

15. ESTABLISHMENT OF THE ANTI-JAPAN RESISTANCE MOVEMENT AND SERI THAI (1981)

THE FEELINGS OF THE THAI PEOPLE

from Their Own Experience and from Knowing that the Nation Was
Invaded by Japan

The majority of Thai people are patriots. Whether they were in Thailand and experienced for themselves that the nation was invaded, or were overseas and heard about it, the feeling arose that they must fight the invaders to recover the independence of the nation.

While I was at a cabinet meeting on the afternoon of 8 December [1941], the Japanese army moved from Battambang to Bangkok, as was reported in the cabinet minutes, which I print here as part 2 [not included in this translation]. When the cabinet meeting ended at 17.55, I returned home by car and noticed many groups of Thai people gathered on both sides of the road and crying. This exact situation appeared in the American newspaper, *Washington Times Herald*, of 18 December from a story which the paper's reporter slipped out of the country, as follows: "The Thailanders, shocked by the news of the surrender, wept as they stood dazed in the streets."

When I reached home, I found several friends waiting for me, such as Luang Bannakonkowitz (Pao Chakkaphak), Nai Sanguan Tularak, Nai Chamkat Phalangkun, Nai Wichit Lulitanon, Nai Tiang Sirikhan, Nai Thawin Udon, M.L. Kri Detchatiwong (Luang Detchatiwongwarawat) and so on. The friends who had come to see me explained the feelings of themselves and the majority of the people who had experienced the sight of the Japanese army, a foreign army, invading Thailand. The Thai people had cried, not out of cowardice and fear for their lives, but because of anguish and resentment. Anguish because foreigners had invaded. Resentment because the government had not, as it had announced both in the newspapers and on the radio, made them sacrifice themselves to fight the invaders. Even though they could not fight with weapons, they could burn houses and granaries before the enemy invaded, leaving just the earth for the

invaders to seize. As the government slogan ran: "Let the enemy seize only the surface of the earth." The government spokesman had also announced that the citizens should use every weapon available such as guns, swords, pikes, spears, and so on, even poisonous animals and plants such as snakes, centipedes, scorpions, horse-eye beans [*fak mamui*, an irritant plant], and so on (those still alive today who heard the government radio broadcast of that time can probably remember). When the Japanese actually invaded, the army, police, and people at the border were ready to sacrifice their lives to fight them. But the government allowed the Japanese in by not calling on the people to fight.

The group of friends who came to discuss together saw that the people should not rely on the government to preserve the independence of the Thai nation. That is, the government would increasingly have to follow the demands of the Japanese to the point where the country would be totally bound to Japan.

When we had talked together for some time, those at the meeting agreed to dedicate their lives to recover the full independence of the Thai nation. To that end, they agreed to establish an "anti-Japan resistance organization" consisting of patriotic Thai people of all classes and social levels both inside and outside the country. The meeting entrusted me with the duty of being the head and deciding on the future plan of action.

THE TWO TASKS of the Anti-Japan Resistance Organization

The organization had two tasks to perform: first, to fight the Japanese invaders with the Thai patriotic forces, in cooperation with the Allies; second, to make sure the Allies recognized the true intention of the Thai people not to be their enemies.

After the government of Prime Minister Field Marshal Phibunsongkhram declared war and created a state of war with the Allies, this second task was extended as: "to make sure the Allies recognize that Thailand is not on the losing side in the war, and to do anything to lessen the severity of the situation".

If we merely took up armed resistance against the Japanese without making the Allies understand, Thailand would be considered an enemy by the Allies, and Thailand would be on the losing side in the war. But if we used only words to talk with the Allies with no armed action against the Japanese inside Thailand, the Allies would not think this was enough to overcome the problem that Thailand had been involved in the war.

DISCIPLINE AND CAUTION of the Members inside Thailand

I appealed to the founders and later members of the anti-Japan movement in Thailand to bear in mind at all times that for the activities to succeed without loss to the organization, all founders and members must maintain secrecy and act with tight discipline, to prevent the enemy destroying the movement. They must always bear in mind that the activity zone of the movement of resistance against Japan inside the country was territory which had fallen under the occupation of Japan and of a Thai government which was under the power and influence of Japan. The Japanese army which had invaded Thailand had only fighting units and supply units. Suppose Japan brought in units of the special military police which the Japanese call Kempeitai. They had the same nature as the special military police of Italy and Germany known as Gestapo. They had the power to arrest people suspected of being enemies of Japan, and might imprison, torture, or kill them, as Japan had done in the Chinese territory under Japanese occupation.

Besides, the Thai police and military police who had not joined our resistance movement were intent upon suppressing anyone who resisted the Japanese, or who was suspected of preparing to resist the Japanese, against the wishes of the Thai government. Such people could be arrested and jailed by the Thai police or military police. Hence as the members of the resistance movement were still surrounded by the Japanese and by a government under the power and influence of Japan, it was necessary to use caution and work in an "underground" way, or as is known in English as "*cover story*".

But if the organization were able to seize some territory outside Bangkok and form a resistance government, those who joined the resistance government would not need to work underground but could fight Japan openly and let the Allies know and openly support the resistance government.

Any member of the organization who was ordered by the organization command to work openly in the Allied countries would be free from the threat of the Kempeitai or Japanese Gestapo and of the Thai police and military police under Japanese influence.

THE PLAN TO SEIZE THE NORTHERN REGION to Set Up a Government of Resistance against Japan

When those who came to the meeting to found the anti-Japan resistance movement had talked together and come to this understanding, I asked them all to return home and help one another to study the situation, to

consider the thoughts and feelings of the people in general, and to discuss together again after thinking the matter over.

The meeting ended at 11 P.M. on that 8 December.

I asked M.L. Kri Detchatiwong, who was chief engineer in the highway department and a well-known figure in the north (his wife's mother was from the family of Chiang Rai rulers), to talk with me further whether it was appropriate for the resistance movement to seize the northern region, because this region had a back door to Burma which was then under the British. M.L. Kri agreed and advised we should hurry to seize the rail route at Paknampho (Nakhon Sawan) before Japan did. The northern road route at that time reached only to Saraburi and Lopburi.

While I was talking with M.L. Kri around midnight of 8 December, Group Captain Kat Kengradomying (Luang Katsongkhram) arrived at my house and asked to meet me urgently. I had M.L. Kri hide in one room while I met with Gp. Cpt. Kat who was one of the promoters of 24 June. Gp. Cpt. Kat greeted me and stated that he could see nobody who could help the nation. He swore that he was loyal to me and would act on my command to recover the independence of the Thai nation. Then he announced that he was ready to use one army company to take me, him, and trusted friends to travel to Kanchanaburi, and to enter British Burma to organize a government in exile to resist Japan. He hoped that the British government would lend support. I expressed my thanks to Gp. Cpt. Kat, and explained to him that it was not yet time to form a government in exile in Burma because we should establish a government to resist Japan inside our own country, in particular in the northern or northeastern region. The north was more appropriate because it had a back door to British Burma. Besides, Gp. Cpt. Kat was from Chiang Mai and could probably assist with this plan. Gp. Cpt. Kat said he agreed with my plan. I thus asked him whether he had trusted friends in the military stationed at Nakhon Sawan. He replied that he had friends who were sufficiently close and reliable. I thus asked him whether he was willing to travel by motorboat as quickly as possible to Paknampho (Nakhon Sawan) and contact his military friends to help the nation by seizing the railway line at and around Paknampho, and blocking the Japanese from moving troops to the north where our group would secretly go to establish the government to resist Japan. Gp. Cpt. Kat travelled by motorboat in the early morning of 9 December. On the 11th, he returned and reported to me that when he reached Nakhon Sawan, the Japanese had already seized the railway. Hence we had to find another way.

I saw that even though the plan to seize the railway at Nakhon Sawan could not be carried through, that had not wrecked the plan to organize forces in the provinces by the method of setting up several units secretly in various localities. This plan is covered in the report of 7 May 1946 of the

special committee of the Assembly to investigate the national property which the Seri Thai had expended both inside and outside the country. I also had it published in the book *Letters of Nai Pridi Banomyong to Phra Phisan Sukhumwit about the Records of Seri Thai Concerning Actions in Kandy, New Delhi, and the USA, with appendices on several matters concerning Seri Thai*, in both Thai and English [the English version: *Political and Military Task of the Free-Thai Movement to Regain National Sovereignty and Independence*, Bangkok: American, 1979].

JAPAN DEMANDS THE THAI GOVERNMENT to Remove Me and Nai Wilat Osathanon from the Cabinet by Making Me a Regent

On 16 December 1941 the Assembly passed a resolution approving the proposal of the cabinet to appoint me to one of the vacant posts of regent (as Chaophraya Yommarat had passed away).

The background of this event appears in the primary documents as follows.

Testimony of Police Major General Adun Adundetcharat, deputy prime minister, given under oath before the war crimes tribunal on 17 December 1945.

"I went to the Suan Kulap palace, the residence of the prime minister. I met the prime minister and Nai Wanit Pananon. Nai Wanit said that the Japanese disliked Luang Praditmanutham and Nai Wilat Osathanon because these two leant towards the British. Any matter that the cabinet agreed with Japan could not be pursued smoothly because these two did not see eye to eye with Japan. He wanted these two out of the cabinet. As for Luang Pradit in particular, the Japanese proposed he should be appointed to the Regency Council. As to why Japan wanted Luang Pradit as regent, I think they understood that Luang Pradit was someone who had influence, and who commanded the respect of officials and people. If he became a regent, he would be removed from political duty but it would not appear, the Japanese thought, that the Japanese were mistreating him. After Nai Wanit had spoken with me, the prime minister spoke with me in the same vein. He asked me to inform Luang Pradit, Nai Wilat Osathanon, and Nai Thawi Bunyaket and then proceed with the matter further. Thus I asked the three individuals to Suan Kulap palace and explained to them what was desired and why. Luang Pradit responded that he would consult with his group first. Nai Wilat had no objection. That

evening Luang Pradit came to meet me at my residence at Parusakawan palace, and explained that he had consulted with his group but still felt uneasy that joining the Regency Council might appear inappropriate or unseemly. I tried several ways to explain the long-term necessity. Finally Luang Pradit agreed. Nai Thawi Bunyaket arranged matters for Luang Pradit and Nai Wilat to leave the cabinet and for Luang Pradit to join the Regency Council.”

A note by Nai Thawi Bunyaket under the title “Additional facts about events in Thailand during the Second World War by Nai Thawi Bunyaket” was printed in the book by Nai Direk Jayanama entitled *Siam and World War II*, published in 1957, pages 357–59, as follows [N.B. this passage was not included in the English version of Direk’s book]:

Later, on what date I cannot recall, but I think between 10 and 12 December or thereabouts, and certainly not many days after the government signed the agreement allowing the Japanese army to pass through Thailand, the Japanese government began negotiations to borrow a first instalment of money from Thailand to pay Japanese military expenses. Nai Pridi Banomyong, minister of finance, proposed to the cabinet meeting that we should realize that giving the Japanese government money for their military expenses would not end here. Probably they would ask for loans again and again without end according to their military needs. If we gave the loans, we would have to print more banknotes, which would rapidly increase the number of banknotes in circulation in the market. This would have a bad effect on the economy. It would create inflation. Hence it would be better to make the Japanese military print their own notes to use inside their own army, and call them invasion notes. Thus when the war was over, we could cancel these notes. In that way, when the war was over the finance and economy of the country would not be affected, and there would be no inflation. The prime minister countered that although acting on the opinion and proposal of the minister of finance would prevent inflation, it would be equivalent to showing that we had lost independence and sovereignty, and hence he did not agree. The minister of finance replied that the fact we had allowed the Japanese army to enter all over the place and do whatever they liked, surely implied that we had already lost independence and sovereignty. On this point there was violent argument between the prime minister and the finance minister, but in the end the prime minister remained steadfast in his opinion in favour of lending baht to the Japanese army by printing additional notes according to necessity. A few days later, the cabinet was reshuffled. Nai Pridi Banomyong was removed from the

post of minister of finance and became a regent, for which one position was vacant. About the same time another two or three ministers were removed from their posts. As far as I can remember, Nai Direk Jayanama was removed as minister of foreign affairs (later sent as ambassador to Tokyo), and Nai Wilat Osathanon. As it happened, we had to go on continuously printing notes for the Japanese army to borrow and use with a certain amount of gold stored in Japan as guarantee and later with a large amount of yen as guarantee also. Besides, the Japanese government adjusted the exchange rate between baht and yen, increasing the value of the yen up to one yen to one baht, which before had been 1.50 yen to one baht. This arose from the loan because Japan wanted to repay us with a smaller amount of yen.

THAMMASAT UNIVERSITY AS THE SECRET LOCATION of the Command Headquarters for the Resistance Organization Which Later used the Name "Seri Thai Movement", and as Detention Camp for British and Americans during the War

I was still rector of the University of Moral and Political Sciences.

I established an understanding with the prime minister (Phibun) and deputy prime minister (Adun) that while the Japanese were not happy for me to be in the cabinet which was a political post, the rectorship was not a political post. Besides I had accepted this post with the approval of the Assembly according to the act establishing Thammasat University. I maintained I should continue in the rectorship. The government had no objection.

I used the university as the command headquarters of the anti-Japan movement which later united with the Seri Thai in the USA and Britain and used the name "Seri Thai movement".

DETENTION CAMP FOR BRITISH AND AMERICANS during the War

On 11 December 1941 the Thai government and the Japanese concluded an agreement on military cooperation. The Thai government made preparations to arrest British and American nationals and detain them as enemy nationals. If the Thai government did not make such arrangements, the Japanese army would. The Thai government entrusted Police Major General Adun, deputy prime minister, to carry this out.

The deputy prime minister came to see me and asked to divide off part of

Thammasat University to detain these nationals. He also asked the university to arrange for its staff to take care of this detention camp. As camp commander, the army appointed M.R. Phongphrom Chakraphan, a reserve major serving as an official in the customs department of the Finance Ministry. He had previously been one of my subordinates. The army asked the university staff to arrange the best possible accommodation for the detainees.

As rector I accepted the deputy prime minister's proposals, because I saw that first, these nationals in Thailand would avoid detention by the Japanese who might use the torture methods which the Japanese had already inflicted on British and Americans inside Japan; and second, helping nationals of the Allied countries was one way to make the Allies treat Thailand less harshly in the event that the Allies won the war.

I entrusted Nai Wichit Lulitanon, secretary general of the university, who was also secretary general of the resistance movement henceforth known as the Seri Thai movement, to be head of the university staff in charge of accommodation for the detainees.

The university welcomed and watched over these detainees to the best of its ability to prevent the Japanese grabbing and torturing them.

After the Second World War, Lord Mountbatten divulged to the *Times* newspaper of 18 December 1946 as follows:

There are, I know, many who were prisoners of war in Siam who have good reason to be grateful for Pradit's good will to us. So let us honour a man who has rendered high service to the allied cause and to his own country, and who from my personal knowledge of him is a firm advocate of Anglo-Siamese friendship. The chain of local resistance to Japanese oppression in the occupied lands of South-East Asia had very few gaps in it, and one of the strongest links was forged by Pradit in Siam. (Loud and prolonged cheers.)

In addition, there are documents of the British Special Forces Club of 17 December 1970 concerning me as follows:

01-589-0490

01-589-4315

SPECIAL FORCES CLUB

8 Herbert Crescent

Knightsbridge

London S.W.1

17th December 1970

H.E. Nai Pridi Banamyong

E.c. 3 – 5

17, rue Emile Dubois,

PARIS XIVe.

Your Excellency,

It was the unanimous decision of the Committee that I should write to express the wish that you would accept our invitation to be an Honorary Member of this Club.

As you know, the Club was formed in 1945 by and for those who served in Special Forces and who were engaged in resistance and underground movements during the 1939/45 war.

It would give us, and all members of the Club, great pleasure to learn that Your Excellency will accept this Honorary Membership. I know that it would give particular pleasure to those members, both Thai and British formerly in the Siam Country Section of Force 136 who in the war years worked so closely with and received at all times such steadfast support and encouragement from you.

This invitation is offered as a mark of our acknowledgement and high appreciation of the outstanding part played by Your Excellency in promoting and sustaining the resistance movement which in days of peril and hazard rendered service to both our countries.

I am, Your Excellency,

Yours sincerely,

[signed] Geoffrey H. Walford

CHAIRMAN

As the university had given a good welcome to the detainees, and protected them safely from the Japanese, one day Professor Hutchenson, a Thammasat professor detained in the camp, told a student who was on the staff looking after the camp that he had observed the university's conduct towards the detainees was better than Japanese conduct towards detainees in

China. He wondered whether the students had set up a movement like the Free French. The student replied that he should put the question to someone senior. This surmise among the detainees got through to the staff of the US embassy in Bangkok who were detained inside the embassy itself. The facts appeared in the report of 18 August 1942 by Mr. Chapman, former second secretary in the American embassy in Bangkok. This report was disclosed twenty-five years after the event in the US government volume on "Foreign Relations of the United States" 1942, volume 1, pages 917-920:

At the time of my departure from Bangkok on June 29, 1942, the Thai Government appeared to be under the control of and subservient to the Japanese military although still nominally independent. The pre-war Council of Ministers remained in office with a few exceptions. As previously noted, Luang Pradist Manudharm, pre-war Minister of Finance, who has so stoutly resisted Japanese attempts at financial penetration and who has staunch pro-Allied sentiments, has been "promoted" to the Council of Regency to eliminate him from political activities inimical to Japan. . . Luang Vichitr had recently become Foreign Minister. Nai Direk, the pre-war Foreign Minister, was safely under observation as Thai Ambassador in Tokyo. As indicated in a previous paragraph the only notable absentee was Nai Vilas Osathananda, formerly Director General of the Publicity Department.

Indications of the development of a "Free Thai" movement organized by university students were reported. Evidently the objectives of such a movement would be to create an underground revolutionary group which at a propitious moment would seize the power and free the country from the Japanese yoke and the control of its present . . . leaders. Whether the small group of liberal and pro-Allied leaders who are still in the Government . . . are connected with this movement is not known.

THE ESTABLISHMENT OF SERI THAI in the USA and Britain

Let me recount the feeling of the majority of patriotic Thais in the USA and Britain, and the attitude of the US and British governments towards the establishment of Seri Thai in the two countries.

I have already related how the Thais in Thailand experienced firsthand the Japanese invasion from 8 December 1941 onwards which created the desire to found the anti-Japan resistance movement to recover the full independence of the Thai nation. Among the Thais in the USA and Britain also, the desire arose

to form an organization to resist the Japanese and recover the independence of the Thai nation. Although they received news somewhat late, these overseas Thais did not waste much time in putting out a statement opposing Japan, and considering forming a resistance organization.

On 11 December 1941, three days after Japan invaded Thailand, M.R. Seni Pramoj, Thai ambassador in Washington, made a statement to the press and sent a telegram to the Thai government in Bangkok. The gist was that the Thai embassy in Washington would carry out those orders from the government which the embassy saw were not orders issued on the command of the Japanese. One day later on 12 December, the embassy heard the news that the Thai government had made an agreement of military cooperation with Japan. The embassy informed the American government that the embassy did not recognize this agreement with the Japanese government, and that the ambassador and embassy officials were preparing to form the Seri Thai organization. The American government consulted with the British government. However, the British government replied to the American government in a memo from the British embassy on 24 January 1941 which appeared in the US government volume already mentioned (*Foreign Relations of the United States*) 1941, volume 5, page 302, as follows:

711.92/33

The British Embassy to the Department of State
AIDE-MEMOIRE

His Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom welcomes the proposal made in the State Department's memorandum of December 18th to continue to recognize the Thai Minister in Washington as the representative in the United States of the free people of Thailand. When the question of setting up a Free Thai movement arises, the personalities of possible leaders will naturally require careful consideration, and His Majesty's Government are now going into this question so far as the United Kingdom is concerned. The Thai Minister in London has shown no wish to come out into open opposition to the regime in Bangkok, and His Majesty's Government consider that it will be best to arrange for his departure.

When the American government received this memo from the British embassy, it replied by a memo on 19 January 1942, which appeared in the same volume for 1942, volume 1, pages 913-914, as follows:

With regard to the Thai Minister in Washington this Government has decided, after careful consideration of all factors involved, not to proceed

at present with the proposal to recognize the minister as “the representative in the United States of the free people of Thailand”, and intends for the time being to continue to recognize him as “Minister of Thailand”.

With regards to the text of the statement which the British Government proposes to issue in London, this Government considers that it would be preferable to defer the issuance of any statements by the British and the United States Governments until such time as word shall have been received that the British and the American Ministers to Thailand have safely departed from the country. This Government agrees that any statements issued in regard to Thailand by the British Government, the Netherlands Government and the United States Government should not conflict.

Washington, January 19, 1942

Although the British government reserved judgement on recognizing the Thai ambassador in Washington as the head of the Seri Thai movement, yet the ambassador and embassy officials in Washington received assistance from the US government to establish Seri Thai forces of Thai patriots and volunteers to go to Thailand to fight the Japanese.

The Seri Thai movement in the USA called the organization in English the “*Free Thai Movement*”.

The great majority of Thais in Great Britain joined the Seri Thai in Britain. Males were trained as British soldiers to go and fight the Japanese in Thailand. Those interested in the details should read the chapter by Nai Puey Ungphakorn, “Temporary soldier”, published in the book by Nai Direk Jayanama on Siam in World War II.

As the British government still referred to Thailand as “*Siam*” and the Thais as “*Siamese*”, in Britain the Seri Thai movement was called the “*Free Siamese Movement*”.

Later when the anti-Japanese resistance movement inside the country had united with the Seri Thai in the USA and Britain, we called our movement the “Seri Thai movement”.

Yet the British government documents still referred to the “*Resistance Movement*”, hence in announcements and official agreements with the British government, we called it in English the “*Thai Resistance Movement*”.

SOME DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE SERI THAI MOVEMENT and the Claims of the CPT in Resisting Japan

The Chinese annual encyclopedia “*su chia chu su nian tian*” or “encyclopedia of world knowledge” which was published several years running from 1958, claimed that the Communist Party of Thailand was founded on 1 December 1942. That means the CPT was founded eleven months and twenty-three days after the Japanese army invaded Thailand. Documents of the Communist Party of Thailand after 1949 uphold the same claim as this encyclopedia. This day was regularly celebrated as foundation day. This indicates that the party was founded later than the anti-Japan resistance organization and the Seri Thai in the USA and Britain.

Many Chinese journals and documents have pronouncements by the CPT claiming that it led the Thai people to fight the Japanese. But a new announcement was made later maintaining 7 August 1965 as the day known in Isan language as the “day of the gun shot”, meaning the day when the CPT shot an enemy. This was twenty-three years after the Chinese encyclopedia and the CPT claim that the party was founded in 1942, and twenty years after the end of the Second World War.

There is no evidence that the CPT communicated to any Allied country that it had joined the armed struggle against the Japanese. Moreover, there is a point for concern. If two parties making war against the common Japanese enemy each fought in its own different way without a common military plan, they would be at a disadvantage. One party might strike before the right time and provoke the Japanese to destroy Thailand before Allied help could arrive. Take the example of the Polish communists who rushed to launch their struggle against Germany before the Allies could send troops to help. Or consider if the Allies had mobilized forces to attack the Japanese when the CPT was not yet ready. That would have resulted in damage to the Allies and the people’s forces organized by the CPT.

In the Chinese encyclopedia and documents of the CPT, there is no evidence they made any understanding with the Allies. Communists in the Allied nations have not stated that the CPT made any agreement that if the CPT led forces to fight the Japanese, the Allies would recognize Thailand as not on the losing side of the war. Hence when Japan admitted defeat, what could the CPT have done to make the Allied countries recognize Thailand was not on the losing side of the war—even after the Thai government had declared war and created a state of war with Great Britain, USA, and China? Would the CPT have led the Thai people to fight on alone against Britain, USA, and China until these countries recognized that Thailand was not on the losing side?