

Facts and Details

[Home](#) > [Asian Topics](#) > [01Hill Tribes and La](#)

HMONG, THE VIETNAM WAR, LAOS AND THAILAND

1. [HMONG AND THE VIETNAM WAR](#)
2. [Rescue of an American Pilot by the Hmong](#)
3. [Hmong After the Vietnam War](#)
4. [Hmong in Thailand After the Vietnam War](#)
5. [Hmong After the Vietnam War and the United States](#)
6. [HMONG IN LAOS](#)
7. [Hmong Insurgencies in Northern Laos](#)
8. [Revival of Hmong Insurgencies in Northern Laos](#)
9. [Attacks by Hmong Insurgencies in Northern Laos](#)
10. [Fighting the Insurgencies](#)
11. [Is the Hmong Insurgency in Laos Still Fighting](#)
12. [Hmong Tribes Surrender after Years on the Run](#)
13. [HMONG IN THAILAND](#)
14. [Efforts to Repatriate Laotian Hmong in Thailand Back to Laos](#)
15. [Hmong at Wat Tham Krabok
in Thailand](#)
16. [Hmong Forced Out Of Homes In Thailand](#)
17. [Hmong Forced to Go Back to Laos](#)

HMONG AND THE VIETNAM WAR

■ From 1959 to 1973, the CIA trained Hmong tribesmen to fight against Communist insurgencies in Laos. Many of the first recruits were Hmong guerillas who fought under the charismatic leader Vang Pao and had worked earlier with the French. The Hmong have traditionally occupied the strategic highlands in Laos overlooking North Vietnam and have traditionally been enemies of the lowland Vietnamese. They entered the conflict against Vietnamese first as scouts for the French and later as guerrillas for the Americans.

■ Under the guidance of the CIA and American special forces the Hmong rescued American pilots, identified targets for American bombs, fought Lao and Vietnamese communist forces, manned strategic mountain and jungle areas used by U.S. forces, disrupted and sabotaged supply lines, gathered critical intelligence and defended navigational sites in Laos that allowed precise, all-weather U.S. air strikes against enemy targets in northern Laos and North Vietnam." .

- About 35,000 Hmong were recruited for the war effort. About 30,000 of them were They were key in thwarting attempts by the Vietnamese army to make major inroads into northern Laos and slowing the movement of supplies on the Ho Chi Minh Trail. The Hmong had problems with helicopters though. American pilots usually kept the motor running when they landed and Hmong who had never seen them before walked right into them. More than twenty Hmong died this way in a twelve year period.
- Hmong were called "damned good fighters" by the CIA. They fought bravely against some of the toughest North Vietnamese and Lao troops for 13 years and suffered from casualty rate five times higher than the rate experienced by U.S. soldiers. Over time so many Hmong were killed that by the end of the campaign many of the fighters were Thai troops recruited to take their place. But that time the war had been overtaken by a conventional war and the Hmong had outlived their usefulness.
- As many as 20,000 Hmong soldiers died during the Vietnam War. Hmong civilians, who numbered about 300,000 before the war, perished by the tens of thousands.

Rescue of an American Pilot by the Hmong

- Marc Kaufman wrote in Smithsonian magazine: "In a mountaintop guardpost near the village of Ban Va in central Laos, Hmong soldiers watched the American pilot eject from his burning plane. It was December 1964, early in the Vietnam War, and the pilot was on a bombing run. The Hmong, part of a secret army backed by the CIA, hoped to reach him before North Vietnamese troops in the area did. [Source: Marc Kaufman, Smithsonian magazine, September 2004]
- The leader of this cadre of ragtag Hmong soldiers, Nou Yee Yang, recalls that he and his men walked for hours before reaching a field where they spotted a parachute. They found the pilot hiding in some bushes. "He was sweating and very scared because he didn't know who we were," Yang says. Phoumi, the Hmong soldiers said to the pilot, referring to a Laotian leader supported by the United States. The Hmong, who spoke no English, hoped the pilot would recognize the name and understand they were on the American side.
- Yang says the airman was still uncertain whether the Hmong soldiers were friend or foe as they led him to another hilltop village. Their American-donated radios weren't working, so they put the pilot's helmet on a long stick and waved it to signal U.S. search planes. A U.S. helicopter arrived the next morning. The pilot "was smiling so much and waving his arms goodbye when he left," Yang recalls, adding that the American presented his rescuers with his pistol as a token of gratitude.
- Bill Lair, a CIA official based in Laos at the time, who directed the agency's operations there, says Hmong soldiers risked their own lives to lead many U.S. pilots to safety. The total number of American airmen rescued by the Hmong was, according to agency spokesman Mark Mansfield, never tallied by the CIA. Yang, now 65, fled Laos after the communist takeover in 1975 and has lived in Milwaukee since 1979. He still speaks no English and has found little work in the United States other than odd jobs. Nonetheless, he says, he feels connected to this country, in part because of that pilot he rescued four decades ago. Yang never did learn the man's name. "I wish that someday I could meet him again," he says through an interpreter.
- Another Hmong veteran in Milwaukee, Xay Dang Xiong, 61, says he commanded Hmong forces protecting a secret American radar installation on a Laotian mountaintop. Like Yang, Xiong fled Laos in 1975. Today, he works with Lao Family Community, a Hmong social service agency in Milwaukee "When we fought alongside the Americans in Laos, it was called the secret war," he says. "Hmong

people did so many dangerous things to help, but people here still don't know that. It's still like a secret."

Hmong After the Vietnam War

- During the war the Hmong in Laos had been sharply divided, with some factions supporting the royalists, some supporting the opposition and some remaining neutral. About the only thing that unified them was their opposition to the Communists. In Thailand, ironically, many Hmong supported the Communist Party of Thailand in their struggle with the Thai government in the 1960s and 70s. In both Laos and Thailand the Hmong ended up on the losing side and suffered as a result.
- After the Americans left Laos in 1975 and the Communist Pathet Lao gained control of the country, the Hmong were quickly overrun by Communist forces, who later launched a campaign to eliminate minorities—particularly the Hmong—who had assisted the Americans during the war. Hmong villages were burned and by some estimates thousands were massacred. The new pro-Vietnam Communist government in Laos used Soviet artillery, napalm and chemical weapons against the Hmong. An estimated 10 to 25 percent of all Hmong in Laos were killed during and after the Vietnam war. By one count there were 400,000 Hmong in Laos at the beginning of the Vietnam war and only 300,000 when it was over.
- "In 1975, the current communist government came to power," says Jane Hamilton-Merritt, author of *Tragic Mountains*, a history of the Vietnam-era conflict in Laos. "It announced publicly that it intended to 'wipe out' the Hmong who had allied themselves with the Royal Lao Government and the United States and therefore opposed the communist Pathet Lao soldiers and the North Vietnamese military forces operating in Laos. . . . Wiping out the targeted Hmong began in earnest in early 1976 and continues in 2004." [Source: Marc Kaufman, *Smithsonian* magazine, September 2004]
- The Hmong were reportedly the targets of chemical weapon attacks. According to witnesses yellow powder was dropped from airplanes on Hmong villages, causing villagers to go into convulsions and vomit blood. Thousands reportedly died from the "Yellow Rain," which was allegedly released by the Soviets or Vietnamese. No firm physical evidence was ever found to confirm the reports. A yellow toxic powder was discovered in area, but tests showed later that it could have been bee droppings.
- Intense fighting continued until 1980. One Hmong man told the *Washington Post* that his parents and two sisters and were ambushed and killed by what they believe were government soldiers in 1978.

Hmong in Thailand After the Vietnam War

- At the end of the Vietnam War in the early 1970s as many as a third of the Hmong population left Laos and fled across the Mekong River to Thailand. In Thailand, the Hmong were housed in a series of refugee camps. About 130,000 made their way to United States. Another 50,000 to 100,000 stayed in Thailand. About 400,000 remained in Laos.
- Hmong recruited by the CIA to fight on behalf of a pro-American government during the Vietnam War were all but abandoned in Laos after their communist enemies won a long civil war and began single-party rule in Laos. Many managed to flee into Thailand and later resettled in the United States and elsewhere, but thousands stayed behind, some adjusting to the new regime and others staying in the jungle, where they faced continuing attacks by the government.

- On the relation between Hmong who fled Laos for America and the Laotian government, Marc Kaufman wrote in Smithsonian magazine, “Although there are Hmong-Americans who do return regularly to Laos, relations between the Hmong-American community and Laos are strained. As it happens, Vang’s house in St. Paul was torched five months after his father had called for normal trade relations with the Laotian government and its president, Khamtai Siphandon, and negotiating an end to the 30-year-long jungle warfare. The U.S. State Department currently advocates normal trade relations with Laos. In September 2003, the two countries took an important step when they signed a trade agreement. It is awaiting Congressional approval. [Source: Marc Kaufman, Smithsonian magazine, September 2004]
- Many of the Hmong in the United States are outspoken in their calls for the overthrow of the Laotian Communist government. The leader of the Hmong resistance movement against the Lao government was Gen. Vang Pao, once a close American ally. He lived in California for many years and died in January 2011. In the 2000s he was criticized by the American government for his support of the armed resistance movement against the Lao government and was charged in a U.S. court for his involvement in Lao coup plot.

Hmong After the Vietnam War and the United States

- The U.S. promised to "take care" of the Hmong. Some veterans and widows of the secret war were airlifted by CIA-operated Air America. But, when the war was over, and U.S. forces left Vietnam, the Hmong still in Laos were largely left to fend for themselves.
- Many felt the United States betrayed the Hmong in the worst way. One State Department official who helped resettle some of them said, “They fought with us and they paid they highest price. They’re deserving as the last human element in terms of us taking care of our allies. If the Hmong were good enough to fight and die for us, they have to be good enough to resettle.”
- U.S. Government agencies did not acknowledge the role played the Hmong until the 1990s. Veterans led by the former Hmong leader Vang Po want recognition and benefits from the United States government. Marc Kaufman wrote in Smithsonian magazine, “Their sacrifice was virtually unknown to most Americans until 1997, when efforts by Hmong veterans and their advocates resulted in the installation at Arlington National Cemetery of a commemorative plaque. “In memory of the Hmong and Lao combat veterans and their American advisors who served freedom’s cause in Southeast Asia,” reads the memorial, one of a handful honoring foreign soldiers in the cemetery. “Their patriotic valor and loyalty in the defense of liberty and democracy will never be forgotten.” [Source: Marc Kaufman, Smithsonian magazine, September 2004]
- “The Hmong in Laos may be considered the last victims of the Vietnam War. Today, as many as 17,000 of them who fled into the jungle 30 years ago are said to remain in hiding, fearing for their lives and conducting sporadic guerrilla incursions against the still-communist Laotian government. Reports suggest that hundreds of Hmong have recently begun to emerge from the jungle, lured by the prospect of amnesty. Douglas Hartwick, U.S. ambassador to Laos, says that his goal has been to “reconcile Hmong insurgents and the Lao government.” However, many of those who have left their mountain redoubts have reportedly met with retaliation instead, perhaps facing imprisonment or execution. The Laotian government denies this. Hartwick says only: “We have been unable to substantiate these reports or repudiate them.” [Ibid]

HMONG IN LAOS

- At the end of the Vietnam War in the early 1970s as many as a third of the Hmong population left Laos and fled across the Mekong River to Thailand. In Thailand, the Hmong were housed in a series of refugee camps. About 130,000 made their way to United States. Another 50,000 to 100,000 stayed in Thailand. About 400,000 remained in Laos.
- Hmong recruited by the CIA to fight on behalf of a pro-American government during the Vietnam War were all but abandoned in Laos after their communist enemies won a long civil war and began single-party rule in Laos. Many managed to flee into Thailand and later resettled in the United States and elsewhere, but thousands stayed behind, some adjusting to the new regime and others staying in the jungle, where they faced continuing attacks by the government.
- On the relation between Hmong who fled Laos for America and the Laotian government, Marc Kaufman wrote in Smithsonian magazine, “Although there are Hmong-Americans who do return regularly to Laos, relations between the Hmong-American community and Laos are strained. As it happens, Vang’s house in St. Paul was torched five months after his father had called for normal trade relations with the Laotian government and its president, Khamtai Siphandon, and negotiating an end to the 30-year-long jungle warfare. The U.S. State Department currently advocates normal trade relations with Laos. In September 2003, the two countries took an important step when they signed a trade agreement. It is awaiting Congressional approval. [Source: Marc Kaufman, Smithsonian magazine, September 2004]
- Many of the Hmong in the United States are outspoken in their calls for the overthrow of the Laotian Communist government. The leader of the Hmong resistance movement against the Lao government was Gen. Vang Pao, once a close American ally. He lived in California for many years and died in January 2011. In the 2000s he was criticized by the American government for his support of the armed resistance movement against the Lao government and was charged in a U.S. court for his involvement in Lao coup plot.

Hmong Insurgencies in Northern Laos

- The last, almost forgotten conflict of the Indochina war may still be continuing in northern Laos. Most of the fighters are ethnic Hmong, who are descendants of Hmong fighters enlisted by the CIA in America’s “secret war” in Laos at the time of the Vietnam War and were abandoned when that war came to an end and continued fighting. The Laos government has refused to admit that a Hmong insurgency exists.
- Several insurgencies operate or operated in northern jungles of northern Laos, some of them around the former Ho Chi Minh Trail. It is not often clear what they are fighting for. Some want more autonomy for the Hmong regions. Others just seem to be out to get revenge for the awful things the Communist regime did to them. The largest group, the Ethnic Liberation Organization of Laos (ELOL) may have several thousand fighter but probably has few hundred.
- Most of the insurgent groups were small a little more than militias. Some remained loyal to the Lao National Liberation Front (LNFL) of Vang Pao, the leader of the CIA-funded Hmong army, even though he had been living in California and Minnesota since 1975. One diplomat told the Washington Post, “These groups don’t seem to get along very well. They don’t like each other, and they often seem to work at cross purposes.”

■ In the 1970s and 80s, the Lao army with massive help from the Vietnamese military largely eliminated these groups but was unable to get rid of them completely. Some insurgents lived like wild men in the jungle with families because they were afraid if they emerged they would be imprisoned or killed by Laotian security forces. As of 2004, around 17,000 Hmong were still believed to be living in the jungles.

Revival of Hmong Insurgencies in Northern Laos

■ In the late 1990s and early 2000s, Hmong insurgents became active again in Xianghoang and Oudomxai northern Laos. A government spokesman said, “There is no security threat in Xiang Khouang province just a few isolated acts of banditry in which hardly anybody was killed.”

■ The fact that there was evidence of an insurgency despite the best efforts by the Lao government to hide it was given a proof that insurgency was fairly large spread. One diplomat told AFP, “The intensification of the attacks is beginning to create a siege mentality among the population...Despite the secrecy maintained by authorities here, the casualties being suffered the army can no longer be hidden from a population in which relatives are being killed....As well as troop losses, a large number of government officials in northern villages have been killed by rebels.”

■ The Hmong have little incentive to attack foreign, particularly Americans, because many Hmong now live in the United States and many of them were once fighters themselves and they continue to support insurgencies in Laos.

Attacks by Hmong Insurgencies in Northern Laos

■ The Hmong insurgents ambushed army convoys, burned houses and tried to defend families that were involuntarily being resettled in the lowlands.

■ Caryle A. Thayer, an Australian expert on Southeast Asia, told the New York Times, “Hmong armed groups have been giving the Lao Army hell. They’ve raided and grabbed weapons. They’ve ambushed columns and shot down a helicopter. The groups have received an influx of weapons smuggled into Laos from Thailand by Hmong émigrés from the United States.

■ The fighting was heaviest in Xiangkhouang Province. Five people were killed, including two children, 14 were wounded and buildings were wrecked in a night time raid in Muang Khoun, a former royal capital in Xiang Khuong, residents there said. One resident told AFP, “Around 30 of them came into town firing their guns in the air and shouting...We all just ran out and hid while they ransacked and burned our homes.”

Fighting the Insurgencies

■ In an effort to win the hearts and minds of Hmong insurgents and their sympathizers, the Laotian government quietly allowed them to enter civilian life and provided them with some assistance to start new lives in return for laying down their weapons.

■ In the early 2000s, Vietnamese security forces became active again on Laos, at least in a supporting role, after the increase in insurgency activity. Analysts estimated that there were between 500 and 1,000 Vietnamese soldiers fighting with the Lao Army.

- The government denied that any Vietnamese forces were involved but suspicions about this claim were raised in 1998 when a plane carrying top Vietnamese officials crashed in Xiangkhiang, killing everyone on board.

Is the Hmong Insurgency in Laos Still Fighting

- Little reliable information about fate of the Hmong insurgents emerged until late 2002, when two Western journalists working for Time magazine made contact with one of the Hmong groups and came out with startling photographs and stories of their desperate existence.
- Roger Warner wrote in the The Nation in 2007: “We looked into claims that Hmong are still fighting against their old enemies in Laos. We found those reports true on a small scale. Scattered bands of ragged fighters subsist off wild plants, trying to evade the Laotian army and almost every day, the leaders of these Hmong bands talk on satellite phones with their Hmong-American relatives. [Source: Roger Warner, The Nation (Thailand), June 28, 2007]
- “There is no doubt that some Hmong-Americans have been up to their eyeballs in supporting and guiding the Hmong resistance in Laos, but there are different ways of interpreting this fact. Some might say it is heroic and steadfast for old allies to continue the fight for years after the US forces went home. (After all, which of our Iraqi and Afghan allies will do that?) Others might say that the old Hmong-American leaders are like exiled White Russians in Paris after World War I, plotting and scheming to return to power and not doing a good job of it. [Ibid]
- Human-rights workers have another angle: go to the Amnesty International Website, they say, search under "Hmong" and start reading about all the violence done against tribespeople by the Lao regime, which adds up to borderline genocide. You can frame the arguments any way you want, but for me, the more I learn about the Hmong resistance in Laos, the more I find it ambiguous and troubling. There's a cycle of violence in the boondocks of Laos, and all sides are keeping it going. I put the blame first and foremost on the Lao People's Democratic Republic, which is doing the actual killing; the Hmong-Americans rank a distant second. [Ibid]

Hmong Tribes Surrender after Years on the Run

- In 2005, AP reported: Nearly 200 members of a Hmong hill tribe surrendered to authorities early today after decades on the run in Laotian jungles, a move that heralds a possible end to a tragic legacy of the Vietnam War. U.S. sympathizers traveling with the 170 women, children and old men said they were received warmly when they arrived around dawn in Laos The group emerged at the village of Chong Thuang, said Ed Szendrey, a pro-Hmong activist from the United States who met up with them in hopes of helping ensure their safety. [Source: AP, June 04, 2005]
- If all proceeds peacefully, those who surrendered today are expected to be followed by several thousand others, from various Hmong bands in hiding around Laos, said Szendrey, who 's with the U.S.-based Fact Finding Commission. Szendrey said the initial official reception for those surrendering was warm and relaxed and that the police chief said the military had been told to stand down. “It looks like the government is prepared to handle it on the local level and not get the military involved," said Szendrey. “It looks like the Lao government is actually handling it pretty well."

HMONG IN THAILAND

- As of the early 1990s around 40,000 of the 200,000 Hmong that fled Laos after the Vietnam War, remained in refugee camps in Thailand, too frightened to return to Laos. Some stayed in Thailand despite having the opportunity to go to the United States because they heard about the problems suffered by Hmong living abroad. Others wanted to continue fighting the Laotian Communists and stay close to where the action was, Many Hmong wanted too become Thai citizens but the Thai government wouldn't allow it. They worried if they were sent back to Laos they would be persecuted or even killed.
- Thailand considers the Hmong refugees illegal immigrants and suspected some of them of illegal drug trafficking and helping Hmong exile groups stage attacks against neighboring Laos, harming bilateral relations. In the 1990s, the Thai government stepped up its effort to improve relations with the Laos government. The Hmong in Thailand, still regarded as enemies of the Laos government, were an obstacle to these efforts and the Thai government wanted to get rid of them.
- In November 2004, 150 Hmong, about half of them children, were detained for entering Thailand illegally from Laos. They had hoped to eventually make it to the United States. In July 2005, Thailand urged Laos to repatriate more than 6,000 ethnic Hmong migrants. Thai authorities said many were from Petchabun Province in Laos and had been duped into leaving Laos by human traffickers who promised they would be resettled in the United States. In August about 150 Hmong, including 90 children, went on a hunger strike, at a detention center in Thailand, saying they would rather die than be repatriated to Laos.

Efforts to Repatriate Laotian Hmong in Thailand Back to Laos

- After an agreement was signed between Thailand, Laos and the United Commission for Refugees in 1991, the U.S. has insisted that it was safe for the Hmong to go back to Laos, and many were repatriated at the expense of U.S. taxpayers. Many Hmong felt it wasn't safe. More than 15,000 of them fled the refugee camps to avoid repatriation.
- In the mid 1990s, the United Nations closed its refugee office in Laos and the United States said it had no further plans to resettle any more Hmong. The Hmong that remained in Thailand remained stranded and were largely forgotten. The final group from the last official refugee camp for Hmong from Laos, at Ban Napho in northeastern Thailand, went home in 1999.
- The Lao Human Rights Council has asserted that refugees in Thai camps were denied food in an attempt to repatriate them to Laos. According to the U.S. State Department, Laos is a "most repressive state." Representative Patricia Shroeder from Colorado recently wrote a letter to the king of Thailand, stating that the Hmong should not be returned to Laos because of "the ongoing bloody civil war in Laos...well-documented cases of mandatory [forced] repatriation of Hmong to Laos...and gross violations of human rights by the Lao government, which closed Laos to all monitoring by independent human rights organizations."

Hmong at Wat Tham Krabok

in Thailand

- More than 12,000 Hmong sought refuge in Wat Tham Krabok, a Buddhist temple 60 miles north of Bangkok. Eventually a refugee camp sprung around the temple. By the early 2000s, their numbers had

grown to 15,000, with three out of four born in Thailand. They made a meager living producing handicrafts, working as farm laborers, and performing dangerous rock quarry jobs that the Thais avoided. Some dealt and used drugs. The Laotian government regarded the refugees as a source of funding for Hmong insurgents in Laos.

- According to estimates by the Thai and U.S. governments, between 30,000 and 100,000 additional Laotian Hmong refugees live in Thailand outside Wat Tham Krabok.
- About 15,000 Hmong at Wat Tham Krabok were repatriated to the United States. The United States said was willing to take about half of the 15,000 refugees, provided they were registered as residents of the camp. By July 2005 about 10,000 Wat Tham Krabok refugees were settled in the United States. Another 5,300 were supposed to resettle there by September 2005.
- In August 2004, the Thai government detained 1,500 refugees at Wat Tham Krabok refugee camp because they had failed to meet the registration deadline to move to the United States. In May 2005, the camp at Wat Tham Krabok was closed.

Hmong Forced Out Of Homes In Thailand

- Reporting from Huay Nam Khao, Thailand, Rungrawee C. Pinyorat of Associated Press wrote: “Soaked by rain, thousands of poor ethnic Hmong refugees from Laos were living without shelter in northern Thailand, forced from their homes under a Thai campaign to pressure them to return to their native land. Landlords in this village said the government set a deadline for them to evict the estimated 6,500 refugees from their bamboo shelters, threatening locals with prison or fines of up to \$1,200 for sheltering the Hmong, considered by Thailand to be illegal immigrants. [Source: Rungrawee C. Pinyorat, Associated Press, July 6, October 1, 2005]”
- The 6,500 refugees have been scattered along the roadside near Huay Nam Khao village. At first, they huddled under umbrellas and trees. Then they constructed bamboo huts and plastic lean-tos. Many have retreated to hillsides that provide more space and safety from possible flooding. A baby girl who died after she and her parents spent a shelterless day and night in the rain. The mother of the two-month-old girl said the baby had a high fever and had diarrhea after spending an afternoon in the rain. “She was shaking and crying for a long time. When she stopped crying, she was dead.”
- Medical care was cut off to the Hmong. Thai officials also instructed vendors not to sell food to the refugees, including children, camped out since by the roadside in Huay Nam Khao, village leaders said. “They have no place to stay, no place to cook. How can they stand the heat and rain?” asked Sawai Leeprecha, a Thai-Hmong village leader. Some of the Hmong demonstrated outside a government office near the village, located in Phetchabun province about 185 miles north of the Thai capital, Bangkok. But most clustered in groups along the road carrying reed mats and plastic sheeting. “The Hmong would like to call for the United Nations to help us survive,” said Jongli Saeloh, 43. “I would rather die here than be sent back to Laos.” A sign on a fence read: “Please help, we’re very hungry.”
- The refugees had appealed to the United Nations to treat them as political asylum seekers and help find them a new home. Although pressure on the Hmong has eased, military operations against small bands of Hmong insurgents in Laos continue and tensions persist. Displaying a crease in his flesh from a bullet wound in his left leg, 64-year-old Jer Saechong told AP he had been an officer for the CIA-backed “Secret Army,” but made his peace after 1975, settling down to farm north of the Laotian capital, Vientiane. Then, in 2004, “many former CIA soldiers were arrested and never returned,

including five from my village," he said. "I was very frightened and decided to travel across the border," said Jer, who slipped into Thailand with his wife and five children a little over a year ago. Chongmi Saelee, 37, said her husband — whose father also fought for the CIA — disappeared two years ago after coming back from a visit to the United States with money given him by his relatives. When she went to the police for help, she said, "they told me that they would also kill me if I continued to search for him."

- Many of the migrants here in Phetchabun province, however, are not so clearly fleeing persecution, and Thai officials are trying to sort them out. "These people have entered the country illegally and will be sent back according to the law," Gov. Direk Thungfang said. Some of the Hmong acknowledge bribing Laotian and Thai officials to get them into Thailand...using small bars of silver worth about \$100 that are the traditional way of holding wealth

- In December 2006, Some of the Hmong were repatriated back to Laos while U.S. President George Bush was visiting Thailand.

Hmong Forced to Go Back to Laos

- Seth Mydans wrote in the New York Times, "In a quick, one-day operation, Thai soldiers with riot shields and clubs evicted more than 4,000 Hmong asylum seekers from a holding center and forcibly repatriated them to Laos, where they say they face retribution from their government. Thailand acted despite protests from the United Nations and human rights groups. Even as the soldiers were trucking the Hmong over the Mekong River into Laos, the United States government was calling on the Thai government to stop. Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva said Thailand had received assurances that the returnees would be well treated and "that these Hmong will have a better life." [Source: Seth Mydans, New York Times, December 28 and 29, 2009]

- "Close to 5,000 troops and security officers entered the Hmong encampment in Phetchabun Province, about 200 miles north of Bangkok, at 5:30 a.m. and opened the operation by rounding up "potential troublemakers," said Sunai Pasuk, the Thailand representative of Human Rights Watch. The Hmong were processed at a military headquarters, then bused across the Mekong River into Laos. "This forced repatriation would place the refugees in serious danger of persecution at the hands of the Lao authorities, who to this day have not forgiven the Hmong for being dedicated allies of the United States during the Vietnam War," Joel R. Charny, acting president of Refugees International, an advocacy group in Washington, said in a statement. [Ibid]

- Col. Thana Charuwat told AP that no weapons were used and the Hmong offered no resistance "In advance of the eviction, the military removed residents' mobile telephones and halted medical services and food provided by aid groups, apparently "to physically and mentally break their resistance to their deportation," Mr. Sunai said. "Such coercive, intimidating and brutal measures are clearly the opposite of the concept of 'voluntary repatriation,' " he said. Refugee experts say the camp residents are a mix of refugees who fear persecution and economic migrants who have left Laos over the past few years. They have included dozens who display what appear to be battle scars, as well as some older refugees who fought on the American side during the war. [Ibid]

- "Mr. Panitan said Laos had said that the returnees would be treated well and that the United Nations could interview them within 30 days of arrival to determine if any were eligible for resettlement elsewhere. "There is no reason to believe that they will be harmed," he said. "We have been repatriating Laotian Hmong in the past few years," he said. "I think this is the 19th time, and they seem to be fine. Their living conditions seem to be better when they return."

Image Sources: Wikimedia Commons

Text Sources: *Encyclopedia of World Cultures: East and Southeast Asia*, edited by Paul Hockings (C.K. Hall & Company); New York Times, Washington Post, Los Angeles Times, Times of London, The Guardian, National Geographic, The New Yorker, Time, Newsweek, Reuters, AP, AFP, Wall Street Journal, The Atlantic Monthly, The Economist, Global Viewpoint (Christian Science Monitor), Foreign Policy, Wikipedia, BBC, CNN, NBC News, Fox News and various books and other publications.

[Page Top](#)

© 2008 Jeffrey Hays

Last updated November 2012

Questions or comments, e-mail ajhays98@yahoo.com | [About This Project](#) | [Support and Donations](#)