

DOES DEFECTION MATTER? THE IMPACT OF THE
CHIEU HOI PROGRAM IN VIETNAM

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Art of War

by

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ABSTRACT

DOES DEFECTION MATTER? THE IMPACT OF THE CHIEU HOI PROGRAM IN VIETNAM, by Major Christopher J. DeMure, 99 pages.

An analysis of the Chieu Hoi Program warrants considerable similarities to other conflicts. In addition to the role of the host nation government, the psychological aspect of defection is paramount. Whether it is a military strategist, historian, or the casual observer, there is temptation to simplify the most complex of problems in war. It is simple—and often convenient—to generalize the motives of belligerents with the broadest of strokes. Social and cultural differences can also skew one's perception of the enemy. With limited understanding about their motivation and psychological weaknesses, a basic question emerges: Do all enemy fighters really fight for the reasons we believe they do?

The Chieu Hoi Program was a success on many levels. It helped drain Viet Cong manpower by nearly 194,000 fighters. Compared to other pacification programs, it was perhaps the most cost-efficient of the Vietnam War. No matter how well the U.S. supported the program, the South Vietnamese government's level of commitment limited its success. A lack of South Vietnamese leadership influenced more than Chieu Hoi—it substantiates the limits of a program without host nation ownership, and serves as one of the missed opportunities in a complex war.

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ACRONYMS

APT	Armed Propaganda Team
CORDS	Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support
GVN	Government of Vietnam
MICH	Ministry of Information and Chieu Hoi
NVA	North Vietnamese Army
POW	Prisoners of War
U.S.	United States
VC	Viet Cong

CHAPTER 1

THE EARLY DEMAND SIGNAL

An insurgency is like a train. Throughout its course, some people get on and others get off.

— Amilcar Lopes da Costa Cobral, Guinea-Bissau, Nationalist Leader

The War of Missed Opportunities

The Vietnam War cannot fit neatly into the singular context of a civil war, guerilla insurgency, act of foreign aggression, or simply conventional conflict. What began as a low-grade insurgency evolved into a resilient North Vietnamese taking over the South in April 1975. The small United States (U.S.) advisory mission in the 1950s concluded with 58,272 service members killed in action. However, in the examination of the American and South Vietnamese relationship, a common thread is present throughout the war. “Missed opportunities” by both parties led to confusion, inefficiency, and finally to a closure which benefitted neither. U.S. policymakers ignored nearly two millennia of Vietnamese history and failed to confront the difficult truth that civil wars—at least for the indigenous participants—are not limited in nature. A foreign partaker in someone else’s civil war cannot have as much at stake as the parties within the host nation.

South Vietnamese leaders are not exempt from scrutiny either. Their lack of initiative to increase the perception of their government’s legitimacy hindered overall war efforts, but specifically pacification programs. A salient example is Chieu Hoi, a defector program in operation from 1963 to 1971 responsible for over 190,000 enemy fighters rallying to the South. Despite sporadic and inadequate leadership by South Vietnamese officials, the program survived due to committed U.S. administrators. Ogden Williams, a

senior U.S. Chieu Hoi advisor commented about the challenges of working with the South Vietnamese:

There's not a program in Vietnam that could not have been carried out much better if we had had the time, the money, the right kind of GVN (Government of Vietnam) leadership. And I might add, the right kind of advisors. If you want to criticize, you can criticize every single thing we did. But, you've got to measure results and performance against inputs, environment, and lead team. Rome isn't built in a day.¹

This thesis focuses upon the expectations from a foreign-inspired program influenced by limited host-nation government.

An analysis of the Chieu Hoi Program warrants considerable similarities to other conflicts, most notably current operations in Afghanistan. In addition to the role of the host nation government, the psychological aspect of defection is paramount. Whether it is a military strategist, historian, or the casual observer, there is temptation to simplify the most complex of problems in war. The Prussian theorist Karl von Clausewitz perhaps phrased it best: "Everything is very simple in war, but the simplest thing is difficult."² It is simple—and often convenient—to generalize the motives of belligerents with the broadest of strokes. This can be due to cynicism, lack of education, or simply bias. Social and cultural differences can also skew one's perception of the enemy. With limited understanding about their motivation and psychological weaknesses, a basic question emerges: Do all enemy fighters really fight for the reasons we believe they do?

¹ Interview with Ogden Williams by J. A. Koch, in J. A. Koch, *The Chieu Hoi Program in South Vietnam, 1963-1971* (Santa Monica, CA: Rand Corporation, 1973), 89-90.

² Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed. and trans. by Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976), 59.

The world is full of ideologues and leaders who preach violence in the pursuit of religion or some other cause. Committed extremists such as these are unlikely to be pacified. However, many others—sometimes a large portion of fighters—have chosen to pick up arms for a number of reasons. They might seek employment and need earnings to support their family. On the other hand, they might have joined the opposition because they could not comprehend the risk of siding with the minority government. Maybe, they have grievances. Simply put, the fighter’s decision to fight may not stem purely from military angst; instead, social, economic, and cultural factors could weigh heavily into the individual’s decision-making cycle. Inducing enemy fighters to defect can provide substantial results at a relatively low cost.

The Impact of Defection

Known as “Open Arms,” the Chieu Hoi Program was in existence from 1963 to 1971 and responsible for nearly 194,000 enemy fighters switching sides. The operational logic of the effort resonated upon some common principles. Defection from the enemy, if accomplished in large numbers, would damage its operational abilities. Next, defection causes significant damage to the cohesion of an enemy unit and hinders the individual morale of those fighters left behind. In addition, ralliers would contain information that could be useful to South Vietnamese and U.S. operational plan. Overall, the Chieu Hoi program was part of a comprehensive counterinsurgency policy that intended to break the link between the rural population and insurgent fighters.

The situation became more tenuous as popular support in the U.S. dwindled and American policymakers hurried to speed up the transition to South Vietnamese agencies. Observers of the Vietnam War commonly focus upon the U.S. bombing campaigns to

wane North Vietnamese forces or the Phoenix Program's effect of weakening the Viet Cong's civilian infrastructure.³ However, other and less-known efforts also produced a measurable effect throughout the war. To better understand Chieu Hoi, it is key to first consider the complexity of the Vietnam insurgency and existing social problems. In addition, the examination of prior pacification efforts before Chieu Hoi helps explain why the U.S. and South Vietnamese ultimately created the program.

A Complex Insurgency

With the U.S. still concerned about the balance of power in Europe after World War I, the international system placed little focus toward Southeast Asia in the 1930s. The Japanese increased their sphere of influence before World War II and sought control of Indochina in the early 1940s. In August 1940, Japan seized the transit hub of Haiphong as well as the major airfields in Tonkin. Just a few months later in May 1941, they expanded into Vietnam. In response, the Indochinese Communist Party worked with other nationalist groups and formed a new organization, later referred to as the Viet Minh. A passionate nationalist named Ho Chi Minh led the faction. The Viet Minh worked to create defense capabilities and created anti-Japanese guerilla elements. As the U.S. dropped two atomic bombs in Japan in August 1945, the legitimacy of Japanese

³ The Phoenix Program was a counterinsurgency program administered by the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), U.S. Special Operations Forces (SOF), and South Vietnamese military forces. The program's mission was to identify and neutralize civilian infrastructure in support of the Viet Cong. Phoenix was highly debated since much of the focus was assassination, torture, or kidnapping of the targeted individuals. The program officially ran from 1965 to 1972 and claimed to neutralize over 81,000 individuals, of which over 26,000 were killed. For further reading, please see Dr. Mark Moyar's *Phoenix and the Birds of Prey: The CIA's Secret Campaign to Destroy the Viet Cong* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1997).

influence weakened throughout Vietnam. Ho Chi Minh surged at the opportunity and declared his guerilla elements to now be the Vietnam Liberation Army. A shadow government quickly spread through the country in order to support the Ho Chi Minh's military capability. The new regime would later go by the title of the Viet Cong Infrastructure. By Victory over Japan Day (V-J Day) on August 15, 1945, Ho Chi Minh and his forces took control of Vietnam.

With her colonial influence, France still sought presence in Vietnam after World War II. In 1946, Ho Chi Minh hesitantly accepted a French proposal to allow Vietnam to exist as an autonomous state within the French Union. However, the French attempted to reestablish colonial rule and fighting once again broke out. By 1949, the Viet Minh, resourced with military and economic aid from Communist China, fought an increasingly effective guerrilla war against France. The U.S. helped supply French forces.

In November 1953, the French military, fatigued by jungle warfare, occupied Dien Bien Phu, a fortified mountain outpost on the Vietnamese border near Laos. In 1954, the Viet Minh army, led by General Vo Nguyen Giap, moved toward the French and encircled Dien Bien Phu in March with 40,000 Communist troops. Giap defeated the French forces in July and international leaders drew a truce at the Geneva Conference. The French were to withdraw from the North and Viet Minh elements would move from the South. The 17th parallel would divide Vietnam in half. Almost immediately, Ho Chi Minh began eliminating non-Communists within the North. In 1956, the new Communist Democratic Republic of Vietnam resurrected revolutionary cells in the South.⁴ In April

⁴ Ken Conboy and Ken Bowra, Illustrated by Simon McCouaig, *The NVA and Viet Cong* (London: Osprey Publishing, 1991), 8.

1959, the Democratic Republic of Vietnam issued directives to establish logistical caches and supply lines into South Vietnam. With an expanded operational reach, the Communists were able to grow rapidly and launch attacks against South Vietnamese military units and government officials.⁵ A year later, the Communist elements organized once more into the National United Front for the Liberation of the Southern Region. The guerilla elements now gained a true political party for their movement.

United States advisors were in Vietnam since the 1950s. The rapid growth of the National Liberation Front worried American leadership and prompted a larger U.S. contribution. The advisory effort grew as did for military aid to the South Vietnamese. Many of the Viet Minh forces that opposed the French also conducted guerilla operations against the South. Along with money and supplies, the U.S. placed a new emphasis upon a broad set of counterinsurgency programs. The Chieu Hoi Program began in 1963 because of the U.S. and South Vietnamese pacification effort during the previous few years.

Pacification

Pacification began as a national initiative to improve economic, health, and educational conditions within South Vietnam. Tran Dinh Tho defined it as:

The military, political, economic, and social process of establishing or reestablishing local government responsive to and involving the participation of the people. It includes the provision of sustained, credible territorial security, the destruction of the enemy's underground government, the assertion or re-assertion of political control and involvement of the people in government, and the

⁵ Cao Van Vien et. al., *The Indochina Monographs: The U.S. Advisor* (Washington, DC: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 1980), 122.

initiation of economic and social activity capable of self-sustenance and expansion.⁶

Early programs aimed to increase nationalistic sentiments toward the South Vietnamese government in hopes of settling unrest and thwarting the revolutionary movement, National Liberation Front, supported by the Democratic Republic of Vietnam. As the Viet Cong (VC), the military wing of the National Liberation Front, began to increase in numbers throughout the countryside, the focus began to shift toward improving the security of hamlets the Vietnamese government. At the request of President Kennedy, U.S. advisors helped implement early security-based programs such as the Rural Community Development Program in 1959 with the intent of keeping the Viet Cong away from the villages.⁷ The program eventually changed names to Agroville, which provided the framework for the Strategic Hamlet Program.

There were a number of American and Vietnamese leaders who felt the program could make a genuine difference. However, implementation issues plagued the effort. Roger Hilsman, the director of the State Department's Bureau of Intelligence and Research, claimed the Government of Vietnam (GVN's) implementation of the program displayed a, "total misunderstanding of what the Strategic Hamlet Program should try to

⁶ Tran Dinh Tho, *Pacification* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Library 1980), v.

⁷ The Rural Community Development Program was an effort established in 1959. It was based partly on the success of a similar program in Malaya by the British to suppress a communist uprising. The Agroville Plan's goal was to remove the "neutral" population from guerrilla contact. Through direct force and incentives, peasants in rural communities were separated and relocated into large communities, eventually known as Agrovilles. By 1960 in Vietnam, there were twenty-three Agrovilles in which thousands of individuals resided.

do.”⁸ There was rampant corruption by Vietnamese officials, as well as inaccurate reporting about the completion of hamlets. Insurgent forces were easily able to destroy the villages, delegitimizing the government in the process. Hilsman later on went to say, the strategic hamlet concept was, “useless, worse than useless.”⁹ When such attempts proved futile, the U.S. civilian and military organizations, most notably the Military Assistance Command in Vietnam and the Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support (CORDS), worked to establish pacification as a primary goal in South Vietnam and to drive the Viet Cong from the rural areas in the South.

Early efforts from 1958 to 1963 at pacification by the Diem government sought to increase government control in the countryside. Give the reader dates “Pacification was designed to achieve three basic objectives: (1) to end the war and restore peace; (2) to develop democracy; and (3) to reform society.”¹⁰ The program called for the relocation of South Vietnamese peasants into secure rural areas that served as agricultural communities. Diem’s program attempted to end the kidnapping and assassination of rural village officials, and to improve education, medical services, social services, and electricity while providing new training programs in advanced agricultural techniques to the relocated villagers.

⁸ Roger Hilsman, *To Move a Nation* (New York: Doubleday and Company, 1967), 427-438; Senator Mike Gravel, ed., *The Pentagon Papers*, 5 vols. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971), 440.

⁹ George Washington University, “Episode 11: Vietnam, ‘An interview with Roger Hilsman,’” National Security Archive, George Washington University, accessed 18 May 2012, <http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/coldwar/interviews/episode-11/hilsman1.html>.

¹⁰ Brigadier General Tran Dinh Tho, *Indochina Monographs: Pacification* (Washington, DC: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 1980), 19.

Others, however, viewed the relocation programs as a means to force the government's will upon the people: "Relocation consists of destroying the fabric of rural society, using every military means possible to uproot the people and lay waste their homes for the purpose of creating a captive mass of people with their spirits broken in the hope of facilitating easier penetration with the new ideology."¹¹ Designed to provide a range of new social services and other amenities to the two to three thousand peasants who were required to live in them, these fortified concentrations inadvertently became symbols of peasant hatred for Diem's government.¹² Coercive tactics used by the Diem regime to affect the relocation of peasant populations hindered the success of the Agrovillage program:

The placing of local peasants who were or might become anti-RVN where they could be neutralized was far different and implied varying degrees of coercion, and small efforts along this line were attempted in early 1959, culminating in the agrovillage program of July 1959. Had the half a million or more peasants assigned to move cooperated, a series of strategically placed farm communities organized on military lines would have extended from the North to Saigon, but peasants refused to build these agrovilles, and the program instead became the focus of peasant resistance.¹³

Friction between the peasant population and the South Vietnamese government led to an early dismantling of the Agrovillage initiative. The Agrovillage program was unsuccessful due to the establishment of a "clumsy, dishonest administration serving Diem and to the physical hardship of peasants being too far from their fields and the

¹¹ Phillips Jones Griffith, *Vietnam* (New York: Phaidon Publishing, 2006), 79.

¹² Tho, *Indochina Monographs: Pacification*, 33.

¹³ Gabriel Kolko, *Anatomy of a War: Vietnam, the United States, and the Modern Historical Experience* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1985), 95-96.

psychological wrench of being separated from ancestral homes and burial plots.”¹⁴ For the Vietnamese farmer, their ancestral lands represented more than a profession or way of life. The land was the spiritual basis for all life:

In the old ideographic language of Vietnam, the word *xa*, which Westerners translate as ‘village’ or ‘village community,’ had as its roots the Chinese characters signifying ‘land,’ ‘people,’ and ‘sacred.’ These three ideas were joined inseparably, for the Vietnamese religion rested at every point on the particular social and economic system of the village . . . They believed that if a man moved off his land and out of the gates of the village, he left his soul behind him, buried in the earth with the bones of his ancestors.¹⁵

The Viet Cong maintained a psychological advantage and successfully carried out propaganda attacks on the South Vietnamese government. As a result, U.S. Ambassador Henry Cabot Lodge requested General Ed Lansdale to serve as an “executive agent” between the U.S. and South Vietnamese officials in order to streamline the pacification effort.¹⁶ As a Colonel, Lansdale served in the Office of Strategic Services in WWII and helped to defeat the Huk Rebellion in the Philippines in the late 1940s, and later in 1954 Lansdale helped set up the Saigon Military Mission in Vietnam to create dissent between the Viet Minh and China during the Indochina War.¹⁷ As Lansdale described in *In the Midst of Wars*, he noticed a fundamental difference in military training and indoctrination between the Allies and the Viet Minh:

¹⁴ Neil Sheehan et al., *The Pentagon Papers* (New York: Bantam, 1971), 129.

¹⁵ Frances FitzGerald, *Fire In The Lake: The Vietnamese and the Americans in Vietnam* (Boston, MA: Little, Brown and Company, 1972), 143-144.

¹⁶ Richard A. Hunt, *Pacification: The American Struggle for Vietnam’s Hearts and Minds* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1998), 67.

¹⁷ Stanley Karnow, *Vietnam: A History* (New York: Viking Press, 1983), 220-221.

The best Viet Minh teams were composed of personnel trained for political-military action in an isolated school, where their final examination was conducted personally, individual by individual, by Ho chi Minh himself—similar to what Mao Tse-tung had done in China. This personal involvement in turning out cold war professionals would be an alien concept to any of the Western leaders I know, none of whom had any real familiarity with the daily actions on cold war battlegrounds. In this respect the Communists had the edge over us. Their leaders asked their field lieutenants to do tasks, which they themselves had performed.¹⁸

General Lansdale also delivered a basic counterinsurgency plan based on recommendations from the U.S. embassy team that focused on the weakening of Diem's rule by Viet Cong propagandists:

Further aggravating many of the government's problems is the active and partly successful campaign of the Viet Cong to discredit President Diem and weaken the government's authority through political subversion, as well as through military action. Among other factors making this possible is the void between the GVN and its people which stems from the failure of the GVN to communicate understandably with the population and, in reverse, the lack of an effective mechanism whereby the people can in their terms communicate with the GVN.¹⁹

In 1961, Diem again tried to improve security in the countryside by launching the strategic hamlet program. The initiative stemmed from Sir Robert Thompson, who served as the head of the British Advisory Mission to Vietnam and drew upon his experiences from Malaya. Thompson's theory incorporated the building a foundation of political support for the program, and forcing the government to provide genuine protection to the

¹⁸ Edward G. Lansdale, *In The Midst of Wars* (New York: Harper and Row, 1972), 161.

¹⁹ United States, Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1961-1963, Volume I, Vietnam 1961* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1988), 1, accessed 18 April 2012, <http://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1961-63v01>.

villages. Ngo Dinh Nhu, the brother of Diem and leader of the Personalist Labor Party, was in charge of the strategic hamlet program. Richard Hunt described the new initiative:

Instead of surrounding hamlets with security forces, as Thompson suggested, Diem and Nhu conceived the strategic hamlet program with a different emphasis. Their proposal was that security would begin within hamlets. Nhu, who directed the program, established three goals for it. First, the government would connect the people within the fortified hamlets into a communications network, providing them with local defense forces to ward off guerrilla raids and stationing reaction forces nearby in case of emergency. Second, the program would strive to unite the inhabitants and include them in governmental affairs. Lastly, the program would improve living standards.²⁰

By August 1962, the government of South Vietnam completed over 2,500 of the hamlets, with an additional 2,500 under construction.²¹ Government officials claimed this figure “represents an increase of 1,300 since January 1962, indicating a monthly construction rate of something over 200.”²² The rapid construction rate should have been an indication the new number of hamlets would exceed the government’s capacity to properly manage them. Nhu assumed full responsibility for the program and emphasized the importance of strengthening government politics in the village. New focus in the living conditions included health reforms and educational advancements:

In health and education, the effort concentrated on eliminating illiteracy, making primary and secondary education available to the rural population, providing free medical care and improving sanitation. Such programs as the construction of classrooms, dispensaries, maternity wards, and the recruiting and training of teachers, nurses, technicians, were undertaken as pacification progressed.²³

²⁰ Hunt, *Pacification*, 21.

²¹ Sheehan et al., *The Pentagon Papers*, 129.

²² Central Intelligence Agency, confidential report, 16 July 1962, accessed 21 April 2012, www.ddrs.psmedia.com, 4.

²³ Tho, *Indochina Monographs: Pacification*, 7.

Villages also needed to rely on an internal security structure and a political core of leadership to combat guerrilla attacks. The hamlet program, designed to combat Viet Cong control South Vietnamese rural areas, focused primarily upon problems within the village. U.S. advisors believed security was paramount to everything else: “Although a secure peasantry is essential to full mobilization of the populace in support of the government, security and political action must go hand-in-hand—the one complements the other, and in some cases political action can precede, and contribute to, the attainment of security.”²⁴ While the American military and civilian leadership supported the strategic hamlet initiative, the program had numerous logistical and fundamental shortcomings. In many instances, the hamlets were poorly constructed and defenseless with little security. Government administrators often possessed little experience.²⁵ Village defenses were poor and often consisted of “weakly constructed bamboo stakes,” and the weapons of some guards were “eight-foot poles with ropes used for hitting VC cadres and tying them up.”²⁶ The poor manner in which the South Vietnamese implemented the strategic hamlet program unfortunately widened the gap of trust between the villagers and the leaders in Saigon. With the introduction of the program, it forced the relocation of an estimated 4.3 million or 33.3 percent of the population by the

²⁴ The White House, Memorandum for the President, 22 March 1965, accessed 21 April 2012, www.ddrs.psmedia.com, 3.

²⁵ Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1961-1963, Volume II, Vietnam 1962* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1990), 1.

²⁶ Hunt, *Pacification*, 22.

end of September 1962.²⁷ Villagers also objected to leaving behind their family history. For many, departing their homes also meant leaving ancestral graves.²⁸

The hamlet program did achieve moderate success in the later years of the Vietnam War, but earlier attempts at providing rural security failed to address the issues affecting the villages at that time. American and British advisors drew upon their past counterinsurgency experiences in the Philippines and Malaya, respectively, and pressured Diem and his cabinet for new pacification options. The Chieu Hoi Program was one of the new efforts and focused upon providing a range of incentives for Viet Cong fighters to defect to the side of the South Vietnamese government. Local “returnee” programs existed before Chieu Hoi, but no other program could compare in scale or performance.²⁹ It is imperative to first understand the framework of the new initiative.

Chieu Hoi Program and Framework

The Chieu Hoi Program, originally known as “The Movement to Regroup Misled Members of the Resistance” was an initiative that offered forgiveness to any North Vietnamese soldier or Viet Cong fighter who agreed to lay down their weapons and join the South Vietnamese. The program guaranteed the fighter’s safety immediately upon his surrender, as well formal reception by a staff that could provide shelter, food, and

²⁷ Karnow, *Vietnam*, 256-257.

²⁸ Sanford Wexler, *The Vietnam War: An Eyewitness History* (New York: Facts on File Publishing, 1998), 54.

²⁹ Airgram from American Embassy Saigon to Department of State, POL 18, Provincial, Municipal, and State Government, S Viet, Political and Defense, 1963, Subjectnumeric File, Records of the Department of State, Record Group 59, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

medical supplies. South Vietnamese security forces and loyal citizens would guard the individuals in strategic hamlets. It ultimately allowed the fighter to reintegrate into society and once again join a local community. Given the rapid growth of Viet Cong guerillas in previous years, the Chieu Hoi Program seemed like a logical effort to drain some of the enemy's manpower.

Dividing the program into five separate parts is the best manner to describe the concept of the Chieu Hoi Program. The initial step is inducement, or simply the operations designed to persuade enemy fighters in rallying to the South. Officials used leaflets and speaker systems to advertise the program to Viet Cong fighters. Later on, the program utilized former ralliers to spread word about their treatment. The second part, reception, dealt with the transition a fighter made after his decision to leave the enemy ranks. Chieu Hoi personnel provided ralliers with food and clothing, as well as small allowance for their stay in reception centers. The requirement for defectors was to remain in the Chieu Hoi centers for at least 60 days. The third step, reeducation, took place during the stay at the Chieu Hoi center. It consisted of political indoctrination of the South Vietnamese objectives, as well introduction to other ralliers. The goal was to educate the individual in social and political objectives, while also instilling a sense of citizenship into the South Vietnamese government. After pressure from U.S. advisors, the Chieu Hoi program further included vocational and literary instruction to better prepare ralliers to function in society. The 60 day mark allowed the individual to remain at the center for additional training, or leave in order to live in a South Vietnamese village.

The next part of the program was intelligence utilization conducted by U.S. and South Vietnamese officials. This process matured during the life of the Chieu Hoi

Program. It included interviews about tactical operations, and allowed officials to grasp Viet Cong plans more rapidly. Intelligence was key to induce other potential ralliers to side with the South. As the program expanded in the late 1960s, ralliers became integral components of local security forces and as scouts for U.S. forces. Although the Chieu Hoi Program primarily targeted lower-ranking soldiers, enemy leadership remained worried about many of their fighters falling into enemy hands.

The final portion of the Chieu Hoi Program was resettling the ralliers. Some returned to their villages, while others opted for new beginnings elsewhere. The program helped find employment and attempt to ensure a smooth transition as a functioning member of South Vietnam society. For many, fighting was what they knew best and, and as a result, volunteered for some form of military duty. Many joined the Army of Vietnam and some served in paramilitary organizations such as the Armed Propaganda Teams (APTs), Regional Forces and Popular Forces, or the Kit Carson Scouts.³⁰ One of the largest appeals to military service was that a rallier could serve close to home. Service in the Viet Cong generally meant living hundreds of miles away from relatives and loved ones.

The Contribution of Chieu Hoi

From its creation in 1963, the existence of the Chieu Hoi Program displays many salient lessons for similar conflicts. When examining the program, the first step is to understand its evolution from 1963 to its end in 1971. The lens of the analysis shall focus on cost and efficiency of managing the program. Even in war, funds are not limited. In

³⁰ These programs will be discussed in greater detail throughout chapters 2 and 3.

addition, one must examine if results of the program were commensurate with the original goals. The Viet Cong's reaction to the program will allow the reader to judge how the enemy viewed Chieu Hoi. There is little doubt the administrative processes of Chieu Hoi had room for improvement. However, what are the limitations for any similar effort when the advisors believe in the program more than the host nation government? No matter the level of resourcing or quality of the U.S. advisory effort, the reluctance of the South Vietnamese Government undermined the effectiveness of the Chieu Hoi Program. Their passiveness illustrates a missed opportunity in the Vietnam War, and the analysis serves as a useful model for similar efforts in the current environment.

CHAPTER 2

EARLY MOMENTUM DURING A CRITICAL DECADE

Persuasion is often more effectual than force.

— Aesop, Greek slave and fable author (620 BC to 560 BC)

Our area of activity was limited. Production was reduced. Our cadre and soldiers were demoralized. A number of them were influenced by the Chieu Hoi policy.

They (the Allies) will strengthen the Open Arms Program and in other ways call upon our troops to surrender.

We must unmask the enemy's deceitful propaganda, brief cadre on the general situation and help them evaluate the enemy and friendly situations so that they clearly see our victories and the coming enemy collapse.³¹

— Captured Top Secret Viet Cong document, 1966

Though carried out by the government of South Vietnam, American and British advisors helped influence the Chieu Hoi Program from its earliest days.³² Many of the pacification efforts in the rural areas stemmed from the British experience in Malaya, notably the counterinsurgency efforts of President Magsaysay against the Huks in the Philippines. The GVN and allied advisors used strategic hamlets and agrovilles as early as the 1950, but a national-level defector program such as Chieu Hoi was a completely

³¹ PSYOPS in Vietnam Indications of Effectiveness, May 1967, Folder 12, Box 13, Douglas Pike Collection: Unit 3-Insurgency Warfare, The Vietnam Center and Archive, Texas Tech University, accessed 22 April 2012, <http://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/virtualarchive/items.php?item=2171312015>.

³² Many terms describe the individual who chooses to lay down his weapon in order to join the South Vietnam effort. Throughout this thesis, returnees are those who voluntarily return to the government's cause and cooperate with it. The terms Hoi Chahn, returnee, rallier, and defector are synonymous.

new effort in the Vietnam War. As a result, individuals with tangible experience who could help establish the program were vital to the development and of Chieu Hoi.

South Vietnamese motivation and commitment for the program was somewhat limited in the first couple of years. Once American leadership acknowledged the Chieu Hoi Program could induce Viet Cong fighters to defect, the program received more attention with funding, personnel, and resources. Defection as a whole slowed down after the coup of President Diem in November 1963 when a group of South Vietnamese generals murdered both Diem and his brother, Ngo Dinh Nhu, in the back of an armored personnel carrier. The 1963 coup ultimately led to a series of coups throughout the nation and subverted the GVN's war effort. Many potential ralliers opted to maintain their communist ties until the power struggles ended.

The number of ralliers to the Chieu Hoi Program changed as the dynamics of the war evolved. With the increased presence of combat troops and especially fixed-wing bombers, Viet Cong fighters displayed a trend in rallying to the South. The Commander of U.S. Military Assistance Command, Vietnam, General William C. Westmoreland, aggressively employed ground forces in an effort to destroy Viet Cong units and allow friendly elements to conduct pacification operations throughout the rural villages.³³ The result was a period of 1965 to 1967 in which the Chieu Hoi Program exhibited a large number of ralliers. The trend changed in late 1967 as preparation for the 1968 Tet Offensive was in motion. Viet Cong cadre maintained strong control over fighters, but

³³ William C. Westmoreland, "A Military History of Attrition," in *The Lessons of Vietnam*, eds. W. Scott Thompson and Donaldson Frizzel (New York: Crane, Russak, and Company, 1977), 57-71.

the series of offensives had a dramatic effect on both the Chieu Hoi Program as well as enemy forces.

1963–The Early Beginning

In June 1962, Rufus Phillips, then director of the Rural Affairs Office of United States Operations Mission,³⁴ worked with Lieutenant Colonel (Retired) Charles Bohannon³⁵ and South Vietnamese Colonel Hoang Van Lac in an attempt to sell the program to President Diem.³⁶ On the British side, Robert Thompson, the head of the British Advisory Mission, stressed the importance of a defector program directly to President Diem, highlighting the “ground rules under which the insurgents could return to the government side.”³⁷ In August 1962, President Diem’s Directorate General of Information announced the program at a press conference in the early part of the year. A statement by President Ngo Dinh Diem explained the program:

³⁴ United States Operations Mission was the early headquarters for the U.S. effort. The Rural Affairs Office was a group of civilian and military personnel, most of which with recent experience from the Philippines.

³⁵ Bohannon was previously a Lieutenant Colonel in U.S. Army with vast experience in the Philippine counterinsurgency effort. He served a number of tours as an AID consultant and advisor and was a close friend of Rufus Phillips. His archive collection at The Hoover Institution at Stanford University is a great resource for potential researchers.

³⁶ Koch, 2.

³⁷ Note from Robert Thompson to President Diem, September 1962, Box 12, Group of General Records Compiled September 1962–March 1971, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

Citizens and Fellow Countrymen:

As of today, the first anniversary of the start of the National Policy of Strategic Hamlets, the Government of the Republic, led by me, declares a policy of Chieu Hoi for the entire land.

Based on the ideal of Personalism and the spirit of Brotherhood and Justice, the policy of Chieu Hoi sets forth the measures and methods to be applied to these elements who have been tricked, terrorized, exploited by the communist bandits, and who, becoming enlightened (seek of their own volition) to come back to present themselves (to the authorities) to serve the National Government.

I earnestly call on all persons, both those living in the country or living abroad, who have flattered and deceived, and exploited by the communists, to come back soon to the just cause, in order to join with the people in struggling to build a new society, a new civilization, in which each citizen is free to develop himself in all fields.³⁸

Diem did not intend Chieu Hoi to be a large defector or national reconciliation program. He did however value the importance of Viet Cong fighters rallying to the South Vietnamese government, but he did not prioritize the Chieu Hoi Program as a keystone of his policy. Throughout its existence, the Diem government maintained a strict anti-communist policy, which did not help the Chieu Hoi Program early on. His outlaw of Communism in South Vietnam made it difficult to implement a reconciliation program like Chieu Hoi.³⁹ The concept of former Communists reentering society was not congruent with the long-standing policy that prohibited Communism throughout the South. Diem's April 1963 speech merely suggested that fighters lay down their arms in order to rejoin their family:

³⁸ Airgram from American Embassy Saigon to Department of State, April 18, 1963, subject: Chieu Hoi Program, POL 26-1 Counter Insurgency, S Viet; Political and Defense, 1963 Subjectnumeric File, Records of the Department of State, Record Group 59, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

³⁹ Cao Van Vien et. al., *The U.S. Advisor*, 145.

The Chieu Hoi Campaign provides for appropriate measures in favor of all those men and women who—deceived, exploited or enrolled by force by the Communists—have a new awareness and decide from today to return to the side of the National Government.

Those having families and means of subsistence will be authorized to rejoin their families, or to reside in the hamlet or strategic quarter of their choice, subject only to the approval of the Administrative Committee. Those having no means of subsistence or family support can be assured of the assistance of the government.

All of our compatriots in the country or abroad who have been victims of Communist propaganda and exploitation, I urge to return and uphold the just cause of the Fatherland and to contribute their efforts, along with those of all our people in order to build, in a militant spirit, the new society and civilization where every citizen will be able to develop totally and in full freedom.⁴⁰

The Commissariat in President Diem's cabinet initially maintained overall control of the Chieu Hoi Program, although multiple agencies shared some of the administrative processes. Budget support was sparse as salaries for staffs were minimal.⁴¹ Problems also existed within the provincial and district levels. In the early stages, allocated funds were commonly unspent.⁴² U.S. advisors and recent experience from the Philippines was critical for getting the Chieu Hoi Program in the right direction. However, American support was not overt and U.S. personnel were absent from the operating levels. Rather, key personnel advised South Vietnamese officials about key aspects of the new program. Inside the Rural Affairs Office, Charles Bohannon with his recent experience with the

⁴⁰ Koch, 3.

⁴¹ Limited files about the program exist from 1963-1965, but one financial indicator is the total amount per rallier spent. In 1963, it was around \$14.00 per individual. By the end of the program, the amount surged to over \$350.00.

⁴² Koch, 4.

Huk rebellion oversaw the direct funding and advising for the Chieu Hoi Program.⁴³ In the first year, the American influence was almost completely limited to two efforts:

1. the advising of South Vietnamese officials and
2. providing the money and building supplies for the various Chieu Hoi centers.⁴⁴

Unfortunately, many of the events during 1963 displayed a fragile South Vietnam government and kept potential ralliers guessing about what the government might look. The Buddhist crisis in May, and throughout the rest of the year, gave a perception of a government struggling to restore order within its boundaries.⁴⁵ After the coup of Diem in November, potential returnees once again were unsure how the power transfer to the military generals would affect their place in society. Would the new leadership allow former Communists to live peacefully in the South? The events of 1963 threw the country and government programs into a state of confusion. A lack of guidance by Saigon leadership hamstrung Chieu Hoi, as new leaders were unable to transition smoothly from the coup of an unpopular president.⁴⁶ The lack of internal reports and other

⁴³ The minimal U.S. presence was a visual sign to the Vietnamese people that their government was in charge of the program. In fact, as late as 1965, only one American was a full-time employee, and he operated without any formal staff.

⁴⁴ Koch, 42. The annual budget for 1963 is not available, but this Rand report states the U.S. incurred much of the building supplies and other logistics in the first year.

⁴⁵ The Buddhist crisis was a period of political and religious tension in South Vietnam from May 1963 to November 1963, characterized by a series of repressive acts by the government and a campaign of civil resistance, led mainly by Buddhist monks. The crisis was precipitated by the shootings of nine unarmed civilians on May 8 in the central city of Hue who were protesting a ban of the Buddhist flag. The crisis ended with a coup in November 1963.

⁴⁶ Airgram from American Embassy Saigon to Department of State, Provincial Series Report # 7–Initial Reactions to Overthrow of Diem Regime, November 12, 1963, POL 26, Rebellion Coups, Insurgency S. Viet, Political and Defense, 1963

documentation about the Chieu Hoi Program are possible indicators that the program struggled administratively. Despite budgetary and administrative issues, the Chieu Hoi Program displayed impressive results during its debut in 1963. In the first three months of the program, nearly 4,700 enemy fighters rallied to the side of the government.⁴⁷ In fact, the annual total was surprisingly large with 11,428 individuals. A more efficient and properly resourced Chieu Hoi Program might have perhaps produced even greater numbers of Hoi Chahn.

1964–Building Life into the Program

Compared to 1963, instability and political chaos also hindered the program in its second year. In January 1964, General Duong Van Minh was overthrown by General Nguyen Khanh, once again causing unrest in the country. Where Diem had regularly commented about the Chieu Hoi Program, there is little evidence the ruling military junta were directly interested or involved. The instability affected the perception of Chieu Hoi to potential supporters of the program. Many viewed the new government as a puppet of the U.S. While Diem might only envision the Chieu Hoi Program as a process for fighters laying down their arms, his nationalist approach resonated strongly with many.

A sinking perception of the program is evident by the decline in the number ralliers throughout the year. By the end of 1964, only 5,417 had defected to the South.⁴⁸

Subjectnumeric File, Records of the Department of State, Record Group 59, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

⁴⁷ Joseph M. Carrier Collection on the Chieu Hoi Program and Vietnamese Conflict. MS-SEA001, Box # 1, Southeast Asian Archive, The UC Irvine Libraries, Irvine, CA.

⁴⁸ Koch, 22.

The Chieu Hoi Program was faltering under the high turnover of officials and confusion within the government. Ogden Williams,⁴⁹ who became the new director of operations within Rural Affairs in 1964, explained the dire situation:

Our principal problem was to maintain some sort of momentum as the Vietnamese Government was floundering under the impact not only of the overthrow of Diem, but the subsequent overthrow of Duong Van Minh by General Nguyen Khanh. Naturally, all the Ministries were changing, and many government officials had grave doubts about the legitimacy and longevity of the regime, particularly when it came to preparing budgets or authorizing expenditures of funds, whether these funds were of Vietnamese or American origins. My principal function was to assure the continued function of the only elements of the GVN, which remained operational in the field. The ministries were for all practical purposes paralyzed during the period of February to July.⁵⁰

As a result, U.S. advisers focused upon improving the program before it was too late.

Although many as a way to exit the battlefield used the Chieu Hoi Program, the program was not widely known. Once again, British experience in Malaya and American insight from the Philippines were useful as advisers sought new techniques for the program to gain traction. In both conflicts, small teams of defectors travelled to villages in order to discuss their experience after rallying to the government. The goal was to communicate

⁴⁹ Ogden Williams joined the CIA, serving in Germany, Vietnam and India. He resigned in 1962 and joined the Agency for International Development from 1962-74, serving as Deputy Director of the United States Agency for International Development, Tunisia and two tours as Associate Director, of the United States Agency for International Development Vietnam. From 1966-69, Mr. Williams was director of U.S. aid to South Vietnam's Chieu Hoi Program. After retirement from AID in 1974, he returned as a private citizen to Vietnam in 1975 and helped Vietnamese friends to escape to the U.S., after having urged U.S. Congressmen in vain against their abrupt cutoff of aid to South Vietnam. After 1975, Mr. Williams was a freelance writer on refugee and environmental affairs. He served as Washington director of the Afghanistan relief committee in 1981-82.

⁵⁰ From a communication from Ogden Williams to R. W. Komer, June 1, 1971. The correspondence is mentioned in J. A. Koch's Rand study of the Chieu Hoi Program, but no further information is provided.

with families and friends of fighters about the peaceful process fighters could expect. Families would converse with the fighters when they returned to the villages.

The program began in Vietnam during July 1964 with the introduction of the Armed Propaganda Unit Program, a platoon of former Viet Cong fighters who rallied into the Chieu Hoi Program.⁵¹ They provided speeches and conducted skits, but also sought to have a dialogue with the residents about government policies.⁵² The units travelled to VC-controlled areas to speak about the government efforts, as well as to distribute Chieu Hoi propaganda. Later called the APTs, in particular, they sought out families with sons serving in the enemy ranks. The APT members discussed the process of rallying and described their life since returning to the South.⁵³

Similar to 1963, the Chieu Hoi Program struggled to take full advantage of synchronizing the APTs with support from the national offices. Still recovering from the turnover of officials, a lack of continuity existed between the program and other GVN agencies. The confusion did not allow the government to capitalize on large defections during the year, most notably in November 1964. In the IV Corps province, nearly 4,000 Viet Cong attempted to surrender to the government.⁵⁴ Unbeknownst to the provincial

⁵¹ Joseph M. Carrier Collection on the Chieu Hoi Program and Vietnamese Conflict, MS-SEA001, Box # 27, Folder # 1, Southeast Asian Archive, The UC Irvine Libraries, Irvine, CA.

⁵² Ibid., Rutherford M. Poats, Assistant Administrator for AID, in a statement before Congress in April 1967.

⁵³ APTs are to be discussed in chapter 3 in regards to their valorous actions during the 1968 Tet Offensive.

⁵⁴ Press Conference, Saigon, May 11, 1967. Mentioned in J. A. Koch's report but no further information provided.

Chieu Hoi workers, the Ministry of Information initiated a psychological campaign without any coordination with the local administrators. Once the Viet Cong fighters moved the Chieu Hoi offices, no medical supplies, housing, or food was available. Frustrated by the false promises of the program, most of the returnees initiated movement within a week back to the Viet Cong. It was not only a missed opportunity for the GVN, but the confusion also gave the enemy a potent psychological victory about the ineptitude of the Chieu Hoi Program.⁵⁵

In just over the first year of the program, the South Vietnamese and U.S. spent a meager \$400,000 for the Chieu Hoi Program throughout the country.⁵⁶ The total number of ralliers dropped considerably compared to 1963, but the program still helped remove over 5,000 fighters from the Viet Cong ranks. American advisors recognized some of the deficiencies within the program; however, a rapidly evolving South Vietnamese government displayed neither the will nor capacity to make the necessary changes to improve the Chieu Hoi Program. For 1965 to be different than the prior two years, a new level of focus and support by both the GVN and U.S. was necessary.

1965—An Attempt to Expand the Program

After two years of deteriorating results, it appeared the Chieu Hoi Program might slip past the point of no return. The U.S. conducted a key program analysis of Chieu Hoi in 1965 that ultimately resulted in a much wider focus for funding and priority for the

⁵⁵ Koch, 24.

⁵⁶ Joseph M. Carrier Collection on the Chieu Hoi Program and Vietnamese Conflict, MS-SEA001, Box # 27, Folder # 1, Southeast Asian Archive, The UC Irvine Libraries, Irvine, CA.

fragile effort. The report recommended an increase of U.S. assistance, especially with the number of advisers.⁵⁷ It also stressed the need to convince the GVN to place a higher priority upon the Chieu Hoi Program, ultimately recognizing it as a necessary element to the counterinsurgency effort.⁵⁸ A large part of the problem stemmed from Saigon leadership. In August of the same year, an interagency task force reinforced the belief that a successful Chieu Hoi Program required buy-in from key South Vietnamese policymakers. Henry Gosho led the report and mentioned a “lack of adequate direction from the national level” as the top deficiency of the Chieu Hoi Program.⁵⁹

The mere fact that Hoi Chan were former Communists sparked uneasy feelings among many South Vietnamese. Government officials also shared the same trepidation when it came to forgiving Viet Cong fighters.⁶⁰ The hesitancy was the result of internal anxiety about letting former communists into society and an attempt to decipher long-term U.S. involvement in Vietnam. U.S. troop levels slowly began to increase in 1965 with the deployment of 3,500 Marines in March. South Vietnamese were not yet confident about the U.S.’ overall commitment and decided to downgrade the Chieu Hoi

⁵⁷ Inter-Agency Task Force Report on Chieu Hoi Program in August 1965, Charles T. R. Bohannon papers, Box # 36, Folder # 23, Hoover Institution Archives, Stanford, CA.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 9.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 2.

⁶⁰ Much of this apprehension was because ralliers had previously sided with the Communists. President Diem was a staunch anti-Communist and outlawed it altogether in the South. Naturally, there was fear ralliers could infiltrate the government and society while still pledging their allegiance to Communist ties. This resistance would continue for many years, but the focus would transition to economic terms. As ralliers entered the program, they received training, which could lead to employment. With the economy fragile and unemployment high, this was a contentious topic for many South Vietnamese.

Program from an Under-Secretariat in the Ministry of Information to a Directorate in the Ministry of Psychological Warfare.⁶¹ The move also entailed the program under the supervision of a young, Army of Vietnam Captain. U.S. advisors repeatedly insisted the program be led a higher-ranking civil servant.⁶² Henry Gosh, the United States Information Agency Team Chief, described the need for South Vietnamese leadership in the Chieu Hoi Program:

The success of the Chieu Hoi Program depends primarily on success in other aspects (particularly security) of the overall counterinsurgency effort. For example, it is unlikely that significant numbers of main force Viet Cong will experience a 'change of heart' relative to their allegiance as long as they believe the Communists are winning. Also, the program ultimately depends on GVN interest and execution. U.S. advice and resources are essential elements but cannot, without adequate Vietnamese performance, do the job alone.⁶³

The South Vietnamese lack of support for Chieu Hoi in 1965 was also within the provincial offices. Quality personnel was near impossible to recruit as local cadres were given a paltry VN\$100 a month allowance, an amount bordering near the poverty level.⁶⁴ Provincial and district administrators also faced problems from the Viet Cong. Though the program had its share of problem, it was still responsible for nearly 20,000 defectors, a significant total in enemy eyes. By June 1965, Viet Cong terrorist attacks targeted

⁶¹ Koch, 25.

⁶² Ibid., 27.

⁶³ Inter-Agency Task Force Report on Chieu Hoi Program in August 1965, 8.

⁶⁴ Joseph M. Carrier Collection on the Chieu Hoi Program and Vietnamese Conflict, MS-SEA001, Box # 27, Folder # 1, Southeast Asian Archive, The UC Irvine Libraries, Irvine, CA.

Chieu Hoi centers, workers, and their families.⁶⁵ The enemy reaction is strong evidence the Viet Cong did not take the Chieu Hoi Program lightly. The number of defectors to date was significant, but the South Vietnamese were not able to envision a serious plan for the program. U.S. personnel who were close to the program acknowledged the possibility of Chieu Hoi laying the framework for other programs to induce Viet Cong fighters and leaders. Rand scholar Lucian Pye observed a “Failure of the GVN to create a philosophical and long-range political foundation on which a program for the rehabilitation of the former enemy could be geared to the social and economic reconstruction of the nation after the war.”⁶⁶ For the first time, a discussion occurred about the program maturing over time from its primary mission of simply drawing manpower from the enemy. Pye, like many others, envisioned the Chieu Hoi Program as the starting point for a “constructive political and psychological warfare program.”⁶⁷

Unlike the close of 1964, synchronization between the Chieu Hoi Program and other efforts by the GVN and U.S. militaries was much better in 1965. In October, Civilian Irregular Defense Group Civil Affairs/Psychological Operations teams proved to

⁶⁵ Detailed records about specific attacks and terrorist acts are extremely limited from 1963-1965. Many sources do mention that Chieu Hoi centers were attacked, but an exact number cannot be determined. In addition, declassified Viet Cong documents explain their perception of the Chieu Hoi Program; however, these reports do not mention the earlier years of the program. The captured enemy document, Reaction to FWMAF/RVNAF Psywar, Chieu Hoi, Intelligence, and Propaganda Activities, Political Staff Department, Headquarters, VC MR 5 (Texas Tech Virtual Vietnam Archive), is a useful compilation of Viet Cong comments about the program.

⁶⁶ Lucian Pye, RM-4864-ISA/ARPA, *Observations on the Chieu Hoi Program* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, January 1966), 16.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 20.

be a great tool in expanding the reach of the program.⁶⁸ Armed with loudspeaker teams, motion picture equipment, and printed flyers, the teams were an excellent way of spreading word of the Chieu Hoi Program to remote areas of the population.⁶⁹ Their actions seemed to echo some of the earlier successes of the APTs. A 1965 report described their capability: “As the teams have increased their operations throughout the Republic, the Chieu Hoi returnee rate coming into the CIDG Camps has increased significantly. Much of this can be attributed to ‘getting the word’ to relatives and friends of the VC, who pass on the information to the VC.”⁷⁰

It was also apparent that responsiveness was key when it came to spurring ralliers to the government cause. In December 1965, a Viet Cong District Chief in Ninh Hoa was killed along with many of his staff in an engagement with a local force. Within a matter of hours, the local Chieu Hoi office and U.S. Army Psychological Operations team created a leaflet containing a picture of the dead District Chief and a message about the Chieu Hoi Program. To reach a wider audience, an aerial loudspeaker also used recorded messages to mention the death. Within 48 hours, 37 fighters rallied to the government.

⁶⁸ CIDG teams operated within the Area of Responsibility (AOR) of Special Forces Camps. They usually conducted patrols into hamlets and conducted face-to-face meetings with locals, distributed health kits, etc.

⁶⁹ PSYOPS in Vietnam Indications of Effectiveness, May 1967, Folder 12, Box 13, Douglas Pike Collection: Unit 3-Insurgency Warfare, The Vietnam Center and Archive, Texas Tech University, accessed 22 April 2012, <http://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/virtualarchive/items.php?item=2171312015>.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 70.

Local interrogators interviewed each of the defectors and each man credited the announcement of their chief's death as the primary reason for rallying.⁷¹

By the end of 1965, the total number of ralliers was just below 28,000. Perhaps more impressive was the cost of such an effort. After a U.S. budgetary review of South Vietnamese and U.S. expenditures, the per capita cost per rallier was approximately \$14.00.⁷² There was no more favorable program of any operation throughout Vietnam. It was apparent to many the program produced results at an efficient, low-cost price. In the same report, Lucian Pye stressed the importance of steadfast leadership and recommended an American official and staff be assigned to the program. With backing by the U.S. Ambassador to Vietnam, the new official would be able to communicate directly to the South Vietnamese Prime Minister about the Chieu Hoi Program.⁷³

1966–Momentum Produces Results

The prior year displayed a Chieu Hoi Program that produced results with low cost. As evident by Viet Cong attacks, the enemy seemed concern about the number of fighters he was losing each year. Even if the South Vietnamese were hesitant with their commitment toward the program, American officials attempted to hedge their efforts by placing their most capable people into the Chieu Hoi Program. Henry Cabot Lodge, the U.S. Ambassador to Vietnam, appointed Ogden Williams the responsibility of turning the

⁷¹ Ibid., 72.

⁷² Koch, 26.

⁷³ Ibid.

program around.⁷⁴ Lodge also implemented Lucian Pye's recommendation from 1965 and Williams reported directly to William Porter, the Deputy Ambassador. Surrounded by an experienced staff of retired military, members from the United States Information Agency, as well as individuals from United States Agency for International Development, Williams worked hurriedly to revamp the program. He recalled:

During this initial six months, we were able to redefine Chieu Hoi doctrine and sell this doctrine to the GVN Chieu Hoi organization, and establish in the minds of all concerned the program elements which have never since required revision; recruit and field an entire advisory staff in all major provinces, starting from scratch; commence the reorganization and revitalization of the Chieu Hoi Ministry; and establish adequate budget levels for 1967. During this brief period, all the advantages of flexibility, direct control of field advisory personnel, and the substantial absence of red tape made it possible to achieve radical improvements in the program at a pace no longer feasible today.⁷⁵

The Chieu Hoi Program was a South Vietnamese effort, but the U.S. provided over 75 percent of the funding. Despite noticeable results over the previous four years, the U.S. struggled with getting the government's full commitment. There was also worry about valuable funding getting lost on its way to the provincial and district levels. In a memorandum to Ambassador Lodge, the Secretary of State, the Secretary of Defense and Central Intelligence Agency Director, Deputy Ambassador William Porter mentioned his concern: "There was a consensus that the U.S. Mission would have to intensify its effort to overcome the GVN's lack of commitment to the Chieu Hoi Program. The CIA will study the possibility of channeling aid funds for the Chieu Hoi program directly to the

⁷⁴ Ogden Williams was also known as the "father of Chieu Hoi Program" for many of the changes he oversaw starting in 1966. At the time of his appointment, he was on his third tour in Vietnam.

⁷⁵ Ogden Williams, "End of Tour Report-1969," MACCORDS/Chieu Hoi/VN. This report is mentioned in J. A. Koch's *Chieu Hoi Program in South Vietnam, 1963-1971*; however, there is not further information about its location.

province level, by passing GVN bureaucratic channels.”⁷⁶ The appointment of Ogden Williams by the U.S. resonated with the South Vietnamese as they improved their Chieu Hoi leaders. Colonel Pham Anh the Army of Vietnam Captain as the top official within the Ministry of Information. Leadership improvements also occurred with the introduction of external advisors. Americans previously acknowledged Caucasians do not warrant the same effect in an Asian defector program, and made the decision to serve more in an advisor role away from the public eye. However, Chieu Hoi reception centers and district offices was still in need of additional cadre. With the vast experience in the Philippine advisory effort during the 1950s, Ogden Williams made the decision to invite nearly 50 workers from the Philippines. The United States Agency for International Development enlisted their help in Vietnam by taking over the advisory role of the Provincial Chieu Hoi Centers. The new advisors spoke English, on many occasions Vietnamese, and arrived with credibility as both an Asian and with experience of rural operations in their nation. Looking back, Rufus Phillips stated, “Bringing them over was a tremendous innovation that helped increase the overall Chieu Hoi Program.”⁷⁷

American organizations and programs were also undergoing important changes that helped streamline their support to the Chieu Hoi Program. By the end of the year, the Office of Civil Operations was set up to “coordinate and integrate all U.S. civilian programs and personnel concerned with land reform, agricultural training, medical

⁷⁶ Interagency Meeting on Vietnam: Kam 1966, 13 January 1966, Folder 17, Box 5, Douglas Pike Collection: Unit 1-Assessment and Strategy, The Vietnam Center and Archive, Texas Tech University, accessed 4 May 2012, <http://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/virtualarchive/items.php?item=2120517001>.

⁷⁷ Rufus Phillips, interview by author, in Arlington, VA, 12 March 2012.

assistance, etc.”⁷⁸ The organization consisted of a single U.S. advisor within in each province and region, a move that helped with direct communication to South Vietnamese officials and their Philippine counterparts. The Assistant Administrator for the Agency for International Development, Rutherford M. Poats, testified to Congress that the move would “streamline command and communication channels, a common program philosophy and direction and single point of coordination with the Vietnamese Government and U.S. Military.”⁷⁹ Deputy Ambassador William Porter placed a senior Foreign Service Officer, Wade Latham, in charge of the Office of Civil Operations.⁸⁰

After years of fighting, some Viet Cong were disillusioned with the Communist ideology. For nearly all of the Viet Cong lower-ranking fighters, they did not possess a formal understanding of Marxism or the Communist objectives.⁸¹ However, many of the cadre and officers did receive years of education and were not as willing to shift allegiance to the South. The year did observe the highest-ranking defector, Lieutenant Colonel LeXuan Chuyen, make his way to the side of the government. His reasons might stem more from personal dissatisfaction, but his presence in the Chieu Hoi Program was important considering his rank. In his testimony after rallying, he explained the reasons behind his decision to rally:

⁷⁸ Koch, 28.

⁷⁹ Rutherford M. Poats, Assistant Administrator for AID, in a statement before Congress in April 1967.

⁸⁰ Koch, 28.

⁸¹ For further reading about individual motivation, please see Dr. Joseph M. Carrie, *Viet Cong Motivation and Morale: The Special Case of Chieu Hoi*. Many of the fighters never received any formal Communist training and often pulled from their villages to the Viet Cong.

I had many reasons for rallying. The first reason is that I do not like this kind of war and I don't like this kind of method of operation, which is designed to impose the yoke of Communism upon the Vietnamese people.

The second reason I left is that I have been a member of the Party since 1946 and I have studied very many things—the principles, doctrines, theories, and ideology of Communism. The thing I object to among the Communists is that under their regime, the people lack liberty. Also, from the economic point of view, in the North the Viet Minh have a program for economic production in order to raise the level of living of the country, but they have not been successful in that.

The final reason that I left was that I was not in agreement with the VC about the way in which they employed the higher ranking cadres like myself.⁸²

Chuyen's rally to the Chieu Hoi Program was a unique opportunity to publicize the defection of a senior officer in the national spotlight. Although no individual of higher rank ever rallied to the program, his comments provided first-hand experience about the challenge of inducing Viet Cong leaders. His remarks also revealed an interesting question by potential Hoi Chahn: What will do in the long-term after I rally? He later explained in a 1966 interview, "there are many VC cadre, both of superior grade and of ordinary grade who might be tempted to rally, but who do not know clearly what the Government will do with them and how their talents will be employed."⁸³ His decision

⁸² Lawrence E. Grinter, "Amnesty in South Viet Nam: An Analysis of the Chieu Hoi (Open Arms) Program in the Republic of Viet Nam" (Unpublished paper, August 1967), Appendix B, 1-3. The research was done in South Vietnam in 1966, when the author was working for the Simulmatics Corporation, under Project Agile funded by DARPA. It is unclear whether the report was written at Simulmatics, or after Grinter's return to the University of North Carolina.

⁸³ J. M. Carrier and Charles Alexander Holmes Thomson, *Viet Cong Motivation and Morale: The Special Case of Chieu Hoi* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 1966), 18, accessed 24 March 2012, http://www.rand.org/pubs/research_memoranda/RM4830-2.

might also provide a rare insight to how Premier Nguyen Cao Ky⁸⁴ valued defector programs in his overall counterinsurgency strategy.⁸⁵ Within a few months after Chuyen's return, Premier Ky travelled to Manila to meet with President Johnson in order to announce the beginning of a bold effort of "offering comparable positions to Viet Cong who surrender."⁸⁶ Shortly after, Lieutenant Colonel Chuyen served as the director of the National Chieu Hoi Center in Saigon.⁸⁷

New initiatives started to appear in other efforts. In Saigon, the South Vietnamese government built a new National Chieu Hoi Center in August to increase the capacity for returnees to the capital area. With the addition, there were now a facility and resources to receive, interrogate, and train over 500 individuals.⁸⁸ A similar expansion also occurred at the provincial and regional areas with the addition of similar facilities and an expansion of Chieu Hoi resettlement villages. For the first time, the newly established

⁸⁴ Ky was the prime minister of South Vietnam in a military junta from 1965-1967.

⁸⁵ There is a lack of primary sources about the Chieu Hoi Program during the years of the military junta. This is one of the new instances in which one can infer Premier Kay maintained some level of utility for Chieu Hoi, and defector programs in general.

⁸⁶ Grinter, 22.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Inter-Agency Task Force Report on Chieu Hoi Program in August 1965, Charles T. R. Bohannon papers, Box # 36, Folder # 23, Hoover Institution Archives, Stanford, CA.

Joint U.S. Public Affairs Office fielded Chieu Hoi advisers at the national level to aide psychological warfare campaigns by the South Vietnamese.⁸⁹

As 1966 ended, the number of returnees rose to over 20,000, a drastic increase compared to the 10,018 in 1965.⁹⁰ A major contribution was the increased hardship for Viet Cong fighters on the battlefield. The year began with Operation Crimp, a joint Australian-U.S. mission that sought to destroy an underground Viet Cong headquarters. The mission involved extensive use of B-52 bombing campaigns.⁹¹ Large search and destroy missions were also carried out by U.S. and South Vietnam elements. Later in the year, the 196th Brigade and 22,000 South Vietnamese troops led Operation Attleboro in an aggressive sweep through Tay Ninh Province. The mission ends after six weeks, with more than 1,000 Vietcong and 150 Americans killed.⁹² The increased tempo of military operations, in conjunction with heavy use of bombing campaigns, exploited the fears of Viet Cong military forces. In a 1966 study of captured Viet Cong fighters, the top worries were:

⁸⁹ JUSPAO, *Chieu Hoi Program 1965-1966*, JUSPAO Memorandum, File 86, Vietnam Box 34, Vietnam Collection, USASOC Archive, 1967, 4.

⁹⁰ Joseph M. Carrier Collection on the Chieu Hoi Program and Vietnamese Conflict, MS-SEA001, Box # 26, Folder # 1, Southeast Asian Archive, The UC Irvine Libraries, Irvine, CA.

⁹¹ Also known as the Battle of Ho Bo Woods. B-52 aircraft targeted a large tunnel complex in January. Incidentally, the complex was used as a staging ground for attacks on Saigon during the 1968 Tet Offensive.

⁹² Harry G. Summers, *Historical Atlas of the Vietnam War* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1995).

- 1) Specific fear of the B-52 bomber, particularly the surprise element in B-52 raids, the sheer destructiveness of the bombs, and the inadequacy of shelters once considered safe.
- 2) Fear of bombing and strafing by all types of aircraft including helicopters.
- 3) Fear of artillery strikes, particularly airbursts.⁹³

Providing information about the Chieu Hoi Program also became standard as a planning criterion for nearly every military mission. By April 1966, commanders instructed units to “disseminate Chieu Hoi output as a part of every military operation.”⁹⁴ More than ever before, support for the Chieu Hoi Program was at its highest level. U.S. military commanders included its propaganda in nearly every operation and there was obvious correlation between success on the battlefield and Viet Cong wanting to rally to the South. Nearly five years in existence, the total number of defectors was just shy of 50,000 individuals.

1967–Pacification, CORDS, and Dai Doan Ket

With the gradual increase of U.S. troops, American leadership made better results were in the volatile rural areas a top goal. However, physical security was paramount before civilian efforts could begin. The two—security and pacification—were to be synchronized and planned together. As a result, civilian development programs fell under military leadership. In May 1967, General Westmoreland, Commander of U.S. Military Assistance Command Vietnam, took charge of U.S. support of the South Vietnamese pacification program with the formation of the CORDS. Robert Komer, a Special

⁹³ JUSPAO report, 70.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 93.

Assistant to the President, served as Deputy for Pacification under Westmoreland.⁹⁵

Vietnam was no exception to the fragile relationship between military and civilian agencies during war. Ambassador Ellsworth Bunker explained the alignment of pacification programs under Westmoreland:

Support of revolutionary development has seemed . . . to be neither exclusively a civilian nor exclusively a military function, but to be essentially civil/military in character. It involves both the provision of continuous local security in the countryside—necessarily a primarily military task—and the constructive programs conducted by the Ministry of Revolutionary Development. I have concluded that the U.S. advisory and supporting role in revolutionary development can be made more effective by unifying its civil and military aspects under a single management concept. Unified management, a single chain of command, and a more closely dovetailed advisory effort will greatly improve U.S. support of the vital revolutionary development program.

Therefore, I am giving General Westmoreland the responsibility for the performance of our U.S. Mission field programs in support of revolutionary development. I have directed that a single chain of responsibility for advice and support of the Vietnamese program be instituted from Saigon down to district level.⁹⁶

With the United States Agency for International Development still providing funding and personnel support for the Chieu Hoi Program, the effort now became (at least on the U.S. side) the responsibility of a new civil-military agency. Under CORDS, a new Chieu Hoi Division emerged, led once again by Ogden Williams. The division grew with additional U.S. personnel,⁹⁷ but concern existed about the alignment under CORDS. In writing to Komer, Williams stated his reservations:

⁹⁵ Komer was commonly referred to as “Blowtorch Bob.” A WWII veteran who joined the CIA in its infancy, Komer was an integral figure in U.S. pacification efforts.

⁹⁶ Press conference, Saigon, 11 May 1967.

⁹⁷ Chieu Hoi Budget—1965 and 1967, Charles T. R. Bohannon papers, Box # 35, Hoover Institution Archives, Stanford, CA.

You will recall that you gave me carte blanche, and in the six months prior to the organization of OCO and later CORDS, the carte blanche really operated. The formation of OCO and the later formation of CORDS no doubt served many U.S. purposes, but they were not of particular advantage to someone running a single project such as myself. My own background in Vietnam is such, and particularly as regards dealing with Vietnamese officials at any level, that all I needed or wanted was the freedom to operate and the overall bureaucratic support which you provided at the outset in 1966.⁹⁸

With the creation of CORDS also came a new level of funding for the Chieu Hoi Program. In 1967, the cost invested for the processing and retraining of a single Hoi Chanh was \$350.00, a sharp rise rose from \$14.00 in 1963.⁹⁹ This was due to increased salary for workers, better resources for reception centers, and initial stipends for Hoi Chahn after they rallied. The rise in funding might be characteristic of a new level of enthusiasm U.S. leadership. As discussed in the previous year, Premier Ky announced during a conference in Manila with President Johnson the framework of programs to support Chieu Hoi. Just a short time later in 1967, the Assistant Chief of Staff for CORDS informed Komer that support was nearly unlimited: "President Johnson and others have repeatedly urged that no effort be spared to expand and intensify the Chieu Hoi Program. Washington repeatedly has stated money is no object. Thus, any responsibly expenditures should be supported, if not with GVN funds, with U.S. funds."¹⁰⁰ Washington's new appreciation for the Chieu Hoi Program was visible with

⁹⁸ Williams to Komer memorandum, May 5, 1970, 2.

⁹⁹ Chieu Hoi Budget, 3.

¹⁰⁰ Chieu Hoi Budget-1965 and 1967, Charles T. R. Bohannon papers, Box # 33, Hoover Institution Archives, Stanford, CA, Memorandum from Wade Latham to R. W. Komer, on "Chieu Hoi Action Program for July-December 1967." Latham was Assistant Chief of Staff for CORDS from 1967-1968 and previously served as the Director of the Office of Civil Operations (OCO) under Deputy Ambassador William Porter.

the largest budget increase to date. The total budget for the year was \$9.9 million, with the GVN now contributing approximately \$1.7 million.¹⁰¹ The leadership in CORDS felt the budget was adequate to support the annual goal of 45,000 returnees, a level over two times as high as the target in the prior year. In order to mitigate the surprise of a rapid influx of ralliers, CORDS implemented a caveat: “It has been demonstrated repeatedly that GVN funding and administrative procedures do not admit of adequate flexibility of rapidity of response to permit the Chieu Hoi Program to go forward at the pace the priority demands.”¹⁰² To alleviate any problems, CORDS established a contingency fund so that a Chieu Hoi program manager could draw up to VN\$10 million if a mass defection were to suddenly occur.¹⁰³

With the creation of CORDS, senior U.S. administrators hoped to identify faulty leadership among South Vietnamese programs. Many U.S. advisors had spent a few years in Vietnam and were able to name which of their counterparts were a hindrance. Ogden Williams knew who needed to depart the Chieu Hoi Program and communicated often with South Vietnamese officials about leadership shortcomings. He also “periodically supplied Komer with lists of those who should be removed, and some of these men were indeed removed as a result of Komer’s interventions with the GVN at higher levels.”¹⁰⁴ Since the U.S. personnel were only advising the program, it was best for Vietnamese

¹⁰¹ Chieu Hoi Budget, 4.

¹⁰² Memorandum from Wade Latham to R. W. Komer, 2.

¹⁰³ Koch, 32. The idea of a contingency fund was recommended by Ogden Williams since he assumed his earliest position in the Chieu Hoi Program.

¹⁰⁴ Koch, 33.

officials to remedy leadership challenges. A 1967 Rand report describes the challenge of poor Chieu Hoi administrators in Military Region 4 and describes the cultural nuances of Vietnam society:

In one instance, when the Chieu Hoi Minister attempted to remove four Chieu Hoi service chiefs in MR 4 who were Hoa Hao, leaders of that sect accused the GVN of a systematic policy of removing their brethren from government posts and informed the Prime Minister that the 'Hoa Hao would be obliged to draw the necessary conclusions.' When the Minister explained the men were being removed because of ineptitude and not because they were Hoa Hao, 'this line of reasoning was so novel as to leave the Hoa Hao without comment—but still skeptical.' The solution was to play musical chairs with the recalcitrant Chieu Hoi chiefs to prove the principle that, despite local politics, government appointees could be removed to break up local accommodations, and, in the words of a CORDS advisor, to "stimulate the tired blood of these officeholders."¹⁰⁵

U.S. advisors needed to allow South Vietnamese officials to sort out similar issues. If Ogden Williams and his advisors were to solve each problem, the Chieu Hoi effort would be a puppet of an external actor. The critical issue was not the case of local politics as mentioned above; it was convincing the South Vietnamese government as a whole to place more effort behind the Chieu Hoi Program.

In a memorandum to Komer during 1967, Wade Lathram observed the South Vietnamese government was "grudgingly supporting the Chieu Hoi Program, although slow improvement is discernible."¹⁰⁶ Shortly before the end of the year, the government finally upgraded the Chieu Hoi into its own Ministry, although the move seemed nothing more than a change in name. A lack of quality personnel still plagued the effort and Komer received the recommendation to contact Primer Minister Ky about the "transfer of at least 50 good quality ARVN offices to the Ministry of Chieu Hoi (MCH) as a matter of

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Memorandum from Wade Lathram to R. W. Komer, 2.

high priority.”¹⁰⁷ The South Vietnamese government did not comply and the move did not occur. CORDS produced one final assessment during 1967 and mentioned an insufficient level of GVN participation in the psychological aspects of the Chieu Hoi Program. Latham correctly identified some of the problems that would continue to nuance the program until 1971:

A lack of quality and quantity in the GVN staffing of the program; inadequate and ineffective political orientation of the Hoi Chahn while in the Centers; no adequate system for ‘follow-up’ on the Hoi Chahn after he left the Center; insufficient tactical and intelligence exploitation of the Hoi Chahn; and an absence of flexible funding procedures to permit rapid response to problems and targets of opportunity.¹⁰⁸

National Reconciliation and Dai Doan Ket

With the U.S. troop level at its highest point of 500,000, American leadership proposed reconciliation in an effort to speed up the closure of the war. U.S. policymakers were skeptical if the deployment of additional ground forces could help win the war. Anti-war protests were becoming common within American society. Though an elected government replaced the military junta, the current system did not appear to be much better. In September 1967, the transition to an elected form of government occurred and, after a power struggle within the military, Nguyen Van Thieu ran for presidency with Nguyen Cao Ky as his running mate. Both men wanted to serve as the head of state, but

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 3.

¹⁰⁸ Memo from Latham to Komer. There was also additional research conducted by the Chieu Hoi Division of CORDS in conjunction with the Simulmatics Corporation. Simulmatics was a research corporation with strong ties to the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Tasked by the Pentagon with helping to pacify South Vietnam, they conducted political and social psychological research on Viet Cong defectors, government soldiers, and Vietnamese villagers. Further research about their findings can be found at The Simulmatics Corporation, *Improving Effectiveness of the Chieu Hoi Program*, rev'd final report (New York, September 1968), 44-45.

the group of senior South Vietnamese generals opted for Thieu. In order for the two to work together, Ky would control the military body and help shape policy behind the scenes. Ultimately, officials helped rig the election to ensure Thieu and Ky would emerge. The partnership was not as cooperative as the generals hoped with Thieu sidelining Ky supporters from key military and cabinet positions. With Thieu's background as a South Vietnamese general, American officials would attempt to persuade him to support the Chieu Hoi Program and similar efforts.

The initial challenge for U.S. officials was to expand the category of defectors. From 1963 to 1967, the Chieu Hoi Program did achieve a level of success in targeting lower-ranking soldiers and cadres. However, many were young, uneducated, and only held low-ranking positions within the Viet Cong. Still, what actions could induce senior leadership to defect? Perhaps the most important innovation to the program since its commencement was the April 1967 proclamation by Prime Minister Nguyen Cao Ky of a Policy of National Reconciliation or Dao Doan Ket. Ogden Williams recalled, "the U.S. had dreamed up national reconciliation in 1966 and it had been negotiated with the highest levels of the Vietnamese government at the Manila Conference."¹⁰⁹ Under the current Chieu Hoi Program, the government allowed ralliers amnesty and civil rights. However, Dao Doan Ket assisted ralliers by helping them identify careers commensurate with their abilities and skills. The Proclamation stated:

All citizens who abandon the Communist ranks will enjoy all the rights set forth in the Constitution, including the right of freedom, the right to have life, property and honor protected by law, the right to take part in elections, the right to

¹⁰⁹ Koch, 36.

rejoin families, the right to choose the place to settle and the right to enjoy national assistance toward improving the standard of living.¹¹⁰

President Thieu later reaffirmed the policy with President Johnson at the 1968 Honolulu Conference, but the Vietnamese Cabinet was still very much against the proposal.¹¹¹ Their stance was not consistent with their U.S. colleagues. American leadership viewed the new program as a potential means of ending the war: “Whereas Chieu Hoi seeks to bring the insurgents back into society, the NRP seeks to bring them back into the decision-making arena. Dai Doan Ket concerns itself not only with integration into society, but with political participation, political rights, and political opportunities.”¹¹² The South Vietnamese only accepted the program in name, primarily due to U.S. pressure. Mixed feelings existed about providing amnesty to hardened Communists and, as a result, officials displayed little energy to implement what they referred to as the “American Program.”¹¹³

Preparation for the 1968 Tet Offensive

The returnee rate in 1967 was similar to the two prior years, characterized by a significant higher number in the first quarter.¹¹⁴ The number of defectors increased compared to 1963 and 1964, likely attributed to increased South Vietnamese and allied

¹¹⁰ Koch, 37. In addition, the promise of amnesty did not include forgiveness from punishment for major crimes committed before joining the Viet Cong.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Douglas Pike, *The Viet Cong: The Organization and Techniques of the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam* (Cambridge, MA: The M.I.T. Press, 1966), 154.

¹¹³ Koch, 37.

¹¹⁴ For the three years, nearly half of all annual returnees were achieved.

presence into new territories. Ground forces deployed for long missions in military regions II and III, highlighted by Operation Irving and Operation Cedar Falls.¹¹⁵ However, as political activity surrounding the fall national elections¹¹⁶ intensified, the returnee rate slowly declined for the remainder of the year. The uncertainty of the Thieu government cautioned many before rallying to the side of the government. A 1967 U.S. end of year report stated, “the program became paralyzed while cadres, administrators, and potential ralliers speculated on the future of the Thieu government and the possibility of a coalition government after Tet.”¹¹⁷

Another cause for the decline in defectors is the strong hold Viet Cong leadership placed upon its fighters in preparation for the 1968 Tet Offensive. The enemy was able to capture the psychological initiative as Viet Cong cadre informed potential ralliers about the prospect of a new government after Tet. The numbers were dramatic as over 2100 rallied in August compared to just over 800 in December.¹¹⁸ Discussed in the next chapter, there is speculation the significant drain of fighters helped spur the Viet Cong in planning a campaign for a popular uprising. Though in hindsight, the actions of the Viet Cong in late-1967 were potential indicators a major offensive by the enemy was in the

¹¹⁵ Koch, 34. A declassified document in 1971 suggested the background for CEDAR FALLS was initiated with intelligence by ralliers to the Chieu Hoi Program.

¹¹⁶ Thieu won the election, but as discussed earlier, there was wide speculation the electoral process was rigged.

¹¹⁷ Koch, 34-35.

¹¹⁸ Chieu Hoi Program 1967 Year End Report, 1967, Folder 7, Box 1, Ogden Williams Collection, The Vietnam Center and Archive, Texas Tech University, accessed 9 May 2012, <http://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/virtualarchive/items.php?item=15250107002>, 2.

works. The sudden drop of Hoi Chahn was an indicator that officials and strategists unfortunately overlooked.

By the end of 1967, 27,178 Hoi Chahn rallied to the government, but a total much less than the annual goal of 45,000.¹¹⁹ However, it did represent a 33 percent increase compared to the 1966 total. There is another interesting facet of the numbers during the year. Of the total number of ralliers, 17,671 were Viet Cong military forces. This is also equivalent to about 20 percent of all enemy forces killed or captured by U.S. and South Vietnamese operations during the year.¹²⁰ In a study conducted in 1968, CORDS posited the same results would have required over 3,000 friendly forces killed, as well as an indeterminable amount of collateral damage.¹²¹ As events ended in 1967, the upcoming 1968 Tet Offensive would test the Chieu Hoi Program like never before.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Ibid., 3. The total number of enemy fighters killed or captured in 1967 was 91,595.

¹²¹ "The Chieu Hoi Program: Questions and Answers," MACCORDS/Chieu Hoi Division, Saigon, March 1968.

CHAPTER 3

THE VIETNAMIZATION OF CHIEU HOI

Since 1967, the enemy has considered the intensification of psywar, or Chieu Hoi, and espionage activities as one of the important measures to carry out the accelerated and special pacification programs. He enhanced the role of these activities everyday.

In brief, the enemy intensification of psywar, Chieu Hoi, and espionage activities last year contributed great efforts to his implementation of the policies concerning destruction and nullification of revolutionary infrastructures and his oppressive control of the people. It also supported his pacification program and lessened our armed forces combat potential.¹²²

— NVA Counterintelligence Office Memorandum dated February 8, 1971, to Province Units and Party Committees of regiment level and above

The U.S. remained devoted to a strategy of attrition, and according to officials, military plans were going along well. General Westmoreland predicted victory by the close of 1967.¹²³ The number of Hoi Chahn was dwindling by the end of the year, a sign to some that the enemy was in hiding. In hindsight, Viet Cong commanders held a close grip to not allow fighters to rally. The nature of the Vietnam war changed in January 1968 when forces from the People's Army of Vietnam launched a series of attacks against military and civilian targets during the "cease fire" of the Tet activities. The event will be discussed in detail within this chapter, but the offensive "provided the shock that led to the loss of faith" in the current U.S. strategy.¹²⁴

¹²² Chieu Hoi Program 1967 Year End Report, 1967, Folder 7, Box 1, Ogden Williams Collection, The Vietnam Center and Archive, Texas Tech University, accessed 9 May 2012, <http://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/virtualarchive/items.php?item=15250107002>, 2.

¹²³ Office of the Secretary of Defense, *United States-Vietnam Relations 1945-1967 (the Pentagon Papers)* (Nimble Books, 2011), vol. 4, 117-119, vol. 5, 8-12.

¹²⁴ Andrew F. Krepinevich, *The Army and Vietnam* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988), 237.

The disbelief of the Tet Offensive drove a wedge between the American society and policy-makers. As a result, there was an increased need to transfer responsibility from the U.S. to South Vietnam counterparts. Referred to as “Vietnamization,” the idea rested upon two key tasks. According to President Nixon, the effort was, “strengthening the armed force of the South Vietnamese in numbers, equipment, leadership and combat skills. The second component is the extension of the pacification program in South Vietnam.”¹²⁵ A large part of the Vietnamization process was the withdrawal of U.S. forces and advisors. This chapter will focus upon Chieu Hoi during the transition, as well as analyzing the Viet Cong perspective about the program.

The Tet Offensive of 1968

A prior agreement between the North Vietnamese and Allied forces existed in which there was a “cease fire” during the Tet, or Lunar New Year celebration. However, January 30, 1968 marked the beginning of a Viet Cong attack that was countrywide in scope and characterized by over 80,000 troops attempting to seize nearly 100 cities. To date, the offensive was the largest of its kind by either side. The initial attacks stunned nearly everyone, leaving U.S. and South Vietnamese military units caught off guard. Yet, the Tet Offensive did not achieve the enemy’s intended goal of causing a popular uprising. Conversely, U.S. and South Vietnamese units were able to shift the momentum rather quickly and inflict a significant level of casualties upon the communist forces.¹²⁶

¹²⁵ Dave R. Palmer, *Summons of Trumpet: U.S. Vietnam in Perspective* (Presidio Press, 1995), 219.

¹²⁶ The Tet Offensive was a military campaign that was launched on January 30, 1968 by forces of the People’s Army of Vietnam against the forces of South Vietnam, the United States, and their allies. The purpose of the offensive was to utilize the element of

Viet Cong planning for the 1968 Tet Offensive began in the later part of 1967. The Viet Cong was fearful of the Chieu Hoi Program and concerned about the annual drain on their overall manpower. With more U.S. involvement and increased funding, the program produced a significant level of defectors from 1965 to 1967. The establishment of CORDS streamlined the pacification process and propagandizing Chieu Hoi was part of nearly every military operation. In fact, the noted British scholar on North Vietnam, P.J. Honey, argued, "The drain on enemy manpower and intelligence caused by the Chieu Hoi Program was one of the major reasons why the enemy was forced to press for an earlier solution to the war than his previous protracted war strategy had contemplated."¹²⁷ As campaign planning continued in 1967, Viet Cong cadre emplaced tightened security measures around lower-ranking fighters. As a result, the program observed a sharp decline in the later part of the year. The numbers fell sharply as 2100 Hoi Chahn rallied in August 1967 and only 889 returned in December.¹²⁸

surprise and strike military and civilian command and control centers throughout South Vietnam, during a period when no attacks were supposed to take place. It is referred to as the Tet Offensive because there was a prior agreement to "cease fire" during the Tet festivities (Lunar New Year Celebrations). The Viet Cong broke the agreement, and launched an attack campaign that began during the early morning hours of 30 January 1968. The main wave of attacks was carried out the next morning. Both North and South Vietnam announced on national radio broadcasts that there would be a two-day cease-fire during the holiday. The term commonly refers to the January–February 1968 offensive, but additional fighting also took place in the spring and summer during the so-called "mini-Tet" offensives in May and August.

¹²⁷ Ogden Williams in his 1969 End of Tour Report.

¹²⁸ Chieu Hoi returnees during the TET offensive, no date, Folder 7, Box 1, Ogden Williams Collection, The Vietnam Center and Archive, Texas Tech University, accessed 6 May. 2012, <http://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/virtualarchive/items.php?item=15250107004>.

While the U.S. escalated the war, they possessed more aircraft, better weapons, and a larger overall force than North Vietnamese forces and Viet Cong in the South. Even with the advantage in size and numbers, the conflict was somewhat of a stalemate. General Vo Nguyen Giap, the commander of North Vietnam's army, felt the time was appropriate to execute a surprise attack throughout South Vietnam. After coordination with the Viet Cong, the Communists initiated a diversionary attack against the American base at Khe Sanh on January 21, 1968. Just over a week later, on January 30, 1968, the main thrust of Tet Offensive began. Just before dawn, North Vietnamese troops and Viet Cong forces attacked towns and cities in South Vietnam, breaking the negotiated ceasefire. In a short period, the enemy forces attacked nearly 100 major cities and towns throughout South Vietnam. The scale and speed of the attack surprised both the Americans and the South Vietnamese. However, much to the surprise of the Communists, the South Vietnamese and U.S. forces fought back with equal ferocity. The Communists expected an uprising from the populous in support of their actions, but instead met heavy resistance.

The Allies were able to repel Communist forces quickly in some cities, while it took weeks of fighting in others. Communist forces succeeded in occupying the U.S. embassy in Saigon for nearly 10 hours. U.S. and South Vietnamese forces regained control of Saigon within two weeks; it took them nearly a month to retake the city of Hue.¹²⁹ In purely military terms, the United States and South Vietnam were the victors of

¹²⁹ The coastal city of Hue was the former national capital until 1945. The city is located near the border of North and South Vietnam and sustained a considerable amount of damage during the events of the Tet Offensive.

the Tet Offensive, as the Communists did not triumph in preserving control over any part of South Vietnam. The Communist losses were high, totaling nearly 45,000.

The failed popular uprising would eventually lead to many Viet Cong displaying skepticism about broken promises by their Communist leaders. In addition, the level of carnage because of executing the Tet Offensive weighed heavily upon those fighters who were uncertain about defecting to the Chieu Hoi Program. The first quarter of 1968 displayed the lowest number of returnees, 2,541, since 1965. Initially, political uncertainty was a key factor as potential Hoi Chahn weighed their options about the long-term status of the South Vietnamese government. A comparison of the first 60 days after the Tet Offensive highlights the low returnee rate, a trend observed in all four regions:

Region	Jan 1967	Jan 1968	Feb 1968
I	234	272	71
II	780	221	121
III	1096	151	150
<u>IV</u>	<u>807</u>	<u>535</u>	<u>421</u>
Total	2917	1179	763 ¹³⁰

Potential Hoi Chahn were also concerned about what would happen if they were unsuccessful in their attempt to defect. The Viet Cong targeted many former returnees as South Vietnamese and U.S. forces pulled from the countryside to protect the populated

¹³⁰ Effects of TET Offensive on the Chieu Hoi Program, no date, Folder 7, Box 1, Ogden Williams Collection, The Vietnam Center and Archive, Texas Tech University, accessed 5 May 2012, <http://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/virtualarchive/items.php?item=15250107003>.

areas.¹³¹ The Viet Cong also sought to destroy the physical image of Chieu Hoi; however, damage to facilities was moderate, with the exception of a handful of provinces. With available funds from the contingency accounts, provincial and district were able to rebuild their reception centers.¹³² Overall, the situation could have been much worse. The Chief of the Chieu Hoi Division in Saigon, Paul Neilson, addressed his subordinates about what happened:

Most of you know at this writing that with few exceptions the Chieu Hoi Program has come through the past few weeks largely unscathed as far as its physical assets are concerned. The expected popular uprising which the VC expected did not materialize, even in the form of defecting Hoi Chahn. Until such time as the current relatively high intensity of combat subsides, we cannot really expect much reaction in the form of increased returnee rates. Engaged forces are often reluctant to recognize even POWs, let alone ralliers. Important activities—such as vocational, political training, (and) resettlement activities—have remained at a standstill since the inception of the Offensive.

Experience has shown that once momentum is lost, a very trying, time-consuming process must ensue before the loose ends can be picked up again.”¹³³

South Vietnamese officials were able to cast away some of their doubt and look upon the Chieu Hoi Program with satisfaction after the Tet. With only a few exceptions, the Hoi Chahn had remained loyal to the government and the APTs fought hard throughout the countryside. The APTs were not equipped for extensive fighting and

¹³¹ A memorandum from Ogden Williams in 1969 about Armed Propaganda Teams explains some of the direct targeting by the Viet Cong during the Tet Offensive. It is obvious that Hoi Chahn were to be killed in order to scare other fighters from rallying.

¹³² Koch notes—Quang Tri suffered the heaviest damage, Thua Thien (60% of its facilities damaged), Kontum, Pleiku, and Vinh Long (suffered major damage), and Kien Hoa (minimal damage to the provincial center, but total destruction of the Chieu Hoi office.)

¹³³ N. Paul Neilson to DepCORDS (I, II, III, IV Corps), Attention: Chieu Hoi Advisors, February 22, 1968, subject “Operational Memorandum No. 5/68: Regaining the Momentum.”

maintained a primary mission of spreading word about the program in hopes of inducing future Hoi Chahn. However, the Tet Offensive brought them into direct contact with Viet Cong and North Vietnamese Army (NVA) units. On February 4, an estimated three battalions of Viet Cong attacked the city of Vinh Long. By their own initiative, an outnumbered APT fought courageously against enemy forces attempting to overrun the provincial hospital. The actions of the APT members allowed nearly ninety patients to escape. After the Viet Cong identified the status of three Hoi Chahn lying in their hospital beds, they slit their throats.¹³⁴ The presence of APT members could also sway Viet Cong fighters to defect. On February 18, the APT in Phuoc Long defended the Chieu Hoi center after numerous enemy attacks from 1:00 am to 3:00 pm. Reinforcements did not arrive until the end of the day, but a subsequent report stated, “the same APT induced fifteen Viet Cong cadres and forty members of their families to rally to the government.”¹³⁵ The Viet Cong were only able to wound one APT member during the engagement.

The enemy’s inability to maintain physical ground and spur a popular uprising during the Tet Offensive made the Chieu Hoi Program more attractive in the spring of 1968. The evidence was visible by April, and gained speed throughout the year. President Thieu’s Accelerated Pacification Program toward the end of the year ignited a large

¹³⁴ Chieu Hoi Operational Memorandum No. 1/69: Administration and Operation of the Armed Propaganda Teams, 16 January 1969, Folder 7, Box 1, Ogden Williams Collection, The Vietnam Center and Archive, Texas Tech University, accessed 15 May 2012, <http://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/virtualarchive/items.php?item=15250107001>.

¹³⁵ Ibid., 3.

movement to the Chieu Hoi Program.¹³⁶ Beginning in November, he proclaimed a three-month goal of 5000 returnees. Of the 18,171 Hoi Chahn to return in 1968, over 40 percent (7,631) changed allegiance during the final two months of the year. The IV Corps area observed the most dramatic progress with nearly 33 percent of all returnees. The region utilized a new technique, the Third Party Inducement Program, to attract more Hoi Chahn. The new program offered financial incentive to convince defectors to rally and paid a cash stipend to both the rallier and individual who helped. From 1965 to 1968, more Hoi Chahn rallied in the IV Corps area than any other region. Ogden Williams commented in his annual report about the challenges the Viet Cong faced when conducting operations in the region. He summarized,

It is apparent that IV Corps effectively meets the three major prerequisites for a healthy influx of returnees:

- (1) An ample VC target
- (2) Absence of extensive NVA units (which exercise control and discipline over lower-level guerilla ranks)
- (3) A fairly well-managed Chieu Hoi Program

¹³⁶ The Accelerated Pacification Campaign was a “clear and hold” strategy using Regional Forces (RF) and Popular Forces (PF). Operating in or near their home villages, the RF and PF were familiar with the countryside as well as the people, knew how to differentiate between Vietcong and nonpolitical families, and built some confidence because villagers knew they would remain in the area. After destroying or at least expelling the Vietcong infrastructure, Accelerated Pacification then turned its attention to economic development, and included clearing roads, repairing bridges, building schools, and increasing farm production. The Americans also tried to train villagers in free elections and then trained elected officials in village administration. Finally, Accelerated Pacification tried to bring about land reform by distributing land to peasant farmers. The results of Accelerated Pacification were mixed at best.

VC recruiting problems in IV Corps also contribute to the rallier rate—a lack of popular support reduced guerilla pay. In addition, guerilla forces had to be transferred from their home areas to fill Main Force and NVA vacancies.¹³⁷

After the Viet Cong sustained heavy losses after South Vietnamese and U.S. counterattack, the attractiveness of returning home was particularly appealing to low-level fighters. Compared to 1967, the percentage of military ralliers increased from 65 to 69 percent, while political returnees dropped from 29 to 21 percent.¹³⁸ This is due to the massive Viet Cong recruiting effort in preparation for the 1968 Tet Offensive. The Viet Cong forced twice as many recruits into their ranks in the later part of 1967, a hurried approach that resulted in a high number of fighters who were not volunteers. There were some sporadic defections of Viet Cong military units, but the overall trend of ralliers was the same as previous years.¹³⁹ The majority were young, uneducated fighters who were tired of the hardship of war.

Ultimately, the flow of returnees after the Tet Offensive proved too much for the South Vietnamese government. The program still suffered from administrative failures and still required intense U.S. involvement. William Lenderking, a United States Information Agency USIA Psychological Operations district advisor, commented about potential missed opportunities after the Tet Offensive. He stated,

The Chieu Hoi Program was indeed significant and imaginative, but the sophistication required to administer it properly—which would have involved detailed recordkeeping and efficient follow-up on Hoi Chahn after they left the Chieu Hoi Centers—was simply beyond the capabilities of the GVN at that time. Further, the requirement that the program be made appealing and credible by

¹³⁷ Comment by Ogden Williams from his 1967 annual report.

¹³⁸ Koch, 44.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

offering ralliers meaningful positions in society was not lived up to at all. The result was another program that was moving erratically, propped up by figures which were not inaccurate as to total numbers, but which actually concealed the most important elements of the story.¹⁴⁰

1968–Post-Tet and the Year of Decision

In May 1968, the U.S. Department of Defense took control from the Agency for International Development for the funding of the Chieu Hoi Program. The Department of Defense was the major contributor as it funded nearly every activity, though administered by CORDS. By the end of the year, the total cost of the program rose to nearly \$23 million, of which the GVN contributed a small \$380,000.¹⁴¹ Although the U.S. contributed a significantly higher level of funds, the South Vietnamese displayed a greater appreciation for the Chieu Hoi Program. The year was an important benchmark in efforts to “Vietnamize” the program. Ogden Williams complained about having to operate the effort with “the leanest operating staff in CORDS . . . (and) at the field level, we are severely anemic in terms of advisory personnel.”¹⁴² Overall, eight provinces were without Chieu Hoi advisors. At least three other provincial advisors juggled Chieu Hoi

¹⁴⁰ Lenderking on “The Price of Illusion: How and Why Pacification Failed in Vietnam.”

¹⁴¹ J. A. Koch explains the figure as the total cost of the program, including U.S. civilian, military, and GVN input, and should not be compared with the USAID/GVN figure of 1967 of \$9.9 million. AID phased out of funding Chieu Hoi in FY 1968, although AID continued to furnish counterpart piasters to Ministry of Chieu Hoi for operational costs. Obviously, this causes problems when conducting a thorough budget analysis of the program.

¹⁴² Ogden Williams, “End of Tour Report–1969,” MACCORDS/Chieu Hoi/VN. This report is mentioned in Koch’s Rand report; however, there is not further information about its location.

responsibilities with other formal programs. Dedicated leadership was still lacking.¹⁴³ The level of U.S. personnel remained the same; however, the number of South Vietnamese officials grew significantly from 72 in 1967 to 116 in 1968.¹⁴⁴ U.S. officials in CORDS believed the additional Vietnamese personnel would alleviate many of the provincial Chieu Hoi advisors from other responsibilities.

For the first time, the South Vietnamese government also displayed a significant recruiting effort to identify employees for the Chieu Hoi cadre. The total number increased significantly to nearly 1,700 employees within the Ministry of Information and Chieu Hoi (MICH), not including those in the APTs.¹⁴⁵ The increase in manpower did not solve issues at the important district level. Although districts were authorized a three-man Chieu Hoi team, many were left uncovered.¹⁴⁶ After Tet, the program also received a new director, Nguyen Xuan Phong, who helped move the program from under the MICH to its own organization, the Ministry of Chieu Hoi. Phong recognized the importance of Chieu Hoi leadership serving at the national level to synchronize operations with the military. He recommended as an “acceptable new status for the Chieu Hoi, a Special Commissariat be set up in the President’s office.”¹⁴⁷ Komer and the leadership at CORDS concurred with his recommendation, but the momentum stopped before it could gain speed. Phong resigned from Chieu Hoi just a few weeks later and

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ Koch, 40.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 41.

accepted a position as a senior advisor to President Thieu. His resignation also spurred South Vietnamese officials to again place the Chieu Hoi Program under MICH, led by the Under Secretariat.

The return to MICH did not change the program goals for the Chieu Hoi Program. Outlined in the 1968 Pacification Guidelines, the annual emphasis focused upon eight key areas:

- 1–Recruit, train, arm, equip, and operate 75 APT companies.¹⁴⁸
- 2–Press for increased use of returnees in tactical and intelligence operations in US/GVN forces. (Additional goal was also set for at least 1800 Kit Carson Scouts by the end of the year.
- 3–Continue to support use of returnees in Revolutionary Development and other GVN civil programs.
- 4–Improve vocational training in Chieu Hoi centers and on-the-job sites.
- 5–Help find jobs for returnees, with a goal of at least 9000 placements.
- 6–Construct reception/holding facilities in 118 districts.
- 7–Improve political training in Chieu Hoi centers by raising the total number of instructors to 100.
- 8–Continue improvement in normal elements of the program, to include inducement, reception, interrogation, training, tactical use, resettlement, and follow-up.¹⁴⁹

As a new technique proved useful in one area, officials shared the information throughout the program. With the success of the Third Party Inducement Program in Military Region IV earlier in the year, other provincial administrators throughout the country attempted to garner the same level of success. The effort focused upon individuals to bring in

¹⁴⁸ An increase from the 69 APT companies the prior year.

¹⁴⁹ The items in the 1968 Pacification Guidelines are only listed in the report; there is no further mention of citation or location of item.

defectors, as well as an emphasis for the Hoi Chahn “turn-around program.”¹⁵⁰ After Chieu Hoi officials briefed new returnees, the defectors would rejoin their former unit to induce other Viet Cong to defect to the program. The new version of the program also included a weapons reward system in which fighters could submit weapons, ammunition, and gear for monetary gain. During 1968, the overall program paid more than VN\$20 million, an amount greater than the earliest Chieu Hoi budgets.¹⁵¹

United States and South Vietnamese leaders placed a conservative goal of 30,000 Hoi Chahn for 1968. After fighters began to defect after the Tet, officials attempted to mitigate an unprepared response for additional returnees and allocated funds for another 30,000. Planners assumed a large return of Hoi Chahn was possible if the military situation continued to improve. Ogden Williams posited, “It had become clear that massive returnee rates could be expected only when new areas and new populations were opened up and transferred suddenly from VC to GVN control. As an area is pacified, the Chieu Hoi rate inevitably declines.”¹⁵² The program still displayed administrative shortcomings, but it is difficult to deny the effect of so many fighters and political agents leaving the Viet Cong. Nearly five years into existence, the results of the Chieu Hoi Program were both nuanced and credible. Just a few months after his critical comments

¹⁵⁰ Grinter, 1-3. The research was done in South Vietnam in 1966, when the author was working for the Simulmatics Corporation, under Project Agile funded by DARPA. It is unclear whether the report was written at Simulmatics, or after Grinter’s return to the University of North Carolina.

¹⁵¹ Ogden Williams, “End of Tour Report–1969,” MACCORDS/Chieu Hoi/VN. This report is mentioned in Koch’s Rand report; however, there is not further information about its location.

¹⁵² Ibid.

about the program, William Lenderking commented with a new perspective about the program: “These returnees are not only out of action in a negative sense; they are beginning to make the significant positive contribution to the national effort which characterizes the bonus aspects of the Chieu Hoi Program—the most important of which involves their becoming GVN supporters at least in some form.”¹⁵³

1969—Full Steam Ahead

The high rate of returnees in the later part of 1968 carried over with tremendous success in 1969. Chieu Hoi officials set the initial goal of 20,000 Hoi Chahn for the year. Due to the rapid influx of ralliers in the first few months, notably 12,383 by the end of May, officials revised the figure to 33,500.¹⁵⁴ The momentum continued with July producing nearly 5,100 ralliers, the highest monthly rate since 1963.¹⁵⁵ Still advising with the U.S. Government, Ogden Williams stated that Chieu Hoi was “now a major political plank of the GVN, regarded as partial proof the people of South Vietnam support the GVN more than the Viet Cong.”¹⁵⁶

The IV Corps led the country with nearly 70 percent of all returnees, but all regions exhibited pronounced increases. By December 1969, 47,023 returnees chose to

¹⁵³ R. G. Jones, “Current Chieu Hoi Appraisal,” MACCORDS/Chieu Hoi Directorate, Saigon, 14 May 1969. On a side note, Jones had become the Director of MACCORDS/Chieu Hoi Division just a couple months before, replacing Ogden Williams.

¹⁵⁴ Koch, 46.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ A comment from Ogden William from his End of Tour Report in 1969.

side with the government.¹⁵⁷ The success extended beyond the Viet Cong laying down their arms to return to the villages, and carried into North Vietnamese forces taking part in the Chieu Hoi Program. The number of NVA defectors increased to 368 from 284 a year prior.¹⁵⁸ Ray Jones succinctly described the success of 1969 compared to earlier years: “In the entire history of the Chieu Hoi Program, there have been only five occasions when the monthly rate exceeded 3000; four of them occurred during the first half of 1969. Only February, with its pre-Tet depression, dropped below this 3000 mark.”¹⁵⁹ The Chieu Hoi Program had finally started to receive more attention due to a collaborative effort of the South Vietnamese and U.S. governments. The annual budget now reached \$28.5 million and the average cost per rallier increased dramatically to \$350 per Hoi Chahn.¹⁶⁰ This was significant given the \$150 mark just three years earlier, as well the original level of just \$14 per rallier in 1963.¹⁶¹ Improvements were also visible in respect to manning. For the first time, South Vietnamese officials allocated funding for “Chieu Hoi Cadre” in nearly every village.¹⁶² The Chieu Hoi Program did not have

¹⁵⁷ Koch, 46.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

¹⁵⁹ Raymond G. Jones, “The Chieu Hoi Program” (Washington, Vietnam Training Center, December 1969).

¹⁶⁰ Koch, 47.

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

¹⁶² Ibid. The funding was approved to begin in 1970 with the U.S. covering the cost. Afterwards, the GVN was responsible for pay and benefits of the cadre.

personnel to man every district with advisors, but forty-four provinces contained a three-to-five individual Chieu Hoi team, as well as American or Filipino advisors.¹⁶³

The MICH received a new director at the beginning of 1969, the highly respected Nguyen Ngoc An. His deputy minister, Colonel Hien, took charge of The Chieu Hoi Program.¹⁶⁴ Richard Jones initially described An as involved, touring the various centers and conducting assessments from the field.¹⁶⁵ However, he also believed that An placed little trust in the Chieu Hoi Program and it unfortunately “showed through.”¹⁶⁶ Just as the U.S. invested human capital into the program with Ogden Williams and his team a few years before, the South Vietnamese also attempted to make key changes among their top leadership positions. In September, after pressure by U.S. advisors, President Thieu appointed Dr. Ho Van Cham to be the Minister of the Chieu Hoi Program.¹⁶⁷ The young medical doctor had a reputation for stressing the importance of a national reconciliation effort.

South Vietnamese officials struggled with the balance of national level guidance and allowing Chieu Hoi district offices to have flexibility. In October, Jones further articulated a point that the Ministry of Information and Chieu Hoi Program failed to work together in order to maximize impact. In a subsequent interview, he explained:

¹⁶³ Ibid.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

¹⁶⁵ Jones Interview, 43.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

¹⁶⁷ Dr. Ho Van Cham was an interesting figure with a strong U.S. background. He completed his graduate work at Columbia University in New York.

The two just didn't work together. It was apparently difficult for the MOI to see the importance of working closely with Chieu Hoi. There was a very difficult problem in achieving a balance between having a well-managed operating Chieu Hoi Program and the kind of inducement that should go into it. It was difficult to get these people to understand that Chieu Hoi was more than just an inducement process and the necessity for good Centers, training programs, and other incentives to substantiate the credibility of the Program.¹⁶⁸

Jones acknowledged that a program such as Chieu Hoi needed to have flexibility at the lower levels. In other words, a bureaucratic system imposed by administrators hundreds of miles away could not capture the local dynamics as well as those who experienced it each day. He stated, "Provinces are not to be assigned returnee goals from higher authority."¹⁶⁹

However, guidance from higher echelons could also be helpful. The National Identity Registration Program attempted to resolve a longstanding problem within Chieu Hoi and required officials fingerprint all Hoi Chahn to be fingerprint after they rallied. This helped to eliminate much of the duplication and skewed statistics within the program.¹⁷⁰ Even with the potential for inflationary figures, the total number of ralliers—47,023—in 1969 was quite impressive.

1970—Keeping the Pace

As the Vietnam War entered a new decade, the nature of the conflict was also changing. For many years, the war was largely a struggle for control of territory. The South Vietnamese and U.S. militaries worked tirelessly to neutralize the enemy's strategy

¹⁶⁸ Raymond G. Jones, "Chieu Hoi Operational Memorandum No. 6/69: Chieu Hoi Planning," MACCORDS/Chieu Hoi, Saigon, March 1969.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

¹⁷⁰ Koch, 49.

of guerilla warfare, acts of terrorism, and political penetration into the fragile government. Now, a renewed focus for internal security and consolidation was prevalent as indication suggested a Vietnam with dissipating U.S. presence. The 1970 Pacification and Development Plan¹⁷¹ was a key document in the effort to strengthen internal security. It emphasized the necessity to gain momentum with pacification, as well as increased attention toward the Chieu Hoi Program. Overall, the security situation in the country was improving and acts of terrorism and sabotage were on the decline. Robert Komer described the environment:

By 1970, the war had become largely localized. Analysis of the 1970 incident rate and statistics show clearly that both the military war and terrorism now impact on a key few areas. Insurgency-type activity is largely concentrated in three provinces of southern I Corps (Quang Nam, Quang Tin, and Quang Ngai); Binh Dinh, Phu Yen, Pleiku, and Kontum in northern II Corps; and Kien Hoa, Vinh Binh, An Xuyen, and Kien Giang in IV Corps. In most populated areas of the other 33 provinces, the intensity of the conflict and even terrorism has radically declined in many cases only to sporadic harassment.¹⁷²

The overall objectives of the Chieu Hoi Program remained constant. However, a new focus and strategic emphasis was observable by South Vietnamese officials. An attitudinal shift occurred during 1970 in which the Chieu Hoi Program was to become a, “true national reconciliation program.”¹⁷³ The total number of ralliers decreased from a year prior, down from 47,023 to 32,265 Hoi Chahn. Officials set the goal for 1970 at

¹⁷¹ For further reading, look at Appendix 8 in the Koch study for Rand.

¹⁷² R. W. Komer, “Impact of Pacification on Insurgency in South Vietnam,” *Journal of International Affairs* 25, no. 1 (1971): 63.

¹⁷³ Koch.

40,000 individuals.¹⁷⁴ Part of the new focus was improving the Chieu Hoi Program's capability to influence Hoi Chahn after they rallied. Providing a rallier with the necessary tools to reenter the workforce had been an integral part of the Chieu Hoi Program since 1964.¹⁷⁵ However, several factors prohibited the achievement of the goal. Since its inception, the program suffered from a lack of qualified instructors, as well as a short timeline each Hoi Chahn spent in the reception center. It was not until Deputy Secretary of Defense David Packard made a visit to the Chieu Hoi centers that vocational training received more resources.¹⁷⁶ In fact, Packard's guidance went beyond Chieu Hoi returnees and included both veterans and refugees. The United States Agency for International Development started the process and contracted additional personnel to teach key skills such as animal husbandry, agriculture, and small engine repair.¹⁷⁷ The effort was a collaborative approach on the part of the Ministry of Labor, Ministry of Education, as well as the Ministry of Chieu Hoi.

Another nagging issue to the Chieu Hoi Program also received some attention in 1970. Identification cards, as well as conducting follow-up with Hoi Chahn as they reentered society, were perpetual issues for administrators. In March, The Chieu Hoi

¹⁷⁴ Chieu Hoi: A US Pacification program in Vietnam revisited, 1963-1972, no date, Folder 3, Box 1, Ogden Williams Collection, The Vietnam Center and Archive, Texas Tech University, accessed 8 May 2012, <http://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/virtualarchive/items.php?item=15250103001>, 38.

¹⁷⁵ Koch, 53.

¹⁷⁶ David Packard was also the founder of Hewlett-Packard and sought to import sound, business models into government practice. He was a strong advocate for economic improvements for Hoi Chahn as they entered the Chieu Hoi Program.

¹⁷⁷ Koch, 53.

Directorate established a goal that 70 percent of all Hoi Chahn who were processed would receive identification cards.¹⁷⁸ An annual report pointed out the program exceeded the goal was exceeded, with only some National Police personnel missing identification due to a backlog in cards.¹⁷⁹ In fact, identification cards went to 95 percent of all Hoi Chahn who returned in from 1970 to 1971.¹⁸⁰ For the previous seven years, program officials struggled to follow-up with ralliers from the Chieu Hoi Program. The 1970 budget finally contained funds allocated for the activation of an automated tracking system.¹⁸¹ Once enacted, it allowed for elements of the National Police and Ministry of Chieu Hoi to fingerprint Hoi Chahn and register their whereabouts as they crossed provincial boundaries.

Threaded throughout the existence of the Chieu Hoi Program was a subtle—and sometimes overt—resistance by GVN officials to fully recognize Hoi Chahn into society. Until 1970, this conviction was prevalent with the treatment of Viet Cong prisoners of war (POW). Previous conversions were limited to an ad hoc basis in earlier years.¹⁸² In March of 1970, the city of Da Nang hosted the first public ceremony of its kind. Overall,

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

¹⁷⁹ As mentioned in the 1970 Project Status and Accomplishment Report within the DARPA report “The Chieu Hoi Program in South Vietnam, 1963-1971.”

¹⁸⁰ Koch, 53.

¹⁸¹ Ibid., 54.

¹⁸² Ibid.

74 Viet Cong POWs were given Hoi Chahn status in front of their countrymen.¹⁸³ By the end of the year, the total number of POW to Hoi Chahn had risen dramatically to 313.¹⁸⁴

South Vietnamese officials displayed a new regard for the Chieu Hoi Program, but the U.S. continued to prop it up financially. The 1970 budget stipulated VN\$460 million of Vietnamese funds for all Chieu Hoi operations, but was unable to become reality due to a severe shortage of piasters from the government.¹⁸⁵ Without assistance from the U.S., American officials pondered if the South Vietnamese would limit the scope of the Chieu Hoi Program. As a result, the Department of Defense provided the 1970 funding of the program, continuing to serve as an Agency for International Development/Department of Defense activity.¹⁸⁶

The year also marked a noticeable change in the transition of the Chieu Hoi Program becoming a truly Vietnamese effort. U.S. advisors remained constant throughout the year.¹⁸⁷ The trend also continued with the successful Third-Country Nationals. Officials stated they would phase out 32 of the 39 advisors after the Ministry of Chieu Hoi improved its capability to assume advisory functions.¹⁸⁸

Many scholars and historians will comment on the Chieu Hoi Program's inability to attract high-ranking military and political Viet Cong and NVA. The conclusions of this

¹⁸³ Ibid.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., 55.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid. Incidentally, of the 39 advisors, 38 were Filipinos.

thesis will debate this topic in more detail, but it is appropriate to first identify the strategy in late-1970. In November, the Special Pacification and Development Campaign was undertaken in order to allow for a transition to the 1971 Community Defense and Local Development Plan, which was anticipated to begin in March 1971.¹⁸⁹ The document highlighted a new emphasis toward inducing high-ranking military, albeit not completely through the Chieu Hoi Program. Nonetheless, the concepts do bear close resemblance to the Chieu Hoi framework:

(1) The satisfactory result of the security and pacification and the large-scale operations conducted by the RVN and Allied Forces to attack and destroy the VC sanctuaries across the borders created a favorable environment for the expansion of our Chieu Hoi Program.

Thus, every effort should be made to propagandize and appeal to high-ranking Communists, youth, and the enemy units that have infiltrated into either provinces or border areas. Especially in III and IV CTZs, we must aim for their logistical areas and the Communist command now being destroyed in Cambodia.

(2) There should be separate appeals for cadres and soldiers infiltrated from the North, and cadres and soldiers of COSVN. Use to the fullest all information and psychological warfare means, as well as armed propaganda teams for more effective action.

Organize teams of high-ranking ralliers to talk to organizations or people, college students, and other associations in order to motivate those families with relatives following the Communists to call them back to the Nationalist cause.

(3) The training program to create cadres and retrain ralliers who are capable of effective participation in the Pacification and Development program should be continued.

(4) Officials must follow up and assist ralliers in order to create favorable circumstances for their participation in the self-development program.¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁹ Ibid.

¹⁹⁰ GVN Circular 1626-PThT/BDPT/KH, dated 30 May 1970, from the Prime Minister to All Ministries, entitled “Special 1970 Pacification and Development Plan: Greater National Unity.”

As a goal for the campaign, a target of 12,000 ralliers was set.¹⁹¹ However, during the four months of the effort, only 9,560 Viet Cong rallied.¹⁹² While the 1970 numbers of 32,661 for the Chieu Hoi Program were not as spectacular as 1969, the program continued to have an effect in the overall pacification effort. The 1970 annual report identified noticeable improvements among the administration, noting the program had been “injected with a sense of discipline, responsibility and urgency, although there are still cases of mismanagement and inefficiency.”¹⁹³ Some advisors who had been involved with the Chieu Hoi Program since its infancy sensed the current state of the program was heading in a respectable direction. Australian advisor Richard Riddle commented about the Chieu Hoi Program just before the end of the year:

The present Ministry (Chieu Hoi) is the best in my experience and they, from the Ministry down, would certainly continue the program even if the Americans left. They have replaced more incompetent chiefs in twelve months than all other ministries put together and generally speaking, the quality of the replacements are quite superior.¹⁹⁴

As American presence began to withdrawal from Vietnam, it was obvious the Chieu Hoi Program would rapidly need to become a Vietnamese effort. Would returnees continue to rally in order to become Hoi Chahn? On the other hand, would the phasing out of U.S. personnel also halt the measurable progress that the Chieu Hoi Program had produced for nearly a decade?

¹⁹¹ Ibid.

¹⁹² Ibid.

¹⁹³ Charles T. R. Bohannon papers, Box # 7, Hoover Institution Archives, Stanford, CA; R. L. Yabut, DepCORDS (MR 4), *Annual Report 1970*.

¹⁹⁴ Undocumented quote Koch, 56.

1971–Transfer of Power

Similar to 1970, the number of ralliers fell short of expectations. Overall, 20,444 defected compared to the goal of 25,000 for 1971.¹⁹⁵ The year also contained a wide spectrum of returnee rates. February was the largest of the year with nearly 3,100 returnees, a possible indicator of the Viet Cong once again keeping a close hold on fighters until after the annual Tet.¹⁹⁶ The Presidential elections in October also spurred many potential Hoi Chahn to sit tight. A month prior, the September total was a mere 754.¹⁹⁷ After two opposition candidates boycotted the election, the incumbent President Thieu was the only candidate and ultimately received 100 percent of the vote. As controversial as the October 2 election might have been, there was still an immediate increase in the number of Hoi Chahn. The level of defectors in October more than doubled compared to September, but also included 444 POWs who received Hoi Chahn standing.¹⁹⁸ November was even more staggering, with nearly 2,300 POWs recognized in the Chieu Hoi Program.¹⁹⁹ Both months are possible indicators of the program

¹⁹⁵ Community Defense and Local Community Plan.

¹⁹⁶ DOD-OASD comptroller reports. Fighters were kept close and had little opportunity to rally.

¹⁹⁷ Captured Enemy Document, Reaction to FWMAF/RVNAF Psywar Chieu Hoi, Intelligence, and Propaganda Activities, Political Staff Department, Headquarters, VC MR 5, 21 April 1971, Folder 4, Box 20, Douglas Pike Collection: Unit 1-Assessment and Strategy, The Vietnam Center and Archive, Texas Tech University, accessed 11 May 2012, <http://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/virtualarchive/items.php?item=2122004003>.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., 6.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., 8.

transitioning from purely a defector program into a national reconciliation effort, as officials were more willing to integrate former prisoners.

The year was also a strong showing for enemy infiltration. In 1970, nine outposts belonging to the Regional Forces and Popular Forces; however, just one year, later the enemy overran 39.²⁰⁰ Another disturbing trend surfaced that challenged the credibility of the Chieu Hoi Program. A 1973 report described the situation, characterized by “Indications of collusion between some of the RF/PF and the VC, i.e., VC agents defecting to the GVN as ‘false ralliers,’ joining the paramilitary forces, and then helping their VC comrades overrun the posts.”²⁰¹ It is important to note that the final Rand report about the Chieu Hoi Program stated that approximately 1 percent of Hoi Chahn returned to their Communist ties.²⁰²

A relative sense of stability resonated throughout the country in 1971. There was an overall decrease in the level of hostilities, and the political climate after the Presidential elections was calmer than the past. The U.S. was preparing to depart and the annual budget remained about the same. A small reorganization occurred within the Ministry of Chieu Hoi, allowing more authority and flexibility at the local levels.²⁰³ For the first time, South Vietnamese officials allowed Hoi Chahn to hold more prominent

²⁰⁰ Koch, 57.

²⁰¹ Ibid.

²⁰² Ibid., 294.

²⁰³ Reaction to FWMAF/RVNAF Psywar, Chieu Hoi, Intelligence, and Propaganda Activities, Political Staff Department, Headquarters, VC MR 5, April 1971, Folder 8, Box 14, Douglas Pike Collection: Unit 3-Insurgency Warfare, The Vietnam Center and Archive, Texas Tech University, accessed 15 May 2012, <http://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/virtualarchive/items.php?item=2171408008>.

positions, particularly those dealing with propaganda. In many instances, Hoi Chahn wrote and managed leaflets and media programs for television.²⁰⁴

The phasing down of the Chieu Hoi Program continued into 1972. There was a reduction in the number of Armed Propaganda Teams, a sharp decline in Kit Carson Scouts, as well as in funding and manning of the program. With the American advisory effort ending, the Chieu Hoi Program was truly a Vietnamese effort. By June 1972, the U.S. Chieu Hoi Division barely existed with a staff of three individuals.²⁰⁵ Saigon's Chieu Hoi Directorate was "Vietnamized" a year earlier than any other American pacification programs.²⁰⁶

²⁰⁴ Koch, 58.

²⁰⁵ Ibid.

²⁰⁶ Chieu Hoi: A US Pacification program in Vietnam revisited, 1963-1972, no date, Folder 3, Box 1, Ogden Williams Collection, The Vietnam Center and Archive, Texas Tech University, accessed 15 May 2012, <http://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/virtualarchive/items.php?item=15250103001>, 88.

CHAPTER 4

IT COULD HAVE BEEN BETTER

At least there was such a program. What did we have in our Civil War—Andersonville and Libby Prison?

— Ogden Williams, former director of Chieu Hoi Division

The Chieu Hoi Program reflects the complexity of U.S. involvement in the Vietnam War. An analysis of the effort also reveals a lack of South Vietnamese leadership and reluctance throughout its existence. Without a strong host nation leadership, any program is essentially limited with the effect it can yield. U.S. advisors were able to increase the efficiency of Chieu Hoi, but the South Vietnamese hesitancy stalled the program from achieving a larger result. Ultimately, the lack of South Vietnamese participation in the Chieu Hoi Program is just one example of many missed opportunities in the Vietnam War.

Initially, American influence was primarily advisory efforts in an effort to mitigate Communist aggression from the North. Even during the escalation of U.S. ground forces, advising South Vietnamese military units and civilian agencies was a considerable task. Throughout the war, U.S. advisors served alongside South Vietnamese counterparts to pacify geographic areas and help improve the government's infrastructure. The North Vietnamese and Viet Cong also understood the importance of people in the countryside and valued control of them critical to success in the war.

The advisory effort is a significant component in the study of the Chieu Hoi Program. The U.S. and British presented some of their most experienced and brightest personnel to the cause. However, in the end, Chieu Hoi came to life as an American and

British model. With heavy U.S. pressure, the program slowly became more of a South Vietnamese effort. However, its origin was American and not conceived by South Vietnamese officials. Throughout the life of the program, it suffered to shake the stigma of being an “American program.”²⁰⁷ Even so, the Chieu Hoi Program was worth the effort and proved to be a more cost-efficient option than an overreliance upon military force.

So Who Rallied?

When determining the impact of the program, it is difficult to assess its true contribution to the war. Then again, how does one measure its impact? Is its level success purely the metric of the total number of ralliers? For many U.S. officials during the Vietnam era, numbers and “body counts” were perhaps the ultimate measure of effectiveness. Early U.S. strategy in the Vietnam War hinged upon attrition characterized by a heavy use of firepower. Through this lens, the Chieu Hoi Program appears very successful, especially since it was responsible for over 194,000 ralliers to side with the South.²⁰⁸ No other pacification effort, to include the Phoenix Program, could claim similar numbers. The program denied the enemy a significant level of manpower. Should numbers serve as an accurate measure of success?

The quantity of ralliers was not the priority for administrators of the Chieu Hoi Program. Richard Riddle voiced his concern about goals and benchmarks in April 1970. He stated, “it has continually been the posture of both the Chieu Hoi directorate and of

²⁰⁷ Koch, 37.

²⁰⁸ Ibid., v.

the regional advisor that quotas should never be imposed on the Chieu Hoi Program.”²⁰⁹ For the administrators of the program, the long-term status of the Hoi Chahn was the focus of the program. Eugene Bable, a senior advisor, commented, “the importance of it (Chieu Hoi) was the way in which they (Hoi Chahn) integrated into their new society in South Vietnam.”²¹⁰ The former fighters ultimately proved to be some of the most loyal South Vietnamese. Many administrators pointed to the level, less than 1 percent, of Hoi Chahn who defected to the North.²¹¹ The 1968 Tet Offensive displayed their courage under fire, most notably amongst the Armed Propaganda Teams.

Problems after Rallying

A major deficiency of the program existed with the lack of vocational training for ralliers. Instruction improved with increased funding and senior U.S. officials, namely David Packard, pressing the South Vietnamese for better options. However, a general reluctance existed to hiring Hoi Chahn resonated throughout South Vietnam. They were, in fact, former Communists just a short time before. Riddle articulated the problems throughout society:

[F]rom the president down only lip service is paid to rehabilitation of ralliers and the only employers of ranking Hoi Chahn are the Americans and the

²⁰⁹ Notes on End of Tour Reports by Richard A. Riddle, CHD 17 April 1970, 1601-04 (32) Misc. Reports, # 32 1970, General Records, Chieu Hoi Division, Office of Psychological Operations and Chieu Hoi, CORDS MR 2, Records of the United States Forces in Southeast Asia, Record Group 472, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

²¹⁰ Koch, 20.

²¹¹ Interview with Eugene Bable in Jeannine S. Swift, *Chieu Hoi: A U.S. Pacification Program in Vietnam Revisited, 1963-1972* (University of Maryland, College Park, 1999).

Chieu Hoi Ministry (the latter on a temporary, non-civil service basis.) North Vietnam university trained doctors who rallied three years ago are still emptying bed-pans in hospitals despite the efforts of the Minister (himself a doctor) to gain them acceptance from the Vietnamese equivalent of the AMA. At province level, this distrust is most obvious among Vietnamese military who have missed numerous opportunities of operational success through ignoring intelligence received from Hoi Chahn sources.²¹²

The distrust continued throughout the Vietnam War. In nearly every region, U.S. agencies were the largest employer of ralliers. This point has strong implication for any conflict with a wealthy, external actor. During a war, or even in the post-conflict process, local economies are fragile. The high salaries offered by the external military or civilian agency attract many of the qualified host-nation personnel who would otherwise seek employment elsewhere. In Vietnam, a disproportionate level of Hoi Chahn worked for the U.S. With American involvement decreasing, it proved to be a short-term fix and not a long-term solution.

Benefits given to the Hoi Chahn were not commensurate with those given to the South Vietnamese military. For instance, free housing went to defectors as they joined the government cause. This greatly angered war veterans, as they perceived it as an injustice to their patriotic service. It is difficult to surmise if the situation would be different based upon increased benefits for the veterans. There would likely be some form of resentment and bias in the South Vietnamese society toward Hoi Chahn. The level of resentment could fluctuate depending on geographic location, history of Viet Cong attacks, etc. For instance, a city close to the North Vietnamese border that sustained

²¹² Richard Riddle, Memo, Pacification and Development Problems, 7 August 1970, Plans and Programs # 43, Folder II, 1970, General Records, Chieu Hoi Division, Office of Psychological Operations and Chieu Hoi, CORDS MR 2, Records of the United States Forces in Southeast Asia, Record Group 472, National Archives, College Park, MD.

continual terrorist attacks over the course of many years might be less willing to accept Hoi Chahn compared to a city with a low level of Viet Cong violence. National acceptance of Hoi Chahn is beyond the scope of the Chieu Hoi Program. Administrators of the effort could only prepare ralliers with new skills to rebuild their lives. For this part of the program to succeed, it involved follow-up with ralliers after they left Chieu Hoi centers. Unfortunately, the absence of any formal program to check on Hoi Chahn hindered the program. Identification cards were not a staple of the program until 1970, nearly seven years after the start of the program. This lack of continuity and assessment also prohibits researchers and analysts to properly examine the reintegration rate. An accurate study of what happened to the Hoi Chahn is not possible.²¹³

Did the Rank of Hoi Chahn Matter?

It is possible to provide some level of analysis about the demographics of the Hoi Chahn. The Chieu Hoi Program was not a conduit for high-ranking North Vietnamese or Viet Cong. The soldiers in the NVA, as a whole, were from the North. Therefore, rallying to the South would be defecting to a location far from their relatives and loved ones. Ideology also played a significant role with the type of defector who rallied. Many of the ralliers were low to mid-level Viet Cong or part of the Viet Cong Infrastructure. The majority were young males the enemy forced into their ranks. The Viet Cong commonly

²¹³ AVFA-CORDS-CHD, Provincial Problem List for CH, 21 March 1969, General Records, Chieu Hoi Division; Office of Psychological Operations and Chieu Hoi, CORDS MR2, Records of the United States Forces in Southeast Asia, Record Group 472, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD; Koch, *The Chieu Hoi Program in Vietnam*, 108.

removed them from their villages unwillingly and the new concepts did not possess a firm grounding of Communist theory.

After years of hardship, many became disappointed with Viet Cong's policies and harsh behavior.²¹⁴ Some would consider the lack of high-ranking fighters a shortfall of Chieu Hoi, but it is difficult to ascertain the true effect the Viet Cong felt because of the defections. James Megellas, the deputy director of CORDS in Military Region 2, stated, "the simple, irrefutable premise which justifies continued emphasis on the Chieu Hoi program is the basic fact that for every one that rallies, there is one less out there shooting at you."²¹⁵ However, the devoutly communist leaders were much more difficult to entice. After years of indoctrination, they were true believers in their cause. The challenge is similar to Islamist extremists in the 21st century or followers of Martin Luther during the Protestant Reformation during the 1500s. Such movements contain committed ideologues that hold their beliefs true. It is nearly impossible to drive a wedge between the ideology and individual. If it is possible, the level of effort to do so is more than likely too high and would require a level of resources not proportionate with the expected level of utility. This conundrum raises debate about how to deal with such individuals, particularly during a conflict of armed force.

²¹⁴ J. M. Carrier and C. A. H. Thomson, *Viet Cong Motivation and Morale: The Special Case of Chieu Hoi* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Publishing, 1967), x. Dr. Carrier also expressed this point during a personal interview with the author at his home in Los Angeles, CA in March 2012.

²¹⁵ James Magellas, DEPCORDS, I FFV, II CTZ, End of Tour Report, 1601-04 (32) Misc. Reports, # 32 1970, General Records; Office of Psychological Operations and Chieu Hoi, Chieu Hoi Division, CORDS MR 2, Military Assistance Command, Vietnam, Records of the United States Forces in Southeast Asia, Record Group 472, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

Enemy Reaction to Chieu Hoi

Enemy reaction to the Chieu Hoi Program can also confirm or deny its effectiveness. It is a logical assumption that if an enemy felt a program was affecting his ability to wage war, he would retaliate. Simply put, the Viet Cong would attack the Chieu Hoi Program if threatened. It is clear the program worried the Viet Cong throughout its tenure. They considered it a serious threat and allocated personnel and resources to mitigate the program's appeal. A captured Viet Cong document in 1969 explains their concern:

Although being confused and on the verge of collapse and failure, the enemy (US and GVN) still carries out his very cruel and cunning plans. The surrenders are now very dangerous for us but favorable for the enemy. The U.S. and Puppet Governments are doing their utmost to encourage and adopt these surrenders to implement their national policy plan. We should actively oppose the enemy's open-arms program.²¹⁶

Many captured documents and interviews with Hoi Chahn reveal the Viet Cong studied the effects of Chieu Hoi in order to complete a similar plan. A later improvement of the program involved Hoi Chahn returning to their units to inspire other defectors. It also caused concern to Viet Cong leaders with the notion of spies within their ranks. A captured document mentioned the concern: "Some enemy spies carried out Chieu Hoi activities and assassinated personnel of friendly guerilla forces. An enemy spy who has been planted in the ranks of village unit cadre, killed several friendly cadre they returned to the enemy. In general, we can say there are several suspected individuals among out

²¹⁶ Directive on VC Defectors, Can Giuoc District, CDEC #10-1507-69, "History of the Vietnam War on Microfilm," Vietnam Archive, Texas Tech University, Lubbock, TX.

armed forces.”²¹⁷ The Viet Cong implemented a reindoctrination program to counter Chieu Hoi. Leaders forbid any personnel from possessing any of the propaganda leaflets, a difficult task considering the Americans dropped millions over the course of the war. There was also concern about any defection to the South serving as a catalyst for many more. The looming threat of desertion from Viet Cong ranks caused leaders to actively mitigate the risk. Officers received orders to speak to their units after a desertion or after the dropping of propaganda leaflets. Their instructions were to, “gather all of their men together to guide them, motivate their thoughts, analyze and criticize the event and remind people of the nature and traditions of our army, and create hatred against the enemy.”²¹⁸

Chieu Hoi also forced the Viet Cong to physically target the program’s centers and facilities. Many reception centers sustained damage during the 1968 Tet Offensive, although the violence continued into 1969. In October, the Viet Cong assaulted four Chieu Hoi centers due to nearly a year of rapid defection.²¹⁹ Hoi Chahn was a primary target of the Viet Cong. The direct targeting of defectors is most visible after the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong sustained heavy losses from the 1968 Tet. Enemy leadership

²¹⁷ Reaction to FWMAF/RVNAF Psywar, Chieu Hoi, Intelligence, and Propaganda Activities, Political Staff Department, Headquarters, VC MR 5, April 1971, Folder 8, Box 14, Douglas Pike Collection: Unit 3-Insurgency Warfare, The Vietnam Center and Archive, Texas Tech University, accessed 19 May 2012, <http://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/virtualarchive/items.php?item=2171408008>.

²¹⁸ United States Mission in Vietnam Press Release with attached translated document, “Captured Document Shows Viet Cong Response to Open Arms Program,” Vietnam Archive, Texas Tech University, Lubbock, TX.

²¹⁹ U.S. Military Assistance Command, Vietnam, “VC Efforts to Disrupt the Chieu Hoi Program” (Headquarters, United States Military Assistance Command, Strategic Research and Analysis Division, 1969), 2.

needed to instill fear among their units about the risk of rallying to Chieu Hoi. Once identified, the Viet Cong killed many Hoi Chahn in their hospital beds. Not only was assassination of former ralliers tolerated, it was encouraged. A Viet Cong directive explained: “Along with the annihilation of tyrants, local administrative personnel, spies, and pacification personnel, we should be determined to take disciplinary measures against the most dangerous surrenders in local areas. We should employ armed forces, security forces, guerillas and secret agents to search for their lairs in order to annihilate them.”²²⁰ Overall, it is clear the Chieu Hoi Program posed a threat to the Viet Cong. Even though the ralliers were low to mid-level fighters, they were still away from Viet Cong ranks. Their interrogation by Chieu Hoi officials provided the U.S. and South Vietnamese a snapshot of enemy activities in “real time.” The program incited enough fear in the Viet Cong leadership that the organization utilized their manpower and resources to direction target Chieu Hoi.

Role of the South Vietnamese Government

No matter how well administrative processes improved or the U.S. increased funds for Chieu Hoi, the lack of interest by the South Vietnamese government prevented internalization of the program throughout society. The factor of time was crucial in the difference of priority between U.S. advisors and South Vietnamese officials. American advisors operated within a schedule set by Washington leadership; they understood time was a scarce commodity. South Vietnamese never displayed a similar passion about

²²⁰ Directive on VC Defectors, Can Giuoc District, CDEC #10-1507-69, “History of the Vietnam War on Microfilm,” Vietnam Archive, Texas Tech University, Lubbock, TX.

Chieu Hoi. After the debilitating losses to the North after the 1968 Tet Offensive, the number of Hoi Chahn increased steadily. This provided some momentum for Vietnamese Chieu Hoi administrators, but the government never completely bought into the program. Richard Riddle, one of the last U.S. administrators in Chieu Hoi, commented, “many Vietnamese felt no such urgency to change.”²²¹

The lesson for any similar effort is the long-term success of any program ultimately correlates to the leadership and participation by the host nation. One of the most significant opportunities missed by the South Vietnamese was providing the perception of “winning.” Potential defectors were more likely to rally based upon the relative concept of the South Vietnamese controlling or influencing territory. This notion was important at both the national and local levels, particularly in the districts and villages. Perceptions of winning in a conflict is perhaps most important at the local level because power and politics are indigenous.²²² The image of Chieu Hoi as an American effort precludes many ralliers from believing in South Vietnamese leadership, both for the program and at the national level.

Violence is a necessary part of increasing the probability for defection. The threat of death of capture should compliment the process of inducement. In the Vietnam War, the U.S. provided the preponderance of fixed-wing aircraft, bombers, and other weapons.

²²¹ Notes on End of Tour Reports by Richard A. Riddle, CHD 17 April 1970, 1601-04 (32) Misc. Reports, # 32 1970; General Records; Chieu Hoi Division; Office of the Psychological Operations and Chieu Hoi; CORDS MR 2; Records of the United States Forces in Southeast Asia, Record Group 472; National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

²²² Roger Trinquier, *Modern Warfare: A French View of Counterinsurgency* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2006), 6.

Without a South Vietnamese threat that emanates beyond the length of U.S. involvement, potential ralliers make a calculated decision. This point has relevance in other theatres and conflicts as well. If the host nation cannot defend itself, or possess the capacity to pose a unilateral threat to the opposition, potential ralliers will likely stay the course.

The South Vietnamese Government did not allocate attention to the local dynamics of the conflict, as well as addressing some of the grievances. Ralliers feared their return to the side of the government and personal safety must be the first priority. The chance of retaliation or prejudice toward defectors limits their desire to side with the government. In Chieu Hoi, society remained hesitant about Hoi Chahn due to a perception of inequity. South Vietnamese veterans did not receive a stipend, lodging, or vocational training after their service—Hoi Chahn did. These unaddressed grievances prevented the ralliers from gaining increased stature in society. The situation improved after word spread about their courageous acts in the 1968 Tet Offensive, but the issue plagued Chieu Hoi throughout its existence. Local administrators recommended such changes, but South Vietnamese government officials displayed little interest. The lack of “bottom-up” advice from district and provincial administrators was a significant opportunity neglected by the South Vietnamese. Local suggestions commonly reached other levels only due to American advisors, a short-term solution that does not build long-term capability.

The Chieu Hoi Program is a success on many levels. It helped drain Viet Cong manpower by nearly 194,000 fighters. Compared to other pacification programs, it was perhaps the most cost-efficient of the Vietnam War. The highest amount spent per rallier never exceeded \$500 per Hoi Chahn. Conversely, the estimates to kill an enemy fighter

varied throughout the war, but many sources report it never dipped lower than \$20,000 per individual. However, the Chieu Hoi program alone could never win the Vietnam War. It was one part of a larger effort to end the conflict, and had little effect toward the North Vietnamese. No matter how well the U.S. supported the program, the South Vietnamese government's level of commitment limited its success. A lack of South Vietnamese leadership influenced more than Chieu Hoi—it substantiates the limits of a program without host nation ownership, and serves as one of the missed opportunities in a complex war.

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