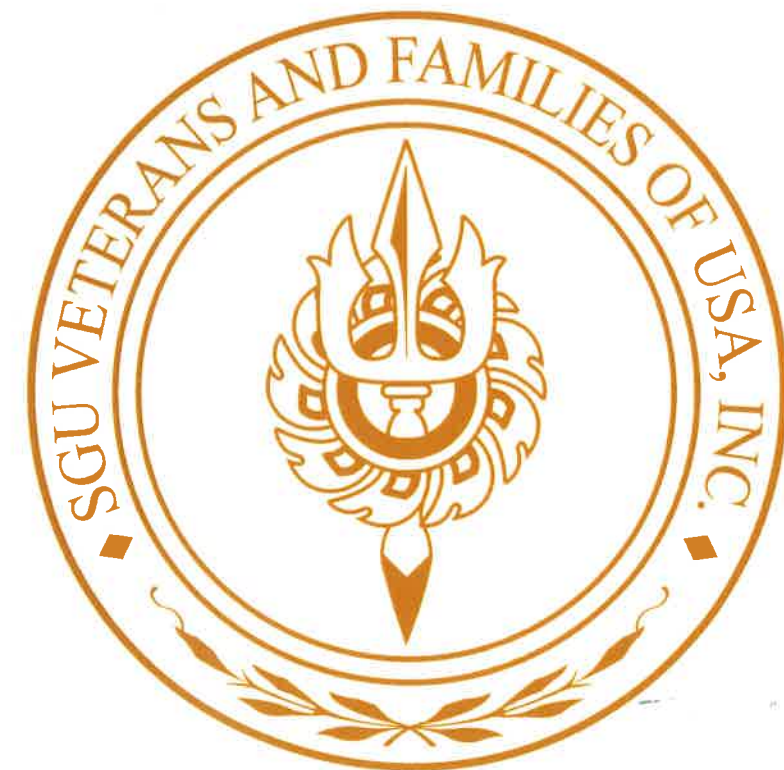




**SGU VETERANS AND FAMILIES OF U.S.A., INC.**  
302 University Avenue, W. Suite 201  
Saint Paul, MN 55103  
TEL: 651.528.6240



# **The Special Guerilla Units Service History**



*SGU Veterans and Families of USA is a Nonprofit Organization  
IRS 501(c)3 and (c)4 EIN# 72-1612652*

© COPYRIGHTED 2010

## **The Service History of the Special Guerrilla Units (SGU)**

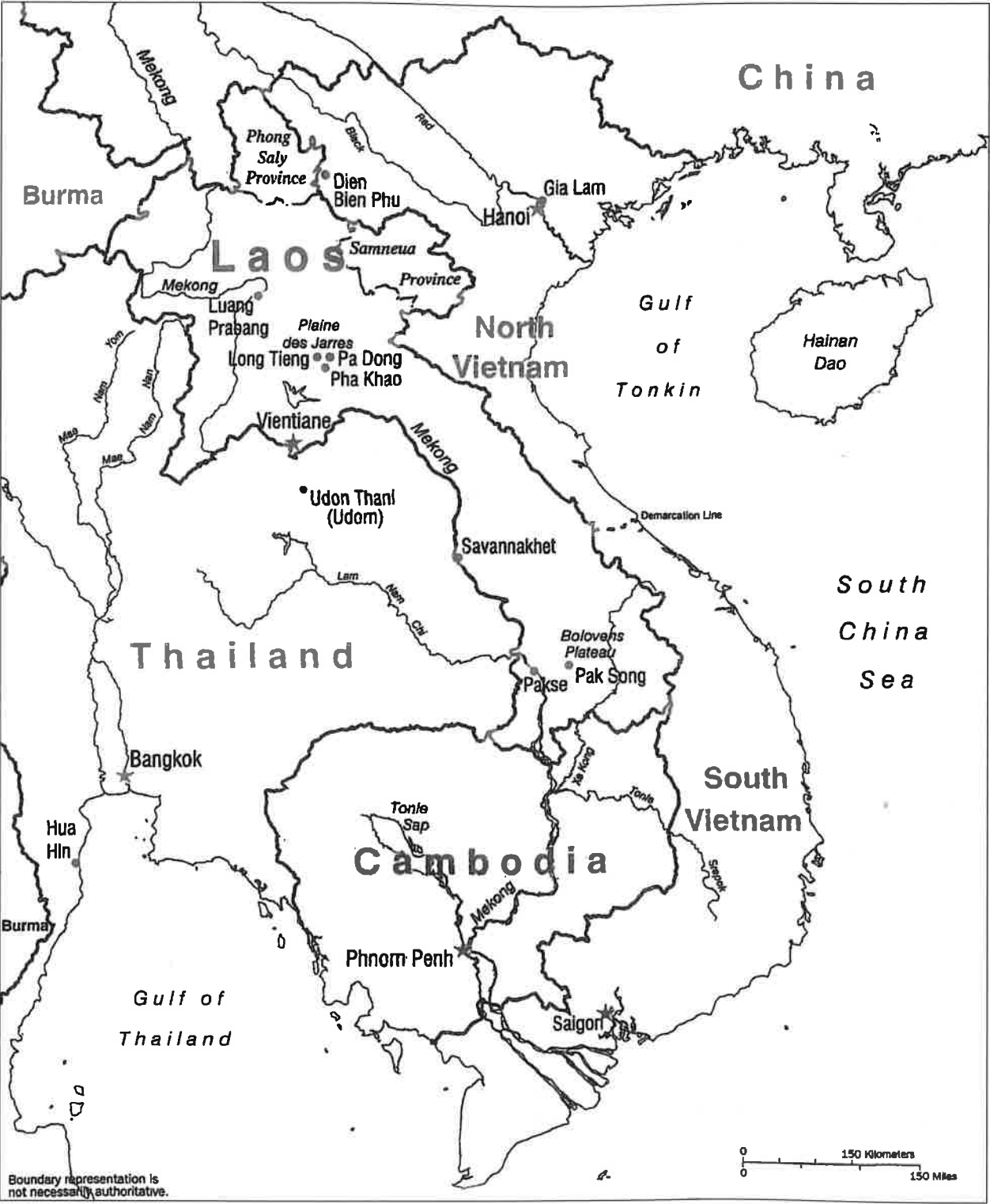
Presented by the Special Guerrilla Units Veterans and Families of USA, Inc.

Enclosed is a brief background of information on the establishment of our SGU and Families of USA, Inc. We, the members of this non-profit organization, are military veterans who provided arm-services to the United States of America during the Cold War era in Southeast Asia. We served and fought on behalf of the United States inside Laos. We are proud to present you this synopsis of how the SGU was created by the United States' CIA to participate in the Secret War inside Laos, as part of the Vietnam War.

---

Materials in this informational handbook are properties of and used with permission from the SGU Veterans & Families of USA, Inc., Collection.

Air Operations in Laos, Pre-1975  
(Southeast Asia, or formerly called Indochina)



During President John F. Kennedy's briefing at the State Department, he points to the importance of winning Laos and protecting Vietnam from Communists takeover. Courtesy of the JFK Library.





# Proclamation



## SGU SERVICE IN DEFENSE OF FREEDOM

**Laos 1961 - 1975**

*Whereas, Laos was declared to be a neutral country by the Geneva Accords and Agreements of 1954 and 1962 so that no foreign troops should fight on Lao Territory; and*

*Whereas, the North Vietnamese Communists and their allies in China and the Soviet Union did not respect the neutrality of Laos and the freedoms of all the Lao peoples so that the Free World was forced to stand behind the legitimate government of Laos and the Lao peoples to prevent the military conquest of Laos by Communist forces; and*

*Whereas, United States efforts needed support from local ground forces to confront Communist aggression in Laos by opposing Communist forces in close combat, to provide timely and accurate intelligence on the movement of Communist forces, and rescue its flyers whenever their aircraft crashed in Laos; and*

*Whereas, North Vietnam contrary to international law used Lao territory for its war of aggression against South Vietnam by building the Ho Chi Minh supply trail from North Vietnam to South Vietnam through Laos, forcing the United States to interdict such illegal use of Laotian territory; and*

*Whereas, the United States needed to have reliable ground forces guard its Navigation Radar stations in northern Laos which were used to guide its bomber aircraft accurately to their targets in North Vietnam;*

*Therefore, in January 1961 Colonel James W. Lair and General Vang Pao agreed that Major Vang Pao would recruit Hmong and other Laotians to serve in Special Guerilla Units to accomplish the above strategic purposes in defense of Lao freedom and independence and in opposition to Communist aggression and tyranny. Soldiers in the Special Guerilla force were trained and paid directly by the United States as part of the Vietnam War. We, James W. Lair and Vang Pao, the officers initially responsible for establishing the Special Guerilla Units, hereby proclaim that the Special Guerilla Units provided faithful, dedicated, and excellent service to the just cause of democracy and freedom in Laos, the ideals of the entire Free World during the Cold War, and the highest strategic interests of the United States of America and her allies in self determination.*

*Affirmed this 20th day of November 2006*

*James W. Lair*  
Colonel James W. Lair



*Vang Pao*  
General Vang Pao



In 2006, former CIA James W. Lair and General Vang Pao signed a Proclamation to officially recognize the military services and sacrifices of the SGU Veterans and Families of USA, Inc.





Secret War operation map in Laos. The red arrows and circles represent the North Vietnamese Army penetrating into the territory occupied by the SGU forces. The red line running south is the Ho Chi Minh Trail that the NVA used to supply military supports and troops to South Vietnam. Courtesy of SGU.



## INTRODUCTION

After WWII, China closed its doors to foreigners and built an alliance with Communist Russia. The two superpower countries attempted to conquer Asia and Southeast Asia. Meanwhile the Westerners were preparing to return home in peace and give independence to the French-Indo China countries as the North Vietnamese Vietminh defeated the French at Dien Bien Phu in 1954. Subsequently, Laos was newly established as an independent and neutral state by the 1954 Geneva Accord. To protect United States' principal interests in Asia, President Dwight D. Eisenhower sent the CIA to look for friendly allies and began to send troops into South Vietnam, including the United States Air Force and Navy to the South China Sea in the late 1950s. The Communist North Vietnamese Army (NVA) began to infiltrate Laos and built the Ho Chi Minh Trail through the eastern part of Laos and Cambodia to supply military and personnel units to fight against the American peace keeper troops in South Vietnam and the South Vietnam army. The NVA could not cross directly to South Vietnam due to the heavy concentration of South Vietnamese troops stationed at the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ); thus, they used the Ho Chi Minh Trail to send troops into South Vietnam to fight against American democratic values.

In 1959 a CIA officer, Mr. James W. Lair, was assigned to work in Thailand, where he established the Thai Police Aerial Reinforcement Unit (PARU) in preparation to fight against the Communist forces in Thailand. Through this assignment, Lair along with his PARU team began thinking about recruiting the Hmong to fight against Communist forces in Laos. He sought out Hmong military leader Vang Pao, who then was a Major

in the Royal Lao Army and was the commander of the 10th infantry battalion in the Plain of Jars, located in northeastern Laos. Lair took a risk and flew out in search of Major Vang Pao, meanwhile Kong Le staged a coup d'etat in Vientiane, the capitol of Laos while siding with the Communist Pathet Lao, where he was aided by the Soviet Union. The Soviets helped with an airlift and parachuted military supplies to Kong Le, a move that concerned the CIA that Laos could fall under Communist control.

In the meeting held between Lair and Vang Pao to build an alliance to fight Communist forces, Lair asked, "What do you want to do?" Major Vang Pao answered him, "We are surely cannot live with the Communists. We either run south for our survival or, if, someone supplies us arm-support, medical, and food then we will fight to protect our women, children and the country." Lair then understood Major Vang Pao's need and ambition to fight against the Communists.

Lair returned to the CIA Headquarters to consult with his superior, Chief Gordon L. Jorgensen, to arm Major Vang

CIA Col. James W. Lair, left, and General Vang Pao, right, visit women and children whose men had gone to the battlefield. Courtesy of SGU.



Pao. Fortunately, Jorgensen was able to schedule a dinner meeting with the CIA Deputy Director Desmond Fitzgerald, who stopped in Laos while on his way from South Vietnam. After listening to Lair's outline of recruiting, training, and financing the Hmong to meet the United States' objectives inside Laos, Fitzgerald immediately suggested that Lair send a brief proposal to Washington, D.C. for consideration. At that time President Eisenhower was looking for and thinking of ways to stabilize the situation in Laos without having to send American troops there. Eisenhower argued that if Laos was to fall under Communist control so would the rest of Southeast Asia, which was referred to as The Domino Theory. As President Eisenhower best stated, "We cannot let Laos fall to the Communists even if we have to fight." The president favored Lair's plan and the CIA began to arm Vang Pao and the Hmong soldiers to fight in Laos on behalf of the United States. This plan kept that the United States from violating the 1954 Geneva Accord; which stated that Laos was to remain a neutral state keeping foreign governments from being

A Thai PARU explains to the newly recruited SGU soldiers how to use their weapons.





A United States Green Beret demonstrating to the SGU soldiers how to use M-57. Courtesy of SGU.

involved in the Vietnam conflict. At Lair's request, the first 1,000 rifles were dropped to Vang Pao and his army in Pa Dong in early January 1961.

Before taking office as president, John F. Kennedy met with Eisenhower about the dire situation in Laos in which he explained at his first press conference in the State Department's Auditorium on March 23, 1961. Kennedy is quoted as saying,

"Laos is far away from America, but the world is small. Its two million people live in a country three times the size of Austria. The security of all Southeast Asia will be endangered if Laos loses its neutral independence. Its own safety runs with the safety of us all, in real neutrality observed by all."

He also understood Eisenhower's statement that the "Laotian independence suited the policy of the United States, so long as the government remained non-Communist. Laos represented



one of the dominos in Southeast Asia that concerned President Eisenhower and Secretary of State John Foster Dulles. Although the country had little intrinsic value, its geographical position placed it in the center of the Cold War in Southeast Asia. If Laos fell to the Communists, Thailand might be next, according to the domino theory. And the collapse of Thailand would lead to the Communist domination of Southeast Asia and perhaps beyond."

While the Hmong program was expanding under the commandship of Lair and Vang Pao, Kennedy had been seeking a diplomatic solution inside Laos. At a meeting in Vienna in June 1961, Kennedy and Soviet Prime Minister Nikita Khrushchev issued a joint statement of support for a neutral and independent Laos. At the same time, a 14-nation meeting was held in Geneva to iron out a settlement to the pressing problem in Laos. On July 23, 1962 a formal Declaration on the Neutrality of Laos was signed in Geneva. It provided for a coalition government and the withdrawal of all foreign troops from the country by October 7. The US pulled

President Kennedy briefs his staff the important of Laos to winning the war in Vietnam. Courtesy of JFK Library.





President Kennedy welcomes King Sisavang Vathana and his delegation to Washington, D.C., to strengthen their relationships and effort to the Secret War inside Laos. Courtesy of JFK Library.

out its military advisers and support staff. Air America, a CIA-hired air support unit, also stopped dropping military supplies to the Hmong and the SGU and their families. Assistant Secretary of State Averill Harriman, who was ensuring that the US complied with the Geneva Accord, allowed the CIA to retain only two men in Laos to monitor and make sure the Communists also complied with the Geneva Accord.

When the two men's report reached the CIA Headquarters from Laos, their memo indicated that this agreement was a deception. It soon became clear that 7,000 NVA troops had not left Laos. As a matter of fact, the NVA was expanding its areas of control, attacking key positions throughout Laos. As the Hmong's ammunition supplies dwindled, William Colby, who was head of the CIA Far East Division, pleaded to Harriman to resume the air supports and military supplies to the Hmong. "My arguments became more forceful," Colby recalled, reflecting on the intense cables he received from the two CIA officers who were still up in the hills observing and reporting on what was happening. Harriman approved an Air America drop of military supplies for defense purposes. As Colby pointed out, however, Harriman personally approved



each and every clandestine supply flight and its cargo to Vang Pao inside Laos. This signified that Communist Russian did not honor their signatory as Kennedy did. Instead, Khrushchev supported Communist NVA and Pathet Lao to take offense in Laos while the American complied with the treaty.

As Hanoi sent additional troops into Laos during 1963, Kennedy had authorized the CIA to increase the size of the SGU army, which established its Headquarters in the valley of Long Tieng. By the end of that year, the total of SGU troops increased to 20,000 strong. In 1969, this CIA special force was named the Special Guerrilla Units (SGU) in which the

Top: General Vang Pao, left, organizes SGU soldiers to execute the new mission from Washington. Courtesy of SGU.

Above: Long Tieng, the CIA Headquarters in Laos. Courtesy of SGU.





Hmong and Lao SGU trained T-28 bomber pilots ready for flying missions. Courtesy of SGU.

CIA paid and supported all of their military activities in Laos. The SGU's duties were to blow up the enemy's supply depots, ambush their supply lines, trucks, mine and attack enemy strong holds. The SGU played a critical role for the CIA in rescuing American pilots shot down while flying from North Vietnam into Laos.

As the fighting between the two sides of the war increased, the ground communications for the SGU forces had become more difficult in reporting enemy movements and targets. The SGU also had limited communications. Lair knew that air supports and effective communications were needed to successfully attack the Communists NVA and PL. Thus, to protect the troops on the ground as per Lair's consideration, Vang Pao sent him two Hmong soldiers, Mr. Ly Lue and Mr. Vang Toua. They were trained to fly T-28 bomber aircraft. Soon the two became successful air bombers, proving that the pilot program was effective in training more SGU soldiers to take up flying in order to support the troops on the ground. Many SGU bomber pilots flew and attacked enemy movements until they died.

Air America's role became more critical in supplying



Air America helicopter sling-loading ammunition to the SGU soldiers in the frontline. Courtesy of SGU.

the military needs in the conflict to deflect Communist forces inside Laos. More SGU servicemen and women were recruited to fight on America's behalf in this Secret War due to the drawback of the neutral policies signed by the US and her super power friends. Many Hmong-Lao SGU died in Laos saving Americans. The SGU soldiers were recruited, trained, assigned missions and paid by the US Government through a special budget controlled by the CIA. In each SGU Groupe Mobile, or regiment, there was a CIA field officer and a Hmong or Lao interpreter to oversee the daily activities of the soldiers. The war inside Laos conducted by the CIA became a Secret War because this kept the United States from violating the Geneva Accords. This CIA clandestine military operation in Laos was not properly shared with nor recognized by the US Congress until 1969, which was unveiled by Senator James W. Fulbright. By then more than 40,000 SGU had already been fighting in the war. Although the war was kept secret and for the United States to reassure the SGU troops of her commitment to the fighting, the CIA sent Vang Pao to Washington, D. C. in 1972 to meet with several of Nixon's key staff.



The Vietnam War and the CIA's secret military operation soon faded away. Once Kissinger and Nixon reached an agreement with Chinese Premier Mao Zedong in Peking on America's interest in 1973, the meeting resulted in the ending of the war. The arrangement for the closing down of the Secret War in Laos, which was in conjunction with the Vietnam War, there were two peace treaties signed: On January 27, 1973 the Paris Peace Accord was signed to end the Vietnam War. Secondly in the following month, a cease-fire agreement between the two Lao factions known as the Vientiane Peace Agreement was signed. According to the new coalition government, one of its goals was to take care of the people on both sides of the war and to have them live in peace and harmony with each other. When Laos collapsed in May 1975, 3,500 top ranking SGU officers and their families were airlifted out of Long Tieng, the Headquarters of General Vang Pao, to Thailand for safety. At the same time, hundreds of thousands of other SGU soldiers were abandoned and left behind in their outposts. As a result of helping the CIA

Top: President Nixon meets with Chinese Premier Mao ZeDong that officially ended the Vietnam War in 1973. Courtesy of SGU.

Left: General Vang Pao shakes hand with a member of the Nixon Administration during his visit to the United States in 1972. Courtesy of SGU.





The last day of SGU soldiers and their families evacuating out of Long Tieng in May 14, 1975. Courtesy of SGU.

sponsored Secret War, more than 35,000 Hmong-Lao SGU soldiers had been killed; the majority had died in direct military engagement against the Communist forces in Northeastern Laos. The total numbers of killed and wounded civilians are not known. The Communist Pathet Lao then began arresting the remaining high ranking military officers, civilian officials and the Royal Lao family members, including the King and Queen, all were sent to the re-educational camps.

This also caused a massive exodus of SGU soldiers and their families out of Laos, of which the vast majority were the Hmong. Hundreds of thousands of Hmong soldiers sought safety in Thailand. A vast majority was killed or had died of starvation and diseases as they made their way to seek safety and freedom in Thailand. Many families tried crossing the Mekong River, but some drowned and never saw the other side of the river. In Thailand, some of the SGU members and their families were fortunate enough to be granted resettlement in the United States, France, Canada, and Australia. In the United States the SGU veterans and their families depended on General Vang Pao's leadership to help with the resettlement process: he then established several non-profit organizations to assist the SGU veterans with their new life in a new land.

In 1997, Colby testified and reminded Congress and his American counterparts of the sacrifice of the Hmong for the American's cause in Laos,

"For 10 years, Vang Pao's soldiers held the growing

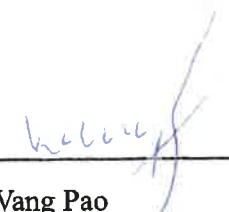
North Vietnamese forces to approximately the same battlelines they held in 1962. And significantly for Americans, the 70,000 North Vietnamese engaged in Laos were not available to add to the forces fighting Americans and South Vietnamese in South Vietnam."

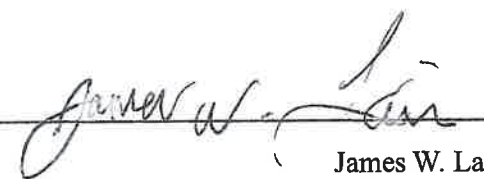
The SGU's sacrifices for the United States were made with honor. To minimally recognized the SGU's military service to the United States, Congress unanimously voted the H.R. 371, or the Hmong Veterans' Naturalization Act of 1997, in which it provided the SGU soldiers and their widows their US citizenships with the help of interpreters and with less questions. However, today the SGU veterans continue to advocate to gain access to VA benefits because it would help them overcome or have access to be treated for Post Traumatic Syndrome Disease and a host of other challenges that complicate their ways of living in the United States. Due to their military services and sacrifices for the United States during the Secret War in Laos, they should be entitled to the VA benefits as their American veterans, who fought in the Vietnam conflict. #

General Vang Pao, right, addresses the Hmong community leaders on the social resettlement in America. Courtesy of SGU via Vang Xang.



We certify that the information in this booklet is prepared by the best of our knowledge.

  
General Vang Pao  
Former Commander of the SGU &  
Military Region II in Laos

  
James W. Lair  
Former CIA Operative in Southeast Asia  
SGU Recruiter

*"Remembering and Serving Those Who Gave All."*

\* \* \*

The SGU Veterans and Families of USA would like to thank you for  
reviewing this brief background history of our non-profit  
organization.



CIA James W. Lair and General Vang Pao reunited in the United States for the first time in St. Paul, Minnesota in 2006 since the Secret War in Laos that had ended in 1975. Today, the two continue to work closely with the community to educate them about the war and advocating for Hmong Veterans' benefits at the state and federal levels.





General Vang Pao and CIA James W. Lair met with former SGU veterans during Lair's visit to Minnesota in November 2006. Courtesy of SGU.



Hmong students with Vang Pao and Lair. During time of peace, we teach the SGU veterans' children to be good citizens and pay tax to support our United States government. Courtesy of SGU.



James W. Lair and General Vang Pao discussing the future of the Hmong veterans. "It is time for us to relax and have the younger generation take over; we have to relax," Lair stated to Vang Pao. However, Vang Pao replied, "We will be able to relax after the SGU Veterans and Families of USA, Inc., is well established." Courtesy of SGU.





*On January 3rd, 2011, General Vang Pao ask Dr. Charles Waters to help his SGU Veterans to gain benefits before he passed away on the 6th.*



## SGU VETERANS AND FAMILIES OF U.S.A., INC.

302 University Avenue, W. Suite 201  
Saint Paul, MN 55103  
TEL: 651.528.6240



### Letter of Appointment

- Whereas:** There is a need to have an Executive Director for the SGU Veterans and Families of USA, Inc., a 501 (c) (3) and (4) non-profit organization located in the State of Minnesota and serves as the National organizational headquarter.
- Whereas:** There is need a to have an Executive Director with strong knowledge of nonprofit administration, good Leadership skills to solicit and secure operational funding for the organization;
- Whereas:** There is a need to have an Executive Director for the SGU Veterans and Families to work with locally and nationally in both private and public sectors, as well as individual member to promote the well being of the former SGU Veterans and their family members;
- Whereas:** There is a need to have an Executive Director who is knowledgeable about the chain of command activities from the Secret War in Laos during the Indochina War in Vietnam; and
- Whereas:** There are other more specific duties as follow:
- Able to work with legislators to work on local, state and federal issues related to veterans;
  - Develop new programs to meet the need of the community members;
  - Ability to work with and under the Board of Director;
  - Providing monthly financial report to the Board of Director;
  - Attend regular board meetings and as required;
  - Work cooperatively with the auditor and complete other governmental personnel;
  - Provide overall supervision to all employees and delegate all workload to appropriate board members or staff;
  - Oversees and coordinate all progress and problem of all programs;
  - Develop and enforce personnel policies and procedures;
  - Serve the role of a Community Leadership in representing the Board the agency as needed.
- Therefore:** We, General Vang Pao and Colonel James W. Lair, are here to appoint former **Lieutenant Vang Xang** to be the **Executive Director** to administrate and carry the above missions to fulfill the need of the former SGU service men, women and their survived family members on this SGU Veterans and Families of USA, Inc.

General Vang Pao  
Former SGU Commander-Laos

April 10, 2010

Colonel James W. Lair  
Former SGU Recruiter-Laos





## LIEUTENANT XANG VANG

Lt. Xang Vang was born on November 1, 1950 in the Village of De Xher (Dej Txhaw) in a suburb village of Nong Het District, Xieng Khouang Province, Laos. His parents were Mr. Nhia Bee Vang and Mrs. Sao Yang.

Since Laos lacked a school system for children, Lt. Vang started his education by learning from his uncle Wa Her Vang at military outposts, who served in the Royal Lao Army and later for the CIA's Special Guerrilla Units (SGU). Lt. Vang continued his elementary school in Long Cheng and then at General Vang Pao's College Sam Thong in Sam Thong town, Laos.

As the Secret War crisis escalated with heavy fighting at both Sam Thong and Long Cheng, Lt. Vang was recruited to serve in the Special Guerilla Units as a Sergeant. Lt. Vang was handpicked by General Vang Pao to serve directly with the CIA officers at the Ammunition Department in Long Cheng. He was promoted to the Lieutenant rank until Laos collapsed into communist control on May 14, 1975.

In America, Lt. Vang was elected to be the director and/or chairman of many non-profit agencies, such as the

Lao Family Community of Minnesota, Lao Veterans of America, Hmong American Mutual Assistance Association, Lao/Hmong Washington House, and Hmong Youth Association of Minnesota. After these organizations were properly established and operating, Lt. Vang moved forward to the University of Minnesota to create an agricultural training program called Minnesota Agricultural Enterprise for New Americans (MAENA) to teach refugees to grow American fresh produce and sell at farmer markets throughout the Twin Cities.

In the early 1990s, the Hmong youth gangs flooded the communities. As the president of the Hmong Youth Association, Lt. Vang explored ways to help resolve the Hmong youth gang affairs by working closely with General Vang Pao and the local authorities, such as with the police department, mayor's office, and concerned citizens. Within a few years, these agencies effectively worked together to tackle this issue and the Hmong youth gang activities subsided.

In February of 1992, Lt. Vang was sent to Washington, D.C., to advocate

to the legislators about the danger of closing Ban Vinai Refugee Camp in Thailand for the Hmong refugees. He asked the appropriate lawmakers to sponsor new legislation to bring the remaining Hmong refugees to America. Lt. Vang and his colleagues also advocated Congress to pass the H.R. 371 to ease the path for US citizenships for the Hmong and Lao veterans.

In 2006, General Vang Pao and James W. Lair (founder of the SGU) appointed Lt. Vang to be the Executive Director of the SGU Veterans and Families of USA, Inc. Lt. Vang was authorized to take the initial lead in collecting and finding pictures and stories from the war. In 2013, he was part of a decade-long team effort that testified before the MN Legislatures for state funding to construct the Hmong and Lao Veterans Commemorative Memorial. This monument now stands at the MN State Capitol Grounds honoring the servicemen and servicewomen of the Secret War.

Throughout Lt. Vang's community services, he is credited for helping new refugees with their resettlement processes and educating them on being productive American citizens. Lt. Vang began his civic engagements with Congressman Bruce Vento, and then helped Norm Coleman be elected as Mayor of St. Paul as well as elected to be the US Senator from Minnesota. He also donated his personal funds to help the community, including a \$20,000 gift to the Center for Hmong Studies at Concordia University—St. Paul. In 2024, Lt. Vang donated \$10,000 to the SGU Veterans and Families of USA to help establish the organization's new museum.

Today, Lt. Vang is respected by many young Hmong educators and by the SGU veterans and their families. Lt. Vang held many different positions in both volunteer and paid positions, and the Hmong/Lao communities recognized him as the chief translator and secretary for General Vang Pao around the Hmong/Lao American communities in the US. With his selfless commitment to community service, Lt. Vang has met all kinds of people—from janitors to council members, statesmen from different countries, from county commissioners to state and federal legislators, and governors to the Presidents of the United States of America.

*Photo descriptions:* 1) Top left, Lt. Xang Vang with Thai PARU Somphone at Long Cheng in 1973; top right, Lt. Xang Vang with US President George W. Bush, 2003; above left, MN US Senator Norm Coleman, Lt. Xang Vang, and Gen. Vang Pao, 2007; and above right, Lt. Xang Vang with Sen. Fong Hawj at the Memorial, 2018.