



# STATE OF MINNESOTA DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS



20 West 12th Street, 2nd Floor • St. Paul, MN 55155 • Phone: 651-296-2562 • Fax: 651-296-3954  
www.mdva.state.mn.us • 1-888-LinkVet

February 27, 2012

Dan McGrath, Executive Director  
Take Action MN  
705 Raymond Ave., Suite #100  
Saint Paul, MN 55114

Dear Mr. McGrath:

Governor Dayton has asked me to respond to your recent letter to him. As you know, the MDVA fully values and recognizes the contributions of the Hmong warriors during the Vietnam War. The 'secret war' in Laos was crucial to the needs of the United States and Allied forces in Vietnam. Those who fought deserve our gratitude and respect.

To honor them, the Governor's Office proclaims a special day for recognizing the contributions of Hmong Veterans. Attached is the Proclamation from last year's Royal Lao Armed Forces Day.

However, in response to the additional items you requested, we would ask that you consider the precedent, if the state were to grant special recognition through the funding of historical monuments or state burial benefits. As you know, the Laotians are not unique in having served alongside U.S. Forces in the past. So, we hesitate to endorse singling out one group for their significant contributions, as we are grateful for the contributions of all. Many others have repeatedly requested state assistance for similar memorials and recognition.

Furthermore, the MDVA is required by law to follow the federal requirements when issuing Veteran benefits. Minnesota Statute 197.447 defines a Veteran as "... a citizen of the United States or a resident alien who has been separated under honorable conditions from any branch of the armed forces of the United States after having served on active duty . . ." Due to federal restrictions:

1. No use of federal dollars or activities / property receiving federal dollars could be used. This would require, for example, that Minnesota dedicate a wholly owned State cemetery and/or fully funded Honor guard personnel trained in conducting the funeral service. The key point is that all costs associated with such a proposal would have to be Minnesota's.
2. Any honors given to Hmong warriors, would have to be provided equally to others who supported the United States, such as the Vietnamese, Iraqi, Afghan, and Somali personnel. Since 9-11, as an example, Minnesota National Guard members have served in 33 different countries.

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3. Documentations of service and their validations could be extremely difficult, as most activities during those periods were covert, and the documents are usually not certifiable.
4. Funding a Hmong memorial on the Capitol grounds is not within our jurisdiction but rather requires legislative action and financing.

Significant difficulties also apply to your request for a Letter of Recognition and Certificate of Service for all Hmong Veterans. That type of formal recognition is outside our area of authority, and would have to come directly from the federal government.

Sincerely,

  
Larry Shellito, Commissioner  
MN Department of Veterans Affairs

Attachment

cc: Mark Dayton, Governor

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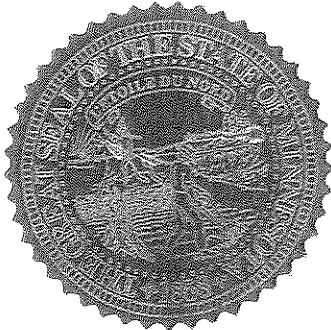
## STATE of MINNESOTA

- WHEREAS: The United States of America was founded upon the premise that all citizens enjoy the blessings of freedom and liberty; and
- WHEREAS: The freedoms and liberties that Americans possess are the direct result of the many sacrifices that veterans have made; and
- WHEREAS: Many members of the Royal Lao Armed Forces worked closely with the United States Armed Forces from 1960 until 1975, ensuring the safety and success of U.S. Soldiers; and
- WHEREAS: Many members of the Royal Lao Armed Forces paid the supreme sacrifice in defense of freedom and liberty; and
- WHEREAS: The United State of America and the State of Minnesota owe a debt of gratitude to those in the Royal Lao Armed Forces who served honorably and bravely.

NOW, THEREFORE, I, MARK DAYTON, Governor of Minnesota, do hereby proclaim Saturday March 26, 2011 as:

### ROYAL LAO ARMED FORCES DAY

in the State of Minnesota.



IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand and caused the Great Seal of the State of Minnesota to be affixed at the State Capitol this 16<sup>th</sup> day of March.

  
GOVERNOR

  
SECRETARY OF STATE