

THE ROYAL THAI ARMY IN VIETNAM

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The Vietnam War is generally thought to be a war in which American forces and their South Vietnamese allies fought the Communists, without any outside assistance or allies. In truth, more than forty nations provided assistance of some type to the Republic of Vietnam as part of what became known as the Free World Military Forces. Seven nations joined the United States in providing direct military assistance; they were the Republic of Korea, Republic of China, Thailand, Australia, New Zealand, the Philippines, and Spain. Five of these nations – Australia, New Zealand, Republic of Korea, Thailand, and the Philippines – provided combat troops that fought alongside American and South Vietnamese soldiers in the field. The purpose of this paper is to examine the events that led to the participation of these forces in the war in Southeast Asia and more specifically to the commitment of Royal Thai Army Forces in Vietnam.

From the earliest days of American involvement in Southeast Asia, U.S. policy makers made certain assumptions about the conflict in Vietnam. As the Korean war had been perceived as a battle against North Korean and Chinese Communist aggression, the policy makers saw the war in Vietnam as yet another opportunity to combat Communist expansion. In Korea, the U.S. had enlisted allies in the fight against the North Koreans, thereby adding to the forces arrayed against the Communists and lending credibility to the American effort there. As retired Lieutenant General Stanley R. Larsen wrote after the Vietnam War, "It is not at all surprising that in the early sixties, when the nature of the U.S. commitment to Vietnam was taking shape, the idea of multilateral aid was being considered."¹

This idea can be traced to an 11 November 1961 memorandum to President John F. Kennedy from Secretary of State Dean Rusk and Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara that noted the need for multilateral action in Vietnam. Rusk and McNamara wrote: "From the political point of view, both domestic and international, it would seem important to involve forces from other nations alongside of United States forces in Viet-Nam...Our position would be greatly strengthened if the introduction of forces could be taken as a SEATO [Southeast Asia Treaty Organization] action, accompanied by units of other SEATO countries..."² It was thought that such international participation would help in deflecting any charges of American imperialism in Southeast Asia and hopefully achieve the kind of consensus enjoyed by United Nations forces during the Korean War. However, nothing came of these early ideas immediately. President Kennedy's focus was on Laos since the security situation in Vietnam did not look that acute at the time. However, by late 1963, the Laos question had been settled at least tentatively by the 1962 Geneva Accords and the situation in South Vietnam had grown increasingly unstable resulting in the death of South Vietnamese Ngo Dinh Diem during a coup in early November.

Shortly thereafter, President Kennedy himself was assassinated. His successor, Lyndon B. Johnson, was left to deal with the growing crisis in Vietnam. Not surprisingly, he, too, rapidly came to the conclusion that international support would be essential to providing credibility for American efforts in Southeast Asia. In the spring of 1964, Johnson launched an international appeal for what he described as "More Flags" to come forth to aid the Republic of South Vietnam, "a beleaguered friend," in its fight against communism. At a news conference on 23 April 1964, Johnson said he anticipated that the

United States would send more military aid to Saigon, but also said he hoped: “we would see some other flags in there, other nationsand that we could all unite in an attempt to stop the spread of communists in that area of the world...”³ Some historians have suggested that the “More Flags” program was really the brain child of Secretary of State Dean Rusk, but there is little doubt that President Johnson, who had built his political career on compromise, achieving consensus, and coalition building, saw the value in Rusk’s approach and made it his own; the search for international support would remain a priority until Johnson left office.

A week after the president made his comments at the press conference, the search for “More Flags” was made official in a 1 May 1964 cable from Secretary of State Rusk to all of America’s embassies worldwide. The message stated: “The United States Government has decided to call upon other nations of the Free World to express their support in the form of political and material contributions to the Vietnamese Government.”⁴ Several countries were already providing technical assistance, development funds, and humanitarian aid. Rusk instructed the American ambassadors to those countries to press their host governments for increased support. To the other ambassadors in those nations that had not yet contributed, he charged them to secure a commitment to provide support to the South Vietnamese. Rusk emphasized that “The nature and amount of the contributions being sought are not for the present as significant as the fact that their being made.”⁵ While not expressly stated, the idea was to get as many “flags” as possible to demonstrate international support not only for the Government of South Vietnam, but also for U.S. policy in Southeast Asia. The most important factor was that an allied nation send

aid, any type of aid to South Vietnam, because by doing so, that country, *ipso facto*, showed it supported the U.S. position there.⁶

The first priority for enlisting aid for the South Vietnamese was aimed at the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO). In a memorandum dated 25 May, McGeorge Bundy, Presidential Assistant for National Security Affairs, recommended that a high-level conference be called to consult with SEATO allies in order to obtain specific support commitments. However, the proposed conference never took place and this was the last attempt to solicit support under the SEATO umbrella. Certain members of SEATO, especially France, disapproved of American policy in Vietnam and rather than deal with such antipathy within SEATO as a corporate body, Johnson eventually turned elsewhere while approaching several of the SEATO member nations directly.

Per Rusk's instructions, U.S. ambassadors traveled throughout Europe, Asia, and Latin America trying to persuade countries to pitch in and help South Vietnam with development funds, medical and engineering advisers, and food. This early effort was not yet targeted on securing foreign combat troops, but that would change with time. The normal procedure was for the American embassies to solicit aid from their host countries in accordance with a list of desired aid prepared by Headquarters Military Assistance Command Vietnam (MACV). When a country agreed to provide assistance, the U.S. government then informed the South Vietnamese government, which in turn would make a formal request for aid from that country.

Despite the diplomatic efforts of the U.S. ambassadors, only 15 countries responded to the initial American request. Only six of the responding nations offered any significant

help; these nations included South Korea, Australia, New Zealand, the Philippines, Thailand, and Nationalist China and this was largely nonmilitary aid. The “More Flags” program was obviously not coming anywhere near what Johnson expected from it.

On 1 December 1964, Johnson convened a meeting of his closest advisors in the White House. At this meeting, the discussion centered around how to best achieve the U.S. objectives in Vietnam. It was agreed that every effort would be expended to end North Vietnam’s support of Viet Cong operations in South Vietnam; to re-establish an independent and secure South Vietnam; and to maintain the security of other non-Communist nations in Southeast.⁷ These objectives portended an increase in U.S. commitment to the war. This led to a commensurate increase in the effort to enlist international support for South Vietnam and U.S. policies in Southeast Asia. During the meeting, the President expressed his dissatisfaction with the “More Flags” program and charged his advisors to develop a new plan to increase international participation. It was decided to ask Thailand to provide military support to South Vietnam. William P. Bundy of the State Department would speak to Australia and New Zealand about the possibility of sending small combat units when and if the United States moved to the second phase of its strategy of increasing military pressure against the Communists.⁸ The Philippines were to be asked for a commitment of approximately 1,800 men. The meeting closed with an agreement to explore any and all possibilities for more outside aid. This meeting and the agreements reached marked a turning point in the “More Flags” program; from that point on, the effort to seek international support for South Vietnam shifted from securing primarily humanitarian and economic aid to obtaining military related aid and ultimately

combat troops that would fight alongside South Vietnamese and American soldiers.

Realizing that getting other nations to commit combat forces in South Vietnam would be a difficult sell, Johnson knew that something had to be done to “sweeten the pot” in order to entice those nations who might otherwise not want to get involved.⁹ On 15 December 1964, the president directed the State Department to notify America’s allies that the United States would subsidize the efforts of any nation, who agreed to provide military aid to South Vietnam. As Robert Blackburn said, “If Lyndon Johnson, using ideological arguments and diplomatic pressures, could not convince other countries to adopt America’s Vietnam policy as their own, he would now attempt to bribe them into doing so.”¹⁰ Still, there was no immediate response from most of America’s allies and only the Philippine, Korean, and Nationalist Chinese governments, who were already providing nonmilitary aid, made it known through diplomatic channels that they might consider providing military assistance to South Vietnam. Therefore, the attempt to buy support did not immediately have the desired results; not one previously uncommitted country chose to offer assistance.

Nevertheless, the American effort to solicit Free World support received additional emphasis as the United States became more directly involved in the war with the commitment of U.S. troops in 1965. It became increasingly important to portray the war as not merely an American war, but rather one in which free nations banded together against the forces of Communism. Accordingly, the Johnson administration continued to press its overseas missions for action on behalf of the “Many Flags” program. As a spur to their orders to continue pushing the program, a cable was sent reaffirming the president’s undiminished personal interest in the program to all U.S. embassies in January and March,

saying: "President continues to place very high priority on obtaining broadest possible Free World support for South Viet-Nam."¹¹

Even as the President and the Joint Chiefs discussed the deployment of a Marine expeditionary brigade to Da Nang, high level discussions were held to discuss how to solicit not just aid and assistance for South Vietnam, but now also the need to secure combat troops from other nations. With the first U.S. Marine battalion on its way to Da Nang, the State Department requested Ambassador Maxwell Taylor's view on the advisability of forming an international combat force in South Vietnam. Taylor had already expressed reservations about sending Marines to Da Nang, stating that he felt that such an approach might encourage the government of Vietnam to let the U.S. government assume an even greater share of the burden. Likewise, he was not enthusiastic about soliciting foreign troops for Vietnam. Despite Taylor's response, the motivation to broaden the international nature of the forces confronting the Communists only increased as the Johnson administration moved toward full-scale deployment of U.S. troops to Vietnam,

In a high-level policy meeting on April 1, 1965, the decision was made to solicit combat troops from Australia and New Zealand. In addition, there was much discussion over the advisability of obtaining troops from the Republic of Korea, which had already indicated a willingness to discuss sending Korean troops to Vietnam. The South Vietnamese had expressed some reluctance in having the Koreans in South Vietnam. Nevertheless, the decision was made to secure concurrence and co-operation from Saigon on possible contributions from other countries, including South Korea. On April 3, a report from General William Westmoreland, senior U.S. commander in South Vietnam, added

additional impetus to the decision to both send U.S. forces and to secure allied troops. Westmoreland reported that recent evidence had revealed that elements of the 325th Division of the People's Army of Vietnam (PAVN, or as they were more popularly known – the North Vietnamese Army or NVA) were operating in South Vietnam; this information meant that the nature of the war was changing and South Vietnam was now facing what amounted to an invasion from the north.

The discussions and decisions that resulted from the 1 April meeting were codified on April 6 with the issuance of National Security Action Memorandum 328. This document charged the State Department to explore with the Korean, Australian, and New Zealand governments the possibility of providing combat forces to join the of U.S. troops that were deploying to South Vietnam.

As the war escalated, so did Johnson's call for allied assistance. He began pulling every lever at his command – diplomatic pressure, personal entreaties, and the disposition of U.S. foreign aid – to broaden allied involvement in South Vietnam. What had started out as a request for all kinds of aid now meant combat troops, not just economic and technical assistance. With nearly twenty years of allied "containment policy" against communism on the line in South Vietnam and international opinions mounting against U.S. policy in Southeast Asia, the president was understandably eager to avoid going it alone.¹²

At a conference in Honolulu on 20 April 1965, the deployment of one Australian battalion at Vung Tau and one Korean regimental combat team of three battalions at Quang Ngai was approved. These forces had previously been offered by the two nations during separate negotiations. Ambassador Taylor in Saigon was directed to secure the concurrence

of the government of South Vietnam. Later it was decided that the Republic of Korea would be asked for a division rather than a regimental combat team.

In early May, General Westmoreland set forth the procedures and command relationships that would govern the employment of allied forces when they arrived in-country. Headquarters would assume operational control of what would be called Free World Military Forces. These forces would retain national command identity, but accept operational control by senior U.S. commanders. The United States in turn would provide administrative and logistical support.

While Westmoreland and his staff worked out the procedures for integrating the allied troops into the command structure, Australia and Korea prepared to send the troops that they had promised. The first to respond was Australia, which formed a task force around the nucleus of the Royal Australian Regiment. This task force arrived in June 1965 and was placed under the operational control of the U.S. 173rd Airborne Brigade, operating from Bien Hoa in III Corps. Additional elements such as a 105-mm battery, a field engineer troop, two signal troops, and an air reconnaissance flight would bring the Australian commitment to 1,557 by the end of 1965.

Also in May 1965 the government of New Zealand decided to replace its engineer detachment, which had been sent earlier, with a combat force. In July, a 105-mm howitzer battery arrived in South Vietnam and was also placed under the 173rd to provide fire support for the Australian task force. By the end of the year, there were 119 Kiwi soldiers in South Vietnam.

The Australian commitment, at Washington's urging, grew from one battalion to

two and included numerous headquarters, support, and aviation units. Additional troop deployments and the arrival of RAAF C-130 Hercules air transports swelled the Australian contingent to its peak in October 1967 when it numbered over 8,000 troops in South Vietnam. Over time, in response to American requests, the New Zealand commitment grew to approximately one thousand combat and artillery support troops. Unlike Thailand and the Philippines, who also would send combat troops, both Australia and New Zealand bore the costs of maintaining their forces in South Vietnam themselves. These two nations were very concerned that a Communist victory in Vietnam might have an impact on the rest of Southeast Asia and the western Pacific. Prime Minister Keith Holyoake of New Zealand said, "South Vietnam is something of a test case in Asia. If the Communists have their war there, they will move on to probe elsewhere, in Thailand, Malaysia, and farther west. Every Communist step forward is a step closer to Australia and New Zealand."¹³ The Australian leadership agreed with Holyoake, and even after dissatisfaction with the war at home began to mount, both Australia and New Zealand maintained a strong presence in South Vietnam right up until the end of the American phase of the war.

The Republic of Korea had initially deployed a task force consisting of an army engineer battalion with associated support and self-defense troops that focused early efforts on civic action projects. The main body of this force had arrived in March 1965 and was based at Di An in Bien Hoa Province. In accordance with the decisions made at the Honolulu Conference in April 1965, the U.S. requested additional South Korean forces and in August, Seoul agreed to the deployment of an Army infantry division, one Marine regiment, and one field support command troops. Accordingly, the ROK Capital Infantry

Division and the 2nd Marine Brigade were completely deployed by early November 1965. These forces, a total of 20,620 soldiers, were placed under the de facto operational control of U.S. Commanding General Field Forces Vietnam and given security duties at Cam Ranh Bay and Qui Nhon.

As efforts to enlist additional nations failed to reap any meaningful results, the Johnson administration focused on getting those allies already in Vietnam to increase their commitments, convincing South Korea to increase its commitment and ultimately the total number of Korean troops reached almost 50,000. This was an important commitment from the U.S. perspective because Korea was an Asian nation that itself had repulsed Communist aggression with international assistance and now it would be seen as extending the same kind of assistance to South Vietnam. South Korean President Chung Hee Park proudly explained that his country's participation in the war "would not only solidify our national security but also contribute toward strengthening the anti-Communist front of the Free World."¹⁴

Despite Park's proclamation, South Korea's motivation was not entirely altruistic. The material cost of South Korean participation in the war was paid by the United States. It amounted to \$1 billion from 1965 to 1970. Additionally, the United States gave South Korea \$150 million in development loans and \$600 million profits from military procurement, contracts for services, and construction projects.

The U.S. also asked the Philippine government to supply troops and the response and resultant costs mirrored those experienced with securing Korean forces. Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos, who agreed to send a 1500-man engineer unit to South

Vietnam, was motivated as much by the desire for financial aid for his country as by any concern for the plight of the South Vietnamese. In return for sending the Philippine troops, the U.S. military assistance program not only paid for the Philippine force, but also granted Marcos several types of military aid, much of it for use in the Philippines itself rather than in South Vietnam. By mid-October 1966, the 2,000-man 1st Philippine Civic Action Group Vietnam was established at a base camp on the outskirts of Tay Ninh City. This force consisted of an engineer construction battalion, medical and rural community development teams, a security battalion, a field artillery battery, and logistics and headquarters element. The Philippine force would cost the United States \$39 million between 1967 and 1969.

Participation by Thailand is interesting in that it involved both motivations that led to other nations' participating. Like Australia and New Zealand, Thailand had some genuine concerns about the spread of Communism in Southeast Asia. However, the Thai government's decision, like that of Korea and the Philippines, to send troops to South Vietnam also had an element of material gain as a major motivating factor.

Although Thailand had traditionally maintained a policy of nonintervention in Southeast Asia, they became suspicious of Communist intentions. Thailand had long been closely monitoring the situation in Vietnam, realizing that the conflict had potential for spilling over into their own country by way of Cambodia. The Thais wanted above all to preserve their own independence while taking a more active role in regional defense matters. Bangkok had first sent troops to South Vietnam in 1964 in the form of a 16-man Royal Thai Air Force.

Johnson was pleased that the Thais had sent this force. However, he wrote Prime

Minister Thanom Kittikachorn requesting that Thailand find some way to increase the level of combat support to South Vietnam, saying that "...the prospects of peace in Vietnam will be greatly increased in measure that necessary efforts of [the] United States are supported and shared by other nations which share our purposes and our concerns."¹⁵

It was imperative for Johnson to have more Asian representation in his "many flags" program to prove to the American public and observers around the world that the program was more than a political charade. Additionally, the addition of more troops from Thailand and other nations would help offset Westmoreland's spiraling requests for additional U.S. forces to fight the war.

Despite Johnson's pointed request, the government in Bangkok initially resisted sending ground troops to Vietnam. The Thai commitment in South Vietnam remained unchanged until early 1966. This commitment included Thai assistance in flying and maintaining some of the cargo aircraft operated by the South Vietnamese Air Force. As an adjunct to this program, the Royal Thai Air Force also provided jet aircraft transition training to Vietnamese pilots in Thailand.

In February 1966, the Royal Thai Military Assistance Group, Vietnam, was activated and the Royal Thai Air Force contingent then became one of its subordinate elements. The thrust of the Thai effort in Vietnam continued to be on training South Vietnamese pilots.

There is no documentary evidence to explain why the Thai government changed its mind about sending combat troops to Vietnam. Perhaps, as the situation worsened in Vietnam, Thailand had decided that it would be advantageous to assume a more active role

in the defense of Southeast Asia. Acceding to Johnson's repeated calls for ground forces also had potential for political capital both at home and abroad. An expanded Thai presence in Vietnam might increase the Thai position and national prestige with regard to other non-Communist nations in the region. In addition, for other nations who sent troops to Vietnam, the American request had meant increased military aid; if Bangkok could get the same deal, it would afford the Thai government an opportunity to modernize its armed forces at American expense. Therefore, Bangkok's security concerns coincided with the potential for material gain; the Thais could help with stopping Communist aggression in Vietnam and at the same time secure a significant amount of military aid in the process.

Regardless of his motivations, Prime Minister Kittikachorn announced to the world at a press conference on 6 January 1967 that Thailand would dispatch a "ground force to take an active part in the fighting in South Vietnam."¹⁶ The Thai government planned to send an 800-man combat battalion. A favorable response to this announcement had been expected from the Thai people, but the reality far exceeded the expectation. More than 5,000 Thais volunteered to fill the force, including some twenty Buddhist monks and the prime minister's son. One 31-year-old monk, when asked why he was volunteering for military duty, said: "The communists are nearing our home. I have to give up my yellow robe to fight them. In that way I serve both my country and my religion."¹⁷

Throughout the discussion with American representatives that led to the commitment of Thai combat troops, Washington had given assurances to the Thai government that the U.S. would fund, equip, and supply any ground forces sent to South Vietnam so that the Thai government would not incur any undue economic burden for

agreeing to join the Free World Military Forces. Washington reaffirmed this and made preparations to provide funding support for weapons and equipment to outfit the Thai force and for facilities to be used by the Thais in South Vietnam. In addition, the U.S. government agreed to pay overseas allowances to Thai troops and death gratuities for any Thai soldiers killed in South Vietnam. These assurances no doubt played a significant role in the decision of the Thais to deploy additional troops.

With the formal decision announced, the Thai unit began training for deployment to Vietnam in March 1967. It was agreed that the Thai force would be located with and fall under the operational control of the 9th U.S. Infantry Division. The Thai government decided to increase the size of the unit to a 3,000-man regimental combat team, consisting of a headquarters company, four rifle companies, a reinforced combat engineer company, a cavalry reconnaissance troop, a six-tube 105mm-howitzer battery, and associated support elements.

Having completed training, the Royal Thai Army Volunteer Regiment (the "Queen's Cobras") began to deploy to South Vietnam on 11 July 1967. The unit arrived in four phases and occupied part of the U.S. base camp at Bearcat, near Bien Hoa and twenty miles northeast of Saigon. The entire regiment had arrived by late September 1967.

The Queen's Cobras began combat operations almost immediately. After a series of small unilateral and larger combined operations with South Vietnamese units, the Thai regiment launched its first major operation, Narasuan, in October 1967 in Bien Hoa Province. The Thai soldiers quickly proved themselves to be a well-trained and resourceful force. In addition to conducting combat operations against the Communist

troops in the area around Saigon resulting in the killing of 145 of the enemy, the Thais were also active in civic action projects, building a hospital, constructing 48 kilometers of new roads, and treating several thousand civilian patients through their medical units.

Even before all the elements of the Royal Thai Volunteer Regiment had arrived in Vietnam, the Thai government had unilaterally begun consideration of the deployment of additional forces to South Vietnam. On 8 September 1967, the Thai government sent a message to the American Embassy in Bangkok offering to provide additional forces if the United States would also agree to provision that force. The Thai Prime Minister proposed a total force of 10,800 Thai soldiers.

The U.S. military headquarters in prepared an extensive study on the Thai proposal. The major issue was one of logistical support. It was assumed that the United States would have to provide maintenance and supply support for the additional Thai forces in South Vietnam. It was determined that current U.S. Army logistical units could provide the necessary support for the proposed 10,000-man force, but could not handle any more Thai troops over that figure.

After extensive consultations between MACV and the Thai military high command, it was decided that the Thais would deploy the additional troops to South Vietnam bringing the strength of the Royal Thai Army Volunteer Force, as it was to be known, to 10,000 men. In return for the Thai government agreeing to send these additional forces, the U.S. government, as with the earlier Thai contingent, agreed to fully arm and equip the force, as well as provide logistical support for the entire Thai force once it arrived in South Vietnam. The equipment and weapons issued to the force would be retained by the Royal

Thai government upon final withdrawal of Thai forces from South Vietnam. In addition, the United States would bear the cost of training the Thai forces before they deployed to South Vietnam and assist in the continuing modernization of the Royal Thai armed forces, an annual increase to \$75 million for the Military Assistance Program for Thailand in fiscal years 1968 and 1969.

Further discussion between MACV representatives and Thai military officials raised the force size between 10,598 and 12,200 for consideration. The Thai government began to refer to the add-on force as a division, but officially it was called the Royal Thai Army Volunteer Force (RTAVF). It would consist of two infantry brigades of three battalions each, an armored cavalry reconnaissance squadron, and a division artillery of two 105-mm artillery battalions and one 155-mm artillery battalion. In addition, there would be a support group that included medical, motor transport, maintenance, and other logistical elements.

After an extensive training period in Thailand the first increment of the RTAVF, also known as the "Black Panther Division," consisting of 5,700 men began arriving in South Vietnam in July 1968 and was deployed in the Bearcat area. The second increment of 5,700 men arrived in January-February 1969. The remainder of the division arrived in the July-August 1969 timeframe.

The area of operations around Bien Hoa assigned to the RTAVF was characterized by a relative low level of enemy activity because the area was used by the Viet Cong primarily as a support area. Consequently, the Thais did not engage the Communists in any large-scale operations. Nevertheless, the RTAVF conducted several well-planned and

successful search and clear missions in their assigned area of responsibility.

In late 1969, questions began to arise in both the United States and Thailand about the nature of the Thai commitment of troops to South Vietnam. The U.S. had welcomed the decision of the Thai government to contribute troops to South Vietnam and willingly agreed to compensate Thailand for that support. However, some in the United States began to question the use of Thai, Korean, and other Free World Military Force troops as "mercenaries" in the U.S. war effort. Part of the reason for this was that the nature of the war had changed. Richard Nixon had been elected, partly because he said he had a plan to end the war. After taking office, he announced his plans "Vietnamize" the war. His intent was to turn over the responsibility for the war to the South Vietnamese and to gradually withdraw U.S. troops as the South Vietnamese forces became more combat capable. The first increment of the withdrawal departed South Vietnam in the fall of 1969. Many influential Thais, seeing that the U.S. was drawing down its forces, began to question the continued validity of having Thai troops in Vietnam.

On 21 December 1969, Thai Foreign Minister Thanat Khoman told newsmen that he was considering the withdrawal of Thai troops "because the United States recently issued another announcement regarding further withdrawals."¹⁸ However, the Thai government did not pursue this line of action until three months later when debate on withdrawal of the RTAVF arose in the Thai Parliament. The fact that the United States continued to withdraw its troops no doubt had a significant impact on this debate in Bangkok.

After six months of discussion, the Thai government announced in November 1970

that it was planning to withdraw its forces from South Vietnam by 1972. The announcement cited the deterioration of security in Laos and Cambodia and the growth of internal insurgency in Thailand, as well as the continuing U.S. troop withdrawals from South Vietnam and justification for bringing the Thai troops home.¹⁹

The Thai withdrawal plan was officially announced on 26 March 1971. It called for a phased draw down of forces with one half of the Black Panther division troops being pulled out in August 1971 and the remaining half in February 1972. The withdrawal plan was executed generally on schedule and the last Thai troops departed South Vietnam in April 1972.

At its highest point, the Thai commitment in Vietnam included over 11,000 troops. During the period of Thai participation in the Vietnam War, it would cost the United States approximately \$50 million dollars annually to train, equip, and supply the Thai units in Vietnam.²⁰ Some observers, like historian Robert Blackburn, have maintained that the Thais, and other members of the Free World Military Forces, like Korea and the Philippines were never more than mercenaries in the paid service of the United States.²¹ There is no argument that Thailand, like Korea and the Philippines, was paid for the service of its troops in Vietnam, but Blackburn and those who agree with his assessment, fail to give sufficient credence to the impact of security issues in the Thai decision to send troops to Vietnam. The Thais, like the Australians and Kiwis, had some very real concerns about the spread of Communism in Southeast Asia.²² For the Thais, who received monetary remuneration for the service of their troops, this reward was icing on the cake – they were fighting Communism and getting paid for it.

Although Johnson never totally gave up on his effort to enlist other international participation in the war, his decision to bomb North Vietnam in June 1966 effectively ended any hope of widening the allied effort. The time of the greatest buildup was during fiscal year 1966, after which there was a leveling off period with a steady decrease in the number of Free World Military Forces as the war went on.

During the war, thousands of Aussies, Kiwis, Koreans, Thais, and Philipinos fought alongside American and South Vietnamese troops. Total casualties suffered in Vietnam by Free World Military Forces was 5,241, of which 4,407 were Korean, 351 were Thai, and 475 were from Australia and New Zealand.²³ There is no doubt that these forces, regardless of their respective governments' motivations, contributed to the overall allied war effort, but Lyndon Johnson's dream of an international consensus supporting U.S. presence and aims in South Vietnam never materialized, despite an inordinate amount of effort to make it so. The international response to the continued U.S. presence in South Vietnam, the mounting unpopularity of the war around the world, and Saigon's ambivalence doomed Johnson's desires for "more flags." Ultimately, the war would remain America's war.

ENDNOTES

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- ¹ Stanley R. Larsen and James L. Collins, *Allied Participation in Vietnam* (Washington, D.C.: Department of the Army), p. 1.
- ² *The Pentagon Papers: The Defense Department History of United States Decisionmaking on Vietnam (The Senator Gravel Edition)* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1972), II, p. 113.
- ³ Lyndon B. Johnson. *Public Papers of the President of the United States* (Washington, D.C.: Office of the *Federal Register*, National Archives and Records Service, 1965), November 22, 1963 to June 30, 1964, p. 285.
- ⁴ Message, Rusk to AmEmbassies, 5/1/64, "Vietnam Memos, Vol. XVIII, 5/64," Item No. 110, pp. 3-4. NSF Country File – VN, Box 4, Lyndon Baines Johnson Library, Austin, Texas.
- ⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 4.
- ⁶ Robert M. Blackburn. *Mercenaries and Lyndon Johnson's "More Flags"* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland and Company, Inc., 1994), p. 14.
- ⁷ Larsen and Collins, p. 3.
- ⁸ *Ibid.*
- ⁹ Memorandum for the President, Dec. 11, 1964, Subject: Third Country Assistance to Viet-Nam. "Vietnam Memos (2 of 2), Vol. XX. Item No. 117. NSF Country File – VN, Box 11, LBJ Library, Austin, Texas.
- ¹⁰ Blackburn, p. 24.
- ¹¹ Message, Rusk to AmEmbassies, 1/16/65, "Vietnam Memos, Vol. XVI, 1/10-31/65," Item No. 153. NSF Country File – VN, Box 12, LBJ Library, Austin, Texas.
- ¹² Edward Doyle and Samuel Lipsman. *The Vietnam Experience: America Takes Over, 1965-67* (Boston: Boston Publishing Company, 1982), p. 124.
- ¹³ Quoted in Doyle and Lipsman, p. 131.
- ¹⁴ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁵ Quoted in Larsen and Collins, pp. 25-26.
- ¹⁶ Message, AmEmbassy Bangkok to SecState, 1/6/67, "Thailand Cables, Vol. V, 10/66-2/67," Item No. 20. NSF Country File – Thailand, Box 283-284, p. 1. LBJ Library, Austin, Texas.

¹⁷ Quoted in Larsen and Collins, p. 27.

¹⁸ Quoted in Larsen and Collins, p. 49.

¹⁹ Larsen and Collins, pp. 48-49.

²⁰ Chester Cooper, *The Lost Crusade: America in Vietnam* (New York: Dodd, Mead, and Company, 1970), p. 267.

²¹ Blackburn, pp.143-144.

²² As a young infantry captain in 1971, I was assigned as an advisor with the Royal Thai Army in Vietnam at Bearcat. In many discussions with Thai officers and men, I found that most of them harbored no ambivalence about why they were in Vietnam; on the contrary, almost to a man, they said they were there to fight the Communists so they didn't have to fight them in Thailand.

²³ Harry G. Summers, Jr. *Historical Atlas of the Vietnam War*. (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1995), p. 92.