Sam Lyon

Title: “An Alliance of Dysfunction”
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Sam Lyon is currently pursuing B.A.s in both History and Secondary Education. Aside from being a student, he is a soldier in the Indiana National Guard, as well as an electrical motor mechanic. He is an avid backpacker and traveler, as well as, obviously, a history enthusiast. This enthusiasm carried him to an internship at the Fort Wayne Historical Society this past summer, and his WWI exhibit is still on display there! Sam’s historical interests are all over the place, and have a lot to do with what classes he is currently taking and what books he is reading; currently his interests lie mainly in warfare and Southeast Asia.

Abstract

This paper asserts that the United States-Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) alliance during the Vietnam War was truly an alliance built upon, and operating within, a system of dysfunction. Focusing on the U.S. military political structure and its dealings with the ARVN, the paper proves that the U.S.-ARVN relationship was dysfunctional. It was, in fact, a tightly woven and toxic system of inter-dependency, which crippled the operational effectiveness of both armies.

My thesis is supported by various examples. The first massive sign of a distrusting and ineffective alliance is seen in the creation of the ARVN itself. While South Vietnamese generals wanted an army more suited towards local, guerilla war, the U.S. desired, pushed for, and attained an army that would be capable of withstanding conventional warfare. The way that the ARVN was structured continued to hurt the people of South Vietnam, who struggled to farm the land while meeting draft quotas, furthering the rift between the U.S. and the South.

Another of the many examples of dysfunction can be observed in the inadequate training and equipment received by conscripted South Vietnamese soldiers. Although drafted to meet U.S. demands, ARVN troops were horribly trained, and many feared that they would perish because of this. This fear, coupled with a massive lack in U.S. arms to supply them, caused the ARVN to be far less aggressive than the U.S. hoped. This lack of aggression, caused by U.S. lack of insight and care for their counterparts, did nothing but harm the American military. It caused American soldiers to, more often than not, be the aggressors in place of ineffective ARVN units.

My road into this subject itself was not a straight one. At first I wished to research and write on the Fall of Saigon, and the U.S.-ARVN relationship in that instance alone. After reading a few documents about U.S. neglect for their South Vietnamese counterparts during the evacuation process, I wanted to see how this dynamic played out during the course of the entire war. The question I set out to answer was, by itself, completely unoriginal. It has been dissected and poured over constantly by politicians, upset veterans, and historians alike since the war’s
termination. That question is, why did the U.S.-ARVN alliance fail? I believe that the unique nature of my research stems from my approach. I looked not to any particular battle, doctrine, or instant, but to the backbone of the alliance itself as the primary cause of U.S.-ARVN defeat.

**Bibliographical Note**

In order to guide this research and support my thesis, I used multiple primary and secondary sources, as well as a reference work. Primary sources include a U.S. Air Force step-by-step account of the Fall of Saigon, multiple newspaper articles, and the Paris Peace Accords themselves. These primary sources were augmented by secondary material ranging from accounts of daily life in the ARVN to the ins and outs of Vietnam’s traditional, subsistence economy. Primary sources were used mostly in discussing battles and the Fall of Vietnam itself, and they were invaluable in providing a sense of firsthand panic and chaos.

A substantial part of my work was devoted towards historical context and the background of the war, and for this I used exclusively secondary sources. One secondary source that proved incredibly useful for me was *ARVN: Life and Death in the South Vietnamese Army*, by Robert Bingham. This source gave key insight to the much unexplored plight of the ARVN soldier. Additionally, I relied on Stanley Kutler’s *Encyclopedia of the Vietnam War* to provide me with definitions, biographies, and orders of battles.