refused to divulge the names of other persons involved.

Mr. Marasco, now 29 years old and a life insurance salesman in Bloomfield, N.J., said that he was admitting his complicity out of a sense of anger over the conviction of First Lieut. William L. Calley Jr. on charges of premeditated murder in the deaths of 22 civilians at My Lai.

His statements coincide with the publication of a novel called "Court Martial," written jointly by Robin Moore, the author of "The Green Berets," and Henry Rothblatt, the attorney who represented several of the Green Berets arrested in the alleged killing.

The novel is said to be a close rendering of the events that led to the arrest of the Berets, including Col. Robert B. Rheault, then commander of the Army's 3,000 Special Forces personnel in Vietnam. The elite corps, which specializes in counterinsurgency, is still in existence, but is now

deployed elsewhere, according to the Pentagon.

Six of the eight Berets (charges against two were held in abeyance) were to have stood trial on charges of murder and conspiracy in October, 1969. But the Army abruptly dropped the case on Sept. 29, in a decision reviewed by the Nixon Administration, on the ground that it could not enlist the cooperation of the C.I.A., which had refused to provide witnesses.

The Vietnamese agent was Thai Khac Chuyen, whose body was dropped into the South China Sea off Nhatrang, the Special Forces headquarters 180 miles north of Saigon. Despite intensive dredging, it was apparently never recovered.

Mr. Marasco corroborated the following details, all of which have previously been reported in the press with unnamed sources cited.

Mr. Chuyen's role as a double agent was discovered when a raid on a Vietcong camp turned up a photograph of him with a high-ranking North Vietnamese official. He was told he would be sent on an important mission and instead was held in solitary confinement, where he compromised himself through lie detector tests and sodium pentathol (truth serum).

He was first drugged with morphine and then killed by Mr. Marasco in a motorboat with two shots to the head from a .22-caliber pistol equipped with a silencer (which jammed between shots). His body was tossed overboard in a mail sack weighted with chains and tire rims by the three officers in the boat. This was on June 20, 1969.

A cover story was fabricated in which a Japanese-American fitting Mr. Chuyen's description was sent on an air-supported "secret mission" near the Cambodian border.

The question of what to do with Mr. Chuyen led to meetings between Green Beret officers and C.I.A. officials. The C.I.A. in Saigon finally sent a message reading "return agent

to duty" and warning of "flap potential." The message, however, arrived after his death.

Mr. Marasco said Mr. Chuyen was a "principal agent," whose function was to hire, train, pay and coordinate sub-agents on intelligence missions. He refused to give the ultimate aim of the missions and referred the question to a "fact sheet" drawn up by Mr. Moore to publicize his new novel. The "fact sheet" is based on a transcript of the "pre-trial" hearings of the case.

The "fact-sheet" stated that Mr. Chuyen had been involved



The New York Times
Robert F. Marasco

in a secret Special Forces unit known as B-37, whose goal was to pick military targets in Cambodia for a projected incursion by United States and South Vietnamese forces and to train 3,000 Cambodian troops to guard the country from Communism should Prince Norodom Sihanouk be deposed.

In reality, Mr. Marasco stated, Mr. Chuyen was a triple-agent, whose real allegiance was to an organization led by Gen. Daong Van Minh. The success of this group, which was striving for a coalition government, would have led to "Communist control" and "massive extermination," Mr. Marasco asserted.

When the charges against the Berets were dropped, the Secretary of the Army, Stanley R. Resor, said that the C.I.A. was "not directly involved in the alleged incident."

But Mr. Marasco maintains that a vaguely-worded execution order was passed on to his

superior officers in Saigon by a "C.I.A. operative whose cover was a lieutenant-colonel, United States Army." He quoted the wording as: "We cannot officially sanction it, but elimination is your best course of action."

"The C.I.A. does not give written orders," Mr. Marasco said. "When someone in the C.I.A. says to you . . . 'your best course of action is elimination' that means, 'we approve it.'"

Mr. Marasco claimed there had been "hundreds" — "and I'm being conservative" — of summary executions in South Vietnam. Most, he said, were carried out by the Provincial Reconnaissance Unit, which he described as an assassination squad of Vietnamese natives "trained, financed and equipped by the C. I. A." But others were carried out by American "advisers," he said.

Mr. Marasco resigned from the Army on Oct. 14, 1969, and shortly thereafter was injured in a car collision in New Jersey that kept him on a hospital critical list for 10 days.

Because he is no longer in the Army, he is not subject to court-martial. Previously, he has made guarded statements on the killing, but has never before admitted it. He said he is receiving no money from the novel "Court Martial."

Did he regret his actions? "No," he said. "I felt that it was my duty. Anything I did in military duty in Vietnam was with the biggest patriotic motives. I never wake up in the middle of the night screaming."

STATOTHR

Maximizing COBRA Utilization

by Jeffrey Record

Bac Lieu is a small out-of-the-way province at the southern end of the Mekong Delta. It rarely makes the 6:30 news. When I was there in 1968-69 with the American advisory team serving as the Assistant Province Advisor for Psychological Operations, there were no North Vietnamese troops in the province. What Viet Cong strength there was consisted largely of part-time village and hamlet guerrillas armed mostly with single-shot vintage German Mausers. They concentrated primarily on blowing up bridges with uncanny accuracy and mining the few passable roads. They were experts at placing booby traps, and the ARVN soldiers obliged them by returning again and again to the same place, tripping the same wires with deadly consistency.

Americans believed there were about 3,000 full-time, hard-core Viet Cong in Bac Lieu, or one per cent of the total population. Arrayed against this scanty enemy presence were over 20,000 well-armed men: elements of the 21st ARVN Division, Regional Force companies, Popular Force companies, and the ubiquitous People's

Self Defense Force, a kind of local home guard. This vast military structure was supplemented by numerous Revolutionary Development Teams, the Provincial Police, the paramilitary Police Field Force, and the Provincial Reconnaissance Unit—an extortion and assassination team run directly by the CIA and composed mostly of criminals, deserters, and former Viet Cong.

On top of this overwhelming numerical superiority, the Vietnamese government possessed, as it does in every province in South Vietnam, complete control of the air through its American ally.

I arrived in Bac Lieu in August, 1968, and my first impressions were favorable. Both the Province Senior Advisor (the head of the American advisory team) and the Province Chief (the Vietnamese "governor" of the province) seemed acutely aware of the military and political dangers inherent in the indiscriminate use of firepower, particularly in such a heavily populated province like Bac Lieu. The Province Chief had refused to permit B-52 strikes, and the Province Senior Advisor had repeatedly denied U.S. Navy requests to shell the province from offshore. He had also forbidden

the use of .50 caliber machine guns because their range and velocity made them too destructive.

Airpower in Bac Lieu was confined mainly to logistical support: the helicoptering of troops and ammunition to various outposts and the airlifting of critical supplies to those hamlets inaccessible by road or canal. The only aircraft permanently stationed at Bac Lieu's small dirt airstrip were five or six light, single-engine planes used for aerial observation. Airstrikes could be had, but only on request. Within 30 minutes of first contact with the enemy, American helicopter gunships and jet fighter-bombers would fly in from the large airbase at IV Corps military headquarters in Can Tho, several provinces away. They would bomb and strafe whatever targets were given them by the Bac Lieu Tactical Operations Center. Outside of actual support for ground combat operations the only airstrikes ever called in were occasional sorties over the province's three small, and virtually unpopulated, free-fire zones.

This atmosphere of modest restraint soon changed, however. There had always, of course, been considerable resistance within the advisory team to any restrictions on the use of airpower. Although civilians and military men could be found on either side of the airpower debate, most of the opposition to restrictions came from the older officers, many close to retirement, for whom Vietnam provided their first and last chance to see real combat. Some found the idea of restraint incompatible with war. Others appeared troubled by the suggestion that military effectiveness was not commensurate with simply the amount of firepower at one's disposal. All the opponents of restraint seemed oblivious even to friendly argument. The moral argument, that unrestricted use of airpower would result in the unnecessary killing of many innocent civilians, ran into the simple reply that "war is hell." The political argument, that such indiscriminate destruction

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