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From Foe to Friend

The Kit Carson Scout Program in the Vietnam War

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This article examines a generally unnoticed chapter of the Vietnam War: the use of former Vietcong combatants as scouts in the United States military forces during the war. The name of the program was the Kit Carson Scout Program. The article will deal with all the aspects of the program, including the training program, the process of stationing the scouts in the United States Army and Marines units, and the significance contribution to the war efforts.

Keywords: *Vietnam War; Kit Carson Scout Program; counterinsurgency*

One day in May 1966, a group of Vietcong fighters turned themselves over to a unit of the Marines near the city Da Nang, through the framework of the program known as Chieu Hoi (CHP).¹ Immediately after their desertion, the fighters' former companions spread rumors among the local population that one of the men of the group, Nu Van Bay, had been tortured and murdered by American soldiers. In reaction to this, the commander of the Marine unit requested the "murdered" deserter to go about the nearby villages personally to refute the rumors. Bay and two of his fellow deserters agreed to engage themselves in this mission, which met with great success. Three of the deserters, *Hoi Chanh* in Vietnamese, passed through the villages and informed the people of the good treatment that they had received at the hands of the Marines. A good indicator of the success of their mission was the subsequent rise in the number of Vietcong deserters in the area near Da Nang. Marine units began to profit from the Hoi Chanh as rank-and-file soldiers. This trial-run program was implemented beginning in August 1966. Six scout units were set up in different Marine platoons that operated around Da Nang, but until October 1966, these were exclusively local initiatives.

In October 1966, the Marine Command in Vietnam ordered the establishment of an official program for the employment of the Hoi Chanh as scouts in the Marine units in their entire operational area (the northern provinces of South Vietnam—Military Region I [MR-I]).² The program acquired the name Kit Carson, in honor of Christopher "Kit" Carson (1809–1868), a mythic figure of the American frontier.³

The success of the Marines in the war against the Vietcong, as explicated to the American Command in the *After Action Report* (AAR),⁴ caused General Westmoreland to expand the program.

This article examines a generally unnoticed chapter of the Vietnam War: the use of former Vietcong fighters as scouts in the United States military forces during the war. This article deals with all the aspects of the program, including the training program, the process of stationing the scouts in the United States Army and Marines units, and significance contribution to the war efforts.

On 29 April 1967, the Intelligence Section of the Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (MACV), published a procedural document that detailed the expansion of the Kit Carson Scout Program throughout all of the active American Army units.⁵ This document defined, in truth, all the important operational issues of the program, and in particular, the scouts' terms of service and wages.

With the formal beginning of the program, MACV defined the missions that were required of the Vietnamese scouts.⁶ First was leading American troops on search-and-destroy missions, since the American units took advantage of the great amount of knowledge bestowed to them by the scouts regarding all aspects of familiarity with the locations in question, locating the Vietcong hiding and storage places, as well as the requisite knowledge needed to identify hidden explosives, landmines, and booby traps. The scouts' second function was intelligence gathering. The third manifested itself within the framework of ongoing psychological battlefront within the villages.

The MACV's instructions were given as part of the process of the reorganization of the pacification program. During the month of May 1967, the Civil Operation and Revolutionary Development Support (CORDS) was established, the modus operandi for treatment of the Hoi Chanh was redefined,⁷ and the Phoenix program was put into operation. The Kit Carson Scout Program was under the responsibility of Chiu Hoi Division (CHD). The American Command gave orders for the employment for pay of, at minimum, one hundred scouts per division. By the end of 1968, fifteen hundred Vietnamese scouts were serving in the American Army. In the wake of what the Americans saw as the program's success, efforts were made to expand the Kit Carson Scout Program throughout 1969. The number of scouts allocated to each division now stood at two hundred. Independent brigades received one hundred. Likewise, roughly one hundred scouts were stationed in each of the regional commands for use by advisers as well as by the naval units that operated throughout South Vietnam.⁸ Additional expansion of the program came with the subsequent stationing of scouts in other units external to the American Army. In January 1969, scouts were stationed with the Australian Army, and in August, scouts began to operate in the framework of Thai Army units. Units from the South Korean Army received scouts in December 1970.

The gradual withdrawal of American Army units, especially combat units, led to the downsizing of the Kit Carson Scout Program. The majority of the scouts left the

Army, and only about four hundred continued to operate in the framework of the South Vietnamese Army. One only can guess what lot befell the scouts as a consequence of the conquest of South Vietnam by the North Vietnamese Army. In the period between August 1966 and March 1971, 369 scouts were killed and more than a thousand were wounded.

Training and Reeducation Programs

After the desertion of Vietcong fighters, the process of sifting and classifying those who expressed readiness to volunteer for the Kit Carson Scout Program began. The classifying process included only Vietcong personnel and not deserters who had belonged to the North Vietnamese Army. The sifting and classifying process included medical examinations as well as a check of the fighters' motivation and family background. There was a preference for those whose families lived in the defended areas, that is to say, under the system of the South Vietnamese government. This was decided so as to prevent the Vietcong from using the family members of the scout as hostages so as to pressure the scout into abandoning the program or serving as a double agent.

After the initial classifying process, the candidates remained at the CHP centers and passed a quasi-re-education program that was a continuation of the re-education program that the candidates had gone through in the first weeks after their desertion. Only after the conclusion of this second re-education program were they sent to the special training camps that had been set up in different areas. In a few cases, the training base was under the authority of the various divisions or independence brigades (such as the 173rd and the 199th) that operated in Vietnam.

The training process in these training camps lasted for a month. Similar to the basic training of the American soldier, the goal for the scout's basic training was that he also be taught to know how to operate within a group framework.⁹ Unlike the American recruit, the scout already knew how to operate under fire. During the training period, the candidates went through a number of courses that prepared them to operate in the platoon and company level. The essential aim of the training camp was to imbue within the future scout the American discipline and the basic knowledge of personal and platoon weapons used by the Americans. Great importance was attached to battlefield tactics, and the scouts executed individual, company, platoon, and division exercises.

The scout learned basic English concepts so that he would be able to communicate with the soldiers of the unit to which he had been attached. A basic course on military concepts on English was the most essential aspect of the scout's training—being basic to his and his new unit's survival during battle.

CHD determined that during the training program, the scouts would undergo quasi-re-education courses in which they would learn about the role and assistance

of the United States in South Vietnam's just struggle against the communist underground in the South (read: the Vietcong) and the communist aggression of North Vietnam.¹⁰ During the program, the demands of his duties also were made known to the scout.¹¹

As part of his preparation at the training base, the scout went through a series of courses on the legacy of battle. In these lessons, the valorous deeds of United States Army scouts were described, beginning with the inception of the program. A booklet prepared under the initiative of the 101st Airborne Division Command and immediately adopted by CHD deserves special mention.¹² The booklet described the life, times, and activity of the mythological frontier hero Kit Carson, in whose honor the program was named. According to American Army documents, whether they stemmed from MACV or CORDS-CHD, the aim of these lessons on the legacy of battle was to exhibit to the candidates their important historical role, imbue in them the needed motivation regarding their danger-filled responsibilities, and dispel any reservations concerning what might be waiting for them as a result of their enlistment alongside American soldiers. According to the opinion of those who designed and ran the program, these lessons were important because they constituted counterpropaganda needed to overcome the brainwashing that the scouts, former members of the Vietcong, had undergone as part of their service in their former communist units.¹³ However, it is possible to analyze and proffer an alternative interpretation for these lessons in the legacy of battle.

As mentioned, the program for the stationing of deserters into American Army units was named in honor of a hero who performed his deeds of valor in the vast regions of the American frontier. The booklet not only described Carson's virtues and heroic deeds, but rather, and in particular, it sought to extol the essence of American values as they had been crafted and enshrined during the national experience on the frontier. All of these values and ideals were manifest in the person of Kit Carson.¹⁴ Carson was portrayed as the ideal American patriot, ever ready to endanger himself for the good of the American nation; he desired no reward in return for such service. He was also an expert at hunting, trading, and of course, scouting, and thus, knew just how to deal with the natives, read the Indians.¹⁵ Here was a clear attempt to fashion these new scouts according to American values and standards.

The desire to glorify and emphasize the frontier ideal also dovetails well with the argument between those who backed "the iron glove"—the use of massive force—and those who supported "the velvety glove"—the implementation of pacification programs.

The frontier was a violent environment saturated with wars and blood. The final victory over the Indians was gained in the end by the physical elimination of their military fighting force and the tribal socioeconomic structure.

In the Marine units, the saying "There are always two ways to do something—the right way and the John Wayne way" was widespread. The meaning of this saying was that victory in the war would be gained only via the implementation of the

pacification programs (the right way) and not through military power according to the frontier model (the John Wayne way).

It is important to point out that the quasipacification missions of Kit Carson are described in the previously mentioned booklet issued by the 101st Airborne Division. These legendary actions take two forms and accurately reflect, at the same time, the situation in Vietnam. On one hand, Carson learned the language and customs of the Indians, and he knew how to win over their hearts. He succeeded in solving many problems that arose between the Indians and the white settlers by means of persuasion and negotiation and by respecting both the Indians' honor and the desired goals of both sides. On the other hand, he also learned how to fight against the Indian tribes; he made successful strikes against their sources of income (the bison herds) and conducted infiltration operations into their meeting places. The units of the 101st Division likewise carried out actions on both of these planes, with great emphasis, however, being placed on military activity.

The Process of Stationing the Scouts in the American Unit

Military orders issued the directive that the scout would be stationed in an American unit only after the completion of the training program and only after he had been re-examined and it had been determined that he indeed had changed his political orientation. Furthermore, after his transfer, it was incumbent on the various unit intelligence officers to follow up on the scout's condition and progress and to organize periodic exams for him to verify his loyalty.¹⁶

These directives never were updated during all the years of the program's operation because there were cases throughout this time in which scouts would desert back to the ranks of the Vietcong, or worse than this, it would come out that they had been spies all along. These ongoing discoveries led to an improvement in the training program and to the increase of its propaganda components.¹⁷

After the completion of the basic program, the scouts were sent to the various units. The transfer process was expedited, essentially, by way of a request from this or that unit to CHD, the modus operandi dictating that the scout would be integrated into a unit serving in an area that he knew quite well.¹⁸ From the various documents, we are able to see that with the scout's arrival to the unit, he would go through an additional, albeit shorter, training program that prepared him to operate within the modus operandi of his new unit through getting to know his fellow soldiers and the specific demands that this unit placed on all of them. Thus, for instance, the Fourth Infantry Division formulated a program in which personal and platoon-level weapons training was continued, as were English lessons and the orientation of the scouts to the particular duties and missions demanded of them in the different units of the division.¹⁹ It is worthwhile to note that the additional program was regarded as an extra polishing of the scouts' previously acquired abilities.

The 173rd Airborne Brigade also constructed a program intended to perfect the basic program. This program included courses directed toward the improvement of the scouts' English and weapons skills. Other courses, likewise, sought to improve the scouts' abilities to deal with special modes of operation undertaken by the various brigade units.²⁰ It appears, then, that the American Army made many intensive efforts to ensure that the integration of the scouts would be complete and that it would be undertaken in the best possible way. In addition to the general training program, various local initiatives were undertaken at the division and brigade level with the goal of having the scouts know how to carry out operations according to the particular instructions of each separate unit.

The American Army did not treat the activity of the scouts as a self-evident feature of their military potential. The Kit Carson Scouts provided a valued additional resource for company commanders engaged in combat operations in South Vietnam's battlefields. For this reason, the scouts were required to pass intensive training courses successfully, and as I will show in what follows, it was for this very same reason that they received enlistment terms identical to those received by the American soldiers with whom they served.

Two documents deal with the formation of the program and its ongoing development throughout the years of its operation. The first document initially was issued by MACV after the success of the trial program undertaken by the Marines Command (III Marine Amphibious Force [MAF]).²¹ MACV also issued the second document after a year and a half in which the program operated at the height of its strength and even had managed to survive the crisis of the Tet Offensive; the document's contents are dedicated to the renewal of the procedures and basis of the program. During the period extending from April 1967 to September 1968, the number of scouts had grown from fewer than two hundred to more than fifteen hundred.²²

These two documents detail everything required of the division or brigade commander so that he would be able to manage the program in the most efficient manner, and as a result, take the utmost advantage the scouts' talents within the framework of the various units. It is important to note that documents issued later than these always point out that the basis for the procedural renewal and update of the participants was these two primary documents outlined above.

With the beginning of the Vietnamization process²³ and the integration of the scouts with the units of Army of South Vietnam (Army of the Republic of Vietnam [ARVN]), the name of the program was changed to Luc Luong 66, the translation of which means Force 66. The number signifies both the year in which the program started and the actual number of the original participant scouts; the first group consisted of six scouts who launched the trial program. The name change was intended to grant the program a Vietnamese character, deriving from the general tendency of Vietnamization. The Americans, nevertheless, saw it "as an American program."²⁴ However, with the future integration of the scouts into the Army of South Vietnam

and the transfer of collective responsibility for the program to the government of South Vietnam, the name change was obligatory. It is revealing to note in this context that regarding other programs, for example, Chieu Hoi,²⁵ the original Vietnamese was preserved and appeared as well in the formal documents of MACV and CORDS to show that these programs were the result of the planning and initiative of the South Vietnamese government and not of the United States.²⁶

The process of absorbing the scouts into the units of the South Vietnamese Army was no simple affair, since the Vietnamese command treated the scouts as traitors twice over; they had betrayed the Vietnamese nation first when they joined the Vietcong, and then they doubled their treachery when they later betrayed their comrades-at-arms and joined the United States Army.²⁷ With the beginnings of Vietnamization and the departure of American combat units from South Vietnam, the number of scouts contracted considerably.

The Scouts' Terms of Service in the Framework of the American Army

The primary characteristic of the program was that the scouts were not drafted but rather were hired by the United States Army in Vietnam. Their enlistment was on a volunteer basis and not out of compulsion to serve as a way of atoning for their former service with the Vietcong. Even the American Army documents speak of hiring the scouts and not drafting them. Accordingly, a great effort was expended to bring about a permanent improvement in the scouts' terms of service in the frameworks within which they operated.²⁸ One can find the guidelines for the employment of Kit Carson Scout (KCS), in explicit fashion, in the following order: "Scouts should be given the same treatment as other members of the Brigade in their area."²⁹ While it is true that the source of this particular directive is a document issuing from the 173rd Airborne Brigade Command, one can find this directive or order, in one form or another, in all of the documents that deal with the employment of the scouts.

During the basic-training program, the scouts went through an enlistment process that included comprehensive medical examinations and acquisition of American uniforms, housing, and sleep and hygienic aids. All of this equipment, in its entirety, was acquired with American funding. The scouts received housing together with the platoon or company in which they had enlisted. From this moment on, the scouts were considered to be an organic part of the American platoon in all things relevant to its existence: training programs, operational activities, meals, and sleep shifts. The scout was, at this point, an American soldier in every meaning of the word.

The base salary of the scouts was higher than that of the South Vietnamese Army soldier. To this base salary was an added grant allocated in relation to battlefield successes as well as grants on occasion of holidays and other events. It has become

clear, from a study conducted by the United States Army's Advanced Research Projects Agency, that the overall discontent and lack of motivation and fighting spirit among the soldiers of the South Vietnamese Army were primarily the result of relatively miserable terms of service. The character of the war, and of course, the character of the modern Army obligated the South Vietnamese Command to send its units into the battle zones in which they were needed most. In the majority of the cases, this could be translated simply as complete separation from family for a long period of time. The trends occurred essentially among the Special Forces, Navy, and Air Force units. Similarly, the low salary the same soldier was receiving did not suffice to support his family.³⁰ The important point, however, is that according to what is described in the documents, the Vietnamese scout was earning the same terms of service as the American combat soldier. Indeed, the general trend was to employ the scouts within areas they knew intimately well. Previously, before their desertion, the scout candidates had fought for the Vietcong in areas close to their homes and families. The Vietnamese scouts, however, were forced to be far away from their family members per the necessities and continual restationing that constantly were obtained in the units with which they served. The American Command recognized the importance of the traditional bond between the scout and his family; the solution to this problem was found by flying the scout back to his family during his formal leave periods, which were paid for by the United States Army and expedited by either Air America airline company or by some other mode of air transportation operated by the United States Army.³¹

This difference in the reality of service between the American Army and ARVN units reveals, perhaps more than anything else, the great differences in the terms of service between the scout and his corresponding number in the South Vietnamese Army. It should be mentioned that the American soldiers also were flown about at the United States Army's expense during their leaves, and thus, it is indeed possible to claim that the Vietnamese scout enjoyed the same benefits as the American soldier.

With their placement within the American unit, we find no small number of memoranda and pieces of correspondence originating from within the various command ranks that deal with the scouts' terms of service within the Kit Carson Scout Program. One can find additional proof that the scout received benefits identical to those of his American counterpart in those directives that speak of medical treatment for which the scout was eligible. It is, of course, explicitly mentioned in the memoranda that each scout was eligible for medical treatment (which also included regular examinations and dental checkups).

The more significant indication of equal treatment is manifest in the fact that when the scout was injured in battle, he earned the right to be evacuated to an American and not a Vietnamese medical installation. The documents mention, in a self-evident manner, that when a scout was injured, he would be evacuated with all possible speed, and if the situation necessitated it, with the aid of a helicopter.³² The documents explicitly state that the scout would be evacuated to American installations. There is no doubt that American medical treatment was inestimably more efficient

and progressive than the Vietnamese medical installations. One simply cannot underestimate the importance of this piece of data. The American soldier in Vietnam received the best medical treatment in the history of warfare (up to the time of the Vietnam War).³³

The Chieu Hoi Program administrator, Eugene Bable, claims that since the program was the direct result of American planning and implementation, the South Vietnamese Army and government had no responsibility for or involvement in the whole affair. According to Bable, integration of the scouts into units external to the American Army, and in particular, into units of the South Vietnamese Army was not a preferable option so long as they had yet to raise their standards to that of the average American Army unit. At this stage of the program (the last quarter of 1969), the American founders of the program claimed that the South Vietnamese government and the South Vietnamese Army Command had yet to acknowledge the importance of the program and the outstanding advantages that it was possible to produce from the organized use of the scouts, former Vietcong members, for the annihilation of the guerrilla base network in South Vietnam.

Despite the fact that Babel claimed that it was of utmost necessity to bring the South Vietnamese Army up to the accepted standards of the American Army units, there were those in the Chieu Hoi department who claimed that it was already urgent to carry out plans for the trial integration of the scouts into the elite units of ARVN.³⁴ It is plausible to assume that desire to expedite this trial program was part of the United States' Vietnamization policy.

One also can see the intention to equalize the scouts' terms of service with those of United States Army soldiers in the demands and obligations that the American Command placed on these same scouts. Despite the fact that the scouts were employed in exchange for a wage, it was the norm to put them into operations every hour of the day, seven days a week. Strict military discipline also was demanded of them. In the various documents, one can find scouts' discharge letters, issued because of discipline problems and deficient performance levels. Ironically, it was not possible to bring scouts to military courts as a result of disciplinary problems—one issue, indeed, regarding which their service was quite dissimilar from that of the American Army soldier. As a result, the American Command abolished scouts' employment within the framework of the American Army unit.

The Scouts Operations within the Framework of the United States Army

Babel best defined the importance of the scouts' operations:

The KCS act primarily as scouts/guides and have demonstrated an outstanding proficiency in avoiding enemy ambushes, mines, and booby traps while leading friendly forces.³⁵

A United States Army conference on the topic of the use of the scouts evinced a similar approach to that of CHD.

The scout that knows where the enemy is and how he is likely to react would save numerous U.S. lives . . . Proper use of the scout can mean the difference between success and failure. Through efficient handling the scouts will improve some of our techniques, thereby bettering our results.³⁶

In sum, the conference raised the following rhetorical question:

Is he [the scout] just an extra rifle or is he a second set of eyes and ears for the unit leaders?³⁷

The scouts' primary role, as defined by the founders and operators of the program, was to lead Army units at the platoon and battalion level on search-and-destroy missions, or as they later were termed, clear-and-hold missions. On missions like these, the scouts attempted to steer the troops clear of ambushes and booby traps. An additional aim was to lead offensive missions, that is, to lead the unit to the hiding places of the guerrilla fighters. With the inception of the Phoenix program, the scouts led the active units to the homes of the Vietcong Infrastructure (VCI).³⁸

To understand the scouts' importance within the context of their activity in the American Army units, we first must understand the American tactics in Vietnam.³⁹ These tactics earned the name Search and Destroy Operations.⁴⁰ The essence of these missions was to search, find, and destroy the enemy with all the means available to the fighting force in question: platoon-level weapons, artillery, tanks, gunships, and any and all assistance from the air.⁴¹ This was, then, an offensive tactic, but the problem lay in locating the guerilla forces. The latter issue was the scouts' primary if not most important mission, since they were intimately familiar with their former comrades' tactics and knew how to find their bases within the thickness of the jungle.

From CORDS-CHD documents, we are able to assemble an almost complete picture of the Scouts' activities in the years from 1969 to 1970. Even though 1969 saw the beginnings of Vietnamization, an extraordinary number of American forces were still on the ground in Vietnam and operating at full strength.⁴² The units that bore most of the combat burden were evacuated from Vietnam only in 1971. The documents provide us with a month-by-month statistical picture of the scouts' activities, the number of scouts per unit, the number of fatalities, and more importantly (according to the documents), the number of fatalities and the amount of damage that they had caused among the enemy.⁴³ There is no intention of going through every month's report in detail, but rather, only a wish to highlight the central tendencies in these documents. Thus, the attempt will be made to show whether or not the aims of the program as defined by its founders in 1966 actually came to practical fruition in the scouts' operations during their service.

The statistical reports also contain a description of the scouts' activities in every one of the units (at the brigade and division level). These descriptions deal with the scouts' activities in the field, and as a result, it can be possible to compare the results of the scouts' actions with the missions placed on them by MACV.

All of the missions that were detailed in the beginning of this article are described as well in the monthly reports. The scouts led the American platoons and battalions into attacks against Vietcong North Vietnamese Army (NVA) units. The scouts took advantage of their ties with the local population, and as a result, were able to supply essential intelligence information. This information was transferred for appraisal to the higher ranks of command; however, it also was used to the immediate advantage of the unit on the ground for the simultaneous execution of local military operations. The intelligence information that revealed future transportation and transit routes of Vietcong and NVA units was translated for the sake of artillery bombardments and aerial attacks, these being operations that did not necessitate sending American soldiers into the area itself. The scouts also assisted in the translation of documents captured during this or that operation, with the intelligence information produced from them often being used on the spot to the units' immediate advantage.

The scouts' activities often concentrated on preventing their units from falling into ambushes, or in contrast, on organizing United States forces' ambushes on the forward transit routes if some route of the enemy traffic had been identified by the unit. During the actual time that the scout physically was leading the forces, his central importance lies in the discovery of mines, hidden explosive charges, and booby traps. These discoveries saved many American lives, and in the reports, much appreciation is expressed for this type of activity. In specific instances, several scouts worked together in the villages in an independent manner and brought about the capture of political and military cadres of varying levels of command and importance.

The most worthwhile example to point out is the establishment of an independent scout force by the Twenty-Fifth Infantry Division. During a six-month period (October 1967 to March 1968), these scouts helped capture more than six hundred VCI.⁴⁴ Scout operations within different operational contexts of the Twenty-Fifth Infantry Division also led to the uncovering of scores of cave hideouts.

In the Fourth Infantry Division, the scouts taught Vietcong fighting tactics to the American soldiers, as well as how to identify and avoid mines and booby traps. In many cases, there appear in the reports detailed descriptions of the scouts' disciplined and valiant behavior in the heat of battle. The descriptive formula is almost consistent throughout; an American force stumbles into an ambush, and the personal action of the scout manages to save his American friends from certain death. Usually in such engagements, the scout is described as having received mortal wounds in exchange for his bravery, for which he earned various medals. In other cases, when the scout managed to stay alive, he was awarded additional monetary grants. Likewise, in the field of psychological warfare, the scouts came to the fore (according to the reports) in bringing a great many benefits to their comrades in arms. Many

Vietcong fighters deserted within the framework of CHP as a result of the concerted efforts of Kit Carson Scouts in the villages.

An additional phenomenon that becomes apparent by reading the reports is the problems that arose throughout the implementation of the program. While generally it is true that procedures and directives formulated by MACV were fulfilled, there were at times anomalous deviations, which as a rule were then fixed during the following month. The primary problem was the scout's monthly payment; however, that problem usually was fixed easily. It appears that the scouts did indeed receive the terms of service according to the format established by the founders of the program. Similarly, the scouts received various additional monetary grants according to which different types of medals they had merited as a result of battlefield performance. Likewise, it is clear that the families of the slain scouts received the monetary grants and payments that they had coming to them. From reading the monthly reports, it is also possible to understand why each unit conducted additional training programs. One of the central complaints was that scouts possessed extraordinarily poor English language skills, which kept them from carrying out even the most minimal essentials of communication between themselves and the commanders of the units. It also became quite clear to the various units that the scouts transferred to their ranks were in need of additional training in American weapons (primarily in platoon-level weapons such as machine guns, grenade launchers, and mortars) as well as in the use of other helpful equipment such as night-vision equipment.

A similar picture arises from reading those documents dealing with the activities of the Marine Combined Action Program/Platoon (CAP) units.⁴⁵ It is possible to construct a nearly complete picture of these activities from October 1969 to April 1971 (with the exception of the month of December 1969). Likewise, within the framework of the CAP, the scouts also were leading reconnaissance missions, assisting in the capture of VCI, and discovering hiding places, mines, hiding caves, stockpiles of weapons, ammunition, food, and medical equipment. The scouts similarly were integrated into the psychological-warfare activities waged by CAP, in which they contributed essential forms of military assistance to the Marine units operating in the villages. According to the depictions left to us by the documentary evidence, it was the scouts themselves who brought the heart of the propaganda war program to the Vietnamese villages.

Summary

Within the microcosm of the Kit Carson Scout Program, one can view, albeit indirectly, the argument between CORDS and MACV regarding the formation of overall strategy that persisted throughout much of the Vietnam War: Should preference be given to that complex of activities surrounding the pacification program, as CORDS had requested, or should conventional military activity be the armed forces' primary preoccupation?

Of all the programs operated by the United States during the Vietnam War, the Kit Carson Scout Program was the only one that enjoyed the general agreement of both CORDS and MACV, even if there were a few reservations here and there. While the program did succeed in integrating elements of unconventional warfare, its primary function was as a support mechanism for the Army units within the context of conventional warfare as understood in its tactical character, that is, search-and-destroy missions. One sees that from its inception, the program was intended as an effective tactical answer to the combat tactics of the Vietcong and that gradually, other spheres of activity were integrated into its combat repertoire, the latter being primarily active participation in the pacification and psychological-warfare programs. Those units that operated within the framework of the Phoenix program also received scouts within their ranks. The overall importance of the scouts who operated amid the American Army units is nowhere in doubt.

In many documents, in fact (including the monthly reports), there were requests to increase the number of active scouts. It does not matter if these requests were part of the ulterior motive of raising the body count or because their activity served to save the lives of a great many American soldiers. MACV enlarged the training programs with the goal of preparing as many Hoi Chanh as possible to become scouts so that these requests of the combat units could be met.

While it is true that MACV acknowledged the importance of the program, the natural and logical implications seem not to have occurred to those in charge. Because of the demand for more battle-ready scouts at the beginning of the program, a subsequent request was issued for the expansion of CHP, with the particular goal of enlarging the number of deserters from the midst of the North Vietnamese Army units. The Army of North Vietnam bore the yoke of combat, particularly in MR-I but after the failure of the Tet Offensive in MR-II as well. Yet, the number of deserters from the North Vietnamese Army was minimal relative to the size of their presence and activities in the South. Aside from this, in cases in which the scouts were put into operation, their main mission was to lead forces into the battlefield, an important role in its own right, yet there was no corresponding practical attempt to increase their activity in the sphere of the pacification program or in the field of psychological warfare. MACV was satisfied with the situation as it was, and despite the fact that it recognized the importance of the program, it decided to go no further regarding any major innovations. Thus, the role of the scouts remained essentially the same—that is, the domain of conventional warfare operations.

Notes

1. The Chieu Hoi program (from this point on labeled CHP) was designed to call on the Vietcong fighters to desert from the ranks of their organization and return to the bosom of the Vietnamese nation. The program promised a general amnesty as well as monetary inducements, family reunion, a plot of land or professional job training, and assistance in finding gainful employment.

2. It is important to point out that Marine units in Vietnam were engaged only in the region MR-I.
3. For a short biography of Carson, see Philip H. Stevens, *Search Out the Land—A History of an American Military Scout* (McGill: Queen's University Press, 1969), 47–66.
4. See, for instance, AAR, which surveys the activity of Second Battalion First Marines Regiment, during the last third of September 1966. The report highlights the contribution of the scouts in locating Vietcong hiding places in those villages entered by the Battalion's units. The scouts assisted in the visual identification of suspects, and as a result, twelve Vietcong soldiers were captured. Similarly, cave hide-outs and other places used for the warehousing of supplies also were uncovered with the aid of the scouts. Major John Ozaki to Lt. Col. Pat K. Elliot, subject: AAR on the Use of Returnees as Guides/Scouts (no date), MR-I Files, Records of the United States Forces in Southeast Asia, 1950–1975 (RG 472), National Archives, College Park, MD (hereafter: RG 472). Ozaki was an intelligence officer (G-2), and management of psychological warfare of the III Marine Amphibious Force (MAF) was his responsibility. Elliot was the Battalion's intelligence officer. This AAR also was sent to intelligence and operations officers (G-5) of the III MAF as well as to the intelligence officer of MR-I.
5. COMUSMACV, MACJ264, subject: Chieu Hoi Returnees in Support of Counter-Insurgency Operations (4/29/67) MACV Files (RG 472).
6. The Kit Carson Scout Program, 1966–1968, prepared by CHD MACCORDS (1/18/69), CHD Files RG 472, 2-3. See also MACV Directive no. 381-5, subject: Use of Chieu Hoi Returnees in Support of Counterinsurgency Operations (2/17/68), MACV files RG 472, 3.
7. This is the Vietnamese expression for the Vietcong men who became deserters in the framework of the Chieu Hoi program.
8. American naval units operated on a number of fronts throughout the Vietnam War. The first front was the attempt to seal off hermetically the routes for the flow of men and military hardware from the North to the South by way of the sea (Operation Market Time). A second front was associated with the placement of infantry forces on boats along the length of the rivers of South Vietnam, and likewise, in the Mekong Delta as part of search-and-destroy operations (Operation Game Warden). In addition to this, battleships of the Seventh Fleet carried out shore bombardment of enemy targets and provided artillery support, and the Fleet's air wing carried out thousands of bombing missions in both North and South Vietnam. For the first two missions, outlined above, the assistance of Vietnamese scouts was sought—former Vietcong members who were intimately familiar with the waterway smuggling routes and the hiding locations of the Vietcong units along the length of the rivers. Regarding the function of the scouts in the naval operations, see, for instance, Thomas J. Culter, *Brown Water, Black Berets—Coastal and Riverine Warfare in Vietnam* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1988), 315, 321. On Operation Market Time, see Spencer C. Tucker, ed., *The Encyclopedia of the Vietnam War—A Political Social and Military History* (Oxford: ABC-CLIO, 1998), 249–50.
9. Regarding the basic goals of the American basic training, see James R. Ebert, *A Life in a Year: The American Infantryman in Vietnam, 1965–1972* (Novato, CA: Presidio Press, 1993), 26.
10. CORDS IV Corps Directive no. 19-69, subject: Kit Carson Scout Program (2/6/69) CORDS-CHD, MR-IV Files, RG 472, 4.
11. For the details of the program, see The 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile) Kit Carson Scout Training Program, 4-69 (7/30/69), 20–30.
12. HQ 101st Airborne Division (Airmobile), The Story of Kit Carson (no date), CORDS-CHD Files RG 472.
13. The First Cavalry Division (Airmobile) Kit Carson Scout Training Program, 4-69 (7/30/69), 13–16.
14. For the creation of the mythology surrounding the personality of Kit Carson, see Richard Slotkin, *The Fatal Environment—The Myth of the Frontier in the Age of Industrialism 1800–1890* (New York, 1985), 200-207.
15. HQ 101st Airborne Division (Airmobile), The Story of Kit Carson (no date), CORDS-CHD Files RG 472.

16. HQ US Army Advisory Group Directive no. 381-5, Use of Chieu Hoi Returnees in Support of Counterinsurgency Operations (2/17/68) MR-IV Files RG 472.

17. Jack Shulimson, *U.S. Marines in Vietnam—The Defining Year, 1968* (Washington, DC: History and Museums Division, Headquarters, U.S. Marine Corps, 1997), 610.

18. The American tendency was the result of the British experience in Malaysia in which it became clear that the deserter operated best in those areas intimately familiar to him. See MACV Directive no. 525-6, subject: Combat Operations—Kit Carson Scout Program (9/23/68) MACCORDS CHD Files RG 472, 2.

19. David R. Gray, Chieu Hoi Advisor to the District Chieu Hoi Chiefs in Binh Dinh (1/14/69) MR-II Files RG 472. The primary mission of the Fourth Infantry Division was to block the Cambodian border so as to interdict incoming units of the Army of North Vietnam. The primary operations area was the central highlands of MR-II. The character of a KCS' duties in the framework of divisional missions obligated him to have an expert knowledge of the area's physical features, transportation routes, and hiding and gathering places. See Jeffery J. Clarke, *Advice and Support: The Final Years, 1965–1973* (Washington, DC: Center of Military History, U.S. Army, 1988), 393–97.

20. HQ 173rd Airborne Brigade (Separate), subject: Concept of Employment of Kit Carson Scouts (2/29/68). See also Memorandum for the record from LTC Joe F. Stewart; said memorandum is located in CHD files: KCS Project Officer, subject: KCS Field Trip to II Corps (4/29/69) CORDS CHD Files RG 472, 1–2.

21. MACV HQ MACJ264, subject: Use of Chieu Hoi Returnees in Support of Counterinsurgency Operations (4/29/67), MACCORDS CHD Files RG 472.

22. HQ MACV Directive no. 525-6, subject: Combat Operations—Kit Carson Scout Program (9/23/68) MACCORDS CHD Files RG 472.

23. The Vietnamization was the gradual transfer of the administration of the war effort to the South Vietnamese Army. The Vietnamization began in the end of the Johnson administration and was the major tendency in the Nixon administration.

24. Eugene P. Bable, CHD Memorandum for Record, subject: Integration of KCS into GVN (9/29/69) MACCORDS—CHD Files RG 472 (the emphasis is in the original).

25. In many cases, American documents were used as a basis for the Vietnamese translation of the Phoenix program: Phung Hoang. This expression represents a mythological animal in Vietnamese culture that was similar to the phoenix of Western tradition.

26. The discussions surrounding the name change began at CORDS already in July of 1967. Colby, as the general director of CORDS, tried to find a name of a mythological Vietnamese hero that could be used instead of the name Kit Carson—the mythological hero of the American frontier. See, for instance: Memorandum from Colby to AC of S Jacobsen (6/23/69) MACCORDS Files RG 472. After many discussions, it was decided in August 1969 to use the name Luc Luong 66. It is difficult to explain the reasons for these in-depth discussions and ongoing attempts to find a suitable name for the program amid the top brass in CORDS deliberations, which occupied their time for two whole months. The most plausible explanation is their desire to bequeath a Vietnamese character to the program and to remove all responsibility for it from the United States Army.

27. See, for instance, Stuart A. Herrington, *Stalking the Viet Cong* (Novato, CA: Presidio, 1993), 17–18; Tom Mangold and John Penycate, *The Tunnels of Cu Chi* (New York: Berkley Books, 1986), 197. It is important to point out that it was also possible to find this viewpoint among American Army officers; see Samuel Zaffiri, *Hamburger Hill—May 11–20, 1969* (Novato, CA: Presidio, 2000), 78.

28. See, for instance, the memorandum for MACV's renewal of administrative procedure from the date 9/30/68, MACV HQ MACJ12, subject: Change Number 3 Personal policy Manual for US Forces in Vietnam. MAC Files RG 472.

29. HQ 173rd Airborne Brigade (Separate), subject: Concept of Employment of Kit Carson Scouts (2/29/68).

30. Advanced Research Projects Agency, *Preliminary Distribution of ARVN Living Standards Study* (11/22/69); the study can be found in CORDS files.

31. CORDS Notice no. 56, 39–69, subject: Kit Carson Scouts Travel on Air America (5/15/69). MR 2 Files RG 472.

32. This appears in an MACV memorandum dated to 2/13/69 (the memo is located in the III MAF files). The memo was, in reality, an update of administrative procedures.

33. The death rate of the injured in Vietnam declined to 19 percent. In the Second World War, the death rate for the injured stood at more than 29 percent, and in Korea, it stood at more than 26 percent.

34. LTC Joe F. Stewart, KCS Coordinator, CHD, subject: KCS request from ARVN Ranger Command (9/25/69), MACCORDS CHD Files RG 472.

35. Memorandum from Eugene P. Bable, CHD, subject: Proposed Agenda Items for Central Pacification Development Council—Integration of KCS into GVN (9/15/69) MACCORDS—CHD Files RG 472, 1.

36. MACV, Kit Carson Scout Conference (5/5/70) MACV Files RG 472, 2.

37. *Ibid.*

38. Dale Andrade, *Ashes to Ashes—The Phoenix Program and the Vietnam War* (Lexington, MA: Lexington Books, 1990), 109.

39. In this context, no attempt will be made to estimate whether American tactics actually succeeded or failed during the Vietnam War.

40. On becoming Commander of United States Forces in Vietnam in June 1964, General Westmoreland defined three missions designed to return order and security throughout all the areas of South Vietnam. The first was called “clearing.” It involved the destruction or expulsion of the enemy forces so that the civilian agencies would be able to begin to function among the village population. The second mission was labeled “securing.” It dealt with the effective maintenance of the area that had been cleared through continual scouting missions sent out into the surrounding area from small military encampments, known as fire bases. The third mission involved the search-and-destroy operations. See William Westmoreland, *A Soldier Report* (in Hebrew, *Hayal Medaveah*), trans. Moshe Bremer (Tel Aviv: Maarachot, 1979), 74–75.

41. Marilyn B. Young, *The Vietnam Wars, 1945–1990* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1991), 162–63; Spencer C. Tucker, *Vietnam* (Lexington, KY: The University Press of Kentucky, 1999), 128–31.

42. At the end of 1969, there were 475,200 American soldiers in Vietnam, compared to 536,100 soldiers at the end of 1968.

43. MACCORDS—CHD subject: Monthly Report—Kit Carson Scout Program, CORDS CHD Files RG; these documents were meant for the administrators of CORDS in every one of the four Commands: the Marine Command (III MAF), the Army Command (USARV), and the American Aid Headquarters (MACV).

44. We are not able to verify this piece of information independently, but this datum appears in a report of March 1969 without any accompanying critique, and thus, we can assume that it was considered by the founders of the program to be trustworthy.

45. One can find information on KCS’ activities within the domain of CAP on the following Internet site: www.kcster.com/test/CAP/documents.htm. CAP was established within the context of Marine activities in MR-I in August 1965. The commander of the Marine forces in South Vietnam, General Welt, understood that a complete purification of those areas under his command could be expedited only with the foundation of a system of cooperation and trust between his units and the local village population.

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