

# Lao Veterans of America (LaoVeterans.com)

"We cannot let Laos fall to the Communists even if we have to fight."

President Dwight D. Eisenhower, December 31, 1960.

"About 9,000 Hmong tribesmen have been equipped for guerrilla operations, which they are now conducting with considerable effectiveness in Communist-dominated territory in Laos... As men leave food-raising duties to serve as guerrillas, a problem is growing over the care and feeding of non-combat Hmong. The CIA has given some rice and clothing to relieve this problem."

Memo from Brig. General Edward Lansdale, July 1961. Published in the Pentagon Papers.

"The problem of Laos is the refusal of the communist forces to honor the Geneva Accords."

President Lyndon B. Johnson, January 18, 1965.

"A measure of the heroism and effectiveness of the Hmong struggle can be seen in the fact that the North Vietnamese forces arrayed against them increased over the years from the original 7,000 to 70,000, including several of North Vietnam's best divisions. The battle became increasingly conventional."

Ambassador William Colby, former CIA Director, Congressional Testimony before the House Subcommittee on Asia and The Pacific, April 26, 1994.

"We have been providing logistical support and some training for the neutralist government in order to avoid Laos falling under communist domination. As far as American manpower in Laos is concerned, no American manpower is there at the present time on a combat basis... Laos relates very much to Vietnam because the Ho Chi Minh Trail runs through Laos. It is necessary, under those circumstances, that the United States takes cognizance of that, and we do have air reconnaissance. We do have, perhaps, some other activities. I won't discuss those other activities at this time."

President Richard Nixon, (Press conference comments) September 26, 1960.

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The most conservative estimated number that during the United States' involvement in the Vietnam War, 35,000 to 40,000 young brave Hmong were killed in combat; 50,000 to 58,000 were wounded; and 2,500 to 3,000 were missing in action. When the United States withdrew from Southeast Asia, genocide followed the Hmong--thousands of

Hmong were murdered by the communists when they tried to flee to neighboring Thailand.

"Everyone of them that died (Hmong), that was an American back home that didn't die, or one that was injured that wasn't injured. Somebody in nearly every Hmong family was either fighting or died from fighting... They became refugees because we (United States Government)... encouraged them to fight for us. I promised them myself: "Have no fear, we will take care of you".

Edgar Buell, senior U.S.AID/CIA official working with the Hmong "Secret Army" During the war years, quoted on 60 minutes, March 4, 1979.

Some source said: There was about 100,000 North Vietnamese soldiers fought in Laos: 70,000 of this number including several of North Vietnam's best divisions fought directly against the Hmong soldiers, and about 30,000 were fighting with the U.S. SOF and Hmong soldiers along the Ho Chi Minh Trail.

About April 1975, the United States withdrew its troops from Indochina. During May 12-14, 1975, the CIA/Air America evacuated about 2,500 Hmong officers and their families from the secret base at Long Cheng in Laos (Headquarters of General Vang Pao--the combined base for the Hmong, CIA, Air America, and U.S. Air Force "Ravens"). They were evacuated to the U.S. former air base in Namphong, Khonekene, Thailand. The rest of the Secret Army (Special Guerrilla Units {SGU} and other special units) who were left behind began to walk to the Mekong River and attempted to cross into Thailand. The Communists killed thousands of these soldiers and their families. During the evacuation, and in subsequent years, thousands of Hmong and Lao veterans and their families were killed by communists North Vietnamese and Pathet Lao security forces. Thousand died of starvation as they fled toward the security and freedom on the other shore of the Mekong River. Thousands drowned in the river before reaching the Thai border. Even today, despite official denials at senior levels of the Pathet Lao government, the communist regime in Laos continues to persecute and discriminate against Hmong because of their role in the U.S. Secret Army.

The Vietnam War ended in 1975, genocide and persecution of the Hmong followed. This Stalinist regime arrested King, Queen, Crown Prince, members of the Royal Lao Family, and its high ranking officials in the Royal Lao government about 46,000 to put in the re-education camps, and also used chemical warfare "Yellow Rain" to eliminate members of the U.S. Secret Army and their families. From the period of 1975 to 1980, the Stalinist regime in Laos killed about 30,000 Hmong men, women, and children in the former 2nd Military Region of Laos where the major of the CIA operations took place, especially, around the foothills of Phou Bia Mountain. This is the Lao People's Democratic Republic's (LPDR) "ethnic cleansing" policy against the Hmong people. Today, LPDR government still continues systematically to persecute the Hmong people in that part of the world.

In addition to a devastating loss of life, the war resulted in a loss of our homeland, and we had to become countryless people and political refugees in a third country such as America, Argentina, Australia, Canada, China, France, Japan, and New Zealand.

Later in 1975, the Hmong and Lao soldiers and families began to take refuge in the United States. Their exodus continues to the present period. Many of those are still separated from their families and are finding reunification difficult. Thus, they have organized "Lao Veterans of America" as a Non-Profit organization. Its home office is in Fresno, California where it will be a central communication to all Lao veterans, which are scattered throughout the world.

The Lao Veterans of America, Inc. (LVA), like the American Legion and the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW), represents veterans who served the United States honorably. It is among the largest veteran organizations of its kind in the United States and includes tens of thousands of Hmong and Lao veterans and their families who played a key role in the U.S. covert war in Laos during the Vietnam War. It is a non-profit corporation--with chapters organized throughout the United States in states such as Alabama, Alaska, Arizona, Arkansas, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Florida, Georgia, Hawaii, Illinois, Iowa, Kansas, Louisiana, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Nebraska, North Carolina, Ohio, Oklahoma, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, South Carolina, Texas, Virginia, Washington, and Wisconsin. We also have members in Australia, Canada, and France. The LVA membership includes significant numbers of women who served in combat and combat support roles.

Members of Congress as well as current and former U.S. military and intelligence officials have honored the LVA and its work. Members of the LVA have been awarded the U.S. Vietnam Service, Vietnam Veterans National, Vietnam Campaign, and Purple Heart medals. The LVA has received bipartisan support on Capitol Hill for its efforts. It has been singled out with Congressional awards and citations as well as being honored in Congressional Records statements and in Congressional letters. The LVA also has received state and community recognition. California, Iowa, Kansas, Louisiana, Massachusetts, Minnesota, and Wisconsin have recently passed a Joint Resolution and Proclamation in recognition of Hmong and Lao veterans and asked the Congress and President of the United States to grant those veterans and their families full U.S. citizenship. During recent years, former CIA Director William Colby and Dr. Jane Hamilton-Merritt have also cited the Hmong and Lao veterans--and their leadership--in Congressional Hearing testimony. LVA also have over twenty (20) U.S. veterans group writing letters of support to the Hmong Veterans Naturalization Act.

In recent years, with the declassification of secret information in U.S. intelligence and Defense Department files, military histories of the Hmong veteran's service have finally appeared in books. Examples of such books are: *Tragic Mountains, The Americans and the Secret Wars for Laos, 1942-1992*, by Dr. Jane Hamilton-Merritt; *War in Laos 1954-1975*, by Kenneth Conboy; *The War in Laos 1960-75*, by Kenneth Conboy; *Shadow War: The CIA's Secret War in Laos*, by Kenneth Conboy and James Morrison; and *Across the Mekong*, by Charles O. Davis.

## WELCOME TO THE LOS VETERANS OF AMERICA INSTITUTE (LVAI)

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