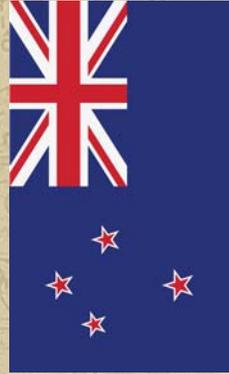
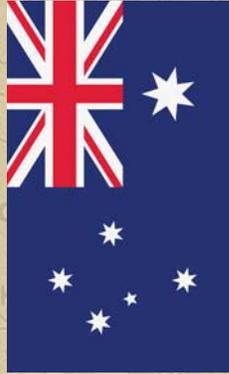




UNITED STATES ALLIES IN THE VIETNAM WAR

INTRODUCTION (PART 1 OF 5)



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 context. As in all conflicts, a complex web of motivating forces animated the combatants. Lofty 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.



An American and Korean officer inspect a unit of Korean, American, Australian, and Vietnamese military policemen in Saigon. (National Archives)

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 Philippines faced 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 their own houses 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 wrestle with the Vietnam War's legacies. While western 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 South Vietnam came under 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 perspective, 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 domination 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 destroy 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 political and military standpoints. 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 pacifying 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 one less American Soldier, Sailor, Marine, or Airman who had to deploy. For that simple (if imperfect) calculus alone, Americans were grateful.



The Free World Military Assistance Forces Headquarters building in Saigon. An Australian Land Rover 1/4 ton truck and three Volkswagen Kombi Vans (with red kangaroos) are parked in the car park. (U.S. Department of the Army)



The inauguration ceremony marking the formal opening of the International Military Assistance Office building (IMAO) of the Republic of Vietnam. The Color Guards represent South Vietnam, the United States, the Republic of China (Taiwan), Australia, the Philippines, the Republic of Korea (South Korea), New Zealand, and Thailand. Cholon, Vietnam, April 8, 1965 (National Archives)

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 2.18 percent, with the Americans a very close second at 2.15 percent. The South Koreans were next at 1.4 percent, and both the Thais and Australians were under 1 percent. Nine Filipinos 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 then. The first South Korean combat troops arrived shortly after the Americans escalated their involvement by deploying combat troops in 1965.

Allied Nation	Timeframe	Total Number of Military Participants	Total Number Killed
United States of America	1962–1973	2,709,918	58,318
Republic of Korea	1965–1973	320,000+	4,407
Australia	1962–1972	61,000+	500
Thailand	1965–1972	40,000+	351
New Zealand	1964–1972	3,800+	83
Philippines	1966–1969	10,000	9

Allied Strength in Vietnam, 1964–1972					
Year	Australia	South Korea	New Zealand	Philippines	Thailand
1964	200	200	30	20	—
1965	1,560	20,620	120	70	20
1966	4,530	25,570	160	2,060	240
1967	6,820	47,830	530	2,020	2,220
1968	7,660	50,000	520	1,580	6,000
1969	7,670	48,870	550	190	11,570
1970	6,800	48,540	440	70	11,570
1971	2,000	45,700	100	50	6,000
1972	130	36,790	50	50	40

Source: *The Encyclopedia of the Vietnam War: A Political, Social, and Military History*, edited by Spencer C. Tucker

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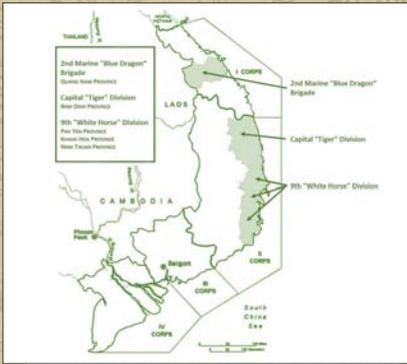
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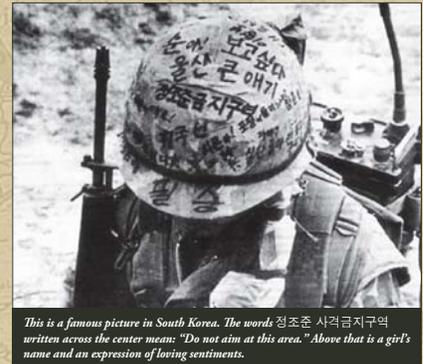
UNITED STATES ALLIES IN THE VIETNAM WAR



THE REPUBLIC OF (SOUTH) KOREA (PART 2 OF 5)



Korean Tiger Division instructor supervises Vietnamese students on the rifle range, August 1968. (National Archives)



This is a famous picture in South Korea. The words 정조준 사격금지구역 written across the center mean: "Do not aim at this area." Above that is a girl's name and an expression of loving sentiments.

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 drawn criticism 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 unsung and underappreciated outside of military circles. Indeed, for many Americans who served with them, their fighting abilities were the stuff of legend. Korean troops recorded 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 denied sanctuary to the communist insurgency and disrupted Viet Cong activity in their assigned areas of operation.

ROK code of conduct in the Vietnam War:

- To the enemy, be courageous 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, contemporaries 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 second only to 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 low coastal regions. ... The [South Vietnamese] government is clearly on the defensive. ... Pacification remains stalled and further deterioration of rural security is expected."



The response to the CIA's assessment arrived in the form of the ROK Army Capital "Tiger" Division and the ROK 2nd Marine "Blue Dragon" Brigade. These Korean units were primarily responsible for the pacification and



Korean troops use chart to show villagers types of Viet Cong booby traps. (National Archives)

security of the coastal provinces of Binh Dinh, Phu Yen, Khanh Hoa and Ninh Thuan in II Corps. They undertook the task with vigor. The coastal areas, especially south of Qui Nhon down to Phan Rang, remained relatively secure from then onward under the watchful eye of the ROKs.

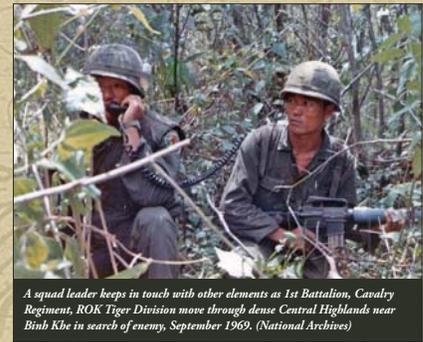
In September 1966, South Korea sent a second army division, the 9th "White Horse" Division, to take over operations in the southern part of II Corps' coastal region. This freed up the ROK marines to move north to assist the U.S. Marines in Quang Nam province, in I Corps, a dangerous and volatile region aptly nicknamed "Marine Country" by American servicemen.

An analysis of a combat action by Korean Capital Division forces from January 1968 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.

(Vietnam Studies: Allied Participation in Vietnam, by Lieutenant General Stanley Robert Larsen & Brigadier General James Lawton Collins, Jr., U.S. Department of the Army)

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 efficient 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



A squad leader keeps in touch with other elements of 1st Battalion, Cavalry Regiment, ROK Tiger Division move through dense Central Highlands near Binh Khe in search of enemy, September 1969. (National Archives)

documents that ordered NVA [North Vietnamese Army] units to avoid contact with ROKs at all cost, unless 100 percent certain of victory." While most of the apocryphal stories about which units the North Vietnamese truly feared inevitably included the teller's own, nearly every version of the tale included Korean troops.

An official U.S. Army study perhaps summed up the general feeling best: "Considered opinion was that it was good the Koreans were 'friendly'."

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. They appeared to have a natural nose for picking up enemy weapons that were, as far as the enemy thought, securely cached away.

(Vietnam Studies: Allied Participation in Vietnam, by Lieutenant General Stanley Robert Larsen & Brigadier General James Lawton Collins, Jr., U.S. Department of the Army)



Vietnamese students practice the art of Tae Kwon Do under the supervision of their Korean instructors, August 1968. (National Archives)

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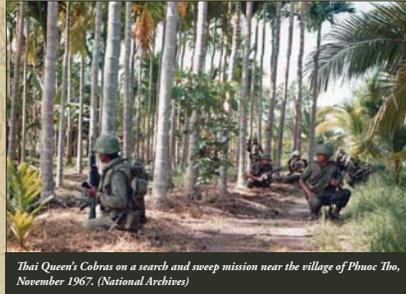
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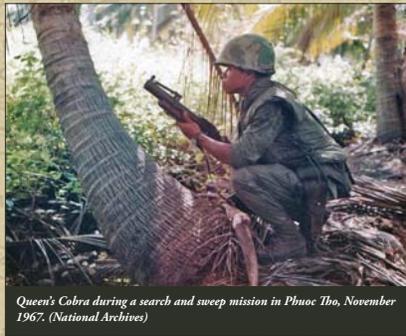
THAILAND (PART 3 OF 5)



Queen's Cobra arrival in the Republic of Vietnam, unloading from U.S. Navy Troop Ship Navarro, September 1967. (National Archives)



Thai Queen's Cobras on a search and sweep mission near the village of Phuoc Tho, November 1967. (National Archives)



Queen's Cobra during a search and sweep mission in Phuoc Tho, November 1967. (National Archives)

Thirdly, Thailand's location was strategically optimal for air operations in both North and South Vietnam (and also over Laos and Cambodia). The U.S. Air Force began flying missions from bases in Thailand in 1961, and by the end of the war in 1975 it was operating out of all seven Royal Thai Air Force bases (Udon, Ubon, Korat, Takli, 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 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 stationed at Camp Bearcat, near Bien Hoa, in II Corps. 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).



Most observers reported that Thai soldiers fought bravely and well in Vietnam. They were generally well-liked by American service people, who apocryphally regarded them as the "luckiest" soldiers in Vietnam. Many Thai troops attributed this legendary luck to the protective powers of their Buddhist amulets, which they professed to believe rendered them bulletproof. Some Americans claimed to share that belief, and were grateful that the Thais were quite willing to share the talismans of their good fortune.

A controversy surrounding Thai soldiers erupted in the United States 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 their involvement in the war led some antiwar activists to argue that Thai troops were mercenaries.

The Thai government did receive 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. ships and planes, and funded by American taxpayers.

Nonetheless, Thailand shouldered a significant burden in the wars in Southeast Asia, both in Vietnam and in Laos, where the United States was embroiled in a covert war against the Communist Pathet Lao insurgency. Though Laos did fall to a communist regime, the Thai strategy of containing the threat outside their own borders succeeded. Thai counterinsurgency skill and expertise helped stanch the spread of communism into their own country, which in turn furthered the U.S. goal of maintaining stable non-communist nations in Southeast Asia.

Between September 1967 and February 1972, nearly 40,000 Thai military personnel served in South Vietnam. Of those, 351 were killed and 1,358 were wounded. The United States remained grateful for their service and sacrifice.

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 is telling:

I am very much aware of and deeply appreciative of steady support you and your Government are 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, colonialism 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.

Thailand is situated near Vietnam and it will be the next target of communists, as they have already proclaimed. This is why Thailand realizes the necessity to send Military units to help oppose communist aggression when it is still at a distance from our country. The government has therefore decided to send a combat unit, one battalion strong, to take an active part in the fighting in South Vietnam in the near future.

— Statement by the Thai government, January 3, 1967.



Thai lieutenant, wearing an assortment of Buddhist amulets, maps out the route the platoon will take for the day's operations near Nhon Trac, October 1967. (National Archives)

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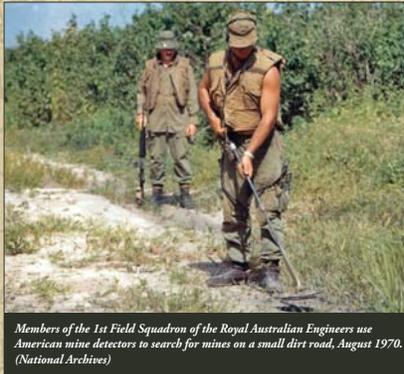
UNITED STATES ALLIES IN THE VIETNAM WAR



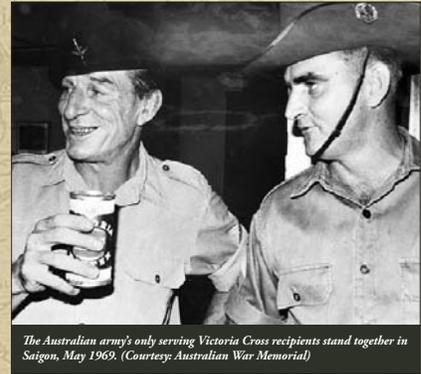
ANZAC (PART 4 OF 5)



Three Royal Australian Air Force Caribou aircraft arrive at Tan Son Nhut Air Base with crew and maintenance personnel to aid in the airlift support mission in South Vietnam, August 1965. (National Archives)



Members of the 1st Field Squadron of the Royal Australian Engineers use American mine detectors to search for mines on a small dirt road, August 1970. (National Archives)



The Australian army's only serving Victoria Cross recipients stand together in Saigon, May 1969. (Courtesy: Australian War Memorial)

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 antiwar 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 Australian and New Zealand veterans of the Vietnam War.

ANZUS

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

Australia

By 1961, the Australian government believed that defeating communism in South Vietnam was a matter both of principle and of self-defense, given the assumption that a communist-dominated Southeast Asia, just to Australia's north, represented a threat. By the end of the summer of 1962 they had sent a team of 30 advisers, 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 80 advisers embedded with ARVN field forces and six Royal Australian Air Force DHC-4 Caribou transport planes (with pilots). They also suffered their first fatal casualty.

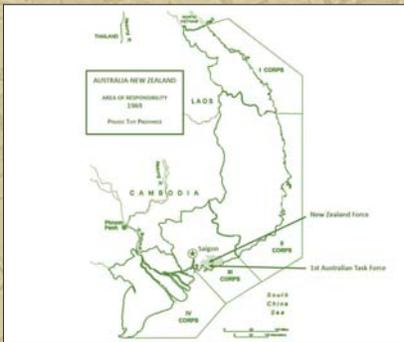
When the United States escalated its support for the South Vietnamese by sending combat troops in 1965, the Australians immediately followed suit. They committed the 1st Battalion Royal Australian Regiment (1RAR), plus support forces to serve under operational control of the US Army's 173rd Airborne Brigade at Bien Hoa. By the end of 1965, 1RAR had expanded to include an artillery battery, an engineer unit, an army aviation reconnaissance flight, and logistic support elements.

The takeover of South Vietnam would be a direct military threat to Australia and all the countries of South and South-East Asia. It must be seen as part of a thrust by Communist China between the Indian and Pacific Oceans.

— Prime Minister Sir Robert Menzies, Hansard, 29 April 1965

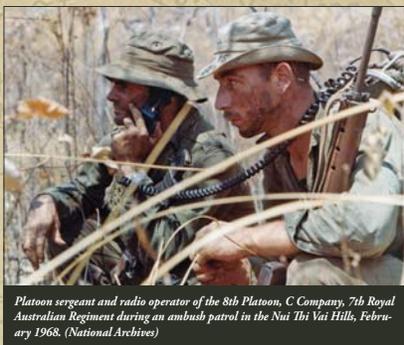
Though the Americans and Australians cooperated and fought well together, the Australian command structure did not wholeheartedly endorse American tactics, or American rules of engagement, which they sometimes perceived to be unnecessarily restrictive and counterproductive. They wanted to fight their own way. So when, in 1966, the Australian government increased its troop commitment to a task force of two battalions with combat logistic support, the 1st Australian Task Force (1ATF), they took the opportunity to separate from the 173rd Airborne and become an independent command with its own area of operations in Phuoc Tuy Province, based at Nui Dat. The 1st Australian Logistic Support Group (1ALSG) was established nearby at the port and airfield facility of Vung Tau.

The Australian "diggers" (a term widely used to describe ANZAC troops since the Gallipoli landings in World War I) were effective and capable soldiers. The Battle of Long Tan illustrates this point.



On August 18, 1966, Delta Company, 6th Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment—totaling about 108 men—set out to search and clear enemy forces from Binh Ba, an old French rubber plantation not far from Saigon. They were met by a combined Communist force of more than 1,500 North Vietnamese and Viet Cong troops.

In the first serious exchange of gunfire, face to face with the enemy, the Australians suffered most of the casualties they would suffer all day. Following their initial encounter, once Delta Company had set up a defensive perimeter, the Australian troops fought off multiple waves of attacks over the next four hours in a heavy rainstorm. They were supported by artillery fire, resupplied by two Royal Australian Air Force UH-1 "Huey" Iroquois helicopter crews, and reinforced by another Australian company that arrived at nightfall in



Platoon sergeant and radio operator of the 8th Platoon, C Company, 7th Royal Australian Regiment during an ambush patrol in the Nui Thi Vai Hills, February 1968. (National Archives)



Members of Royal New Zealand Artillery carry out a fire mission. (National Archives)

armored personnel carriers with .50-caliber machine guns. In the end, the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong broke off contact. The Aussies lost 18 killed and 24 wounded, while enemy casualties were officially estimated at some 245 dead and 350 wounded.

Between 1962 and 1973, nearly 60,000 Australian Army, Air Force and Navy personnel served in South Vietnam. At their peak, there were more than 8,300 Australians in-country at a time. More than 3,000 were wounded and 521 were killed during the course of the war.

New Zealand

Like Australia, New Zealand's government was a reliable ally in the war in Southeast Asia. As early as 1963, they provided concrete support to the South Vietnamese people by sending a civilian surgical team to provide medical assistance in Qui Nhon. By the summer of 1964, they had sent 25 Army engineers to assist with infrastructure reconstruction projects. In the summer of 1965, they sent combat forces.

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.

In 1967, New Zealand further committed two rifle companies from the 1st Battalion of the Royal New Zealand Infantry Regiment, who fought side-by-side with the Australians in the 1ATF.

The nation also provided several New Zealand Royal Air Force UH-1 Iroquois helicopter pilots and, in 1969, sent a small troop of the New Zealand Special Air Service who were also attached to their Australian counterparts.

Between 1964 and 1972, about 3,500 New Zealand military personnel served in South Vietnam, though no more than 550 were in-country at any given time. They suffered 187 wounded and 37 dead during that timeframe.

The [Australian] army took over a stretch of Back Beach at Vung Tau, on the coast near Saigon, and during the war ran its own fortified recreation centre complete with surfboards, sailing boats, water skiing and go-karts, plus bars, a swimming pool, a concert stage and mini-golf beside the beachfront clubhouse. The one nod of recognition that a war was actually going on was there in the barbed wire and machinegun emplacements. At the Peter Badcoe surf club, named after an Australian Victoria Cross winner, the soldiers could stow their weapons, have a hot shower, change into civilian clothes, enjoy a meat pie and a beer.

— Stuart Scott, *Charlie Don't Surf, But Aussies Do*

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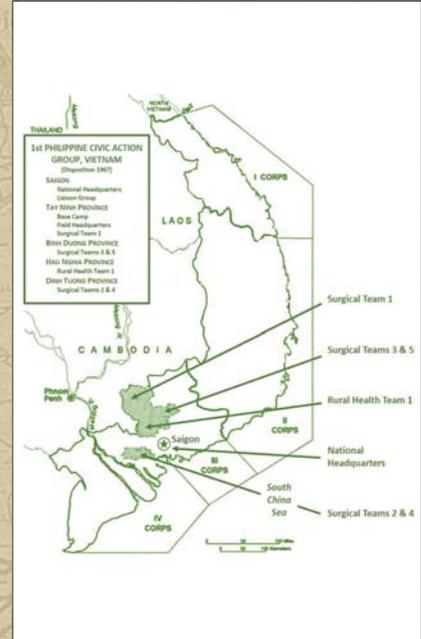
PHILIPPINES (PART 5 OF 5)



PHILCAG-V provided medical care to Vietnamese families throughout Tay Ninh Province, September 1969. (National Archives)



PHILCAG-V brigadier general and Army of Republic of Vietnam Armored Forces major general discuss the civic action program being conducted in the hamlet of Ben Dinh, near Tay Ninh, September 1968. (National Archives)



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.

Note on civic action groups from an Australian observer:
 "Results [of civil aid programs] were also forthcoming from the military point of view. ... Villages receiving civic action stated that these activities were one of the major factors in helping them decide to return to the Government. One villager commented that projects were being completed which the Viet Cong had promised years before but had never carried out."
 — Ian McNeill,
 To Long Tan: The Australian Army and the Vietnam War 1950-1966

Instead, the Philippine house and senate approved an appropriation for civic assistance. In August 1964, the Philippines sent a contingent of 16 doctors, nurses, technicians, and civic action officers from the Philippine armed forces to assist "in the advisory effort directed toward psychological warfare and civil affairs in III Corps," according to the U.S. Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (MACV) Command History (1964). The group was called PHILCON (the Philippines Contingent).

Philippines Civic Action Group-Vietnam

In 1966, the Vietnamese government requested increased aid from the Philippines, including combat troops. In response, the Philippines sent a new detachment to South Vietnam to replace PHILCON. The Philippines Civic Action Group-Vietnam (PHILCAG-V) included an engineer construction battalion, medical and rural community development teams, a security battalion, and a logistics and headquarters element. They set up base in Tay Ninh, 45 miles northwest of Saigon, in the summer of 1966. Over the next 40 months, PHILCAG-V performed a variety of civic action tasks, primarily in public works construction, rural development, and food and medical relief.



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,' it means: 'Filipinos are Number One.'" Apparently, Filipinos were remembered fondly by many Vietnamese people. Operation Brotherhood had left its mark.

Air and Naval Bases

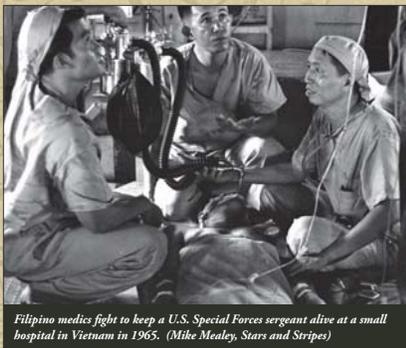
Perhaps the greatest contribution by the Philippine government to the U.S. war effort in Vietnam was the willingness to allow U.S. forces to continue operations out of Naval Base Subic Bay in Zambales and Clark Air Base at Angeles City in Luzon, both in the Philippines.

Operation Brotherhood

In 1954, after Vietnam had been divided into a communist North and a non-communist South, thousands of northern Vietnamese fled south. Oscar Arellano, 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, Philippines President Diosdado Macapagal sought funds from the Philippine congress to send combat troops to South Vietnam.

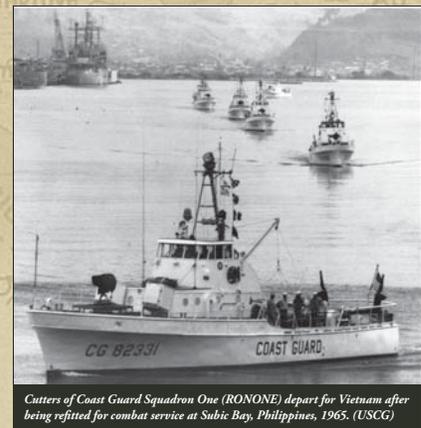


Filipino medics fight to keep a U.S. Special Forces sergeant alive at a small hospital in Vietnam in 1965. (Mike Mealey, Stars and Stripes)



PHILCAG-V sergeant treats a little girl for body sores while her mother holds her during the civic action program in the hamlet of Ben Dinh, September 1968. (National Archives)

While made up of 2,068 Filipino soldiers at its peak, PHILCAG-V was a humanitarian mission, not a combat force. The PHILCAG-V motto sums up the ethos: To build, not destroy; to bring happiness, not sorrow; to develop good will, not hatred. Nevertheless, the Filipino soldiers sacrificed 9 dead and 64 wounded during their time in South Vietnam. PHILCAG-V was fully redeployed back to the Philippines by December 1969.



Cutters of Coast Guard Squadron One (RONONE) depart for Vietnam after being refitted for combat service at Subic Bay, Philippines, 1965. (USCG)

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