

ASHES TO ASHES

THE PHOENIX PROGRAM AND THE VIETNAM WAR

Cover for Assassination
or Effective
Counterinsurgency?

DALE ANDRADÉ

Ashes To Ashes: The Phoenix Program and the Vietnam War.
By Dale Andradé. Lexington, Mass.: Lexington Books, 1990. ISBN 0-669-20014-X. 331 pages. \$22.95.

Ashes To Ashes is an examination of the American Phoenix Program and its parallel South Vietnamese program, Phung Hoang, against the Viet Cong infrastructure. As the author points out, informed discussion of Phoenix/Phung Hoang has been severely lacking over the years. Rather, the program has been so tainted with negative publicity that those persons most qualified to discuss it have, for the most part, chosen to keep quiet instead. However, *Ashes To Ashes* begins to fill a void in America's understanding of "the other war" in Vietnam (i.e., anti-infrastructure operations against the Viet Cong). Filling that information void is important to those American special-operations forces that have foreign-internal-defense missions, if they are to learn the lessons of that conflict.

While *Ashes To Ashes* is a good start toward understanding Phoenix/Phung Hoang, it is not a complete account. The book focuses primarily on operations, while inadequately examining intelligence activities. The author repeatedly stresses the importance of intelli-

gence in anti-infrastructure operations, yet he reveals nothing about that support, other than low-level human-intelligence operations. Low-level HUMINT is the essence of effective police work — the same police work that is so important in a LIC environment. However, the author also makes several references to the importance of intelligence provided directly by the CIA — without discussing that intelligence, its sources or methods.

Indeed, the author's limited discussion points to another aspect of intelligence support: what were the contributions (or lack thereof) of service intelligence organizations and the DIA? The author notes that the priority for those intelligence organizations was order-of-battle intelligence, but was that their only priority? In the author's defense, much of that information is probably still classified, and some of it may never be declassified. However, the need for further information about intelligence support to Phoenix/Phung Hoang remains.

Additionally, *Ashes To Ashes* suffers from three other problems. First, in an effort to evaluate the effectiveness of Phoenix/Phung Hoang, the author sometimes resorts to relying on statistics — the same statistics which he derides. (For example, "Statistics, the opiate that soothed Saigon ..." [page 129]) Second, the author makes repeated references to the "incompetent" and "corrupt" Vietnamese, while Americans are portrayed as omnipotent and benevolent. Third, the book suffers from poor editing. These relatively minor problems detract from an otherwise fine effort.

A historian by training, the author supplies a variety of interesting data from various sources about Phoenix/Phung Hoang, but he nevertheless fails to provide a comprehensive analysis of what this information means. Such an analysis may have to wait until more information about the program is declassified. However, *Ashes To*

Ashes makes a good start toward understanding "the other war" in Vietnam, and the author deserves credit for that.

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Uncomfortable Wars: Toward a New Paradigm of Low Intensity Conflict. Edited by Max G. Manwaring. Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1991. ISBN: 08-133-8081-2. 139 pages. \$32.50.

Congratulations to Max Manwaring for compiling some of the best articles and papers available on the topic of low-intensity conflict. Contributors to the book include some of the brightest minds in the business: Gen. John R. Galvin, William J. Olson, Gen. Fred F. Woerner, Col. Courtney E. Prisk, Ambassador Edwin G. Corr and Lt. Col. John T. Fishel.

Like nearly all compilations from multiple authors, the book suffers from a lack of smooth transitions from one topic to the next, but overall, Max Manwaring has done a superb job in the editorial process while attempting to "connect the dots."

UNCOMFORTABLE WARS

Toward a
New Paradigm
of Low Intensity
Conflict

edited by
MAX G.
MANWARING

Westview Studies in Regional Security

Essentially, the focus of the book is on the need for the United States to develop a new model (or paradigm) to address the threat posed by what has come to be known as LIC. The authors find six primary areas in which America must concentrate its efforts if it is to be successful in the often violent and emerging "new world order." They are: 1) Establishment of legitimacy; 2) Organization for unity of effort; 3) Type and consistency of external support; 4) Discipline and capabilities of armed forces; 5) Intelligence; 6) Ability to reduce outside aid to the adversary. Students of LIC will recognize each element as essential in U.S. support to counterinsurgency operations.

The work is well focused on SOUTHCOM's area of responsibility, with examinations of the Sendero Luminosa, or "Shining Path" insurgent movement of Peru; U.S. support to the legal government of El Salvador against the Farabundo Marti Liberation Front; and a strategic view of Latin America by General Woerner.

Whether or not you agree with the authors is largely irrelevant. These are thought-provoking ideas offered by people who know the business of combining the military-diplomatic means of this nation at both the practical and theoretical level. *Uncomfortable Wars* would be a welcome addition to any professional soldier's library. Buy it, read it, and think about it.

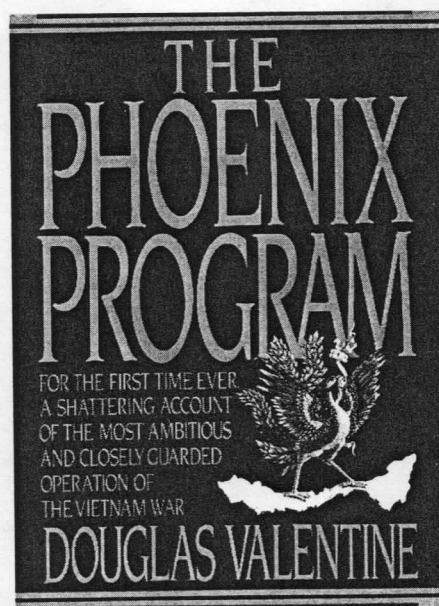
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The Phoenix Program. By Douglas Valentine. New York: William Morrow and Company, 1990. ISBN 0-688-09130-X. 416 pages. \$24.95.

The Phoenix Program, by Douglas Valentine, is a selectively and prejudicially researched work. It is significantly flawed by the author's predetermined conclusion that the Phoenix program was not only a

deliberate instrument of terror but also the harbinger of a legacy of conspiratorial evil that pervaded, and continues to pervade, U.S. policy at home and abroad. The true villain and target of the book extends far beyond the relatively limited theme that the title indicates. That villain is the Central Intelligence Agency.

Valentine's agenda is to convince the reader that Phoenix was much more than a particular effort instigated by the CIA to better coordinate the attack on hidden Viet Cong cadres. Instead, Phoenix was a dark concept that became a way of operational life, infecting virtually every



aspect of the U.S. involvement in Vietnam. In his concluding chapter, Valentine further expands this speculation into U.S. involvement in Central America.

If you are proponent of Big Brother-type conspiratorial themes, this is the book for you. Valentine's preconceived argument is so dominant throughout the book that the reader wonders how honest the author was regarding his intent with many of those he interviewed. It appears that the conclusion of this work was written well before the body and that all that was needed was to find what the author considered to be substantiating evidence. To strengthen his thesis, the author is

selective in his uses of other research.

A case in point is Stanley Karnow's *Vietnam: A History*. Although Valentine quotes Karnow throughout for Vietnamese historical reference (sometimes out of context), he is strangely silent on Karnow's comments regarding Phoenix itself. A critic of the program, Karnow nevertheless honestly recounts the testimonies of former high-ranking Viet Cong officials as to the effectiveness of Phoenix in disrupting the revolutionary infrastructure. You will not find such balance in Valentine's book.

All of this is unfortunate, because there are elements of potential value within the book. Relying to a great deal on interviews with both civilian and military personnel involved to varying degrees with the Phoenix effort, the book does provide insight into the problems that afflicted the program. These problems included the terrible imprisoning, torturing and killing of innocent Vietnamese, the great difficulty in persuading the Vietnamese to commit to the concept and in convincing the myriad agencies and forces to cooperate with each other in a common goal, and the consequences that resulted from placing unqualified or unethical Americans in positions that influenced Phoenix activities. There are, too, the instances of unquestionably immoral and illegal behavior by Americans that should be identified for what they were.

Within the framework of a balanced examination and analysis of the program itself, *The Phoenix Program* could have been a solid contribution to the study of American attempts, both good and bad, to combat communist revolutionary warfare. Instead, the effort will be wasted on all but those already inclined to believe the absolute worst about the United States' effort to combat communism.

Military readers may well find the book difficult to read, both for