

CHIEU HOI RETURNEES DURING THE TET OFFENSIVE

During the Tet Offensive by North Vietnamese and Viet Cong forces in virtually every city and province in Vietnam, former enemies who rallied to the Government of Vietnam through the "Chieu Hoi" (Open Arms) Program distinguished themselves on numerous occasions, often heroically. Other ralliers, called "Hoi Chanh," made noteworthy contributions to relief operations during the aftermath of the attacks.

Among the outstanding contributions were those of the Chieu Hoi Ministry's Armed Propaganda Teams, composed of some 2,700 volunteers, all former returnees. Although the primary mission of the lightly-armed APTs is to spread the word about the program and induce ralliers, the Tet Offensive brought them into direct combat with VC/NVA units. It was in these confrontations that the Hoi Chanh demonstrated their loyalty to the GVN and their determination to defeat the enemy.

In Vinh Long, the Viet Cong attacked with an estimated three battalions occupied a large part of the city. On February fourth, at their own initiative, the outnumbered APT held off Viet Cong forces attempting to overrun the provincial hospital. The actions of the team allowed eighty-six patients to be safely evacuated. Three Hoi Chanh patients were later killed when the Viet Cong slit their throats as they lay in their hospital beds.

In the early hours of February 16th, in Long An Province, the 8th North Vietnamese Army Battalion, supported by mortars and rockets, made a three-pronged assault against Tan An, the province capital. An estimated enemy company directly attacked the Chieu Hoi Center, defended by a 100-man APT. The APT repulsed three attacks and pursued the enemy, maintaining contact until late afternoon. Three enemies were confirmed as killed and two were captured. Other enemy casualties were taken away by retreating forces. The APT also captured three Chinese assault rifles, one Czech machinegun, twenty rockets, two hundred hand grenades, a large quantity of ammunition, and four hundred kilos of explosives, including a charge meant to destroy the main bridge at Tan An. One APT member was slightly wounded. The Long An APT is credited with having thwarted one of the enemy's most serious efforts to capture a provincial capital.

At 10:00 AM on February 19th, an estimated two companies of the Viet Cong 514th Regiment were spotted moving toward Go Cong about two kilometers from the city. The APT company partially encircled the enemy force and called in air strikes from U.S. gunships. The enemy was forced to disperse and their attack on the city completely thwarted. The Viet Cong lost seventeen confirmed dead and an estimated sixty were killed and wounded when their sampans were destroyed. One M-60 machinegun, three Czech light machine guns, fifteen Chinese assault rifles, a grenade launcher,

a mortar, and three carbines were captured. No friendly losses were reported.

At 1:00 AM on February 18th, the Phuoc Long APT repulsed several attacks directed against the Chieu Hoi Center near Phuoc Binh until reinforcements arrived four hours later. In another encounter with the same enemy force at 15:00, the Viet Cong lost four killed and a number of rockets, mines, explosive charges, and a small quantity of ammunition. One APT member was wounded. In early February, the same APT induced fifteen Viet Cong cadres and forty members of their families to rally to the GVN.

At Ban Me Thuot, the APT captured six well-armed Viet Cong, including an enemy Major, and disrupted an enemy company preparing to attack the City. After the attack, the team worked with civil authorities to restore order and escorted refugees and displaced persons to relief centers.

At Soc Trang, the APT repulsed six attacks on the Chieu Hoi Center, killing four enemies and wounding four others. There were no APT casualties. Some returnees were contacted by the VC shortly before the attacks and told to "join the winning side" but all remained loyal.

The Phuoc Tuy Armed Propaganda Team held off enemy probes and withstood mortar attacks against the Chieu Hoi Center throughout the 1st and 2nd of February and evacuated all 62 residents to the security of the Chieu Hoi hamlet two kilometers east of Ba Ria the night of the 2nd.

A small unit of the Khanh Hoa APT providing security for the provincial center in Nha Trang observed a company-sized enemy force occupy a nearby house. They notified a Korean unit posted in the area and a combined Korean-U.S. force attacked and killed thirty-three enemies. In another operation, the APT and Korean forces disrupted covert operations at the Ninh Hoa bus-station and uncovered a VC hide-out at Lach Ninh hamlet.

At An Xuyen, one APT was killed and two wounded in the defense of the Chieu Hoi hamlet.

The APTs in Kien Hoa and Dinh Tuong were commended by provincial authorities for helping repel enemy attacks against those provincial capitals. The Kien Hoa unit repulsed three attacks against the Chieu Hoi Center despite the enemy's use of heavy weapons. It also accompanied the ARVN on military and propaganda missions.

In Chau Doc, one APT member was killed in the defense of Chau Phu City. The APT helped distribute relief supplies and psychological warfare materials after the attacks.

In Kontum, the APT evacuated fifty-three Hoi Chanh to a more secure hamlet and joined with ARVN forces in defensive operations. They also provided security for MEDCAP teams caring for civilian casualties and distributed leaflets.

During the height of the hostilities and continuing two days after the initial attacks, the Binh Dinh APT conducted psyops missions in Qui Nhon by distributing leaflets and broadcasting the latest information to the population with hand-held hailers.

As the result of the inspiration of an older Hoi Chanh, more than twenty returnees from the Bien Hoa Chieu Hoi Center donated blood to aid war victims at the provincial hospital. Thirty-five returnees from the National Center in Saigon also donated their blood.

These sacrifices and contributions illustrate the loyalty and reliability of Chieu Hoi returnees under the most difficult of circumstances. The Hoi Chanh have shown themselves not only to be more than worthy of the trust of the Vietnamese Government and its allies, but also that they are, once again, among the most valuable resources in the military as well as political struggle for the independence of South Vietnam.

Chieu Hoi Division
CORDS
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