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Open Arms—page 1

SAIGON—Filipino counter-guerrilla experts have added their know-how to the crucial Open Arms program here to lure more Communist defectors to the Allied side.

The ⁴⁵~~45-75~~ Filipinos, stationed in Vietnam's provinces, are all veterans of the Philippine government's war against pro-Communist Huk insurgents some fifteen years ago. Most of these veterans are middle-aged, retired Army officers who specialized in land reform, intelligence-gathering, psychological warfare and community development to defeat the Huks. Some were ~~also~~ ~~themselves~~ themselves guerrillas ~~with~~ fighting the ~~Japanese~~ Japanese with American forces during World War II. In Vietnam, some have been so effective in their jobs that the Communist Viet Cong have put a price on their heads.

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The Filipinos are under contract to the U. S. Agency for International Development (AID) and are paid from American funds. They assist Vietnamese government civil servants working in the provinces on the Open Arms program, which consists of welcoming Communist defectors in provincial centers, feeding, ~~to~~ and clothing them for their 45-day stay there, screening, classifying and interrogating them and ~~then~~ then helping them find jobs in the cities or ~~helping them~~ to build Open Arms hamlets.

The program, called Chieu Hoi in Vietnamese, is viewed by officials as a shortcut to victory--a shortcut that ~~Philippine~~ Philippine President Ramon Magsaysay used to defeat the Huk insurgents. ~~Magsaysay's~~ Magsaysay's approach entailed an iron right-hand of military power while extending simultaneously the ~~gentle-~~ gentle, friendly left-glove of social justice. He magnetized the Huks to the anti-Communist side with "land for the land-less;" he sent military engineer units to clear large ~~and~~ tracts of jungle to give the peaceful ex-Huks homesteads on easy payments if they would lay down their weapons.

since the Open Arms program began in 1963, more than 60,000 Viet Cong--roughly six of their divisions--have switched sides to accept the Vietnamese government's offers of amnesty, full citizenship rights and resettlement in South Vietnam's society. In 1966, 20,242 Communists defected and joined the Open Arms program; officials estimate more than 3000 Allied soldiers would have been ~~2~~ killed attempting to eliminate that number on the battlefield.

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Typical of these Filipinos is Roque ("Rocky") ~~R~~e Reyes, a 50-year-old retired military intelligence officer and community development expert now serving as an advisor to ~~the~~ the Vietnamese Open Arms chief in Quang Ngai province, 250 miles north of Saigon. ^{DECEMBERS}

When Roque first arrived in Quang Ngai province ^{last fall,} he found 160 returnees packed into a small provincial Open Arms center; returnees acting as security guards had not yet been armed. A week later, the Viet Cong planted a satchel charge amidst the sleeping returnees, killing one and wounding 22.

Now three months later, three concrete buildings have been completed, enough to house 600 returnees sleeping in double-deck beds. A ten-foot-tall bamboo fence surrounds the center; returnees securing the shelter have been armed. Some of the returnees are learning tailoring; young girls are learning embroidering; basket-weaving and fishnet-weaving have been introduced.

Returnees who are skilled as carpenters and masons help construct the Open Arms offices; a Vietnamese teacher holds adult education courses; movies and medicine are brought in weekly. Roque and his Vietnamese counterpart have more plans for the future—including a returnee-operated barber shop, an Open Arms cooperative, a demonstration plot for improved farming methods, an electric generator for lighting and an incubator for hatching duck eggs. Attempts are being made to distribute small farming plots to some returnees. Because of the vast improvements in the provincial program, the Viet Cong have put a price on Roque's head. ~~END~~

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But he is not worried. During the Philippine war, the Huks launched an all-night raid on his house and failed in three attempts to kill him.

Roque served with American guerrillas during World War II, then ^{SPENT} served 11 eleven years in the Philippine Army, ~~special~~ specializing in ~~int~~ intelligence, and then moved into community development work. He was a member of the National Land Reform Council before volunteering to come to Vietnam.

The Filipino veterans said they saw many ~~similar~~ problems in Vietnam similar to those thatf faced the Philippine government in fighting the pro-Communist Huks. One of these problems is corruption and mismanagement on the part of ^{a few} ~~the~~ government officials in the Open Arms program.

"There have been several incidents in which I had to raise my ^{said} voice," ^{said} one quiet, serious Filipino who did not want to be identified. "Two weeks after I arrived, I went to the warehouse to get ~~the~~ blankets for the Open Arms returnees and the blankets had big holes in them. The Vietnamese government people didn't care. I had to remind them that the returnees had been their enemies and now you want them to be your friends, so you have to treat them well.

"Then two weeks later, a second incident happened. The returnees said the government officials were giving them only 150 piastres (roughly \$1.50) a month for pocket money, instead of the 200 piastres (\$2) which is legally allotted to them for that purpose. I made a report to the province chief ^{County CHAIRMAN} (A Vietnamese administrator roughly similar to an American ~~governor~~). ~~That~~ He scolded the Open Arms chief.

"Since then the Open Arms chief grew aloof. There's a big gap between him and me now. ^{PUT} ~~But~~ Someone must do something to make the Vietnamese government officials more honest. We had the same problem in the Philippines. But the Filipinos were amateurs when it came to corruption compared to the ^{Vietnam}.