



Special Guerrilla Units (SGU) Veterans and Families of USA, Inc.  
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## OUR MISSION

To deepen awareness, to educate, and to preserve the identity, heritage, and legacy of the Hmong Community of Minnesota's "Greatest Generation" who gave and sacrificed their lives to defend and protect the United States' foreign military policies during the Secret War in Laos.



# Brief Background

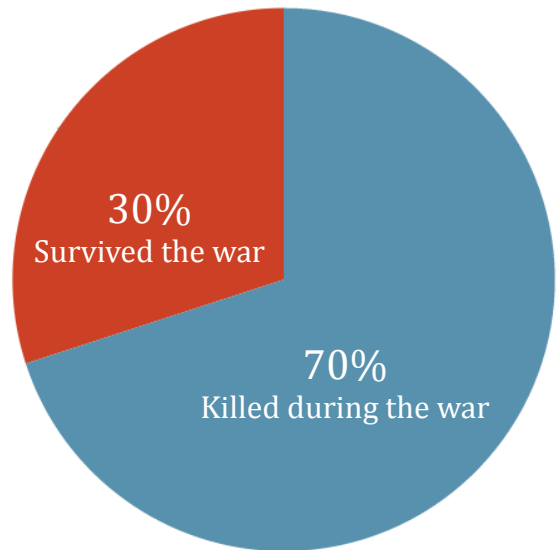
During the Secret War in Laos from 1961 to 1975, as part of the Vietnam War, the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) directly paid, recruited, and trained about 50,000 Hmong soldiers to support and defend US military interests in Southeast Asia. The mission of the Hmong SGU soldiers had four objectives:

1. To slow down and halt communist expansion beyond Laos and Vietnam, preventing what President Dwight D. Eisenhower termed, the “Domino Theory” during the Cold War era,
2. To rescue downed American pilots flown from inside Vietnam,
3. To protect the CIA’s reconnaissance (bombing) radar at Phou Pha Thi, and
4. To deflect Hanoi from sending more North Vietnamese Army troops to South Vietnam along the Ho Chi Minh Trail.

When the war ended in 1975, about 35,000 Hmong SGU soldiers were dead, with thousands wounded as they carried out this mission. Thousands of Hmong civilians perished in the conflict.

After the war ended in 1975, about 15,000 Hmong SGU soldiers plus their families resettled to the US. At the peak, about 5,000 Hmong SGU veterans called Minnesota home. Today in Minnesota, about 900 veterans and about 3,500 widows (mainly women) are still alive.

Special Guerrilla Units (SGU) Veterans & Families of USA, was established in Minnesota in 2004 by former military commanders and community leaders. One of our goals is to honor



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Of the estimated 50,000 Hmong SGU soldiers recruited by the CIA, about 35,000 died (70%) and 15,000 survived (30%) during the Secret War from 1961-1975.

the SGU Veterans by ensuring that their legacies and stories from the Secret War in Laos live on and are used to educate the public.

For the last 19 years, SGU’s operation has relied almost exclusively on veteran and community volunteers and in-kind donations from individuals and business owners. Although our organization has operated with limited funds and with a small office space, our ongoing administrative integrity, commitment to the community, and compassion in supporting our veterans, their widows, and their families are the sources of our strength and existence.



SGU veterans at the dedication of the Hmong & Lao Veterans Commemorative Memorial at the MN State Capitol Grounds, 2016. Left, Sen. Hawj and Lt. Xang Vang at the Memorial in 2018.

- About 80 to 90 percent of the Hmong SGU veterans do not know how to read or write, thus leading to no record keeping of their history.

- Of the 5,000 Hmong SGU veterans who resettled in Minnesota, less than 500 (or 10 percent) of their stories and life experiences are archived and preserved.

- Our organization was one of the chief organizing members in the creation of the “Hmong & Lao Veterans Commemorative Memorial” at the MN State Capitol Grounds (2016).

- In 2019, our organization spearheaded a bill that was signed into law “designating May 14 as Hmong Special Guerrilla Units Remembrance Day” by Governor Walz.

- With few existing records of our Hmong SGU veterans stories and with the death of many of our veterans due to the Covid-19 pandemic, our organization is eager to move ahead quickly and ramp up its efforts to collect and archive the history and stories of our living SGU veterans.

- In 2021, SGU received a \$75,000 grant through The MN Humanities Center to document and record the stories of about 25 Hmong SGU veterans and their widows.

In 1961, under the authorization of President Kennedy, the CIA began paying, recruiting, and training Hmong soldiers in Laos to support and defend the US military interests in Southeast Asia. This CIA secret army was known as the Special Guerrilla Units.



About 80% of the Hmong SGU veterans and their families lived or were concentrated in this part of Northern Laos, and was the Royal Lao Army's Military Region 2. Also, this was where the heaviest of fighting took place during this 14-year Secret War in Laos.

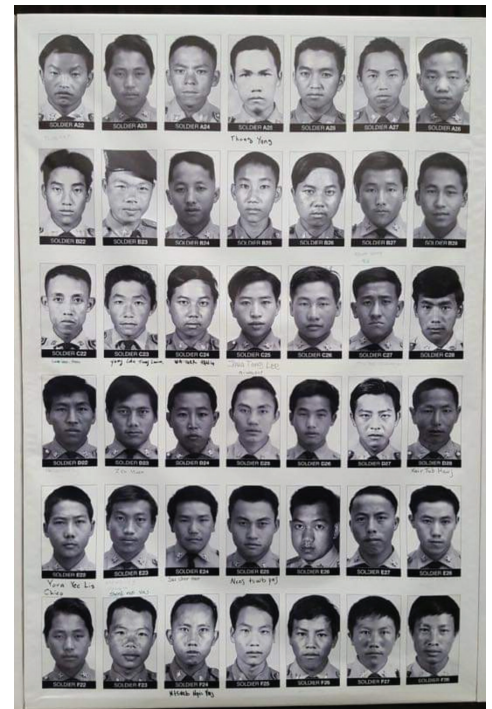
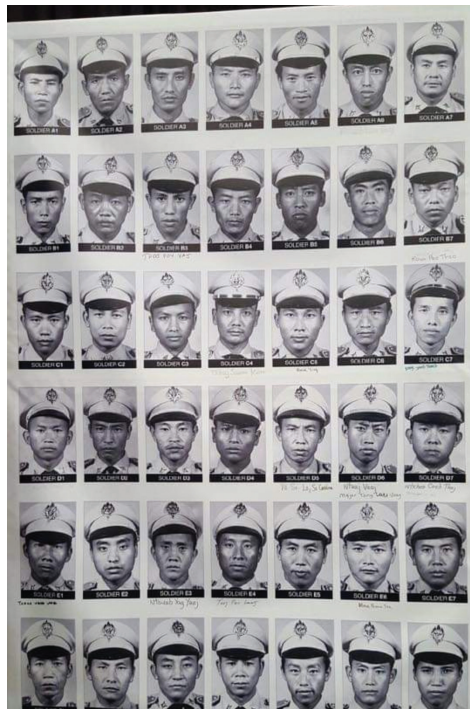
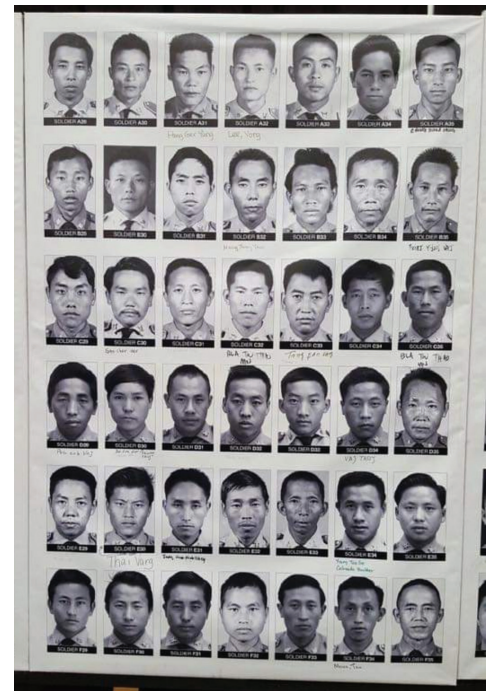
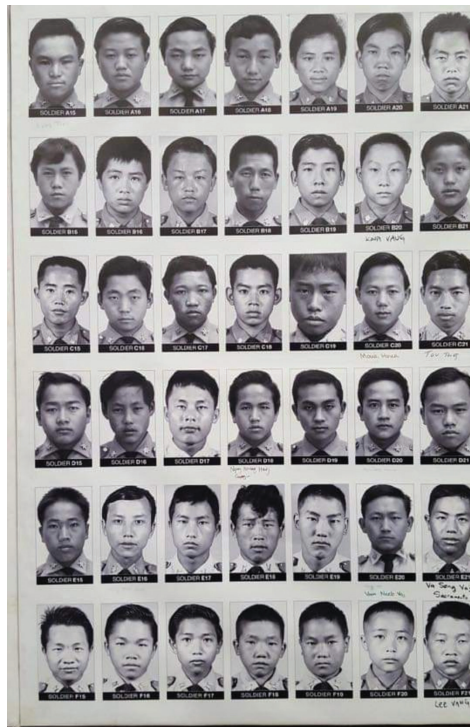
Aside from the 35,000 Hmong SGU soldiers killed,  
thousands were wounded.



SGU Military Medic and long-time MN resident  
Major Yang Thai

“I was wounded earlier on in the war. This did  
not stop me from fighting. The enemy was  
taking over our land, killing our people—I had  
to fight to stop them.”

Lt. Col. Nenglo Yang  
Hmong SGU Soldier  
St. Paul, Minnesota



In Minnesota, less than 10 percent of the Hmong SGU veterans' stories are archived or preserved. Between 80 and 90 of the Hmong SGU veterans do not know how to read or write (especially in English).



“What I am afraid of most is that when my generation dies, their legacies and stories will die with them. Without knowledge of our Hmong veterans’ legacies, we will not know who we are in the future.”

Lt. Colonel Youa True Vang  
Deceased 2019  
St. Paul, Minnesota



**“A short time ago we rounded up 300 fresh recruits. Thirty percent were 14 years old or less, and ten of them were only ten years old. Another 30 percent were 15 or 16. The remaining 40 percent were 45 or older. Where were the ones in between? I’ll tell you – they’re all dead.”**

**-Edgar “Pop” Buell, International Voluntary Services employee, 1968.**





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*"Before the war, all the men in our village worked hard and supported their families. Suddenly, our lives changed. The men began to disappear. They went to fight for General Vang Pao, for the Americans. Most of our husband never returned home. My husband died in the war."*

-Youa Lee, St. Paul, Interview 2011. Minnesota Historical Society.

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