

UNITED STATES NAVAL ACADEMY

THE CHIEU HOI PROGRAM

AND

PERCEPTIONS OF REALITY

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## Glossary of Terms and Abbreviations

COMUSMACV - Commander U.S. Military Assistance Command, Vietnam

CORDS - Civil Operations and Rural Development Support

GVN - Government of South Vietnam

HOI CHANH - Returnee coming in under the Chieu Hoi program

JUSPAO - Joint U.S. Public Affairs Office

Komer, Robert - Former Special Assistant to the President for the “other war” in South

Vietnam who was appointed as Deputy to COMUSMACV for Pacification

OSS - Office of Strategic Services

OWI - Office of War Information

NVA - North Vietnamese Army

VC - Viet Cong; persons belonging to the Communist movement

VCI - Viet Cong Infrastructure; the Viet Cong covert organization as a whole

Williams, Ogden - Head of the new CORDS Chieu Hoi division

"Essentially war is fighting, for fighting is the only effective principle in the manifold activities generally designated as war. Fighting, in turn, is a trial of moral and physical forces through the medium of the latter. Naturally moral strength must not be excluded, for psychological forces exert a decisive influence on the elements involved in war."<sup>1</sup>

During the Vietnam conflict, the United States worked very closely with the Government of South Vietnam (GVN) in utilizing the full potential of psychological warfare in a seemingly futile effort to win the hearts and minds of the Vietnamese people. In 1963, U.S. advisors, along with monetary aid from the Joint United States Public Affairs Office (JUSPAO), were sent to assist the GVN in the forming and execution of a psychological operation entitled the Chieu Hoi, or "Open Arms," program.<sup>2</sup> The two main objectives of the program, as its creators envisioned, were to strengthen the Government of South Vietnam by increasing the solidarity of its citizens and to weaken the cause of the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese Army (NVA) by inducing defections.<sup>3</sup> One of the biggest problems faced by a historian in the study of psychological operations is evaluating the effectiveness of the campaign by using the intended goals of the planners as a yard stick. While one might view the Chieu Hoi program as a complete and utter failure because, ultimately, the United States withdrew from Vietnam, and the Communist cause emerged triumphant. Within the contours of the war itself, Chieu Hoi proponents claimed to have made successful inroads against communism because the planners realized that their initial

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<sup>1</sup>Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed. and trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984), 127.

<sup>2</sup>JUSPAO, *Chieu Hoi Program 1965-1966* (JUSPAO Memorandum, File 86, Vietnam Box 34, Vietnam Collection, USASOC Archive, 1967),1.

<sup>3</sup>Ginger R. Davis, *The Visible Persuaders: A Study of America's Use of Psychological Warfare Using the Chieu Hoi Program as a Case Study* (Ph.D. diss., Texas Tech University, 1998), 102.

attempts using the traditional propaganda of the Korean War (family message, sex appeal, ancestor worship, etc.) were not working and subsequently converted around 1967 to a more practical message stressing money and other tangible rewards for defection.

Despite the Chieu Hoi proponents' optimism, assessing the effectiveness and success of the program is problematic. With the exception of the CIA's Phoenix Program, the majority of psychological operations, or psyops, do not accumulate a body count via assassinations. Thus, other dimensions of the operation should be scrutinized to judge the degree of success attained. Supporters credited specific messages with encouraging potential defectors to rally by looking at the numbers of defections over time and identifying trends in the defection patterns. Secondly, by reading through the numerous interviews with the VC and NVA defectors as they arrived at the Chieu Hoi rallying centers, it was believed at the time that the general attitudes of the enemy as well as their receptiveness to the messages being disseminated by the program could be ascertained. Lastly, proponents paid attention to responses, both counter-propaganda and military force, of the VC and NVA. As will be shown later in the thesis, these two groups were extremely concerned about their losses to the Chieu Hoi Program and tailored specific acts to counter the Chieu Hoi messages through fear, assassination, bombings, espionage, and counter-propaganda.

This thesis will attempt to judge the perception of success of the program and not the numerical gains based upon the number of enemy returnees per month. Judging actual effectiveness, that is, did Chieu Hoi propaganda aid the American cause, would be an almost impossible task to undertake, and, in this study, it is not even desirable. Of more interest to the historian is how perception becomes reality. Policy makers believed their specific changes

brought results and shaped future propaganda efforts accordingly. This perception of success in Chieu Hoi is of value because it can be used as a reflection of societal values, views, and ideas regarding the inhabitants of Vietnam.

In World War II, the use of psychological operations and propaganda to achieve strategic ends was coming of age. The American propaganda effort during World War II was essentially an internal pushing contest between competing agencies with different ideological points of departure. Because the United States lacked a clearly defined federal policy concerning propaganda, conflicting forms and methods of propaganda circulation resulted. The head-on crashes between the two big-league organizations, the United States Office of Strategic Services (OSS) and the United States Office of War Information (OWI), ultimately led to the U.S. Army gaining control over the propaganda campaigns during the war. The OWI had the authority to use “the press, radio, and motion pictures to create and conduct information programs to facilitate an informed and intelligent understanding, at home and abroad, of the war effort, government policies, combat activities, and war aims . . .”.<sup>4</sup> In contrast, the task of implementing a subversive propaganda campaign fell to the Morale Operations Branch of the OSS. Its activities were designed to coax resistance and included blackmail, bribery, abductions, assassinations, distribution of leaflets, and spreading of rumors. Over time, the U.S. Army accomplished a feat that neither the OSS nor the OWI effectively attained by making propaganda a valuable weapon via linking it to conventional military operations. Disappointed with the current civilian efforts of the American psychological campaigns, the Army, which had an intimate knowledge of war and

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<sup>4</sup>Clayton D. Laurie, The Propaganda Warriors (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 113.

how to fight it, pressed for military control over propaganda and eventually attained it. From this point forward, the military maintained tight control over any and all psychological operations conducted during wartime.

In the Korean War, the military continued as the primary instrument of propaganda production for the war effort. Propaganda included such messages as follows: appeals to return home based on the strong family values of the Koreans, depictions of the children left at home by the soldiers as being enslaved by the evil Soviets, portrayals of the corrupt government of North Korea being a puppet for the Soviet Union, and demonstrating how the Russians were simply usurping the natural resources and youth of Korea for its own selfish gain.<sup>5</sup> In addition, there were leaflets which gave detailed instructions on how to treat prisoners-of-war and how to surrender to the U.N. forces. Some leaflets even served as safe conduct passes. In an effort to play upon the strong family values possessed by the Koreans, the creators of the propaganda relied heavily upon the practice of ancestor worship in their messages. Essentially, the belief was that when an individual died, the relatives he/she left behind had to pay homage, pray, and offer sacrifice to the deceased so that his/her spirit would survive in the afterlife. The men should stop fighting and listen to the message of the propaganda for, if the soldiers were off fighting in the war and the women and children were forced into hard labor back home by the evil Soviets, no one would be left to worship the family's ancestors. During the Vietnam War, psychological operations initially followed similar themes.

The major problems American leaders faced regarding Vietnam date back to the eve of

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<sup>5</sup>This information was gained by studying the extensive collection of propaganda leaflets from the Korean War which was owned by Mr. Charles Snyder, Major, USAF, retired.

World War II.<sup>6</sup> While the U.S. and her European Allies were interested in seeing the balance of power maintained in Southeast Asia, no nation was in a position to address the situation in the early 40's. Thus, Indochina was a pawn available for the taking by Japan. On August 30, 1940, Japan occupied a transit base at Haiphong and the major airfields in Tonkin. In May 1941, as the Japanese increased their grip on Vietnam, the Indochinese Communist Party joined forces with other nationalist, but non-communist, groups and formed what later became known as the Viet Minh. Its ardent French leader was a nationalist named Ho Chi Minh. Shortly after this merging, the Viet Minh began creating anti-Japanese guerrilla forces. Following the first atomic bomb drop on August 6, 1945, Ho Chi Minh declared his guerillas to be the Vietnam Liberation Army and within a few days set up a shadow government known later to the Americans as the Viet Cong Infrastructure. By V-J Day, Ho Chi Minh was able to take control over all of Vietnam. In July 1945, after the Viet Minh had defeated the French at Dien Bien Phu, a truce was declared at the Geneva Conference. Vietnam was to be divided along the seventeenth parallel. The French were to withdraw from the North and the Viet Minh from the South. The Viet Minh received control in the North, and soon Ho Chi Minh began eliminating non-Communists from the region. In the South, the United States placed its own candidate, Ngo Dinh Diem, at the helm of the government. With aid from the CIA in organizing a huge support structure for Diem in the form of the Personalist Labor Party, he easily won the election set up for that purpose.<sup>7</sup> The stage was

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<sup>6</sup>Colonel William L. Knapp, *Phoenix/Phung Hoang and the Future: A Critical Analysis of the US/GVN Program to Neutralize the Viet Cong Infrastructure* (Fort Belvoir: Defense Technical Information Center, 1971) 29-32.

<sup>7</sup>Douglas Valentine, *The Phoenix Program* (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1990) 24-25.

now set for unbridled conflict to ensue in the divided Vietnam.

Before one can fully understand the struggle between the Viet Cong shadow government and the allied U.S. and South Vietnamese forces for control of not only the hamlets in the South, but also the hearts and minds of the villagers, it is important to examine the structure of the shadow government and its methods. Following the division of Vietnam along the seventeenth parallel, many Communist members of the Viet Minh, who were required to reside in the North, chose to stay in the South. These Viet Minh became known as the Viet Cong (VC). The guidance of the VC came from the highly dedicated and well-organized shadow government which consisted of the Communist Party structure in the South and members of the National Liberation Front.<sup>8</sup> The National Liberation Front had been created by the Communist Party to carry out its policies and provide some leadership and administration. The often invisible enemy shadow government paralleled the legitimate Government of South Vietnam (GVN) and was fueled by the desire to subvert the GVN and replace it with a Communist government by winning over the villagers.<sup>9</sup> The members of the shadow government, or Viet Cong Infrastructure (VCI) as it came to be known, were called cadres. Two basic types of cadres existed in South Vietnam. The “legal” cadres were those whose primary duty was to reside in the villages and spy on the South Vietnamese. They did nothing in public that would reveal their VC affiliation, and thus they hid their true identity from the villagers. These covert cadres received the title “legal” because they had documents to prove that they were South Vietnamese citizens. On the other

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<sup>8</sup>Mark Moyar, Phoenix and The Birds of Prey: The CIA's Secret Campaign to Destroy The Viet Cong (Annapolis, Maryland: Naval Institute Press, 1997) 11-12.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., 13.



hand, overt operatives who made their affiliation known to all were referred to as “illegal” cadres.<sup>10</sup>

During the 1960s, the political and military cadres orchestrated a mass seizure of hamlets from the GVN across the country. Hamlets were clusters of homes, where several hamlets constituted a village. With the aid of superior intelligence gathering and lethal tactics such as abductions, forced indoctrinations, and even executions, the VCI removed any obstacles presented by the supporters of the GVN in the hamlets. Historian Mark Moyar claimed that “the bulk of the GVN’s leaders, from Saigon down to the hamlets, lacked commitment to their cause, so they failed to motivate themselves, their subordinates, or villagers to resist the VC in the face of stiff opposition.”<sup>11</sup> In the battle for the hamlets, the use of ambushes and the destruction of vital bridges and roads by the VCI effectively cut off the GVN and its military forces from many villages. Once the GVN abandoned a village, the population gave up hope of overcoming the Communists, and the VC needed only to execute a few important villagers to win the individual hamlets. By organizing large political groups in the villages, the cadres succeeded in getting thousands of young males per month to join the local VC guerrilla forces.<sup>12</sup> Party members within these make-shift organizations were assigned various tasks, and the cadres promoted and rewarded those who performed well. The VC also arranged public protests against the GVN to create an emotional instability in the villagers which made them easier to sway to Communist ideals. The shadow government spent a great deal of time and money in locating and eliminating

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<sup>10</sup>Ibid., 16-17.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., 14.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., 14.

GVN informants and agents who resided in the villages. In addition, any villager who was proven to have lied to the VC concerning a GVN spy or who had harbored one, would be publicly executed. The VCI was even able to infiltrate and undermine the GVN intelligence community for a time with its own undercover agents. The belief that the shadow government was able to win significant numbers of followers via intimidation was not the whole truth. Because the villagers most often did not own the land which they farmed and lived on, the VC enticed the villagers with the promise that they would receive their own plots in return for support against the GVN officials. Also, the Confucian beliefs held by the Vietnamese stated that the masses must obey the ruler and that this ruler would be able to weather any attack or outside influence. Thus, as the villagers watched the struggle between the VCI and the GVN gradually shift in the direction of the VCI, they were more willing to openly embrace the ideology of Communism. According to Moyar, “[d]uring the early 1960's, the VC, by defeating the enemy in battle and by leading and recruiting the villagers, showed the people that they had the authority conferred by the will of heaven.”<sup>13</sup>

The Viet Cong Infrastructure consisted of numerous echelons of cadres who passed intelligence between the hamlet and province levels. The high-ranking VCI officials at the province level rarely stayed in contested or GVN controlled areas. Instead, they lived in secure regions such as remote outposts on the Cambodian border or in the “liberated” hamlets. Generally, they inhabited areas already out of reach of the GVN forces and were able to

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<sup>13</sup>Ibid., 24.

effectively exert pressure on the segment of the population already in their grasp.<sup>14</sup> The low level cadres who resided in the hamlets and acted as the instruments of the shadow government's policy received their orders and information directly from the high-ranking officials via illegal cadres who made routine visits to hamlets all over the countryside.

At the outset of the conflict in Vietnam, the propaganda used against the NVA and the VC was remarkably similar to that which had been used in Korea. This fact indicates that the psychological operations division within the U.S. military believed that these themes had been effective in combating the North Koreans just a few short years before. Both the early Chieu Hoi propaganda and the Korea War material appealed to the family and the homeland, relied on imagery which is based on cartoons and photos, gave instructions on how to treat POW's, centered on sex appeal, appealed to ancestor worship, and served as safe conduct passes.<sup>15</sup> In terms of differences between the two, in Korea, the propaganda focused heavily upon portraying the Soviet Union as an evil entity who simply used the Korean people to gain resources and land. Also, a unique Korean War message was that of the enslavement of those family members left on the home front by the corrupt puppets of Kim Il Sung.<sup>16</sup> In Vietnam, there was almost no mention of the larger political environment surrounding the conflict. Up to this point, scholars have not attributed any motive to this change. One can assume that the average Vietnamese villager lacked the political savvy to understand or even care about the larger world context

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<sup>14</sup>Dale Andrade, Ashes to Ashes: The Phoenix Program and The War in Vietnam (Lexington: Lexington Books, 1990), 86.

<sup>15</sup>JUSPAO, *National Catalog of Psyop Materials* JUSPAO Memorandum, 1969.

<sup>16</sup>Information taken from the collection of Mr. Charles Snyder.

outside his village. Essentially, the target audience was significantly isolated from the urban, media centers and lacked the communications necessary to exchange ideas with these areas. This situation was not as prevalent in Korea. Also, the Chieu Hoi propaganda, after about 1967-1968, converted to the more widely received message of money and other tangible rewards such as education and better farm land, whereas the Korean themes never ventured into this area.

Though almost entirely carried out by the Government of South Vietnam (GVN) for its duration, the Chieu Hoi Program was clearly a foreign-inspired endeavor. Begun in 1963, the program was primarily the result of the efforts of two foreigners, Sir Robert Thomas and Rufus Phillips.<sup>17</sup> Thomas, who headed the British Advisory Mission, sold the program to President Ngo Dinh Diem as a policy under which the insurgents would be allowed to return to the side of the GVN through non-violent means. Phillips, the head of the Rural Affairs Office for the U.S. Operations Mission (USOM), worked in conjunction with GVN Colonel Hoang Van Lac to sell the idea to Diem's brother. On April 17, 1963, Diem issued a proclamation which simply called upon the insurgents to stop fighting and rally under the flag of the GVN. The two main objectives of the program, as stated in the proclamation were to strengthen the Government of South Vietnam by increasing the solidarity of its citizens and to weaken the cause of the Viet Cong (VC) and the North Vietnamese Army (NVA) by inducing defections.<sup>18</sup> The general administrative responsibility and direction for the program fell under the jurisdiction of the Commissariat in the

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<sup>17</sup>J. A. Koch, *The Chieu Hoi Program in South Vietnam, 1963-1971* (A report prepared for the Advanced Research Projects Agency and sponsored by the Rand Corporation, January 1973), 20.

<sup>18</sup>Ginger R. Davis, *The Visible Persuaders: A Study of America's Use of Psychological Warfare Using the Chieu Hoi Program as a Case Study* (Ph.D. diss., Texas Tech University, 1998), 102.

President's office. On the U.S. side, direct responsibility for funding and advising lay in the hands of the Rural Affairs Office with Lt. Col. Bohannon taking the lead role. American input and assistance, according to the program's original design, was to be limited to conducting training programs and providing funds and materials to construct the Chieu Hoi Centers where the defectors would rally.<sup>19</sup> U.S. advisors in South Vietnam played a key role in that they urged the program to be given a higher priority than originally intended by Diem. The advisors initiated the Armed Propaganda Unit Program which relied on a base unit of a thirty-five man platoon of former Viet Cong who had rallied at the Chieu Hoi Centers.<sup>20</sup> These units, after receiving some minimal training in psychological warfare, were detached to operate in VC-controlled areas and spread the word among the people about the principles and aims of the GVN via the Chieu Hoi propaganda.<sup>21</sup>

Information about the Chieu Hoi program and its aims reached the target audience of potential ralliers by various channels such as leaflets dropped using specialized bombs from aircraft or distributed by hand, newspapers, radio broadcasts, aerial loudspeaker broadcasts, television, family influence, movies, and contact with ex-VC who had rallied (i.e. Armed

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<sup>19</sup>J. A. Koch, *The Chieu Hoi Program in South Vietnam, 1963-1971* (A report prepared for the Advanced Research Projects Agency and sponsored by the Rand Corporation, January 1973), 21-22.

<sup>20</sup>The Armed Propaganda Units served a similar purpose to the more famous Kit Carson Scouts.

<sup>21</sup>Edward J. Clarkson, *An Unknown Warrior in The Art and Science of Psychological Operations: Case Studies of Military Application* (Department of the Army, Volume 2, April 1976), 758-759.

Propaganda Teams).<sup>22</sup> According to Sir Robert Thomas, the target audience fell into two broad categories. The first was the general population. Under the heading of population, there were two sub-categories: the population under GVN control who had to be educated to accept the ralliers back into their society and the population in VC-controlled areas, specifically the families of insurgents. The second broad category was the insurgents themselves, both military and civilian.<sup>23</sup> Early on in the program, there was a heavy influence coming from the U.S. Rural Affairs Office in terms of assistance with the messages being disseminated. Much of the propaganda produced shortly after the program's inception was tainted by the approach of the American psywarrior in lending his knowledge learned from the experience of Korea. The basic approach was that if it worked against the Koreans, it was sure to work again in confronting yet another Southeast Asian foe. Working from the background of the so-called lessons learned from Korea, the American influence in the early propaganda manifested itself in the form of five major themes.<sup>24</sup> First, the *fear appeal* was utilized to convince the individual soldier and/or civilian that he faced almost certain death if he remained loyal to the Communists. Leaflets depicting the bodies of dead soldiers, women, and children were intended to get the person reading the message to associate the Communist cause with his own possible death and that of his family back home (see leaflet example on page 34). This type of propaganda was often dropped via aircraft

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<sup>22</sup>U.S., Department of the Army, Psychological Operations United in Vietnam (1971), II-16 - II-17.

<sup>23</sup>J. A. Koch, *The Chieu Hoi Program in South Vietnam, 1963-1971* (A report prepared for the Advanced Research Projects Agency and sponsored by the Rand Corporation, January 1973), 64-65.

<sup>24</sup>Robert W. Chandler, War of Ideas: The U.S. Propaganda Campaign in Vietnam (Colorado: Westview Press, 1981), 44-65..

immediately following B-52 strikes. Rallying to the Chieu Hoi Centers was portrayed as the only option which would guarantee safety. The second major theme could be categorized as a *hardship appeal*. The basic premise behind this message was the psychological exploitation of the various adversities and loneliness which the soldier faced in the jungle. The VC and the NVA were reminded of the long night marches and being constantly on the move, of insufficient and low-quality food, of poor sleeping and living conditions, and of shortages of medical services and supplies which led to disease. The soldiers were instructed on how to surrender to the Chieu Hoi Centers and, in return, receive top-rate treatment. They would be placed in an environment where they did not have to dwell on the fact that they might die in such wretched conditions, far away from their ancestors. The third major theme designed to induce surrender dealt with the *loss of faith in Communist victory*. In short, this message focused on placing emphasis on the losses suffered by the Communists on the battlefield in hopes that the soldiers would be convinced that the GVN would win the struggle. The personal testimonies from members of the Armed Propaganda Teams when they rallied at the centers were disseminated through leaflets and loudspeaker broadcasts to paint the picture of a GVN that was successful and victorious. The fourth major appeal was the *concern for family* (see leaflet example on page 35). Nostalgia and the desire to return home to loved ones were the major topics of this message. Another point of focus was the concern about the hardships endured by the soldiers' families in the absence of the head of the household. The Chieu Hoi program was shown as the path to which family unity could be restored. The fifth and final major theme was that of *disillusionment*. The disillusionment appeal was based on the idea that while an individual soldier might be able to bear the burden of the fear and hardship of war as long as he believed in the justness of Hanoi's aims,

he would be more prone to defect once he became skeptical. Accusations of lies, deceit, and betrayal on the part of the VC and NVA leaders were common aspects of this propaganda. Basically, the aim was to weaken the ties between the leadership and the followers by planting the seed of question in the minds of the latter. While undoubtedly a number of these messages “worked,” that is contributed to the surrender of VC, it is difficult to assess which messages were the most effective or how to judge the importance of other, outside factors.

In an effort to shed more light on the actual workings of the Chieu Hoi program in the field, it is necessary to take a look at the actual centers where the “hoi chanh”, or ralliers, sought refuge under the blanket of the GVN. One of the primary ambitions of the program was to establish stable and safe reception centers in every province so that the potential rallier could rally near his home.<sup>25</sup> The centers were protected by the members of the Armed Propaganda Units. By 1965, Chieu Hoi centers had been constructed in the majority of provinces. The types of structures and accommodations utilized varied greatly, from spacious, brick-and-mortar buildings with a mess hall, well-equipped living quarters, and an office to a simple, open-air shack. Based upon interviews with the hoi chanh, the officials and cadre who worked at the centers were fair and sympathetic in their approach to the former VC and NVA.<sup>26</sup> Viewed by the program coordinators as a viable means to rehabilitation, the returnees were often hired to fill many of the administrative jobs at the centers. Such things as first aid, vitamins, and anti-malaria drugs were

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<sup>25</sup>*Rural Reconstruction and Chieu Programs Discussed at Joint US-South Vietnam Meeting* (telegram from Saigon Embassy to State Department 5/1/65 Confidential. Saigon. 1965/3599. LBJ2), 3.

<sup>26</sup>JUSPAO, *Exploitation of VC Vulnerabilities* (JUSPAO Guidance Number 23, Box 3, Psyops Student Materials Collection, USASOC Archive, 14 October 1966), 25.



also provided to the hoi chanh.

One of the first things that a potential rallier would experience at the center was an interview conducted by interrogators from agencies such as the Special Branch of the National Police, the local Regional and Popular Forces, the Free World Forces, and the Army of the Republic of Vietnam. If it was determined over the course of the interrogation that the rallier had useful knowledge of weapons or supply caches, he could be borrowed by the military to assist in the location and destruction of the caches. In order for the military to be able to remove him from the center, however, the hoi chanh had to first “volunteer” to participate in this special duty. Such an action would not only prove his intent to rally, but also would enable him to receive certain tangible rewards in the program’s later years. In terms of responsibility at the centers, the Chieu Hoi Ministry officials were tasked with fingerprinting every rallier and registering the prints under the National Identity Registration Program. The National Police had the duty of certifying the curriculum vitae of each hoi chanh. Upon completion of the interview at the centers, the ralliers were sorted according to three broad levels. Based upon rank and education, the lower level hoi chanh were held at the province for political reorientation, vocational instruction, and even possible participation in tactical and intelligence operations. Ralliers from the province level who required more advanced training in terms of political and vocational features were sent to the regional centers. The elite hoi chanh, or those from the cadre level and all NVA members, were brought to the National Center in Saigon. Here, they underwent further political instruction and intelligence processing and participated in national-level psychological operations.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>27</sup>J. A. Koch, *The Chieu Hoi Program in South Vietnam, 1963-1971* (A report prepared for the Advanced Research Projects Agency and sponsored by the Rand Corporation, January 1973), 76-78.

While the major push of the Chieu Hoi program was to get the actual VC and/or NVA member to defect to one of the various province centers, one of the biggest concerns of the center was the political rehabilitation of the returnee. Most of the ralliers, as indicated in their interviews, were extremely apprehensive about what to expect.<sup>28</sup> Various methods were employed to allay the fears of those rallying. After being introduced to other ralliers at the center and to members of the Armed Propaganda Teams, the rallier then endured a 72-hour political indoctrination course designed to overcome the VC propaganda, to foster the beginnings of loyalty to the GVN by providing a more well rounded understanding of both its political and social aims, and to attain some sense of belonging in the South. For the first few years of the Chieu Hoi program, this approach was deemed as working quite well. However, based on interviews conducted after 1966, it became apparent that the indoctrination at the centers was lacking when compared to that undertaken by the Viet Cong. The GVN Chieu Hoi instructors came across as lacking genuine enthusiasm for the program and adopting a condescending and unfriendly posture toward the hoi chanh. The lectures were simply read from prepared texts, and they often seemed to disregard the educational level of the listeners.<sup>29</sup>

In the program's first three and a half months, Chieu Hoi officials reported that approximately 4,171 Viet Cong had defected to the centers. At the conclusion of the first year,

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<sup>28</sup> J. M. Carrier and C. A. H. Thomson, *Viet Cong Motivation and Morale: The Special Case of Chieu Hoi* (Prepared for the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense, International Security Affairs, and the Advanced Research Projects Agency, May 1966), 43-45.

<sup>29</sup>JUSPAO, *Exploitation of VC Vulnerabilities* (JUSPAO Guidance Number 23, Box 3, Psyops Student Materials Collection, USASOC Archive, 14 October 1966), 32.

the number of hoi chanh was reported to be 11,248.<sup>30</sup> While it is uncertain exactly how accurate these figures are as the officials were under close scrutiny by the GVN to examine the effectiveness of the program, they are in the mid-range of the figures speculated by scholars for this time period. In response to these seemingly high numbers, the U.S. advisors serving in Vietnam urged the GVN to assign a higher priority to carrying out and publicizing the rallier program. It was at this time that the idea of the Armed Propaganda Unit first came into being. The basic theory behind this innovation was that it would be significantly easier for former VC and NVA to infiltrate the enemy-held provinces to spread the word concerning the Chieu Hoi centers than it would for members of the Special Branch and Army of the Republic of Vietnam to do so. Also, the message would be more readily received if it came from an individual who had at one point been a comrade in arms.<sup>31</sup> One of the invaluable roles fulfilled by these units was their ability to spend only a few short days in each of the provinces and still manage to give speeches designed to explain the GVN's policies and unearth the grievances of the locals.

In the program's second year, there was a sudden down turn in the number of ralliers as just over five thousand soldiers, mostly VC, went to the centers.<sup>32</sup> This drastic change can be

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<sup>30</sup>Sam W. Morris, *35,000 Viet Cong Defectors: Chieu Hoi (Open Arms) Program Bringing in 2000 Returnees Every Month* (source unknown, File 11, Box 2, Unit 1, Pike Collection, Vietnam Archive, July 1966), 2.

<sup>31</sup>*Improving the Effectiveness of the Chieu Hoi Program: A Summary* (Simulmatics Corp. revised final report sponsored by Advanced Research Projects Agency 9/67. LBJ1), 86.

<sup>32</sup>Sam W. Morris, *35,000 Viet Cong Defectors: Chieu Hoi (Open Arms) Program Bringing in 2000 Returnees Every Month* (source unknown, File 11, Box 2, Unit 1, Pike Collection, Vietnam Archive, July 1966), 2.

attributed to three major reasons.<sup>33</sup> First of all, those most eager to defect did so in the first year. Second, because numerous members of the GVN had doubts as to the legitimacy and effectiveness of the program, it did not receive the same level of funding in its second year. Third, much of the attention that should have been devoted to ensuring that the program had some quality control measures to post accurate figures was diverted to the creation of the Armed Propaganda Unit Program. At the urging of the U.S. advisors in country, the program was given the due attention and funding was raised. This shift in importance manifested itself in the fact that between August and December of 1965, the number of hoi chanh was an incredible 11,124 which is close to the amount counted for the first year.<sup>34</sup> Please note, these numbers are suspect if for no other reason than the fact that multiple defections by the same individuals undoubtedly occurred. U.S. Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara, in response to the healthy rebound of the program, made recommendations to President Johnson in late 1965 for additional deployments to Vietnam and stressed that Chieu Hoi initiative required revitalization to encourage VC to defect and thus lessen enemy morale.<sup>35</sup> Following the dramatic recovery in 1965, the number of hoi chanh coming in per month began to drop again. But, this time it was due to very different reasons than before.

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<sup>33</sup>J. A. Koch, *The Chieu Hoi Program in South Vietnam, 1963-1971* (A report prepared for the Advanced Research Projects Agency and sponsored by the Rand Corporation, January 1973), 22-26.

<sup>34</sup>*Evidence of Lowered Viet Cong Morale and Propaganda Lines to Counter This* (CIA intelligence information table 12/4/65. TDCS. 314/06030-65. LBJ198), 3.

<sup>35</sup>Lyndon B. Johnson's Vietnam Papers: A Documentary Collection, *Letter from Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara to President Johnson on July 20, 1965*, (College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press, 1997), 220.

One of the major reasons for the drop in the number of defectors after 1965 was a general lack of response to the propaganda messages by the target audience. Those members of the VC and NVA who had rallied immediately after the program's initiation were most likely members of those organizations who were questioning their loyalty and the goals and ideals of the movement and searching for a way out all along. Once this "easy" audience was brought over to the GVN, the task became one of getting the message through to the more hard-core, and hopefully senior and upper level, soldiers. As seen from the many interviews conducted at the rally centers in various provinces, the Chieu Hoi planners slowly learned that the more dedicated VC and NVA were being offered no substantial tangible rewards for rallying to the GVN.<sup>36</sup> Appropriately, the initial messages concerning personal safety, concern for family, ancestor worship, etc., were well received by a group of individuals who were ready to defect soon anyway. Other messages such as those of the sex appeal leaflets acted to turn the reader off to entertaining the idea of the Chieu Hoi program because they were anchored in American values and not those of the Vietnamese (see leaflet example on page 36). The sex appeal propaganda which depicted bikini-clad, over endowed Vietnamese women stated that the soldier could find true happiness and the satisfactions of life which every man was entitled if he chose to rally to one of the program's centers. The individuals drafting the propaganda mistakenly believed that Vietnamese soldiers saw the world through the same masculine goggles as did American GI's. The U.S. advisors failed to understand that the Confucian ideals held by a majority of the Vietnamese directed them to be in harmony with their environment by adopting a middle path in all areas of conduct. The effect of

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<sup>36</sup>JUSPAO, *A Summary Report in 1967 Tet Returnee Survey* (JUSPAO Research Report, File 28, Vietnam Box 31, Vietnam Collection, USASOC Archive, 12 May 1967), 2.

the sex appeal leaflets was to turn off the Vietnamese by solidifying their views that the corrupt outside Western influence present in their country had to be defeated.<sup>37</sup> With the input of the VC defectors at the Chieu Hoi centers, the program coordinators discovered the error of their ways. Essentially, the propaganda themes which had been carried over from the Korean War were no longer effective in inducing the enemy to rally. Had the planners not heeded the information gained through the interviews of the hoi chanh, the program may have ended up being perceived as a failure. However, the Chieu Hoi program was to undergo a significant shift in its nature and stature by being assigned a higher priority level within the GVN, by receiving increased American support, and by enduring a paradigm shift in the basic approach to the task of inducing the target audience to rally.

Despite the general uneasiness which persisted within the GVN concerning the Chieu Hoi program and the relatively low numbers posted in 1964 and early 1966, the American support side of the house believed that the program could be molded into an operationally effective entity if it were afforded the due attention it deserved. Responding to McNamara's view on the program, the U.S. military brought in several high-caliber personnel to revitalize the failing effort. Under the direction of Ogden Williams, a group of individuals came together in mid-1966 to redefine the Chieu Hoi doctrine and turn the program around. Several of the changes that they were able to affect were as follows: the recruitment and fielding of an entire advisory staff in all major provinces, the establishment of a significantly higher budget level in the years upcoming, and the

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<sup>37</sup>Robert W. Chandler, War of Ideas: The U.S. Propaganda Campaign in Vietnam (Colorado: Westview Press, 1981), 16-22.

reorganization of the Chieu Hoi Ministry.<sup>38</sup> Despite the fact that the U.S. was now paying upwards of three-fourths the operating costs, the program was still a GVN venture. Under the reorganization put in place by Williams, the Secretariat in the Ministry of Information headed by Colonel Pham Anh received responsibility for Chieu Hoi. This was quite a jump in levels of importance within the GVN from the Commissariat in the President's office who had been given jurisdiction over the program at the time of its inception. In early 1966, a National Chieu Hoi Center was founded in Saigon for the purposes of receiving, interrogating, and training five hundred hoi chanh concurrently. On country-wide scale, the general quality of the rallying centers was vastly improved. Also, the amount of space available for the resettlement villages was expanded in anticipation of an escalation in the number of defectors.

In May 1967, U.S. support of the reviving GVN pacification program was put under COMUSMACV (i.e Commander U.S. Military Assistance Command Vietnam, General Westmoreland) with the formation of CORDS (i.e. Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support).<sup>39</sup> The Special Assistant to the President for the "other war" in South Vietnam, Robert Komer, was appointed as Deputy to COMUSMACV for Pacification. In short, the U.S. attempt at advising and supporting the revolutionary development in Vietnam was made more effective by unifying the military and civil aspects under a single management concept. Chieu Hoi support became the executive responsibility of a new, unique civil/military agency,

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<sup>38</sup>J. A. Koch, *The Chieu Hoi Program in South Vietnam, 1963-1971* (A report prepared for the Advanced Research Projects Agency and sponsored by the Rand Corporation, January 1973), 26-28.

<sup>39</sup> *Improving the Effectiveness of the Chieu Hoi Program: A Summary*, (Simulmatics Corp. revised final report sponsored by Advanced Research Projects Agency 9/67. LBJ1), 31.

CORDS. The responsibility for development and dissemination of psychological operations relating to Chieu Hoi was given to the combined team of the Joint U.S. Public Affairs Office and the Military Assistance Command Vietnam. Finance, logistics, and personnel support was taken care of by the U.S. Agency for International Development. The new CORDS Chieu Hoi division under Ogden Williams was given the task of handling the Chieu Hoi support effort. As the staff of Williams' new division quickly grew in the number of American personnel present, it still retained close ties with the GVN Ministry of Information in assisting in the development of the budget, advising on all phases of the program, and in preparing/executing the operations. Shortly after May 1967, the total cost invested in the processing, retraining, and resettling of a single hoi chanh increased from fourteen U.S. dollars to almost three hundred and fifty U.S. dollars. The new budget increase was broken down into two categories. The first included all funds designated for the purposes of salaries and allowances of the Chieu Hoi cadre, the Armed Propaganda Teams, and the political orientation teachers; for food, clothing, and allowances of the hoi chanh; for weapons, special missions, transportation, and per diem expenses for the hoi chanh in the field; for psychological operations, political orientation, and vocational training; expansion and improvement of Chieu Hoi centers; construction and improvement of Chieu Hoi hamlets; and survivor allowances for the relatives of hoi chanh and Armed Propaganda Team members killed in action. The second category contained funds utilized for roofing, cement, reinforcing bars, salaries of Americans and Third Country nationals acting as Chieu Hoi advisors, and any equipment which had to be purchased outside South Vietnam.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>40</sup>J. A. Koch, *The Chieu Hoi Program in South Vietnam, 1963-1971* (A report prepared for the Advanced Research Projects Agency and sponsored by the Rand Corporation, January 1973), 30-32.



The new CORDS entity had several aims which it intended to achieve in order to better the potential of the Chieu Hoi program. The first of these targets was the inept and ineffective performance of many of the Chieu Hoi service chiefs at the province level.<sup>41</sup> Williams often provided Komer with lists of those who should be removed, and some of these men were indeed removed as a result of Komer's interventions with the GVN at high levels. Because the Chieu Hoi chiefs were often appointed without any regard for the ability to run and maintain a professional and efficient operational environment, Williams, Komer, and the GVN resorted to Vietnamese solutions in getting rid of the incompetent chiefs. While the chiefs themselves could not understand being removed for simply not performing and even accused the GVN of corruptness for doing so, the GVN resorted to a type of musical chairs to deal with these men. Essentially, the chiefs were shifted around as newly trained ones were brought and given positions where their general lack of qualified skill would not impede the Chieu Hoi efforts.

The second major aim of CORDS was to develop an organized, sustained effort on a nationwide basis to find jobs for the hoi chanh. This had to be done if the credibility of the program was to be maintained in the eyes of the potential ralliers. Up until mid-1967, the failure on the part of Chieu Hoi to place returnees in jobs where they could earn a decent living was having an adverse effect on what the program's venture to obtain its stated objectives. Based upon interviews with numerous hoi chanh, it was eventually learned that many VC ready to rally were reluctant to do so because they were unsure as to how they would be able to support

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<sup>41</sup>Ibid., 33.

themselves and their families.<sup>42</sup> By April 1967, the regional directors and provincial representatives were directed by CORDS to establish an employment program for bringing hoi chanh in contact with prospective employers and generating interest on the part of the potential employers in the hoi chanh as prospective employees.

The third major undertaking by William's group was the enhancement of the ID card program which worked alongside the employment initiative.<sup>43</sup> Essentially, before the hoi chanh could obtain one of these ID cards making him eligible to be considered for employment, an extremely drawn-out security check had to be performed. The police of the village where the hoi chanh had been born needed to be contacted and give information concerning his background to the National Police. Also, the hoi chanh had to be checked against the black list of VC criminals kept in Saigon. Initially, this entire process took upwards of six months. However, CORDS shifted the purpose of the ID card from serving as proof of security clearance to simply a means of identification. This change reduced the time of issuance to less than two months (i.e. approximately the same amount of time that the hoi chanh were required to remain at the centers).<sup>44</sup>

In April 1967, the Chieu Hoi program experienced one of its most important innovations coming from the GVN side. Prime Minister Nguyen Cao Ky publicly announced a nationwide

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<sup>42</sup>JUSPAO, *A Summary Report in 1967 Tet Returnee Survey* (JUSPAO Research Report, File 28, Vietnam Box 31, Vietnam Collection, USASOC Archive, 12 May 1967), 3-4.

<sup>43</sup>J. M. Carrier, *A Profile of Viet Cong Returnees: July 1965 to June 1967* (Report sponsored by the Advanced Research Projects Agency, October 1968), 4-8.

<sup>44</sup>J. A. Koch, *The Chieu Hoi Program in South Vietnam, 1963-1971* (A report prepared for the Advanced Research Projects Agency and sponsored by the Rand Corporation, January 1973), 34.

policy aimed at national reconciliation. Basically, the proclamation provided that all hoi chanh who returned to the GVN would not only be given amnesty and guaranteed their political and civil rights as before under the earlier Chieu Hoi program, but would also be helped by the government to find careers comparable to their experience, ability, and loyalty.<sup>45</sup> President Thieu later reaffirmed this policy of national reconciliation in a Joint Communique with President Johnson issued July 20, 1968. In his reaffirmation, the President included the right to vote and be elected to all individuals who renounced their Communist ties and rallied whole-heartedly to the GVN.<sup>46</sup> Taking into consideration all of these changes made in 1967, the one with the biggest impact upon the performance of the Chieu Hoi program was the shift in the fundamental approach to propaganda which resulted from the concern expressed by the potential ralliers as to how they would support their families and earn a living following the political reeducation at the centers.

As 1967 drew to a close, there was evidence of a dramatic shift taking place within the Chieu Hoi program. Essentially, a movement away from use of traditional Korean War propaganda messages was taking place. The program coordinators did not completely phase out the themes of this previous war but began placing an emphasis on responding to the information gained from the interviews at the centers. Leaflets from the late 60's and early 70's still contain elements of the old approach such as safe conduct passes, appeals to family and homeland, and sex appeal. However, the majority of the new messages focused on inducing VC and NVA to

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<sup>45</sup>JUSPAO, *Campaign Plan for National Reconciliation Program (Doan Ket)* (JUSPAO Memorandum, File 3, Box 9, Unit 1, Pike Collection, Vietnam Archive, 1967), 1.

<sup>46</sup>*Ibid.*, 2.

rally through more practical and tangible enticements of money, better land, and better jobs.

In November 1968, the so-called Third Party Inducement Program was created.<sup>47</sup> It was an intense undertaking which sought to pay rewards to any Vietnamese citizen of hoi chanh who was instrumental in getting a VC or NVA to rally. Obviously, the higher ranking the defector was, the more cash the citizen would receive. In the fall of 1969, this program was terminated as it was deemed to have placed a considerable strain on Chieu Hoi funds without producing a substantial enough increase in the number of ralliers. The fact that this component of the new change within Chieu Hoi failed is not all that important. What is important is that it signifies the recognition on the part of the program officials of a problem with the current inducement approach and creation of a solution to that problem.

By 1968, the prospect of finding employment for hoi chanh in the private sector was significantly better than in years past. American construction companies were hiring the ralliers to work on building projects and in land reclamation programs in South Vietnam. These companies also began employing Vietnamese women as machine shovel operators, truck drivers, and general construction workers.<sup>48</sup> This sort of arrangement made it easier for the families of former VC to find a means of steady income following the completion of the Chieu Hoi centers' reeducation program. By 1970, the number of hoi chanh that were able to find jobs which provided a viable source of funds to support a family had risen to approximately twenty percent. Another avenue of

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<sup>47</sup>Leon Goure. *Inducements and Deterrents to Defection: An Analysis of the Motives of the RS Defectors* (Prepared for the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense, International Security Affairs, and the Advanced Research Projects Agency. August 1968), 53-55.

<sup>48</sup>J. A. Koch, *The Chieu Hoi Program in South Vietnam, 1963-1971* (A report prepared for the Advanced Research Projects Agency and sponsored by the Rand Corporation, January 1973), 85-88.

employment which was opened to the hoi chanh in early 1967 was the government's Rural Development Program. The total number going to this effort was considerably lower than other agencies, but they still rendered valuable services in the task of getting the villagers in the southern hamlets to advance their quality of life and view of the GVN through such changes as agriculture production and political reorientation.<sup>49</sup> Despite all of these advancements made within the realm of job finding, this overall portion of Chieu Hoi remained a weak link throughout the program's duration. A general lack of interest for Chieu Hoi on the part certain GVN officials coupled with the relative difficulty inherent with resettling the large number of hoi chanh that came in during 1967-1968 made for an ineffective re-employment system which hurt the program's standing.

Having discussed two components of the change within Chieu Hoi that were not necessarily yielding high success rates but still signaled a willingness to break with the current system, it now is crucial to focus on elements which appear to be extremely effective. The first of these was the Chieu Hoi Weapons Reward Program.<sup>50</sup> In short, this was a carefully structured program of rewards proffered to those who rallied and either turned in weapons or led Chieu Hoi units to hidden weapons caches. Leaflets and broadcasts instructed the VC and NVA to hide their arms before rallying and promised remuneration when they were retrieved later by GVN soldiers or members of the Armed Propaganda Teams (see leaflet example on page 37). A bonus was promised to defectors who revealed the location of VC arsenals. One problem which

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<sup>49</sup>*Chieu Hoi Program Revitalization* (telegram from USIA to Saigon Embassy 4/21/65 Confidential. USIA. 1965/533. LBJ66), 6-7.

<sup>50</sup>Robert W. Chandler, War of Ideas: The U.S. Propaganda Campaign in Vietnam (Colorado: Westview Press, 1981), 73-75.

developed early on in this program was the issue of allied units keeping the weapons of the VC who rallied to them as trophies and not dispensing the necessary receipt to the returnee to get his money. Credibility of the program remained intact as this type of action was quickly made punishable by severe penalties.<sup>51</sup> In September 1964, the program was initiated but fell by the wayside as GVN patience with Chieu Hoi grew thin in response to low rallier numbers. Once CORDS was created, significant attention was placed back on the weapons reward enterprise. In July 1967, a decree was passed which greatly raised the rates of rewards to increase the level of inducement and to keep up with inflation in South Vietnam.<sup>52</sup> Although it is extremely difficult to measure the exact degree of success of this program in terms of numbers of individuals who rallied specifically due to the propaganda advertising cash for weapons, this program has been viewed as providing a tremendous boost to the potency of Chieu Hoi in achieving its objectives.

The last visible reflection of the shift in the approach to elevating inducement numbers in Chieu Hoi was the actual leaflet propaganda being disseminated in Vietnam.<sup>53</sup> As previously stated, there was a movement away from using the traditional messages from the Korean War era. During Chieu Hoi's first few years, the majority of the returnees had been individuals who would not have been categorized as die-hard Viet Cong. They probably had doubts about being involved in the war and the motives of the side for which they fought. When news reached them

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<sup>51</sup>*Improvement of the Informational-Psychological Program in South Vietnam* (USIA paper and transmittal 6/5/67. Secret. LBJ100,100a), 7.

<sup>52</sup>J. A. Koch, *The Chieu Hoi Program in South Vietnam, 1963-1971* (A report prepared for the Advanced Research Projects Agency and sponsored by the Rand Corporation, January 1973), 71.

<sup>53</sup>JUSPAO, *National Catalog of Psyop Materials* JUSPAO Memorandum, 1969.

of an amnesty program being offered by the GVN, most jumped at the opportunity.<sup>54</sup> However, now that this portion of the target audience was gone, the messages on the leaflets had to be altered to entice members of the group that were more committed to the VC and NVA. Many of the hoi chanh had joined the Viet Cong in the first place because they were highly ambitious and did not want to remain peasants for the rest of their lives.<sup>55</sup> So, it became important to convey to this audience that they need not fear not being able to support themselves and their families nor being given the opportunity to rise to positions of responsibility and status once they rallied to the GVN.<sup>56</sup> In plain language, the new Chieu Hoi leaflets pledged the following: a daily stipend of money for food based on the number of family members, monthly pocket money, rewards for weapons brought in, two new suits, a large sum of money for resettlement in the south, and assistance in the construction of a house plus a six month rice ration if they choose to live in a Chieu Hoi hamlet. The new appeals based on tangible rewards for defection took many forms as the propaganda was created, but the basic messages stressed above were always present. Some of the older pieces from the program's early years such as the safe conduct pass were augmented to include elements of the new strategy (see leaflet example on page 38). The aforementioned changes that were made within the Chieu Hoi program during 1967 represented a significant

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<sup>54</sup>JUSPAO, *Exploitation of VC Vulnerabilities* (JUSPAO Guidance Number 23, Box 3, Psyops Student Materials Collection, USASOC Archive, 14 October 1966), 15-18.

<sup>55</sup>MEMORANDUM. DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE. CONFIDENTIAL. *Political Motivation of the Viet Cong: The Vietminh Regroupees* (Prepared by J. J. Zasloff. Issue date: [No issue date]. Date declassified: April 21, 1977. 192 page(s). CDROM Id: 1977100100155. Fiche#: 1977-288B), 116.

<sup>56</sup>JUSPAO, *A Summary Report in 1967 Tet Returnee Survey* (JUSPAO Research Report, File 28, Vietnam Box 31, Vietnam Collection, USASOC Archive, 12 May 1967), 5.

adaptation on the part of the officials in getting back on track to achieve their stated goals. In addition to focusing on these elements, it is also critical in judging the perception of Chieu Hoi's success to examine the responses of the VC and NVA.

There were three basic methods by which the VC and NVA sought to disrupt and shatter the credibility of the Chieu Hoi program. The first was the use of terror and assassinations. According to USMACV intelligence sources in early 1969, former VC who had rallied to the GVN under Chieu Hoi were selected as primary targets for assassination. Since 1963, the VC and NVA had lost in excess of 134,700 members to the program, and this policy toward the defectors was meant as a deterrent to those considering jumping ship that a lethal reprisal would be exacted on those who defected. In 1968, a total of 88 hoi chanh were assassinated during their processing phase at the centers. The Chieu Hoi centers themselves were also targeted for attack by VC terrorists and lone bombers. As of November 1969, twenty-nine centers had either experienced some sort of attack and recovered or been completely destroyed. On 07 November 1969, a failed attempt was launched at taking the life of the Minister of the Chieu Hoi program.<sup>57</sup> This type of threat coming from the VC was countered by the GVN to upping the presence and equipment of Armed Propaganda Teams and other paramilitary units in both the Chieu Hoi hamlets and the contested regions. The second method employed to counter the program was known as the False Rallier program.<sup>58</sup> False ralliers, or spies, were to infiltrate Chieu Hoi, gain

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<sup>57</sup>JUSPAO, *Viet Cong Documentation: VC Directive on Measures Against the Enemy Chieu Hoi Policy* (JUSPAO Special Memorandum, Section 6, Psyop Student Materials, Vietnam Collection, USASOC Archive, Nov. 1969), 8-11.

<sup>58</sup>*VC Efforts to Disrupt the Chieu Hoi Program* (APO San Francisco: Headquarters, United States Military Assistance Command, Vietnam, Office of the Assistant Chief of Staff, Intelligence, 22 DEC 1969), 2-4.



GVN credentials, and then either provide current intelligence back to the VC or penetrate the South Vietnamese Army and GVN agencies and serve as fifth column agents. The main objective was to get enough persons into the core of the GVN to aid in a decaying process which ideally would emanate from the inside outward. The VC were so intent upon infiltration that they held classes for training cadre on how to penetrate the Chieu Hoi program. The third method was the Reverse Chieu Hoi program.<sup>59</sup> The gist of this venture was to urge soldiers, GVN officials, and members of GVN-controlled hamlets and villages to forsake the government and join the VC cause. The VC's overall pitch was quite comparable to the GVN in that they promised to be liberal and forgive all those who joined them, regardless of their former position in the GVN structure. The amount of information regarding the number of defectors and the relative success of this program is almost none-existent. It seems quite apparent that the VC and NVA were extremely concerned about their losses. Having seen the lengths that the enemy was willing to go to in order to degrade the effectiveness of Chieu Hoi, one could assume that the program was making adequate strides at achieving success. The Viet Cong certainly seemed to believe that Chieu Hoi was a viable enough threat that it had to be countered by the creation of special operations specifically tailored to attain the goal of Chieu Hoi's destruction.

Following the shift in propaganda messages being disseminated and in the general approach to inducement, there was a significant increase in the number of ralliers. In 1969, the year's goal was set at 20,000. The month of May alone had approximately 12,383 VC defect to the Chieu Hoi centers. By the end of the year, the final revised total was 47,023 returnees. All regions encompassed by the Chieu Hoi's sphere of influence reported pronounced increases over

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<sup>59</sup>Ibid., 5.

years' past. In terms of the breakdown of the rallier figures, there were 28,405 Viet Cong soldiers, 12,648 political cadre, 386 NVA, and 5,970 members listed as "other."<sup>60</sup> In 1970, the total number of hoi chanh dropped slightly from the '69 figure to 32,565. The following year, the number of returnees dropped to just over 21,000.<sup>61</sup> The gradual decrease in figures from 1969 to 1971 was attributed to the fact that by the early 70's, the GVN had been able to exert complete dominance in all areas containing the soft-core and moderately committed VC. The hard-core VC which remained were never likely to rally no matter what appeals came from the GVN.

By stepping back and taking a broad picture view of the events during the Vietnam conflict, one will clearly see that the U.S. was unable to consummate the promise of defeating the Communist insurgency. But, to judge all efforts on the part of the U.S. and the GVN as being failures simply because Communism triumphed or because it is difficult to measure gains in psyops would be wrong. The perception of failure for programs like Chieu Hoi and the CIA's infamous Phoenix persists to this day. However, as this thesis showed, while Chieu Hoi did not defeat the VC effort, the program officials actively pursued their goals by responding to the flux in numbers of hoi chanh and to the attitudes of the target audience. This active pursuit of success, the willingness of Chieu Hoi planners to adapt their messages as conditions dictated, produced positive results in terms of the enemy response as explained earlier. As with any psychological operation, it is nearly impossible to simply base effectiveness upon numbers and body counts. Other factors, besides Chieu Hoi, undoubtedly contributed to the enemies' willingness to

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<sup>60</sup>J. A. Koch, *The Chieu Hoi Program in South Vietnam, 1963-1971* (A report prepared for the Advanced Research Projects Agency and sponsored by the Rand Corporation, January 1973), 46.

<sup>61</sup>*Ibid.*, 51-52.

surrender. While looking at numerical gains is an important aspect, it does not solely determine success. Because the enemy responded immediately and violently to certain messages such as the Weapons Reward Program, the safe conduct passes, and the written promises of tangible support from the GVN for resettlement and maintenance of a certain standard of living, the Chieu Hoi program can be at least credited with "limited success." Not only did American policy makers believe their specific changes in messages brought results, but the enemy did as well. Perhaps perception is reality.

Robert W. Chandler, War of Ideas: The U.S. Propaganda Campaign in Vietnam (Colorado: Westview Press, 1981), 50.

Robert W. Chandler, War of Ideas: The U.S. Propaganda Campaign in Vietnam (Colorado: Westview Press, 1981), 54.

Robert W. Chandler, War of Ideas: The U.S. Propaganda Campaign in Vietnam (Colorado: Westview Press, 1981), 22.

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