American Soldiers, Sailors, Marines, and Airmen fought side by side with their counterparts from five allied nations in defense of the Republic of (South) Vietnam. The American people thank, honor, and commend the fighting forces of our allies in the Vietnam War for their service and sacrifice.

For the United States and its allies, the Vietnam War was a multinational effort to stem the tide of communist expansion—supported by America’s Cold War rivals, the Soviet Union and China—in Southeast Asia. South Vietnam was a hot spot in a larger Cold War conflict. As in all conflicts, a complex web of motivating forces animated the combatants. Lofly ideals such as friendship, allegiance, and freedom spurred some to engage. Money, recognition, shared interests, and geo-political advantage played important roles in inciting action as well.

Many nations provided assistance, both military and humanitarian, to the South Vietnamese people from the mid-1950s to the mid-1970s. A total of six nations sent combat troops to fight in South Vietnam against North Vietnam and the southern-based Viet Cong insurgency in the 1960s and 1970s. These nations were the United States, Australia, New Zealand, Republic of (South) Korea, Thailand, and the Philippines.

In 1965, when the U.S. military moved massively into South Vietnam, Thailand, Malaysia, and the Philippine fiscal internal threats from armed communist insurgencies, and the communist underground was still active in Singapore, … America’s action … enabled non-communist Southeast Asia to put its own house in order. By 1975, they were in better shape to stand up to the communists. Had there been no U.S. intervention, the will of these countries to resist them would have melted and Southeast Asia would most likely have gone communist. The prosperous emerging market economies of ASEAN (the Association of South East Asian Nations) were nurtured during the Vietnam War years. — Lee Kuan Yew, Prime Minister of Singapore

U.S., citizens and their allies continue to weave with the Vietnam War’s legacy. While wartime nations mostly regard the war’s outcome as a defeat of the United States and its allies, that is not the consensus everywhere. Thailand, for example, celebrates “the American War” as an unmitigated victory, and it is a viewpoint shared by others in Southeast Asia. While Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam were communist regimes, Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, the Philippines, and Thailand did not. For many people in these nations, Communist revolutionaries represented a grave national threat. From their perspectives, the war in Vietnam successfully halted that threat. To one degree or another, leaders in these countries acknowledge that the multi-decade American presence in Southeast Asia—and the Vietnam War in particular—was a positive factor in the prevention of communist dominion in the region.

More Flags

On April 23, 1964, President Lyndon B. Johnson for the first time publicly stated, "I would hope that we would see some other flags in [South Vietnam] … and that we could all unite in an attempt to stop the spread of communism in that area of the world, and the attempt to drain freedom." His appeal became the basis of the American “More Flags” campaign, an endeavor to encourage wider international participation in the security of South Vietnam. The United States used the term “Free World” in its efforts to garner participation especially by Western Bloc and other non-communist countries. Bilateral diplomacy was also brought to bear.

Free World Allies

The contributions of the Free World combat allies in Vietnam were significant, both from a political and military standpoint. Historians and commentators differ in interpreting the motivations not only of the participating governments, but also of the individual participants. The South Koreans, Thais, and Filipinos received considerable American financial support to facilitate their military participation in South Vietnam. The Australians and New Zealanders, by contrast, served in Vietnam at their own expense. Negative or ambivalent political impressions notwithstanding, there was a general consensus among American military leadership at that time that the Free World allies fought well. Taken as a whole, the combat effectiveness of the Free World forces relieved significant pressure on American troops, and played a critical role in persuading and securing their assigned areas of operation. Perhaps even more importantly from the American psychological perspective, every allied soldier, sailor, marine, or airman who served in Vietnam meant less American soldier, sailor, marine, or airman who had to deploy.

For that simple (if imperfect) calculus alone, Americans were grateful. For every allied soldier, sailor, marine, or airman who served in Vietnam meant more importantly from the American psychological perspective, every allied soldier, sailor, marine, or airman who served in Vietnam meant less American soldier, sailor, marine, or airman who had to deploy.

By the Numbers

A quick glance at the numbers provides an indication of the service and sacrifice of the Free World allies. The New Zealanders had the highest ratio of fatal casualties to participants at 1.3 percent, with the Americans a very close second at 2.3 percent. The South Koreans were next at 1.4 percent, and both the Thais and Australians were under 1 percent. NineFilipino were killed in the conflict. Of the allies, the Australians served in Vietnam for the longest period of time, but they deployed relatively few military personnel before 1965, and, as with the Americans, they were advisers rather than combatants before them. The first South Korean combat troops arrived shortly after the Americans escalated their involvement by deploying combat troops in 1965.
The Republic of (South) Korea (Part 2 of 5)

The Vietnam War was South Korea's first major military engagement since the signing of the Korean War armistice in 1953. All Korean troops in Vietnam were volunteers. The United States thanks and honors the Korean veterans who served in Vietnam.

South Korean military participation in the Vietnam War began in the autumn of 1965 and did not end until the last American combat troops departed. The first Republic of Korea soldiers and marines (commonly referred to by American forces as ROKs, pronounced “rocks”) began arriving several months after the first American combat troops arrived. Military observers asserted that the ROKs fought bravely, many said fiercely. Their tactics and techniques have often been criticized from some commentators as being unnecessarily brutal, but their bravery and discipline were not questioned, even by their enemies.

The success and contributions of Korean forces in Vietnam are to some degree unknown and underappreciated outside of military circles. Indeed, for many Americans who served with them, their fighting abilities were the stuff of legend. Korean troops returned a high casualty ratio against Communist forces and captured a large number of prisoners and vast stores of weapons and war material. In so doing, they donated sanctity to the communist insurgency and disrupted Viet Cong activity in their assigned areas of operations.

ROK code of conduct in the Vietnam War:

To the enemy, be courteous and fearless.
To the Vietnamese people, behave with kindness and warmth.
To our allies, show them we are well disciplined and reliable.

Perhaps most importantly from the United States’ perspective, contemporary observers believed Korean troops were as effective as their American counterparts in combat, which took the burden off U.S. troops in the Koreans’ area of operations. The United States subsidized Korean forces’ participation and in some ways the Vietnam War proved an economic boon for the fledgling nation.

From 1965 to 1973, more than 300,000 ROK soldiers and marines served in South Vietnam. That number is exceeded only by U.S. and South Vietnamese service members and more than all the rest of the allies combined. Nearly 5,000 Koreans sacrificed their lives in the war.

ROK Areas of Operation

In March 1965, a CIA report described South Vietnam’s principal problem thus: “The Viet Cong are continuing to make significant gains, particularly along the line, coastal regions. ... The [South Vietnamese] government is clearly on the defensive ... Puffication remains stalled and further deterioration of rural security is expected.”

The Koreans were thorough in their planning and deliberate in their execution of a plan. They usually surrounded an area by stealth and quick movement... The enemy feared the Koreans both for their tactical innovations and for the soldiers’ tenacity... The Koreans might not suffer many casualties, might not get too many of the enemy on an operation, but when they brought in seventy-five or a hundred weapons, the Americans wondered where in the world they got them.

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American military observers recorded that the ROK forces served with distinction and valor in Vietnam. Korean troops attained an almost mythic status among friends and foes alike, and some contemporaries also accused South Korean troops of using overly aggressive, even brutal tactics. Tales and legends abounded among U.S. service people of the ROKs’ strict discipline, toughness, and military prowess. They were said to be especially resourceful and effective in counterinsurgency warfare, small unit tactics, and operations, and hand-to-hand combat.

One legend oft-related by American servicemen was particularly revealing. A typical version went something like this: “I've seen captured enemy stores of weapons and war material. In so doing, they donated sanctity to the communist insurgency and disrupted Viet Cong activity in their assigned areas of operations.

An analysis of a combat action by Korean Capital Division forces from January 1966 clearly illustrates the Korean technique. After contact with an enemy force near Phu Cat, the Koreans “reacting swiftly... deployed six companies in an encircling maneuver and trapped the enemy force in their cordon. The Korean troops gradually tightened the circle, fighting the enemy during the day and maintaining their tight cordon at night, thus preventing the enemy’s escape. At the conclusion of the sixth day of fighting, 278 NVA had been KIA with the loss of just 11 Koreans, a kill ratio of 25.3 to 1.

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The Republic of (South) Korea (Part 2 of 5)

The Vietnamese students practice the art of Tae Kwon Do under the supervision of their Korean instructors, August 1968. (National Archives)
Thailand was a staunch supporter of United States involvement in Vietnam from the outset. Thailand maintained that it sided with South Vietnam and the United States out of a desire to help the South Vietnamese and to halt the rise of communism in the region. Some have also pointed to the economic benefits they received from the U.S. for supporting the Saigon government as another motivating factor. Regardless, almost all agree that Thai participation benefited President Johnson’s Free World alliance. The United States owes the Thai veterans of the Vietnam War a debt of gratitude.

From the American government’s point of view, it was critical for American public support of the war that Thailand accepted shared responsibility for the defense of Southeast Asia. President Johnson’s 1964 appeal to Thai Prime Minister Kittikachorn Thanom was telling:

“I am very much aware of and deeply appreciative of steady support from you and your Government in providing … It is, nevertheless, my hope that Thailand will find ways of increasing the scale and scope of its assistance to Vietnam, as a renewed demonstration of Free World determination to work together to repel Communist aggression.”

Several distinguishing factors made Thailand an excellent U.S. ally in the region.

Firstly, the Thai government keenly believed that communism posed a danger not only to their own nation but also to all of Southeast Asia. They were determined to stifle this threat before it could destroy them; which dovetailed nicely with American goals in the region.

Secondly, unlike most of Thailand's neighbors, colonization had not left a mark on the collective psyche of the Thai people. Thailand had never been ruled by a colonial power, and while they had experienced pressure from the British in Burma to the west, and the French in Indochina to the east, they had never given up their national sovereignty. As a result, most Thais harbored notably less antipathy toward and distrust of Europeans and Americans than did their fellow Southeast Asians.

Thirdly, Thailand’s location was strategically optimal for air operations in both North and South Vietnam (and also in Laos and Cambodia). The U.S. Air Force began flying missions from bases in Thailand in 1963, and by the end of the war in 1975 it was operating out of all seven Royal Thai Air Force bases (Udon, Ubon, Korat, Takhli, Nakhon Phanom, U-Tapao, and Don Muang at Bangkok). The U.S. spent $250 million on construction at these bases, part of the $2 billion overall investment that was pumped into the Thai economy over the course of the war.

By October 1967, the first Thai combat troops had arrived in Vietnam to fight alongside the Australians, New Zealanders, and U.S. Soldiers. They were the Royal Thai Volunteer Regiment (a.k.a. the Queen’s Cobras). In 1968, the Queen’s Cobras were replaced by the Royal Thai Army Expeditionary Division (a.k.a. the Black Panthers).

The Thai government received more U.S. foreign aid during the Vietnam War than any other country in Southeast Asia save South Vietnam. Like South Vietnamese troops, Thai soldiers were trained and equipped by the United States, transported in U.S. drops and planes, and funded by American taxpayers.

Nonetheless, Thailand shouldered a significant burden in the wars when the international press took note of their delight in American material goods and their rumored association with the Saigon black market. That coupled with the revelation that the U.S. was subsidizing material goods and their rumored association with the Saigon black market. That coupled with the revelation that the U.S. was subsidizing material goods and their rumored association with the Saigon black market. That coupled with the revelation that the U.S. was subsidizing material goods and their rumored association with the Saigon black market. That coupled with the revelation that the U.S. was subsidizing material goods and their rumored association with the Saigon black market. That coupled with the revelation that the U.S. was subsidizing material goods and their rumored association with the Saigon black market. That coupled with the revelation that the U.S. was subsidizing material goods and their rumored association with the Saigon black market. That coupled with the revelation that the U.S. was subsidizing material goods and their rumored association with the Saigon black market. That coupled with the revelation that the U.S. was subsidizing material goods and their rumored association with the Saigon black market. That coupled with the revelation that the U.S. was subsidizing material goods and their rumored association with the Saigon black market. That coupled with the revelation that the U.S. was subsidizing material goods and their rumored association with the Saigon black market. That coupled with the revelation that the U.S. was subsidizing material goods and their rumored association with the Saigon black market. That coupled with the revelation that the U.S. was subsidizing material goods and their rumored association with the Saigon black market. That coupled with the revelation that the U.S. was subsidizing material goods and their rumored association with the Saigon black market. That coupled with the revelation that the U.S. was subsidizing material goods and their rumored association with the Saigon black market. That coupled with the revelation that the U.S. was subsidizing material goods and their rumored association with the Saigon black market. That coupled with the revelation that the U.S. was subsidizing material goods and their rumored association with the Saigon black market. That coupled with the revelation that the U.S. was subsidizing material goods and their rumored association with the Saigon black market. That coupled with the revelation that the U.S. was subsidizing material goods and their rumored association with the Saigon black market. That coupled with the revelation that the U.S. was subsidizing material goods and their rumored association with the Saigon black market. That coupled with the revelation that the U.S. was subsidizing material goods and their rumored association with the Saigon black market. That coupled with the revelation that the U.S. was subsidizing material goods and their rumored association with the Saigon black market. That coupled with the revelation that the U.S. was subsidizing material goods and their rumored association with the ...
ANZUS

In 1951, Australia, New Zealand and the United States signed a Security Treaty (ANZUS), which was strategically designed to protect the nations' mutual interests in the Pacific. Though the treaty was not formally signed for the Vietnam War effort, Australia and New Zealand nonetheless sent forces on their own expense to support the United States and defend South Vietnam.

Australia

By 1961, the Australian government believed that defeating communism in Southeast Asia was a matter both of principle and of self-defense, given the assumption that a communist-dominated Southeast Asia, just as Russia's north, represented a threat. By the end of the summer of 1962, they had sent a team of 30 advisors, the Australian Army Training Team Vietnam (AATTV), to assist in training the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN). Two years later, the team more than doubled in size to 85 advisors, augmented with an 850- man field force and six Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) transport planes (with pilots). They also suffered their first fatal casualty.

When the United States scaled its support for the South Vietnamese by sending combat troops in 1965, the Australians immediately followed suit. They committed the 1st Battalion Royal Australian Regiment (1RAR), plus support forces to serve under operational control of the U.S. Army's 1st Infantry Division. The 161st Battery of the Royal New Zealand Artillery arrived at Bien Hoa in July 1965, initially to serve with the Aussies under command of the U.S. Army's 173rd Airborne Brigade. They later moved with the Australian task force to Nui Dat, where they served with Royal Australian Artillery field regiments until May 1971.

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The coalition of Australian and New Zealand Army Corps (ANZAC) were valuable allies in the fight to prevent the spread of communism in Southeast Asia. While both countries faced growing anti-war sentiment at home, neither wavered in their commitment to the United States and to South Vietnam throughout the war. Most American soldiers who had contact with these service people from “down under” were impressed by their military professionalism and charmed by their bearing. The United States is grateful to the

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The Philippines provided effective support to the United States and its allies in South Vietnam, initially with the Philippines Contingent (PHILCON) and later the Philippines Civic Action Group-Vietnam (PHILCAG-V). Most of the Filipinos who volunteered and were sent to serve in Vietnam did their duty with honor and dignity. And they achieved excellent results. The United States thanks and honors the Filipino veterans who served in Vietnam.

Operation Brotherhood

In 1964, after Vietnam had been divided into a communist North and a non-communist South, thousands of northern Vietnamese fled south. Oscar Arizmendi, president of the Manila chapter of the Philippines Junior Chamber of Commerce (Jaycees) saw it as a humanitarian crisis and enlisted the support of Philippine President Ramon Magsaysay, who responded thus: “We have been assisted in our hour of need by generous friends. Shall we then deny our help to our neighbors when they are in need of it? Human misery knows no national boundaries. By all means, help them. And if there is anything that I and this government can do to help, please feel free to come to me.” Over the next two years, in what Filipinos designated Operation Brotherhood, the Jaycees, with the cooperation of the Philippine government, sent 235 doctors, nurses, social workers, dentists, and other workers, who treated some 730,000 patients in medical facilities throughout South Vietnam.

Philippines Contingent

In 1964, in response to U.S. President Lyndon B. Johnson’s “More Flags” campaign, Philippine President Diosdado Macapagal sought funds from the Philippine congress to send combat troops to South Vietnam.

Notably, Philippine senator Ferdinand Marcos had led the country’s refusal in 1964 to authorize combat troops to support the South Vietnamese war effort. Once he became president, however, he changed his position and agreed to provide a combat engineering battalion as part of an increased aid package.

“Philuatan”

PHILCAG-V was an effective agent of humanitarian aid and civic action, and was appreciated by the South Vietnamese. Several members of the first PHILCAG-V remember that the South Vietnamese had a special nickname for the Filipinos: “Everywhere they went, they were called ‘Philuatan.’” Apparently, Filipinos were remembered fondly by many Vietnamese people. Operation Brotherhood had left its mark.

Air and Naval Bases

Perhaps the greatest contribution by the Philippine government to the U.S. war effort in Vietnam was the willingness to allow U.S. forces to continue operations out of Naval Base Subic Bay in Zambales and Clark Air Base at Angeles City in Luzon, both in the Philippines.

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