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in the Humanities & Social Sciences



E. Bruce Reynolds. *Thailand's Secret War: OSS, SOE and the Free Thai Underground During World War II.* Cambridge Military Histories Series. Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2005. xx + 462 pp. $85.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-521-83601-2.

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Published on H-War (March, 2006)

Compared to the campaigns in the Pacific, the Southeast Asian campaigns of World War II have received limited attention in military history (the possible exception being the campaign in Burma). In his second book on the role of Thailand in the war, Dr. Reynolds has provided a well-written and fascinating addition to the relatively small body of scholarship in this area. Reynolds' first book, *Thailand and Japan's Southern Advance, 1940-1945* (1994), provided an account of the Thai-Japanese relationship in the war. In *Thailand's Secret War*, Reynolds discusses the other side of the Thai experience in World War II--the courting of and surreptitious cooperation with the Allies.

Prior to the war, Thailand had maintained its independence through a combination of adequate defense against regional aggressors in Burma and Indochina, and skillful diplomacy that played the colonial powers of France and Great Britain off one another and kept the great neighbor to the north, China, at bay. At the start of World War II, a primarily military government sensed the winds of change and succumbed to Japanese pressure in acceding to an alliance and allowing the Japanese to use Thailand as a base for operations against Burma. In exchange, the Japanese allowed the Thai to maintain their government and armed forces and supported them in achieving some of their regional territorial ambitions.

Almost immediately after the start of the war, however, certain factions of the Thai government and of the large Thai population overseas, which was primarily in western countries, lobbied for and began forming ties to Japan's enemies. While some in the Allied countries saw this as opportunism, it merely carried on the tradition of policy that had kept Thailand independent for the previous centuries. Against a backdrop of internal political friction between Thai military and civilian government leaders, Reynolds' research reveals that the outreach to the Allies was complicated by the widely different goals and perceptions of those countries: the United States, Great Britain and China.

The tangled web that Reynolds unravels is worthy of a good spy novel; there are myriad plots and sub-plots. In the largest sense, the Thai situation highlighted fundamental differences be-

tween the Allies regarding the future of Southeast Asia after the war. The British wanted to regain their colonial holdings and saw Thai cooperation with Japan as a direct challenge. They did not trust or want to cooperate with emissaries from the Thai government. The United States, on the other hand, perceived the Thai efforts much more positively. It saw the Thai outreach in terms of its potential to assist the war effort in China and Burma. For their part, the Nationalist Chinese saw the opportunity to use the large ethnic Chinese population in Thailand and the historic Chinese-Thai relationship to extend their influence after the war. Within the struggles among the Allies, were subordinate struggles within the individual Allied camps. U.S. commanders and Office of Strategic Services (OSS) leaders based in China had differences with those based in India. The British Special Operations Executive (SOE) was hampered in its efforts to establish positive contacts with the Thais because of the policies that emanated from British political leaders and the Foreign Ministry.

Owing to the very positive cooperation between the U.S. State Department and the U.S. military (primarily the OSS), and to the fact that the Thais perceived the Americans as the party with the least regional ambitions, the United States had the most success in establishing a presence in Thailand during the war. OSS teams formed and trained Thai guerilla units and, through the Thais, gathered valuable intelligence on Japanese activities in the region. The lack of real U.S. interest during the war, however, resulted in an ironic situation after the war. When the civilian-led government, which was largely responsible for inviting the Americans in, was overthrown by the military, which had cooperated with the Japanese, the postwar United States embraced the military junta due to its strong anti-communist policies. The Thai leadership that provided strong support and basing to the United States during the Vietnam conflict represented this faction of Thai politics, not that of the "Free Thai" who fought side by side with U.S. operatives in World War II.

As previously stated, Reynolds' earlier book, *Thailand and Japan's Southern Advance 1940-1945*, covered the Thai-Japanese relationship in detail. I assume that is the reason that the Japanese are really in the background in *Thailand's Secret War*. It is not necessary to have read Reynolds' earlier book to understand his present book (this reviewer has not), but it probably is the only way a reader would obtain a complete picture of Thailand's unique role in the war. It would also help to have a general knowledge of the course of the war in Southeast Asia in order to place events in their proper context.

Thailand's Secret War is well researched: a review of the sources indicates that Reynolds accessed both U.S. and British official sources, many western and Thai secondary sources, and has interviewed an impressive number of American, British and Thai participants. It is also a well-written book. Reynolds did an outstanding job in providing a clear narrative of what could be a very confusing story. In many cases, a western reader of Asian military history can get lost in long place and proper names that all seem to sound the same. This is not the case in *Thailand's Secret War*. I never had a problem tracking and differentiating between the many personalities and locales. A small criticism is that some locations mentioned in the text are not indicated on the maps provided.

This was a very engaging read. I've already mentioned its value in casting light on previously unheralded parts of World War II. It is also a valuable history to help understand the present state of Thailand and Southeast Asia. Thailand is now under a civil government, but is still a strong partner of the United States. Thailand currently faces many issues, including violence in the heavily Muslim southern provinces, and the rise (or taking the long Asian view, the reappearance) of China as a regional power. Southeast Asia is not a sin-

gular entity and Thailand especially is a unique country that has remained independent based on its ability to navigate among the great powers. *Thailand's Secret War* is an excellent case study of such navigation during World War II. There is no reason to believe that Thailand will not follow a similar course when faced with future challenges.

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Citation: Phillip Ridderhof. Review of Reynolds, E. Bruce. *Thailand's Secret War: OSS, SOE and the Free Thai Underground During World War II.* H-War, H-Net Reviews. March, 2006.

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