

CHIEU HOI: A US PACIFICATION PROGRAM IN VIETNAM
REVISITED, 1963-1972

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***Better they do it imperfectly than you do it perfectly,
For it is their country, their war, and your time is limited.***

T.E. Laurence

As quoted in the introduction of the U.S. Defense Attaché Office

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ABBREVIATIONS

AID	Agency for International Development
APC	Accelerated Pacification Campaign
APTs	Armed Propaganda Teams
ARVN	Army of the Republic of Vietnam
CIDG	Civilian Indigenous Defense Group
COMUSMACV	Commander United States Military Assistance Command, Vietnam
CORDS	Civil Operations and Revolutionary (later Rural) Development Support
COSVN	Central Office South Vietnam
DEPCORDS	Deputy for Civil Operations and Revolutionary (later Rural) Development Support
EDCOR	Economic Development Corps
FULRO	Front Unifié de Lutte des Race Opprimées...United Front of the Oppressed Races
FWMAF	Free World Military Assistance Forces
GPWD	General Political Warfare Department
GVN	Government of Vietnam
IFFV	First Field Force, Vietnam

JUSPAO	Joint United States Public Affairs Office
LTC	Lieutenant Colonel
MAAGV	United States Military Advisory Assistance Group, Vietnam
MACV	Military Assistance Command, Vietnam
MR2	Military Region Two
NLF	National Liberation Front
NRP	National Reconciliation Policy
NVA	North Vietnamese Army
OCO	Office of Civil Operations
POLWAR	Political Warfare
POWs	Prisoners-of-War
PSYOP	Psychological Operations
RF/PFs	Regional Forces/Popular Forces
SEATO	Southeast Asia Treaty Organization
USIA	United States Information Agency
USOM	United States Operations Mission
VC	Viet Cong
VCI	Viet Cong Infrastructure

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The following report, filed in July 1968, details the actions of Kit Carson Scout Canh, a former Viet Cong (VC) guerilla who had rallied to the Government of Vietnam (GVN) under the aegis of the Chieu Hoi program.¹

Kit Carson Scout Canh, Company A, 2nd Battalion, 5th Cavalry, has been with the unit over a year. He is a former Viet Cong Hamlet Chief ... when the unit had surrounded 80 NVA soldiers ensconced in caves, Scout Canh only stopped making loudspeaker appeals for them to defect when he became so hoarse his voice had nearly withered away. On several occasions during this operation, he walked down inside of caves and pulled out wounded who wanted to come out and surrender but could not walk. Captain Clayton A. Pratt, Company Commander at the time, called Scout Canh, a “fearless little man”.²

This anecdote typifies both the problems and benefits of the South Vietnamese pacification program known as “Chieu Hoi.” In Vietnamese, Chieu means “to appeal,” and Hoi means “to return.” The words Chieu Hoi mean “a call to return” with the connotation of returning to the family.³ The program was primarily aimed at inducing members of the VC and the North Vietnamese Army (NVA) to join the GVN, a process that became known as “rallying.”

The premise behind the program was that an enemy force might be weakened, if those fighting were given the opportunity to rally rather than to continue to battle. If enemy soldiers had no alternatives to remaining in the VC or NVA, they would stay despite any discontent they might have with their positions. But, if the GVN could provide an alternative to remaining in the VC or NVA, it could steal away personnel, and weapons, thereby weakening its enemy while simultaneously strengthening its own forces.

Scout Canh was an excellent example of what the program could achieve. Formerly a high-ranking official in the Viet Cong, he risked his life inducing others to join the side of the GVN. But Captain Pratt's comments epitomize the problems the program faced. Pratt was respectful of Canh's bravery and appreciative of his efforts. Yet Pratt's description of Canh as a "fearless little man" reflects a paternalistic attitude toward the Vietnamese which was held by many American troops and advisors. This attitude plagued many US advisory efforts and resulted in programs such as Chieu Hoi being perceived as American, run using American methods, and based on an American timetable.

Though the Chieu Hoi program was initially established in 1963, this paper focuses on the period after 1967, when the Americans took responsibility from the South Vietnamese for organizing many of the pacification operations in South Vietnam. Chieu Hoi became part of the office of Civil Operations and Revolutionary (later Rural) Development Support (CORDS). CORDS was the central US coordinating office for pacification activities in South Vietnam. It was headquartered in Saigon and had four field offices, each responsible for pacification in one of the four military regions of Vietnam.⁴ Within the Saigon headquarters and field offices, CORDS was further divided into separate administrative units called directorates. The duties of the various CORDS directorates included advising on agricultural and economic development, providing medical support, developing and recommending policy proposals and guidelines for the US public safety program, supporting the anti-Viet Cong

Infrastructure (VCI) “Phung Hoang” program, and assisting the Vietnamese with Chieu Hoi.⁵

There have been very few widely disseminated published works on the United States’ pacification program in Vietnam.⁶ One clear reason for this has been a dearth of available official documents; until the last five years, many of the US government records relating to pacification were classified and unavailable to the general public. Historians have had to rely on personal recollections of participants and the bits and pieces of government documents that had been declassified.

The only pacification program which people have looked at in some detail is the “Phoenix” or “Phung Hoang” program that was directed at destroying the Viet Cong political infrastructure. Unfortunately, the books written on Phoenix, with few exceptions, have been written by people who have not attempted a thorough analysis of the program.⁷ The Phoenix program, however, was only one part of the entire pacification effort in Vietnam. Pacification was officially defined by the United States Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (MACV), as “the military, political, economic, and social process of establishing or re-establishing local government responsive to and involving the participation of the people.” The Chieu Hoi program was an integral part of this overall pacification effort, yet little has been published on the program.⁸ Most discussions of the program are brief and usually in the context of the Phoenix program.⁹ As a result, the Chieu Hoi

program is woefully absent from historiographical debates on the Vietnam War.

One of the most contentious issues relating to American involvement in Vietnam is whether or not it was feasible to fight and win with only a limited commitment of American resources. President Lyndon B. Johnson, his Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara, and the Joint Chiefs of Staff, wedded themselves to the idea of a “limited war.”¹⁰ The theory of limited warfare had gained popularity in the Kennedy Administration and was a direct reaction to former President Eisenhower’s military doctrine of “massive retaliation.” Rather than depending on the US nuclear arsenal, Kennedy and his advisors decided that the US should adopt the ideas of “flexible response” and limited war.¹¹

The US was more experienced with the conventional warfare that had been used in World War I, World War II, and Korea. But, as part of the idea of flexible response, theories of counterinsurgency combat became popular. Kennedy and his councilors pushed hard to train selected troops in counterinsurgency warfare. After Kennedy’s assassination, Johnson decided to continue this policy and emphasized the importance of using counterinsurgency tactics in South Vietnam. US policy makers saw winning the “hearts and minds” of the South Vietnamese people through pacification techniques (part of counterinsurgency warfare) as being integral to the success of the war. However, at the same time that counterinsurgency tactics were being used, traditional big battle warfare was also being implemented. The

decision to use such conflicting methods was due to the fact that the very nature of the war was much debated. Some policy makers thought the insurgency movement in the South was being fought by “homegrown guerillas” (the VC) seeking to overthrow the government. Other policy makers were sure that the VC were simply an arm of the North Vietnamese forces.¹² This disagreement carried over into counterinsurgency tactics. Advocates of the homegrown guerilla position saw great value in counterinsurgency programs. Those who felt that the VC were a North Vietnamese tool doubted the efficacy of the programs. This debate has continued among historians of the Vietnam War; the question of whether too many or too few resources were devoted to counterinsurgency remains a hotly contested topic.

Gary R. Hess, in his historiographical essay, “The Unending Debate: Historians and the Vietnam War,” discusses two prominent schools of thought relating to counterinsurgency theory during the war: the so-called “Clausewitzians” and “Hearts-and-Minders.”¹³ Clausewitzians argue that US civilian leaders misunderstood the nature of the Vietnam War and ordered the military to fight the wrong kind of war. They contend that Vietnam was a war of North Vietnamese aggression and not (as the policy makers in Washington believed) an insurgency simply supported by the North.¹⁴ The Hearts and Minders’ argument is almost the reverse. They argue that the war was fought too conventionally and that too little attention was paid to pacification. The Hearts and Minders contend that the US army leadership was at fault for resisting and misapplying the counterinsurgency doctrine.¹⁵ Retired Colonel

Harry Summers, author of *On Strategy: A Critical Analysis of the Vietnam War*, argues vociferously that too much emphasis was placed on counterinsurgency tactics.¹⁶ Summers claims that the guerillas in the South were being controlled by the North. He believes that the war in Vietnam was not a civil war, and that the theory that North Vietnamese forces were an extension of the guerilla effort is not borne out by the facts. He writes that the Viet Cong “harassed and distracted both the United States and South Vietnam so that North Vietnamese regular forces could reach a decision in conventional battles.”¹⁷ Summers claims that the US trained its troops in counterinsurgency doctrine and placed too much emphasis on pacification in the field, to the detriment of the war effort. Summers asserts that the US should have paid more attention to attacking North Vietnam directly. Had the US attacked the North, “the source of the war,” and destroyed its ability to conduct conventional warfare against the South, the VC would have been cut off from their support and the South Vietnamese could have defeated them.¹⁸

On the other side, retired Major Andrew Krepinevich, author of *The Army and Vietnam*, believes that the proper emphasis was never placed on counterinsurgency tactics.¹⁹ Krepinevich asserts that US forces were never trained properly in counterinsurgency. In his view, the US Army felt that counterinsurgency was merely a “fad,” important only because Kennedy and his advisors were pushing it. The Army’s attitude persisted into Johnson’s presidency. Even though the Army claimed they were implementing counterinsurgency tactics, the “Army prescribed no changes in organization

nor any scaling down of the firepower to be used in fighting an insurgency.”²⁰ Krepinevich disagrees with Summers’ opinion that the emphasis of the war should have been on conventional battles against the North. He believes that the internal VC threat to the stability and legitimacy of the Government of South Vietnam should have been the number one priority. Krepinevich further states that “the external, conventional threat was formidable because of the internal strife within South Vietnam and that without the insurgency threat, South Vietnam with US/SEATO backing-would have been a redoubtable deterrent to North Vietnamese aggression.”²¹

The story of the Chieu Hoi program fits into this debate between Clausewitzian vs. Hearts and Minder by virtue of its placement within the larger US pacification machine. Richard Hunt is one of the few authors who specifically analyzes the American pacification activities in Vietnam. His book, *Pacification; The American Struggle for Vietnam’s Hearts and Minds*, traces the development of the US pacification program in Vietnam from 1962 through 1972. Concentrating on the period after the 1967, Hunt looks at how US military and civil programs relating to security, economic support, and social reform were consolidated into the office of CORDS. Hunt examines the resulting CORDS organization and investigates how well it functioned. CORDS was able to exploit the US military’s superior logistical capabilities, as well as the diverse experiences of US civilian organizations, in order to carry out its policies. The Chieu Hoi program was instituted a full four years before CORDS. But it was not until the Americans began to aggressively back

the program in late 1966 and 1967, first through the establishment of the Office of Civil Operations (OCO), and then through CORDS, that Chieu Hoi began to live up to its potential as an effective counterinsurgency program. CORDS was made up of several individual programs relating to different facets of pacification. These offices often tended to function as private fiefdoms within the larger CORDS bureaucracy. Hunt asserts that the statistical tools that this bureaucracy used to measure the progress of their programs resulted in a flawed perception of the ultimate success of pacification.²²

Hunt is one of the few historians to look in depth at some of the major pacification operations in Vietnam and the relationship between CORDS and the conventional US military. Though he only covers the US pacification program at the highest echelons and does not address individual CORDS programs in any detail (except for the Phoenix program), Hunt explains how pacification fit in the context of the broader US military strategy of “one-war,” emphasized by General Creighton Abrams, Commanding General, United States Military Assistance Command Vietnam (COMUSMACV). The idea behind this one-war plan was to attack the enemy simultaneously on all fronts, military, political, psychological, and economic.²³ Ultimately, however, Hunt concludes that though the Americans had a measurable and positive impact on many South Vietnamese pacification programs, “the limited influence of its advisors could not compensate for the flawed execution of pacification plans

and programs, the ubiquitous corruption, and the failure of the South Vietnamese government to build a broad, self-sustaining political base.”²⁴

As in Hunt’s general discussion of pacification in Vietnam, there were many factors outside of the Chieu Hoi directorate’s jurisdiction that affected the ultimate success of their efforts. However, those conditions and interactions that were under the control of Chieu Hoi were still critical to the success of the program. These interactions included Chieu Hoi personnel working with other US pacification programs, the US military, and, of course, with the South Vietnamese counterparts.

In order for the program to become a true South Vietnamese priority, the US advisors had to convince their counterparts of the importance and benefits of the program. Ultimately, Chieu Hoi was dependent on the “quality, competence, and motivation of the Vietnamese,” yet it was not a program conceived by the South Vietnamese and it did not fit easily in their society.²⁵ In order for the Americans to be successful, they needed to understand the South Vietnamese well enough to be able to place the program into the context of Vietnamese culture. Over time, this may have made the Chieu Hoi a relevant Vietnamese plan, one that the Vietnamese could and would have continued without American assistance.

Many US Chieu Hoi personnel did try to understand the intricacies of South Vietnamese society.²⁶ However, their relationships were affected by such elements as bureaucratic squabbles, personal career concerns, and cultural misunderstandings. Additionally, for many Americans, the United States’ faith

in its own mission of containing Communism, and its desire to promote American values in the rest of the world, created tension between the goals of getting the work done their way and on their own schedule and working with the Vietnamese to make **Vietnamese** programs viable.²⁷ Though Chieu Hoi was “Vietnamized” and turned over to the complete control of the South Vietnamese earlier than other pacification programs, in the end, it failed to live up to its potential in making the program a Vietnamese priority.

Chapter 2 : Chieu Hoi Writ Large: A Brief Overview of the Program's History and Operations

In 1956, the Communist Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV) reactivated the revolutionary cells left in the South after the division of Vietnam.¹ In 1959, the DRV issued a directive establishing logistical units to smuggle supplies into South Vietnam. With this support, the guerillas continued to grow in strength, going so far as to launch attacks on South Vietnamese Army Divisions and assassinating South Vietnamese government officials.² When Communists in South Vietnam organized the National United Front for the Liberation of the Southern Region (NLF) in 1960, the guerillas gained an “official” party and structure for their movement. Already a growing military force, at this point the guerilla movement also became a potent political force which the GVN had to counteract. The US Army, which had been counseling the South Vietnamese since 1955, reacted to the increased unrest and began to boost military aid and expand its advisory effort. The South Vietnamese initiated the Chieu Hoi program in 1963, in order to cripple a powerful Communist guerilla movement in South Vietnam. The guerillas in South Vietnam were remnants of the communist Viet Minh forces who had fought against the French.

Along with money and logistical assistance, the US also began placing new emphasis on counterinsurgency programs. The Chieu Hoi program grew

out of this strategy.³ The Chieu Hoi program's full name was "Phong-Trao Chieu-Tap Khang-Chien Lam Duong" (The Movement to Regroup Misled Members of the Resistance). The Vietnamese shortened the name to "Chieu Hoi" while the Americans and the British, who had pushed hard for the program's implementation, called it the "Open Arms Plan."⁴

The Directorate General of Information announced the program at a press conference and read a proclamation by South Vietnamese President Ngo Dinh Diem to the attendees.

"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 element 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.⁵

Ironically, this proclamation put South Vietnamese policy in line with that of the North. Prior to this time, the South Vietnamese had not focused much attention on psychological operations against the North. The Communists, however, had always valued psychological operations as a method of warfare. One of Ho Chi Minh's central principles of political warfare was "Do not attempt to overthrow the enemy but try to win over and make use of him." Additionally, slogans such as "Political activities are more

important than military activities” and “Fighting is less important than propaganda” were well known and widely disseminated in the North.⁶

Due in part to the South Vietnamese negligence of psychological warfare between 1955 and 1959, the Communists and the VC had exploited peasant resentments in order to garner their support for a guerilla war.⁷ Even after 1959, when in response to increased VC attacks, the US military began to assist in the implementation of some psychological operations, poor understanding of Vietnamese language, people, and culture, as well as a lack of coordination between advisory agencies and the Government of Vietnam (GVN), hampered their efforts.⁸ The implementation of the Chieu Hoi program, indicated a new effort and increased dedication towards effective psychological warfare.

The theories behind the Chieu Hoi program were rooted in the respective experiences of the British and Americans in Malay and the Philippines. Sir Robert Thompson, who had administered the Malayan program, and Colonel Edward Lansdale, the former American advisor to President Magasaysay in the Philippines, were both in Vietnam in 1963, working to shape Vietnamese pacification policy. The Chieu Hoi plan most resembled the approach of the Philippine Economic Development Corps (EDCOR) plan.⁹

In 1950, President Magasaysay of the Philippines made a promise that every Hukbalahap (Huk) rebel who voluntarily came over to the cause of the government would be given a home, land, and financial support. Searching for

a way to make this promise a reality, Magasaysay and his American advisors (most significantly, Edward Lansdale) came up with the idea of a modern Roman military “colon.” Originally, the Roman plan was used to attract personnel for the Roman legions. Men would promise to serve ten years of military service in return for titles of land. These men would enter the service and be stationed in remote or unsecured areas to enforce Roman law. While there, the men would develop and stabilize the area in which they were assigned. After ten years, the legionnaires would be given title to lands in that locale, thereby continuing the “Romanization” process in the area.¹⁰

Magasaysay’s plan was not as ambitious as the Roman plan, but had many similarities. Magasaysay obtained public land that was suitable for homesteading. He then ordered the formation of new Army units commanded by senior commissioned and non-commissioned officers who were close to retirement. The bulk of the units were filled with one-year draftees. After six months of training, the units were stationed in distant arable areas and given home sites of fifteen to twenty acres. After their discharge, these parcels of land were given to the recruits to farm.. At that time, the soldiers were also given a house, livestock, and farming implements. If the soldiers improved the land, they were given title to it. Huk rebels who had not been indicted or convicted by a civil court, and had sworn “that they wished to be reeducated in the democratic, peaceful, and productive way of life,” were then relocated amongst these loyal settlers.¹¹ The Huks, however, did not have to relocate. If they wished, they could get vocational training so that they might find jobs in

the cities after their reeducation. In fact, the majority of Huks chose the vocational training over resettlement. Though only 3-4% of ex-Huks ended up accepting the offer of resettlement and land, the psychological benefits of the plan were significant.¹² The program's very existence supported the credibility of Magsaysay's government and the promise of merciful treatment gave the Huks an alternative to the difficult life in the guerilla forces.

The Vietnamese experimented with the basic tenets of EDCOR before the official initiation of Chieu Hoi. Local "returnee" programs had been in place in various provinces for sometime before the organization of Chieu Hoi.¹³ A 1963 airgram from the US embassy in Saigon to Washington reported that these programs promised a "guarantee of safety from the point of surrender; good reception and treatment of returnees; an opportunity for the returnee to restore himself quickly and fully to the local community; and a means of exploiting the returnee to encourage further VC defections."¹⁴ The South Vietnamese and Americans used leaflets and loudspeaker broadcasts to make the appeals to the hiding VC. Chieu Hoi personnel would place returnees in a center in the capital of the province for indoctrination and questioning. As in the EDCOR program, many of the early returnees would then be placed in strategic hamlets among loyal citizens and provided with food, shelter, and clothing. These programs provided superb training for the local South Vietnamese officials, allowing them to create some of the organizational and operational procedures that provided a basis on which Chieu Hoi could build.

Initially, on the Vietnamese side, the Chieu Hoi program came under the general direction of the Commissariat in the President's office, but was split administratively among several agencies within the GVN. There were five functional parts to the program. The first part, inducement, included all activities and operations designed to persuade the VC/NVA soldiers to come over to the GVN side. The second part of the program was the reception of the ralliers. At the local level, the program tried to establish a Chieu Hoi reception center in every province so that a potential returnee or "Hoi Chanh," could rally close to his home. Armed Propaganda Teams (APTs) protected the centers and provided the rallier (and often his family) with shelter.¹⁵ When the Hoi Chanh arrived at the center, Chieu Hoi personnel gave them money for food and clothing, and a monthly spending allowance. The Hoi Chanh were then required to stay at the reception center for 60 days and go through the third step of the program. The third step was reeducation and training and consisted of a multi-step re-education process to prepare them for life in South Vietnam. The orientation involved the rallier being introduced to other returnees at the center and undergoing a 72 hour political indoctrination created to inculcate attitudes favorable to the GVN. The indoctrination course was designed to educate the rallier in the social and political objectives of the South Vietnamese government and give him a sense of citizenship. This process had a more practical side as well, it provided training which consisted of vocational and literacy instruction to help returnees get jobs after their stay

in the centers.¹⁶ After the 60 days were up, the Hoi Chanh could decide whether to leave or stay longer for additional training.

The fourth part of the program was intelligence utilization. This included interviewing returnees to elicit useful intelligence, employing this information in inducing other potential ralliers to come over to the side of the GVN, in uncovering and confiscating VC/NVA caches of military and food supplies, and utilizing Hoi Chanh who volunteered to assist in the tactical military operations of GVN/Free World Military Assistance Forces (FWMAF) units.¹⁷ Often, the gathering of intelligence would occur before the ralliers reached the reception centers as the timeliness of the information was all important, but follow-up interviews would be done either at the reception center or local interrogation centers.

The final step was the resettlement of the Hoi Chanh. This consisted of integrating and assimilating the returnees into the society of South Vietnam, resettling them in hamlets and villages, and assisting them to find jobs. Whenever the Hoi Chanh decided to leave, they were given a separation allowance of 1200 piastres.¹⁸ After separation from the center, the Hoi Chanh were free to do what they wished. Some settled in strategic hamlets, and others wished only to return to their villages and their families.¹⁹ A number of Hoi Chanh, however, volunteered immediately for some kind of military duty. These men may have wanted the security of belonging to an armed group, or wished for immediate employment. The lure of serving close to their homes and families was also a powerful inducement.²⁰ All able-bodied ralliers were

eligible for the draft after six months, but those who signed up immediately were generally given their choice of which unit to join.²¹ While many ralliers joined the Army of Vietnam (ARVN), many joined paramilitary organizations like the APTs, the Regional Forces/Popular Forces (RF/PFs), or after 1966, the Kit Carson Scouts.²²

In order to understand why a VC or NVA soldier might rally, and decide how to best re-educate, re-train, and integrate them into South Vietnamese society, the GVN and Americans had to comprehend the motivations, attitudes, and feelings, which encouraged or inhibited their defection. The life of the Viet Cong soldier was difficult. Reportedly, armed VC cadres commonly took men from their villages and gave them the option of joining “voluntarily” or by “draft.” The VC cadres told the villagers that volunteers would be allowed to stay near their own villages, but those who were drafted would be sent far away. One rallier, “Nguyen” who was interviewed at the National Chieu Hoi Center in September 1969, recounted that those villagers who refused to go voluntarily were bound up, put into a sampan, and sent away.²³ Faced with these options, the villager generally decided to go “voluntarily,” though in the end he was often taken away from his home anyway.

The VC units were given some training as they moved around. The soldiers spent hours practicing crawling and aiming at targets (though not shooting, as ammunition was scarce). The training was exhausting and they had little food or rest. Nguyen told his interviewers that the men in his unit ate

only rice, bean sauce, and spinach gathered from the fields. They could not afford to eat meat or fish, as they were too expensive. At the end of the month if the unit had any money (individual soldiers were not given a salary, money was held by the unit as a whole) they might buy poultry, but this only happened every five or six months. Cooking was usually done twice a day, but the meals were often interrupted by air or artillery attacks. When this occurred the troops would go hungry. Hunger led to discouragement, exhaustion, and an inability to run because of stomach cramps. Many troops dropped from exhaustion and hunger and had to be carried away. Sleep was a rare commodity as the units were generally on the run and trying to avoid attacks by the GVN.²⁴

Not surprisingly, the health of the VC soldiers was poor. Afflicted with illnesses including headaches, malaria, rheumatism, and small pox, the units rarely had enough medicine for everyone. Each company had a nurse with only one bag of drugs; doctors were generally stationed only at the battalion level.²⁵

Nor could the VC soldiers expect villages through which they passed to welcome them. Nguyen reported that most of the villagers his unit came across were frightened because they became subject to bombing and artillery attacks when the VC stayed in their village. The only villagers who were glad were those whose sons had been drafted and were seeing them again for the first time in several months. These villagers were often so joyful that they would also give their sons' friends something to eat. Other villagers were, as

Nguyen explained, “security-minded,” meaning they feared death. These villagers would usually leave the village when the VC troops arrived.²⁶

The Viet Cong soldiers were largely ignorant about the progress of the war. VC commanders kept facts of battles and defeats from their troops to try to prevent desertion. The soldiers lived in fear of air and artillery attacks and morale was low. The VC leaders promised benefits and land when the struggle was over, but as Nguyen related, the troops’ morale still sagged because they knew the “reunification of the country was still far off, and there were plenty of dead at that present time.”²⁷

The VC morale also seemed to have suffered because of homesickness. The family was the strongest and most important structure in Vietnamese society.²⁸ Throughout his interview, Nguyen spoke of yearning for his family, “I missed my family very much: only one visit a year. How could you stand that!”... “We felt homesick and resented the Viet Cong. We love our parents above all; next are our wives. In the evening, when the red sun came down on the horizon, I felt so homesick that I cried.”²⁹ The Viet Cong leaders tried to use kin-like relations to keep the soldiers’ spirits up. Nguyen said that when he initially joined his unit, the company commander and platoon leader asked about his family in an obvious attempt to make his acquaintance.³⁰ Some units even had adopted “sisters” and “mothers.” The mothers called the soldiers “son” and gave them food. The soldiers in turn called them “Mum.” However, there were no real familial connections involved, and the soldiers only responded so that they could get cakes to eat.³¹

From Hoi Chanh interviews and taking into account predominant South Vietnamese rural cultural mores, the GVN and the Americans in the Chieu Hoi program learned that the villagers' and soldiers' strongest allegiances were to their villages and their families, and not to some higher governmental authority. The South Vietnamese and Americans also recognized that many of the low and mid-level Viet Cong had not willingly chosen to serve in the army and that they were tired and disappointed by the VC's policies, promises, and actions.³² Therefore, the South Vietnamese and the Americans came up with several different strategies for disseminating information about the Chieu Hoi program.

The most common method of propaganda dissemination by the GVN and US was the airborne leaflet. By 1966, over 1 billion leaflets already had been dropped over North and South Vietnam.³³ Other techniques included aerial broadcasts, leaflets, rural exhibits, posters, and radio announcements. Interestingly, VC soldiers often initially heard about Chieu Hoi through VC counter propaganda trying to discredit the program.³⁴

Images of family were particularly effective lures. The US and GVN dropped leaflets with pictures of families and accompanying texts all over the South. One example of such a text read:

**TO SONS AND FATHERS WHO ARE STILL BEING MISLED
BY THE VC:**

We miss you, do you remember us? Is there any time when you remember your family? You know the RVNAF (Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces) are winning everywhere. I am worrying where you are now and what is happening to you. The GVN Chieu Hoi program awaits you. I hope this letter reaches you so that you can soon decide to return to us. I hope you will have a safe return.³⁵

Other leaflets exploited the Viet Cong soldiers' low morale, hunger, fear of GVN attacks, and home sickness:

VIET CONG! DO NOT READ THIS LEAFLET!

This leaflet is printed by the Government. Your cadre are scared to let you read what the Government publishes. They are scared that you might find out that:

1. Your food supply is dangerously low because so much has been captured by Government and Allied Forces in recent operations.
2. There are now 980,000 South Vietnamese and Allied Troops looking for you.
3. Your families want you to cease your useless fight and come home to them.
4. The Government's Chieu Hoi Program welcomes and forgives all Viet Cong soldiers and civilian cadre and offers them a new start in life.
5. Because of artillery and air power, four Viet Cong soldiers die for every one Government or Allied soldier who dies.
6. The Allied Forces are not aggressors, but have been asked to come here to secure peace, independence and security for the Vietnamese people.
7. The Allies are not here to exploit us, rather they are giving aid, so that Vietnam can build a free nation based on political and economic strength with social justice.
8. The Viet Cong are losing their unjust fight and your choice is to rally or to die.³⁶

US and GVN pacification officials designed leaflets such as the ones quoted above to be effective means of communicating with the VC soldiers in the field. Nguyen told his interviewers that often VC soldiers picked up the leaflets from the paddy fields or were given them by villagers. The soldiers would read them in secrecy before throwing them away.³⁷

Information garnered from interviews with Hoi Chanh indicated that personal pleas from family and neighbors--some of whom were often ralliers themselves--were also effective means of persuading Viet Cong to join the Chieu Hoi program. Nguyen rallied in large measure because family and friends substantiated the GVN propaganda. While he was in the field he

received a note from a cousin telling him about Chieu Hoi. Later, after he deserted and was hiding near his home, his friends reiterated what his cousin had written to him.³⁸ The idea of being allowed to work for a living or enlisting in village military units close to home, was a welcome one for the average VC soldier. Even joining the GVN army or the Kit Carson Scout program was appealing as the soldiers were given salaries that they could use to support parents and families.³⁹

Enticing the ralliers, however, was only the first part of the task of Chieu Hoi. Some of the propaganda leaflets that were dropped or passed to the VC served as “safe” passes to defect, promising that the rallier would be well treated by any GVN or Allied soldier to whom he presented the pass. If a potential Hoi Chanh saw actions that contradicted the promises he had heard about Chieu Hoi while he had been in the VC, or was badly received by GVN and allied troops, he would reject the call to rally. In order for the program to be successful the GVN and allied soldiers in the field had to accept the ralliers.⁴⁰

When the Chieu Hoi began, pamphlets giving instructions on how to treat potential ralliers were passed out in an effort to create a welcoming atmosphere. These pamphlets were entitled “Twelve Instructions For Cadres At All Levels to Meditate On” and some of these instructions included;

- Thoroughly learn the Chieu Hoi policy, improve your understanding of the policy by constant, daily self-training, so as to be able to carry out the policy correctly.
- Thoroughly understand the policy so as to fill one’s heart with a sense of morality; cadre must first win (Chieu Hoi himself) to the just National Cause, and improve himself.

--Work with determination for the glory of Republican-
Personalist regime by adopting a generous and moral behavior
and by performing one's task with effectiveness.
--Do not indulge in mandarin-like actions nor do one's work in
a mechanical, heartless way.
--Do not fear to work hard: the more sweat we shed the less
blood we will have to shed.⁴¹

These instructions were extremely important. Everything hinged on the Hoi Chanh being well treated and respected before they rallied, during their rehabilitation, and after they were reinducted into Vietnamese society.

In the spring and summer of 1963, the initial enthusiasm generated for the initiation of the Chieu Hoi program was still going strong. President Diem, bowing to pressure from the Americans, had made the program an Under Secretariat in the Ministry of Information and Chieu Hoi, and as such the program enjoyed a certain amount of prestige. The Americans were only minimally involved with the Chieu Hoi program at that point. Though the Americans had pushed hard to get the Vietnamese to implement the Chieu Hoi program, the program was supposed to be a Vietnamese operation. The Rural Affairs Office of the US Operations Mission (USOM)/Agency for International Development (AID) only provided support at the highest level. The American effort was restricted to training and providing construction materials for the Chieu Hoi Centers (like the centers in the provincial program prototypes). There were no American personnel at the operational levels.

During April, May, and June of 1963, the South Vietnamese government reported that nearly 5000 of the enemy had returned to the GVN.⁴² Despite this promising start, the program sputtered after June and the rate of

defections dropped off sharply. As of July, the Chieu Hoi program had still not been implemented in some provinces. Additionally, US AID sources in a July 18, 1963, telegram reported to the American embassy that government statistics on returnees were heavily inflated and VC main forces had yet to be significantly affected.⁴³ The drop in the number of ralliers and the apparent inefficacy of the program, however, was partially due to factors outside the control of the Chieu Hoi program. In the summer of 1963, public support of President Diem was very low. The South Vietnamese mistrusted the Diem government, and perceived it to be highly unstable. Moreover, increasing Communist military successes and a tightening of VC control over their troops (due at least in part to the threat presented by Chieu Hoi) prevented many potential defectors from rallying.

The Diem regime was overthrown early in November 1963. This event threw the country and all government programs into confusion. The VC took advantage of the unsettled conditions and stepped up their activities in several provinces. Nevertheless, local Chieu Hoi officers tried to continue in their activities with the resources they had been given, but were hamstrung by a lack of guidance from Saigon. They were unable to exploit the psychological opportunities arising from the downfall of an unpopular president.⁴⁴ Despite the unrest, however, small numbers of ralliers managed to trickle in to give the program a grand total of 11,248 Hoi Chanh at the end of the year.⁴⁵

The Chieu Hoi program fared even worse in 1964. The subsequent overthrow of General Duong Van Minh by General Nguyen Khanh in January

again threw the country into turmoil. Ministries within the government were in a state of constant flux and many officials questioned the legitimacy and longevity of the new regime. Budgets went unprepared and expenditures unspent regardless of whether the funds came from Vietnamese or American sources.⁴⁶

Ogden Williams took over the United States Operations Mission's Rural Affairs Office in January 1964. His principle job was "to assure the continued function of the only elements of the GVN which remained operational in the field."⁴⁷ The South Vietnamese ministries who had titular control over pacification programs, were for all practical purposes paralyzed during the period of February to July.⁴⁸ The US, through its advisors, continued to urge that the Vietnamese defector program be publicized and made a priority policy within the new regime. President Johnson's special presidential assistant for supervising pacification support, Robert Komer, felt that the program's benefits far outweighed its monetary costs. Considering that only a very small amount of money (approximately \$400,000) had been spent on the program and aid to the Hoi Chanh had not always been honored, the advisors believed that even the 16,000 ralliers who had defected since April of 1963, represented a significant success.⁴⁹

During 1964, in an effort to step up the rate of defection, US advisors created the Armed Psychological Warfare Team program. The teams usually consisted of ten Vietnamese, both men and women. The teams would spend three to five days in a particular hamlet trying to educate the villagers about the

GVN and find out about local problems and complaints. US and GVN pacification officials felt that these teams were successful in educating many villagers and gathering important information.⁵⁰

As a direct result of the successes of the Armed Psychological Warfare Teams, the Armed Propaganda Team program was initiated. The basic armed propaganda unit was a thirty-five man platoon made up of Hoi Chanh. Experienced with the Viet Cong and rudementarily trained by American and South Vietnamese advisors in psychological warfare, these units went into contested or VC-controlled areas to spread news of the GVN. Like the armed psychological warfare teams, the armed propaganda unit would try to explain government aims and policies to the villagers. At the same time, the units passed out Chieu Hoi leaflets, paying special attention to those families with members in the VC. These units were later renamed Armed Propaganda Teams, and became responsible for guarding the Chieu Hoi Reception Centers as well as proselytizing the VC.⁵¹ All in all, however, the returnee total for the whole of 1964 was only 5,417, less than half of the number of ralliers in 1963.⁵²

In 1965, Robert Komer retained his faith in the idea of a defector program despite the Chieu Hoi program's declining success. He recommended increased US government assistance to the Chieu Hoi program, especially in the area of advisory support. He also urged the GVN to regard Chieu Hoi as an integral part of the counterinsurgency plan. Unfortunately, Komer's policy proposals were not followed by any great increases in material or personnel

support. At this time, US pacification activities were split among many different US agencies each with their own priorities and agendas.⁵³ As a result, Komer's ideas, though accepted by the Johnson Administration in Washington, were not properly or fully implemented in Vietnam until 1967. Citing the lack of concrete US support, the GVN continued to consider Chieu Hoi a low priority. Faced with juggling limited resources, lack of qualified personnel, and increasing confrontations with the enemy, the GVN was reluctant to support Chieu Hoi's expansion.⁵⁴ Indeed, the program (which had been an Under Secretariat in the Ministry of Information and Chieu Hoi) was downgraded to a Directorate in the Ministry of Psychological Warfare, led by a young ARVN captain with little experience.

Unfortunately, much of the enthusiasm the South Vietnamese government mustered at the beginning of the Chieu Hoi program did not develop into concrete working programs. Many of the theories and rules produced on paper to make sure the program was implemented correctly, remained on paper. Chieu Hoi also suffered from the government's attitude toward the general population. Critics of the GVN charged that a great failure of the government was its perpetual isolation from and lack of interest in, the average Vietnamese peasant. Additionally, the fact that the Diem government had a strict anti-Communist policy did not help Chieu Hoi's beginning. Diem had outlawed Communism altogether in the South, and this made any reconciliation program difficult to implement.⁵⁵ Diem had been heavily pressured by the Americans to institute Chieu Hoi, and though on the face of it

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(note: only first two tours in Vietnam had nothing to do with Chieu Hoi. The third tour (1966-69) were solely to do with Chieu Hoi.)

RAND corporation analyst Lucian Pye, in a report for the American government in 1966, recommended that an American official with an American staff, the backing of the Ambassador, and a direct line to the South Vietnamese Prime Minister, be assigned to the program. Pye wrote that these measures were necessary "in order that the Chieu Hoi Program be put at the very center of the Vietnamese political effort."⁵⁹ Taking Pye's report to heart, American officials realized that if the program was going to be more effective, steady American support was needed. American officials already knew that the program had the most favorable cost/benefit ration of any operation in Vietnam.⁶⁰ This meant that support would have to include not only more money, but American personnel as well.

The potential successes of the program despite the problems of the past led American officials to take concrete steps to bolster the program. In July of 1966, Ogden Williams, a USAID official who had already served two tours ~~as~~ *in Vietnam* ~~the head of the RAND Affairs office~~ *returned for his third.* He came "with marching orders...to increase the effectiveness of the Chieu Hoi Program

calling upon such financial, personnel, and logistical resources as might be required and reporting directly to ~~the~~ *William Porter* Deputy Ambassador."⁶¹ Other

experienced and capable US personnel soon joined Williams. In the first six months, the group was able to convince the GVN Chieu Hoi organization of the importance of the program.⁶² The GVN responded by moving the responsibility for Chieu Hoi back up to the Director of a Secretariat within the Ministry of Information. The program head changed from an inexperienced

Ken Maynard
Pham An
Monta Osborn

(Note - Role in creation of the Kit Carson Scout program)

The Filipino cadres were there to assist Chieu Hoi chiefs
not supervise them commitments

ARVN captain to a seasoned colonel. In October, Williams' group brought

? → over 45 officers from the Philippines to take over ~~the~~ direct advisory commitments

? supervision of the Province Chieu Hoi Centers. They reorganized the staffs to make the rehabilitation process more efficient and provided much needed monetary support for staffing, construction, and supplies. These Filipino officers who spoke English, and in a few cases Vietnamese, had an invaluable background of civic action and development experience. These efforts paid immediate dividends. Over 20,000 ralliers had returned to the GVN by the end of the year.⁶³

In March 1967, Johnson decided to place the entire US pacification program, including Chieu Hoi, under the control of the USMACV. The American Chieu Hoi program became the Chieu Hoi Directorate within CORDS, and was given direction of the entire Chieu Hoi support effort. Although the South Vietnamese still retained their own Chieu Hoi section within the GVN Ministry of Information, the Americans had taken over the dominant role in shaping the program.

The American staff of the headquarters of Chieu Hoi was largely made up of employees of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), and MACV military personnel.⁶⁴ One of the basic tenets of the overall CORDS program was to combine the logistical and military expertise of MACV with the long term foreign assistance experience of civilian agencies.⁶⁵ To that end, the USAID, which had been very involved in advising

Note -
one role
of Filipino
cadres
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give us
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misuse of
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the South Vietnamese on the Chieu Hoi program early on, provided a majority of the financial and personnel support for the directorate.⁶⁶

The Chieu Hoi Directorate had executive responsibility for advising and assisting the GVN Ministry of Chieu Hoi. This assistance included aiding in the preparation of program and financial documents and coordinating policy planning between American and GVN agencies. Additionally, the Directorate “recommended basic policy proposals, goals, objectives, and guidelines for the planning of US assistance to the GVN Chieu Hoi Program.”⁶⁷ The Chieu Hoi Directorate also tried to ensure that the intelligence and psychological operations potential of the program was available for exploitation by American and GVN intelligence and psychological operations (psyops) units. The staff of the Directorate worked closely in conjunction with the Ministry of Chieu Hoi on the execution of plans and programs.⁶⁸ The staff advised on all phases of the program and coordinated commodity and technical services support.

MACV, in addition to its CORDS office, operated a large tactical psychological operations program that was largely devoted to Chieu Hoi inducement. The 4th Psychological Operations Group, which maintained psyops battalions in the four military regions, produced leaflets that were distributed throughout the country by the 5th Air Commandos of the US Air Force and the Vietnamese Air Force.⁶⁹

The Joint United States Public Affairs Office (JUSPAO) was also involved in advising at the headquarters level. JUSPAO’s major functions were to coordinate military and civilian psyop activities, promote the

development of GVN radio, TV, motion picture and information services and related training courses; and to carry out the information and cultural programs of the United States Information Agency (USIA) and the Department of State.⁷⁰ Most relevant to the Chieu Hoi program, JUSPAO was responsible for guidance relating to American development and dissemination of psyops policy for all aspects of the war and the pacification program. The unit produced leaflets, pamphlets, newspaper articles and photographs, posters, magazines, and loudspeaker tapes, all of which could be used for attracting ralliers.⁷¹ The Americans also became involved in advising the Ministry of Information and Chieu Hoi on all aspects of the program, including the preparation and execution of plans and programs and coordinating commodity and technical support. American support had evolved in five years from one advisor at the most executive tier to hundreds of people shaping the program at every level from the national to the village.⁷²

In April 1967, Prime Minister Nguyen Cao Ky announced a policy of National Reconciliation (Dai Doan Ket). The proclamation said that Hoi Chanh could "...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 rejoin families, the right to choose the place to settle and the right to enjoy national assistance toward improving the standard of living."⁷³ This was an extremely important step. One of the most crucial parts of the Chieu Hoi program was the reintegration of ralliers into the general South Vietnamese community. If ralliers believed that they

would not be able to live a better life in the South, no amount of inducement would be effective.

Unfortunately, the National Reconciliation Policy (NRP) never lived up to its potential. It was another initiative that the Americans had pressed on the Vietnamese. While the GVN officially adopted the policy, the Vietnamese people never truly accepted the program as their own.⁷⁴ There was reluctance on the part of many Vietnamese to offer quality jobs to those whom had been until recently their enemies.⁷⁵ Additionally, the political participation that the NRP had promised to the Hoi Chanh led many in the South Vietnamese government to fear the emergence of a coalition government with the VC.

Despite these hesitations, however, and in large part due to American pressure, the GVN, at least on paper, continued to support the Chieu Hoi program. On December of 1967, the GVN upgraded the Chieu Hoi program to its own Ministry and made changes in personnel at the very highest levels. The new Minister was Nguyen Xuan Phong, and was considered to be part of the most influential inner circles in Saigon.⁷⁶ Despite its new ministerial status, the Vietnamese program continued to have problems recruiting qualified personnel. The GVN staffed Chieu Hoi by appointing either military officers or selecting civil servants; few quality people actually volunteered for the program.

The rallying rate was high in the first half of 1967. However, in the second half, the VC was preparing for the 1968 Tet Offensive and tightly controlling their troops while promising a coalition government after Tet and

the end of the war in 1968. As a result the rallying rate dropped significantly in the fall and early winter.

The impact of the 1968 Tet Offensive was significant on the numbers of ralliers. The attacks had disrupted the security situation in the province and district levels where most of the ralliers were received.⁷⁷ The rates did not improve until the GVN and FWMAF were able to “re-pacify” the GVN territory. Additionally, some Hoi Chanh were reabsorbed by the VC during the attacks and a provincial Chieu Hoi Chief and a number of APT personnel were killed.⁷⁸ However, on the whole, Hoi Chanh and APT personnel remained loyal to the GVN and by the end of the year, the failure of the enemy to continue the momentum of their attack as well as the expansion of allied control of the countryside, resulted in increases in rallier numbers.

Another blow to the program occurred in mid-1968 when Minister Nguyen Xuan Phong resigned. Despite all of Phong’s influence, he had only just begun to get the new Ministry up and running. Phong had hoped that the Chieu Hoi program would become a special commissariat in the President’s office and that he would be appointed to the position. He believed that such a commissioner would have more influence on the RVN military. However, after Nguyen Xuan Phong resigned, Chieu Hoi was again placed beneath the Minister for Information and Chieu Hoi. Setbacks notwithstanding, the Americans continued to work with the Vietnamese on the core aspects of the program. They put special emphasis on such goals as increasing the number of APTs, improving vocational training, building new reception centers, and

improving political training in the centers. Additionally, they instituted new projects such as the “Third Party Inducement” and “turn-around” programs. The third party inducement program paid individuals who brought in defectors and the “turn-around” operation sent briefed returnees back to their old VC units to try to induce other VC to rally.

In 1969, President Richard M. Nixon announced that his administration would go ahead with the process of “Vietnamization.”⁷⁹ This policy, which was developed at the end of the Johnson administration, called for gradually giving responsibility for the ground war back to the South Vietnamese.⁸⁰ At the same time, Nixon proclaimed his vision of US policy towards future Vietnam-style conflicts. This new policy was dubbed the “Nixon Doctrine” by the press and promised US logistical support, but not troops or pilots, to governments endangered by domestic communist uprisings.⁸¹ US combat troop withdrawals began slowly in 1969, but would not significantly affect US pacification programs for another year. In the same year, Ogden Williams left Chieu Hoi and was replaced by his second-in-command Col. Raymond G. Jones. The advisory work of Williams and Jones finally began paying off with the number of ralliers reaching its peak at 47,023.⁸² The Accelerated Pacification Campaign (an effort by the US and GVN to coordinate and integrate military and pacification programs in the countryside) had been especially helpful for Chieu Hoi. Additionally, the national Chieu Hoi program finally had the beginnings of a good internal structure with the reappointment of a Minister of Chieu Hoi, Dr. Ho Van Cham. The Americans

considered Dr. Cham an excellent choice for Minister and worked to reinvigorate the program.⁸³ The program could also now draw from a large pool of ralliers who could be used in various operations as the GVN and FWMAF moved into former VC and contested areas, and increased security in those areas that were pacified. Free from fear of VC reprisals and constant fighting, people in these areas began functioning normally and rebuilding their communities. This led to economic growth and development for the residents.

In 1970, the emphasis of the war had changed from fighting for territory to consolidating that territory and ensuring internal security. As a result, pacification strategies became all the more important, but the relative scarcity of direct contact with VC and NVA troops made attracting ralliers all the more difficult. The overall rallier rate dropped to 32,661, due to this changing nature of the war.⁸⁴ There was also some indication that some members of the GVN were trying to reemphasize the NRP by moving resources from inducement programs into political rehabilitation and vocational training. Also in 1970, Eugene Bable took over from Raymond Jones as head of the Chieu Hoi Directorate. Bable was a USAID employee who had been in Vietnam since 1966, and had previously worked as an advisor in IV Corps.⁸⁵ He brought with him a great deal of experience in working with the Vietnamese and a long history with the Chieu Hoi program itself. Bable's tenure proved to be a crucial turning point for American involvement in Vietnam. The Vietnamization process was increasingly speeding up in 1970 and United States psychological operations campaigns were promulgating

themes of GVN self-reliance and self-sufficiency in an effort to prepare for the departure.⁸⁶ Additionally, the expense of the war was becoming an important issue and pacification managers were under increasing pressure to lower costs of their programs.⁸⁷

Vietnamization continued through 1971. The number of ralliers continued to drop, though this was attributed largely to the expansion of GVN control and presence in the countryside. This meant that the “soft-core” VC areas had already been pacified, leaving only the most dedicated VC who were least likely to rally. The core activities of Chieu Hoi were still emphasized, with special attention paid to the political rehabilitation of Hoi Chanh. However, the number of APTs and Kit Carson Scouts was decreased as the US advisory effort was phased down as part of the overall American pull-out.⁸⁸ Funding for the Chieu Hoi program decreased by 20% and US direct hire personnel were also reduced by 20%. Most drastically, the number of third country national employees (usually Filipinos) was cut by 80%. The reductions in personnel came primarily from the field because the Chieu Hoi Directorate felt that most of the impetus for Chieu Hoi came from the central ministry in Saigon.⁸⁹

By 1972, there were few American personnel still left in the program. All third country nationals were gone and there were just a few advisors assigned to the central directorate office in Saigon. The staff concentrated on making the final preparations for the closing of the office. Congratulated for “working himself out of a job” by William Colby, the DEPCORDS, Chieu Hoi

Directorate head Eugene Bable turned over all responsibilities for Chieu Hoi over to the South Vietnamese Ministry at the end of the year.⁹⁰

Chapter 3: US II Corps and Chieu Hoi

The Chieu Hoi program in II Corps serves as a useful case study for a closer examination of the program. The Chieu Hoi program in II Corps fell under the aegis of CORDS MR2 (military region two, which was equivalent to II Corps), which was under the command of the United States I Field Force Vietnam (IFFV). IFFV was initially established in early 1965 at Fort Hood Texas, and arrived in Vietnam on August 1, 1965 to provide combat assistance to the South Vietnamese Army's II Corps Tactical Zone (II CTZ) and to direct US military operations in the area.¹ Field Force was the term used during most of the war to refer to United States corps-level tactical control headquarters. Since United States forces were to operate within four pre-existing South Vietnamese CTZ's (I CTZ, II CTZ, III CTZ, and IV CTZ), the US Army decided not to introduce other corps designations within the same geographical area.² Additionally, a corps headquarters traditionally only had tactical functions. The Field Force was a more flexible organization that could have responsibilities for such tasks as supply, advising, and pacification.³

II Corps was the largest geographic military region in South Vietnam covering about 50% of the nation with an area of approximately 30,000 square miles. The Corps roughly covered the central portion of South Vietnam with Kontum province marking the northern border of the region and Binh Thuan

province its southern edge.⁴ II Corps was extremely diverse in its geography, ecology, and demography.

The Corps contained three major geographic zones. These were the coastal lowlands, the Annamite Mountain Chain (Central Highlands), and the Plateau Region (Western Highlands). The coast of II Corps was beautiful and diverse, combining beaches, rich delta lowlands which were used heavily for rice cultivation, and cliffs which plunged into the sea. Because of its fertile land, the majority of the then 2.9 million people who lived in the corps zone lived on the coast. The area also included some of the most spectacular beaches in the country and two of the most strategically important harbors in the south, Nha Trang and Cam Ranh Bay. Nha Trang served as the headquarters for the United States First Field Force, Vietnam (IFFV) and the regional headquarters for CORDS.⁵

The Annamite Mountain Chain, a north-south mountain range that marked the border between Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia dominated the Central and Western Highlands. The highlands were approximately 100 miles wide and 200 miles long. The areas were sparsely populated due to the inhospitability of the terrain. The Central highlands are rugged and densely forested and the Western Highlands suffer from droughts during the NW monsoon and heavy rains during the SW monsoon.⁶

The population of the II Corps region consisted mainly of two groups, the lowland Vietnamese, and several tribes of people living in the highlands generically referred to at the time as the “Montagnards.” The two groups did

not coexist comfortably. The Montagnards were predominantly rural people who lived very much apart from the lowland population. Before the founding of the Republic of Vietnam, the French colonial government had generally left the Montagnard population to itself. As a result, the Montagnard connection with the central Vietnamese government was loose at best. When the Diem government came to power, however, it made attempts to absorb the Montagnards into the rest of Vietnamese society. As many of the lowland Vietnamese felt that the Montagnards were culturally backward and savage, the Diem's government's efforts failed. The Montagnards resented the intrusion and several protest movements arose in reaction to the attempted forced assimilation.⁷

The most powerful of Montagnard movements was the Front Unifié de Lutte des Races Opprimées (FULRO).⁸ In November of 1964, FULRO representatives sent the US Mission in Saigon two letters, one announcing the creation of a Federal State of the Montagnard-Cham Peoples and the second asking for a temporary French-American administered United Nations trusteeship for the Vietnamese highlands.⁹ The US Mission, however, did not respond to these requests since it was against their policy to accept any communications from FULRO.¹⁰ One month later in December, FULRO directed a military uprising in the highlands which resulted in the occupation of five US sponsored Civilian Indigenous Defense Group (CIDG) camps between December 17 and 18.¹¹ The revolt only lasted two days but it brought