

DoD FS-42



OPEN ARMS:

AMNESTY
FOR VIET CONG
WHO CHOOSE FREEDOM

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One of the most important and dramatic programs in the war against aggression in South Vietnam is the *Chieu Hoi* (pronounced "chew hoy") or "Open Arms" program. It offers amnesty to Viet Cong guerrillas and persuades them to rally to the side of the Government of the Republic of Vietnam (RVN). *Chieu Hoi's* central theme is an appeal to individual Viet Cong to return to the Government of Vietnam (GVN), to start a new life within GVN society, and to help in the economic and political development of the new nation.

Chieu Hoi seeks to win over a tough Communist audience: leaders as well as rank-and-file of the hardcore Viet Cong organized in well-disciplined units. These units of the National Front for the Liberation of South Vietnam (NFLSVN) are known to the Communists as the "Liberation Army" within South Vietnam.

Doan Ket: National Reconciliation

Prime Minister Nguyen Cao Ky of the Republic of Vietnam, on April 19, 1967, gave new emphasis to the *Chieu Hoi* program by announcing *Doan Ket*, the National Reconciliation Policy. In his address to the Vietnamese people, Premier Ky offered the protection of RVN's newly promulgated constitution to members of the Viet Cong who would rally. He declared that all those who decide to leave the ranks of the Communists and reintegrate into the national community "... will be warmly welcomed as citizens with full rights of citizenship."

All returnees, known as *Hoi Chanh* (pronounced "Hoy Chun"), will be protected by the Government which will also provide them with the means to build a new life. Every citizen who abandons the Communist

ranks will enjoy the rights set forth in the Constitution, including the right to have the law protect his freedom, life, property, and honor; the right to vote; the right to go back and live with his family; the right to choose his place of residence; and the right to enjoy national assistance in the pursuit of his profession.

Premier Ky's reconciliation policy, specially designed to attract high- and middle-level members of the Viet Cong to the Republic of Vietnam's side, also provides that the citizens who rally to the national cause will be employed in accordance with their ability so that every Vietnamese, without distinction, will have the opportunity to contribute positively to the reconstruction and development of the country. Those citizens who rally to the national cause, but who have violated the law under Communist coercion or deception, whether they have been convicted or not, will enjoy all the guarantees set forth in the Constitution. The Premier emphasized that "... the country will be tolerant to the utmost so they have the opportunity to serve and redeem themselves."

Specific Aims of Chieu Hoi

The *Chieu Hoi* program, begun in 1963, is today operating effectively in the field. Already more than 64,000 Viet Cong (VC) and their supporters have decided to rally to the Republic of Vietnam's side. Almost a third as many of the enemy rally as are killed by the South Vietnamese and Allied forces in Vietnam. During March 1967, there were 5,557 Viet Cong who came over to the side of the Saigon Government.

What are the specific aims of the *Chieu Hoi* program?

First, to induce military and civilian VC and members of the North Vietnamese Army (NVA) to come over



to the side of the Republic of Vietnam.

Second, to convert as many VC and NVA as possible into useful citizens through fair treatment, indoctrination, and training.

Third, to weaken the Communist cause through the loss of military personnel and civilian support and at the same time strengthen the Republic of Vietnam cause through the addition of these individuals.

Fourth, to cause dissension and distrust among the members of Communist military and political agencies in South Vietnam.

Operational Structure

Chieu Hoi is run by the South Vietnamese Government with United States advisory assistance and technical aid. South Vietnam's Ministry of Information and Chieu Hoi officials work closely with U.S. agencies. The United States Military Assistance Command Civil Operations Revolutionary Development Support (MACCORDS) has executive responsibility for assistance to the Ministry of Information and Chieu Hoi, and works together with other Vietnamese Government and U.S. Government agencies in making and carrying out plans and drawing up budgets.

The Joint U.S. Public Affairs Office (JUSPAO) maintains close contact with the Ministry of Information and Chieu Hoi (especially the South Vietnamese Information Service) and assists in developing and producing media materials for use in the field. Psyop/information representatives of MACCORDS at regional and provincial levels work closely with their Vietnamese counterparts in psychological and information activities supporting this program. JUSPAO regional personnel work in the field with the Vietnamese, preparing material.

Chieu Hoi Centers are established at three levels: provincial, regional (corresponds to corps area), and national.

Provincial Centers: Each province has one *Chieu Hoi* center, except in two cases where the regional and provincial centers are combined. Provincial centers are expected to have a basic capacity of 50 at one time, although the largest has accommodated about 600. Basic standards call for all provincial centers to have facilities for interrogation, classification, indoctrination, eating and sleeping, and recreation and reading. When feasible, there is land for garden and livestock projects. Not all centers have as yet attained these standards.

Regional Centers: Each regional center is designed to care for 400 *Hoi Chanh*. In addition to facilities found at a provincial center, a regional center may offer vocational education opportunities through local technical institutions.

National Center: The national center at Thi Nghe, near Saigon, has a capacity of 500 which will be increased to 1,000. It receives the more important *Hoi Chanh*, who thus are available for in-depth interrogation. This center also has some vocational facilities.

Chieu Hoi's Progress

After a slow start in February 1963 when only a handful of the enemy was attracted to the Republic of Vietnam's side, *Chieu Hoi* has become more successful than had been anticipated. The number of Viet Cong who rally seems to rise as the VC cause becomes more hopeless and military pressure increases. In 1964, for example, before the U.S. buildup, there were only 5,417 returnees. This number increased to 11,124 in 1965 and reached 20,242 in 1966. In the spring of 1967, the rate was approximately 1,000 a week.

As time goes on, the caliber of the returnees is improving. There are now more platoon and squad leaders, political cadre, and Communist Party members rallying to the Saigon Government.

Chieu Hoi officials consider the surrender of North Vietnamese Lieutenant Colonel Le Xuan Chuyen the outstanding single result of the program in 1966. Chuyen, a veteran of 20 years' service with the Communists, had taken part in 50 major battles, received 35 citations, and was Deputy Chief of Staff of the Viet Cong 5th Division when he voluntarily came over to the South Vietnamese Government. "His intelligence value alone has already saved many lives," one official said of Chuyen's return.

Some of the largest numbers of returnees result directly from military operations. During the coordinated Operations "Irving," "Maeng Ho 6," and "Dai Bang 800" in Binh Dinh Province in the fall of 1966, about 1,600 VC came over to the Government side. Some of these men had been in the Viet Cong movement for years. Many are trained intelligence specialists, medical officers, and combat-toughened soldiers. Sometimes entire platoons rally at once. One case was reported in which 13 VC rallied on a single safe-conduct pass which they had torn into 13 pieces. Each man held a scrap of the pass as he surrendered.

Reasons for "Rallying"

Viet Cong rally for a number of reasons — usually a combination of disillusionment with Communist promises and performance along with a desire to take advantage of freedom offered by *Chieu Hoi* and its opportunities for serving their country and for resettlement, retraining, clothing, shelter, money, and personal security. Then too, there are other reasons — weariness with life under communism, fear of further combat, and the physical and emotional hardship of their lot. Some were forced to join the Viet Cong in the first place, and *Chieu Hoi* offered the best chance of escape. One *Hoi Chanh* described his "induction" into the VC as follows:

"When they [the VC] started drafting men in July-August 1964, I was exempted because of a stomach disorder. In 1965 I was supposed to be drafted again but twice I evaded them by hiding.

"One night in May 1965, the VC surrounded my house, seized me and some others in the village, and hauled us away for guerrilla training. I became a member of an 11-man platoon. Except for the two leaders, all of us were draftees. My battalion was armed with weapons that were brought in from the north.

"We were stationed at Bao Beo when planes came to strafe and bomb. We hid in foxholes, but they weren't safe so I and many others crawled into the rice paddies. After the bombing attack, all guerrillas were supposed to return to their units, answer roll call and search for the dead and wounded. I seized this confusing situation as my chance to escape."

The case of this former member of the 514th Viet Cong Battalion is typical. He stated that the VC had told his villagers that independence would be won in a matter of months. But several years had passed without victory or the fulfillment of a single Viet Cong promise. His family owned 50 acres of land before the VC took control of the hamlet.

"The Communists not only taxed us heavily," he continued, "but took away all of our land — land that our ancestors had acquired by their sweat and blood and then bequeathed to us. At first nearly all of the villagers believed the promises of the Viet Cong, who said they were fighting for the farmers and that land would be equally divided between the rich and the poor.

"That's why many poor people joined the Viet Cong. Today almost all of those early believers have abandoned the VC and their false promises."

It isn't easy to throw your weapons aside and willingly trust your life to men you have been fighting for years. But so many are doing it now that this little-publicized program has become vital to the struggle in Vietnam. Its importance cannot be overestimated as a means of spreading disillusionment and disaffection in guerrilla ranks.

Benefits for the Hoi Chanh

What entices these unfortunate victims of communism to return to the Government's side?

Amnesty, above all. Also an opportunity to join modern development programs, a chance to assist in the national defense, and the means with which to begin a free life.

Material benefits, too, have their attraction. Each man who defects is given free temporary housing at a *Chieu Hoi* re-education center and a daily food allowance of 24 piasters. He receives clothing — a hat and two sets of black trousers and shirts of the type commonly worn in Vietnam — as well as soap and other toilet articles.

Also, he is given a woven mat for his bed, a blanket, a towel, and mosquito netting. In addition, he receives 200 piasters for monthly expenses, optional on-the-job training or vocational instruction, and resettlement, which may include land on which he may build a house, plus 6 months' subsistence. When he leaves the *Chieu Hoi* center, the Hoi Chanh gets a cash payment of 500 piasters. But, most important, he gets his freedom, not only from the Viet Cong but from the relentless attack of the free-world forces as well.

Hoi Chanh Success

Many instances are recorded where *Hoi Chanh* who chose to enlist in the South Vietnamese Armed Forces have given valuable information to their new units which has resulted in successful military operations against the Viet Cong.

The *Hoi Chanh* have also saved lives on the Allied side. They often know where the VC have placed landmines and boobytraps, and have dug tunnel complexes. They have helped uncover caches of arms, munitions, and tons of rice. When they rallied, many brought their own weapons, for which they received a cash bonus.

Lightly armed, 34-man teams (made up of *Hoi Chanh*) go into the hamlets and tell the villagers of their own experiences on both sides. This technique is particularly effective because the people get first-hand evidence of

what life is really like with the VC as compared to life for those who have rallied to the South Vietnamese Government. Often the teams see action against their former VC cohorts. In December 1965, for example, in Hau Nghia Province, it was reported that an armed team killed more VC and captured more weapons than had any regular military force in the Province.

In some areas the VC now avoid coming into provincial towns because they are afraid of being recognized by their former comrades who now patrol the streets. In October 1966, in a battle between an armed *Hoi Chanh* team and the VC, one returnee killed 18 Viet Cong, and another, eight. And in December 1966, another team was responsible for breaking up four VC hamlet cells. VC reaction to use of the *Hoi Chanh* against them was summarized in the following extract from a captured VC document:

"These efforts surely influence our troops. If we do not closely control cadre and soldier thoughts, we shall face many difficulties. For this is a dangerous wicked scheme by the enemy. It is related to the general war situation, all aimed at reducing the fighting spirit of our forces and having a great influence on our struggle toward victory in general. . . ."

Chieu Hoi Techniques

Sometimes the Government's offer of a new life for those who rally to it from the Viet Cong is extended through *Hoi Chanh* volunteers and broadcast by sound equipment installed in aircraft flying above the VC areas. The tape-recorded messages have been so successful that the National Liberation Front (the VC political arm) on occasion has ordered the VC to shout, cover their ears, and beat pots and pans to drown out the loud voice from above that urges them to rally. Almost all the speaker planes are fired at.

When a VC unit has suffered a large number of defections, the VC command may move the unit from its operating area. Viet Cong leaders are trying to counter *Chieu Hoi* by intensifying their political programs. A special campaign to cut defection has been started among families of the VC. Viet Cong soldiers are even required to report regularly on their families' political attitudes. According to captured documents, there is an increasing amount of thought-control in each three-man cell, each squad, and each platoon.

Frequently, printed *Chieu Hoi* leaflets, which can be used as safe-conduct passes, are airdropped. These give

instructions printed in Vietnamese, Korean, and English so that the VC can defect to any of the free-world armed forces serving in South Vietnam. Several million leaflets are produced monthly and more than 150 million were airdropped in 1966.

Often the leaflets include photographs of men who have rallied from the VC unit which has been selected as the psychological warfare target. Letters, too, from these men are reprinted telling of their new life as *Hoi Chanh*. Also, they appeal to the VC to stop murdering their children, parents, brothers, and sisters. The leaflets describe the Open Arms Program and explain procedures for rallying. The potential returnee is told to approach the free-world forces unarmed, during daylight, and with his hands up. He may then ask to be escorted to where he has hidden his weapon. As an added incentive, the returnee is paid a bounty for weapons he delivers. Rates run from 800 piasters for hand-guns to 20,000 piasters for a 75mm caliber recoilless rifle.

Understandably, the *Hoi Chanh* often is afraid to return to his home in Viet Cong territory. Hard-core VC guerrillas are infuriated with the *Hoi Chanh* — much more so than with the free-world troops. Consequently, these *Hoi Chanh* may settle in one of many "new life" hamlets which the Government has built in secure areas.

This is certainly a change for the better for the returnees. For years they had experienced nothing but hard fighting, constant moving, short rations, and rigid physical control.

Training of Hoi Chanh

Once a Viet Cong rallies, he is taken to one of the 44 *Chieu Hoi* centers. Each man is questioned to determine if he is a bona fide Viet Cong. The returnee is then given a physical examination at a dispensary. If medical care is indicated, he is sent to the hospital nearest his center.

A *Hoi Chanh* is encouraged to write to friends in the VC unit from which he rallied. Voluntary live and recorded messages may be made by him and broadcast over local radio stations or by airborne tape-recordings.

The men attend educational classes, and for recreation there are reading rooms, volleyball courts and, at some centers, a television set. If a man wishes, after his first few weeks he may apply for training in such trades as tailoring, automotive vehicle maintenance, brick-making, or other vocational skills.

The *Hoi Chanh* gets 72 hours of political orientation while at the center. He attends classes 4 hours a day, 6 days a week for 3 weeks. There he learns more of Vietnam's history, of its heroes; he studies his Government's structure and how it functions. Also presented is a current analysis of the Communist movement both in North and South Vietnam. The *Hoi Chanh* is told the true nature of the role of the United States and that of the other free-world forces in Vietnam. He also hears about the Revolutionary Development Program which is rebuilding much of the country.

The men stay at the rehabilitation center for as long as 45 days unless they wish to stay longer to learn a vocational skill. When they have completed their training they may join the South Vietnamese Armed Forces or their own *Hoi Chanh* armed team, settle down in a "new life" hamlet, or just walk out and begin life anew with 500 piasters in pocket money. Some also get help in finding jobs. When they walk out of the *Chieu Hoi* center, they receive standard identification papers which bear no indication that the bearer has ever been a Viet Cong or a *Hoi Chanh*.

U.S. Forces and Chieu Hoi

Most Viet Cong returnees go to civilian centers at provincial and district capitals. However, the United States and South Vietnamese Governments are both seeking to encourage battlefield defections. Therefore, every effort is being made to urge U.S. and Allied troops to provide opportunities for the VC to come in voluntarily.

The key to *Chieu Hoi* for the returnee is the safe-conduct pass which guarantees him good treatment. The success of the program, which is taking many enemy soldiers off the firing line and providing much information, depends on the degree to which these passes and their promises are honored.

U.S. forces are told that if the returnee needs medical care, food, or clothing, he should get it — but he should be properly searched and security must be observed, while at the same time preserving the *Hoi Chanh's* dignity. As soon as possible, he should be turned over to Vietnamese Government authorities.

A free-world soldier's delivery of a returnee to a government activity may seem to be a small job to him, but he will have taken the first step in unfolding an

entire new life for his charge, the *Hoi Chanh*. Not only has he removed an enemy from behind a deadly gunsight, but he may have provided information which could save his own or a buddy's life.

The *Chieu Hoi* program has demonstrated that freedom's appeal is relentless. *Doan Ket*, the National Reconciliation Policy of the Republic of Vietnam, promises to bring over more and more *Hoi Chanh* from Communist tyranny. For each "rallier" who comes over to the Government's side, another example is set of the determination that free men display when they are given a choice to work out their own destinies.



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