

## Laos

### “Secret Warriors”

In 1961, when the Vietnam War officially started, another war also waged. This war was known as the Secret War and took place in Laos. Like its name the Secret War was a total secret. The countries involved in the Secret War were the U.S., Thailand, Laos, and North Vietnam. The preludes to the Secret War were differing opinions by political parties on the governmental structure that would reign in Vietnam. This war caused havoc and grief to the people that occupied the territories that became the battlegrounds. In 1961 North Vietnam began advancing into South Vietnam, using military forces, with the intentions of establishing communist type government in Laos. The Pathet Lao, the communist Laos party, allied with North Vietnam while the Royal Laotian party, party in power in Laos, allied with Thailand and the U.S.

Thailand perceived the threat in having Laos, its neighbor, being overtaken by the a communist regime. They knew that if Laos lost, then the natural progression would be for them to be the next target for conquest. The United States of America (U.S.A.) was/is considered the champions of democracy and joined the alliance because they did not want communism to gain strength and spread. These three countries came together and took on the task of stopping the spread of communism into Laos. This war between communist Vietnam and the alliance was known as the Secret War.

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The Geneva Accords of 1954, was the first world country to send soldiers into third world countries thus the U.S.A. needed find a way to help the fight against communism. Thus, they recruited the Hmong and trained, paid, and provided military weapons to them; for the purpose of engagement in guerrilla warfare against the North Vietnamese.



(Image from book: War in Laos)

Here is a picture of one of the first U.S. training groups.



(Image from book: War in Laos)

Here is a picture of Hmong guerillas getting briefing before.

Hmong soldiers rescued downed American pilots from enemy territories and defended American outposts in Laos. One such outpost was an airport by the name of Luang Prabang. Whole groups of Hmong soldiers risked and lost their lives to save one American pilot. They also attacked many North Vietnamese convoy that were using the Ho Chi Minh trail, which cross Northern Laos from North Vietnam into South Vietnam. By attacking these supplies thousands of U.S. soldiers did not die in South Vietnam. The Hmong adult male population was decimated toward the end of the war and to make up the difference, children were recruited, trained in the same tactics and strategies of war and sent to combat. Thailand's also trained Hmongs, formed them into guerrilla groups, and provided air support for them when in combat. They valiantly fought for their cause through out the entire Secret War.

When the U.S. withdrew its troops from South Vietnam in 1975, they also withdrew the training teams, military weapons, and financial support from Laos and the Hmong. This action weakened the Laotian government and Hmong guerillas army that depended on that support. The Pathet Lao communist party eventually took over Laos and the Hmong that were left behind were seen as a threat and persecuted. Deserted by their U.S. allies, the Hmong had to flee to Thailand for refuge. The Secret War ended in the same year as the Vietnam War—1975. The Hmong did not feel this finality, for to this day they still are persecuted

## “The Secret War”



General [Vang Pao](#) led the [CIA](#)'s "Secret War" in Laos.

In the early 1960s, the U.S. [Central Intelligence Agency](#)'s (CIA) [Special Activities Division](#) began to recruit, train and lead the indigenous Hmong people in Laos to fight against [North Vietnamese Army](#) intruders into Laos during the [Vietnam War](#). It became a Special Guerrilla Unit led by General [Vang Pao](#). About 60% of the Hmong men in Laos were assisted by the CIA to join fighting for the "[Secret War](#)" in Laos.<sup>[29][30]</sup> The CIA used the Special Guerrilla Unit as

the counter attack unit to block the [Ho Chi Minh Trail](#), the main military supply route from the north to the south. Hmong soldiers served against the NVA and the [Pathet Lao](#), helping block the Hanoi's [Ho Chi Minh](#) trail inside Laos and rescuing downed American pilots. Between 1967 and 1971, a total of 3,772 Hmong soldiers were killed; another 5,426 were wounded.<sup>[31]</sup> Between 1962 and 1975, some 12,000 Hmong also died fighting against Communist Pathet Lao troops.<sup>[32]</sup>

General Vang Pao led the Region II (MR2) defense against [NVA](#) incursion from his headquarters in [Long Cheng](#), also known as Lima Site 20 Alternate (LS 20A).<sup>[33]</sup> At the height of its activity, Long Cheng became the second largest city in Laos. Long Cheng was a micro-nation operational site with its own bank, airport, school system, officials, and many other facilities and services in addition to its military units. Before the end of the Secret War, Long Cheng would fall in and out of General Vang Pao's control.

The Secret War began about the time the United States became actively involved in the Vietnam War. Two years after the U.S. withdrawal from South Vietnam, the Kingdom of Laos was overthrown by communist troops supported by the North Vietnamese Army. The Hmong people immediately became targets of retaliation and persecution. While some Hmong returned to their villages and attempted to resume life under the new regime, thousands more made the trek across the [Mekong River](#) into Thailand, often under attack. This marked the beginning of a mass exodus of Hmong from Laos. Those who reached Thailand were kept in squalid [United Nations](#) refugee camps until they could be resettled. Nearly 20 years later, in the 1990s, a major international debate ensued over whether Hmong refugees remaining in Thailand should be forcibly repatriated to Laos, where they were still subject to persecution, or should be allowed to emigrate to the United States and other Western nations.

(From "Memories of the Secret War")