

March 31, 2025

My name is Youa Ying Vang. I was born in 1949 in Laos, and at the young age of 13, I became a soldier. In 1971, I was recruited by the CIA to work alongside American forces, serving as a Close Support Radio Operator. My role was critical in gathering intelligence during the Vietnam War, intelligence that helped save countless American lives.

Despite the risks we faced daily, many of us who served in Laos were not provided weapons for self-defense. We operated in the shadows, recording enemy communications, which were then translated and shared with American forces and General Vang Pao. This intelligence was instrumental in tracking enemy movements, planning strategic operations, and most importantly, locating and rescuing downed American pilots. In moments where survival was uncertain, our work meant the difference between life and death.

The sacrifices of the Hmong and other allied forces who stood with the United States have largely gone unrecognized. We risked everything—our families, our homes, and our future—to support a cause greater than ourselves. Many of us were forced to flee our homeland, leaving behind everything we knew, because of our unwavering commitment to the United States and its mission in Southeast Asia.

Yet, despite our loyalty, courage, and sacrifices, we have not been formally recognized as veterans. Those of us who operated from Laos and those who later became naturalized citizens under the Hmong Veterans' Naturalization Act fought side by side with American troops. We bled and suffered as they did. We lost brothers and sisters in combat, yet history has overlooked our contributions.

Today, I urge this body to expand the definition of "veteran" to include those who fought alongside American forces in Laos. Recognizing our service is not just a symbolic gesture—it is a long-overdue acknowledgment of the sacrifices we made for a country that was not yet our own. The United States has always honored those who stood for freedom and democracy; it is time to extend that honor to the Hmong and other allied forces who answered the call to serve.

By granting this recognition, the United States affirms its commitment to those who stood shoulder to shoulder with American soldiers in one of history's most challenging wars. We ask for nothing more than the dignity and respect that all veterans deserve.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully,

Youa Ying Vang



Special Guerrilla Units (SGU) Veterans and Families of USA, Inc.
800 Minnehaha Avenue East, Suite 375 St. Paul, MN 55106
Phone: 651-528-6240 | Fax: 651-330-0991

OUR MISSION

To deepen awareness, to educate, and to preserve the identity, heritage, and legacy of the Hmong Community of Minnesota's "Greatest Generation" who gave and sacrificed their lives to defend and protect the United States' foreign military policies during the Secret War in Laos.



Brief Background

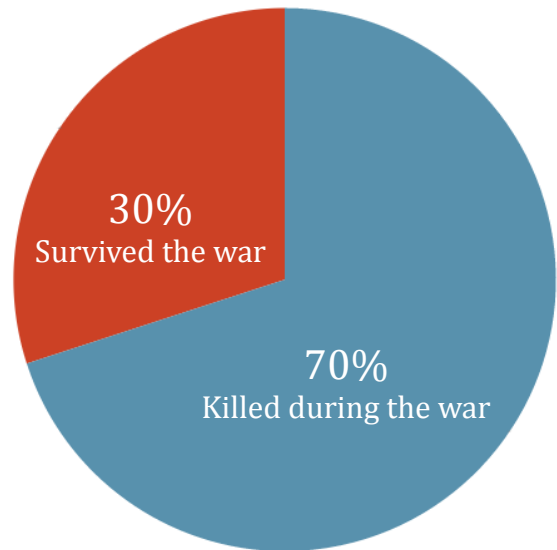
During the Secret War in Laos from 1961 to 1975, as part of the Vietnam War, the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) directly paid, recruited, and trained about 50,000 Hmong soldiers to support and defend US military interests in Southeast Asia. The mission of the Hmong SGU soldiers had four objectives:

1. To slow down and halt communist expansion beyond Laos and Vietnam, preventing what President Dwight D. Eisenhower termed, the “Domino Theory” during the Cold War era,
2. To rescue downed American pilots flown from inside Vietnam,
3. To protect the CIA’s reconnaissance (bombing) radar at Phou Pha Thi, and
4. To deflect Hanoi from sending more North Vietnamese Army troops to South Vietnam along the Ho Chi Minh Trail.

When the war ended in 1975, about 35,000 Hmong SGU soldiers were dead, with thousands wounded as they carried out this mission. Thousands of Hmong civilians perished in the conflict.

After the war ended in 1975, about 15,000 Hmong SGU soldiers plus their families resettled to the US. At the peak, about 5,000 Hmong SGU veterans called Minnesota home. Today in Minnesota, about 900 veterans and about 3,500 widows (mainly women) are still alive.

Special Guerrilla Units (SGU) Veterans & Families of USA, was established in Minnesota in 2004 by former military commanders and community leaders. One of our goals is to honor



Of the estimated 50,000 Hmong SGU soldiers recruited by the CIA, about 35,000 died (70%) and 15,000 survived (30%) during the Secret War from 1961-1975.

the SGU Veterans by ensuring that their legacies and stories from the Secret War in Laos live on and are used to educate the public.

For the last 19 years, SGU’s operation has relied almost exclusively on veteran and community volunteers and in-kind donations from individuals and business owners. Although our organization has operated with limited funds and with a small office space, our ongoing administrative integrity, commitment to the community, and compassion in supporting our veterans, their widows, and their families are the sources of our strength and existence.



SGU veterans at the dedication of the Hmong & Lao Veterans Commemorative Memorial at the MN State Capitol Grounds, 2016. Left, Sen. Hawj and Lt. Xang Vang at the Memorial in 2018.

- About 80 to 90 percent of the Hmong SGU veterans do not know how to read or write, thus leading to no record keeping of their history.

- Of the 5,000 Hmong SGU veterans who resettled in Minnesota, less than 500 (or 10 percent) of their stories and life experiences are archived and preserved.

- Our organization was one of the chief organizing members in the creation of the “Hmong & Lao Veterans Commemorative Memorial” at the MN State Capitol Grounds (2016).

- In 2019, our organization spearheaded a bill that was signed into law “designating May 14 as Hmong Special Guerrilla Units Remembrance Day” by Governor Walz.

- With few existing records of our Hmong SGU veterans stories and with the death of many of our veterans due to the Covid-19 pandemic, our organization is eager to move ahead quickly and ramp up its efforts to collect and archive the history and stories of our living SGU veterans.

- In 2021, SGU received a \$75,000 grant through The MN Humanities Center to document and record the stories of about 25 Hmong SGU veterans and their widows.

In 1961, under the authorization of President Kennedy, the CIA began paying, recruiting, and training Hmong soldiers in Laos to support and defend the US military interests in Southeast Asia. This CIA secret army was known as the Special Guerrilla Units.



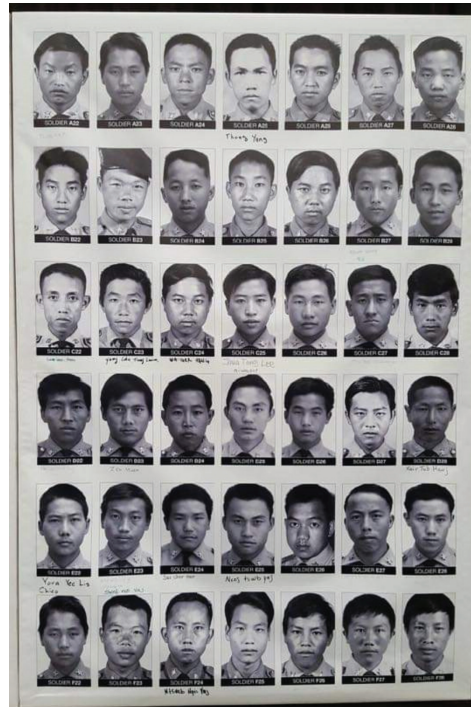
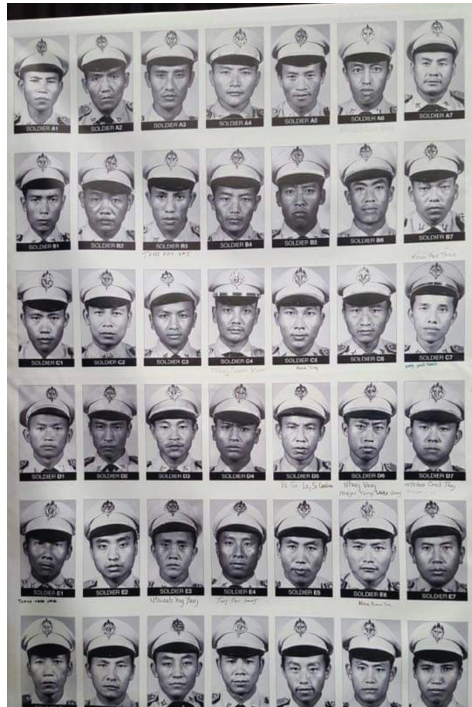
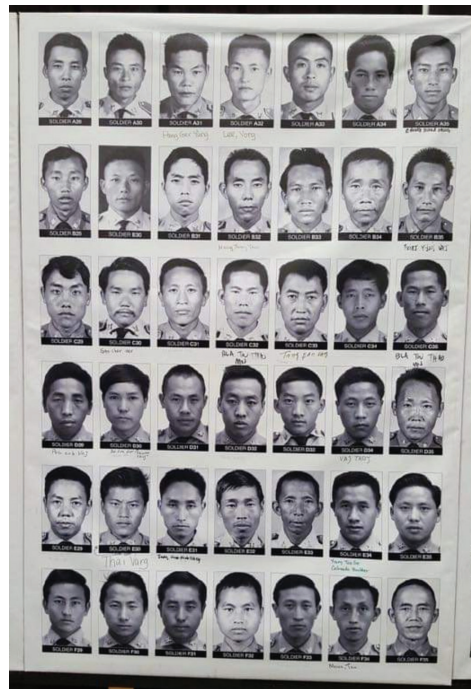
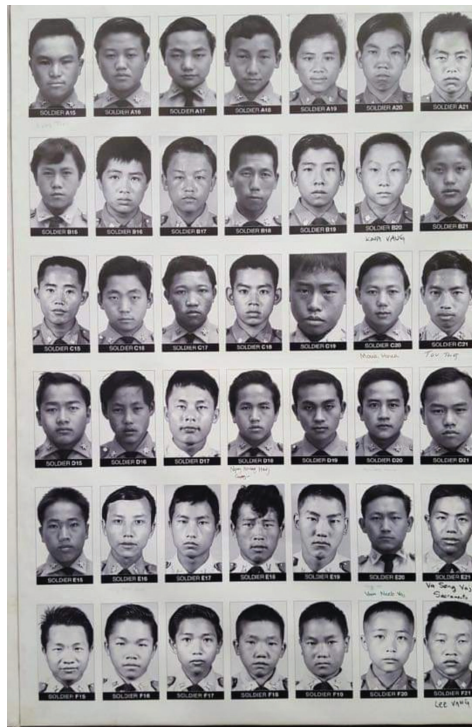
About 80% of the Hmong SGU veterans and their families lived or were concentrated in this part of Northern Laos, and was the Royal Lao Army's Military Region 2. Also, this was where the heaviest of fighting took place during this 14-year Secret War in Laos.

Aside from the 35,000 Hmong SGU soldiers killed,
thousands were wounded.



“I was wounded earlier on in the war. This did not stop me from fighting. The enemy was taking over our land, killing our people—I had to fight to stop them.”

Lt. Col. Nenglo Yang
Hmong SGU Soldier
St. Paul, Minnesota



In Minnesota, less than 10 percent of the Hmong SGU veterans' stories are archived or preserved. Between 80 and 90 of the Hmong SGU veterans do not know how to read or write (especially in English).



“What I am afraid of most is that when my generation dies, their legacies and stories will die with them. Without knowledge of our Hmong veterans’ legacies, we will not know who we are in the future.”

Lt. Colonel Youa True Vang
 Deceased 2019
 St. Paul, Minnesota



“A short time ago we rounded up 300 fresh recruits. Thirty percent were 14 years old or less, and ten of them were only ten years old. Another 30 percent were 15 or 16. The remaining 40 percent were 45 or older. Where were the ones in between? I’ll tell you – they’re all dead.”

-Edgar “Pop” Buell, International Voluntary Services employee, 1968.





“Before the war, all the men in our village worked hard and supported their families. Suddenly, our lives changed. The men began to disappear. They went to fight for General Vang Pao, for the Americans. Most of our husband never returned home. My husband died in the war.”

-Youa Lee, St. Paul, Interview 2011. Minnesota Historical Society.





The Hmong Committee of 100

BACKGROUND ON LEGISLATION

On Monday, November 11, 2024, Veterans Day, the Hmong Committee of 100 invited different Hmong veterans' organizations to celebrate and acknowledge their contributions to peace and democracy. This was the first time ever that all Hmong veterans' organizations joined hands in coming together to memorialize and celebrate. Over 300 veterans, elective officials, and community leaders attended the event. One result from the gathering was a resounding wishes and need for recognition and be granted veterans' benefit like those of their American counter parts.

Between 1961 and 1975, the US Central Intelligence Agency secretly directed and operated a paramilitary force of Hmong guerrilla fighters in Laos, known as the Secret War of Laos. This paramilitary force, known as the Special Guerrilla Units (SGUs), standing in place of American servicemembers, contained the communist forces in Laos and secured the attention of some 70,000 North Vietnamese soldiers who otherwise would have fought against the Americans and its South Vietnamese allies. The CIA's effort with the Hmong kept American ground troops out of Laos. During the war, it is estimated that between 30,000 to 40,000 Hmong were killed in action while serving the United States, and an estimated 2,500 – 3,000 were missing in action.

In 2000, United States Congress passed the Hmong Naturalization Act in an attempt to heal the wounds of the secret war by easing the process by which Hmong and other ethnic Lao could obtain citizenship.

In 2021, Senator Fong Hawj and Senator Chuck Wiger along with Senator Andrew Matthews drafted legislation (SF 986) to grant Minnesota Veteran Benefits to Hmong and other SGUs. However, the legislation did not make it out of the Veterans and Military Affairs Committee.

NEW EFFORTS

On Monday, December 16, 2024, the Hmong Committee of 100 once again met with leaders of four of the five Hmong veterans' groups to see if they would like to move forward with resurrecting SF 986 from the 2021 legislative session, as was introduced by Sen. Hawj and Sen. Wiger. It was agreed that the legislation captures the needs of the Hmong SGUs, and they would like to move forward with the legislation. However, they would like to add additional languages to the legislation. It was agreed that the following languages be added to the original legislation:

Sec. 3 SCREENING COMMITTEE ESTABLISHED

The commissioner of veterans' affairs shall establish a committee of no more than seven individuals. comprising of those who are knowledgeable about the Secret War of Laos.

including SGU veterans, academicians, and community members, to assist the commissioner in determining eligibility under the said legislation.

The next step is to identify the Chief Author for the bill in the Senate and House. After consulting with the “committee” it was agreed that, if Senator Foug Hawj agrees, Senator Hawj should be the Chief Author of the legislation, which Senator Foug Hawj agreed.

BACKGROUND OF THE HMONG COMMITTEE OF 100

Founded in 2024, the ****Hmong Committee of 100**** is a non-partisan 501(c)(4) organization created by Hmong American leaders in various fields. The committee's mission is to foster the political, economic, and social growth of the Hmong community. Members bring expertise from academia, government, business, law, science, and the arts.

The Hmong Committee of 100 will help facilitate and coordinate the efforts of the Hmong veterans' organizations.

CONTACTS:

Lee Pao Xiong, Vice Chair
Hmong Committee of 100
leepaoxiong@gmail.com
651-492-9818

John Yang, Chair of Public Relations
Hmong Committee of 100
JohnBYang@gmail.com
401-533-0125

Advocating on behalf of:

- **Minnesota AAPI Veterans Association**
- **Hmong Committee of 100**
- **SGU Veterans and Families of USA, Inc**
- **Lao Hmong SGU Veteran**
- **Lao Hmong American Coalition, Inc**