

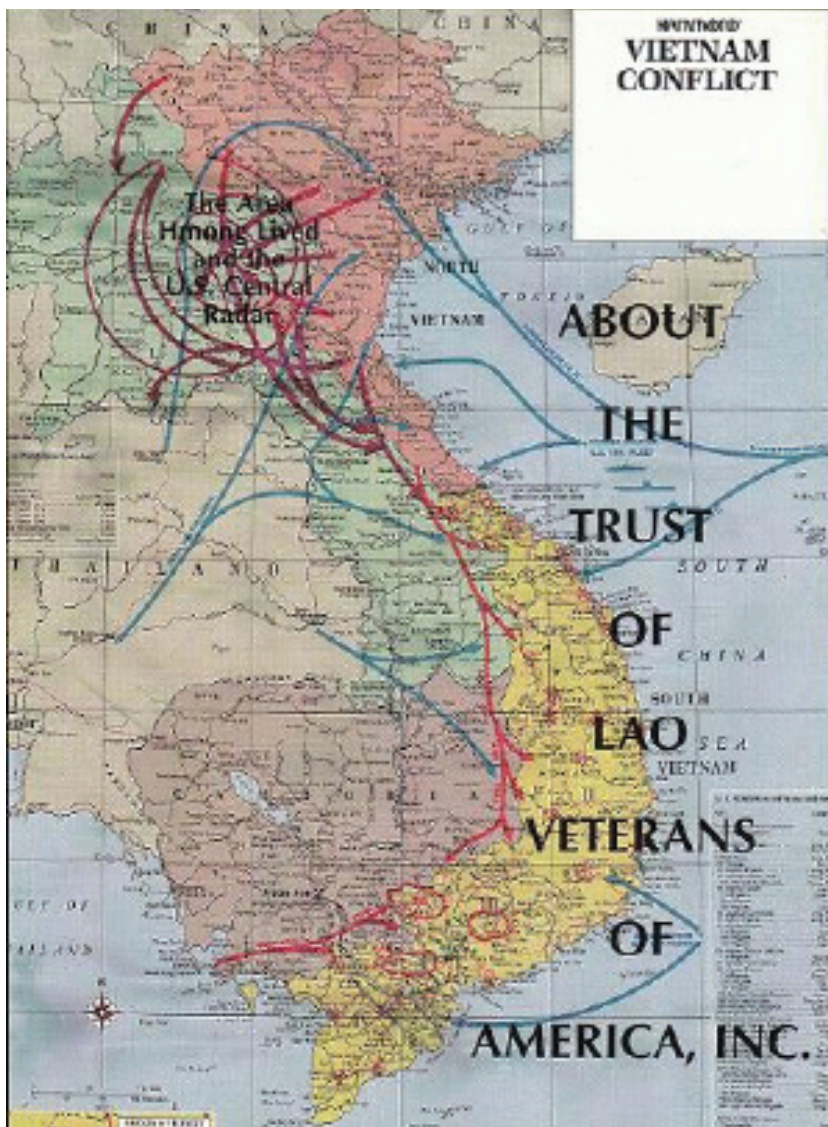
# **The Special Guerrilla Units (SGU) Service History**

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.

---

Map of Laos. The red arrows and circles represent the territory occupied by SGU forces where the red line running south is the Ho Chi Minh Trail.



## INTRODUCTION

After WWII, China closed its doors to foreigners and built an alliance with Communist Russia. The two super power 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 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 named Mr. James W. Lair, who was assigned to work in Thailand, who established the Thai Police Aerial Reinforcement Unit (PARU) in preparation to fight against 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 to fly out to search for Major Vang Pao while 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 Soviet helped airlifted and parachuted military supplies to Kong Le, a move that concerned the CIA that Laos may fall into Communists control.

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

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 back, "We are surely cannot live with the Communists. We

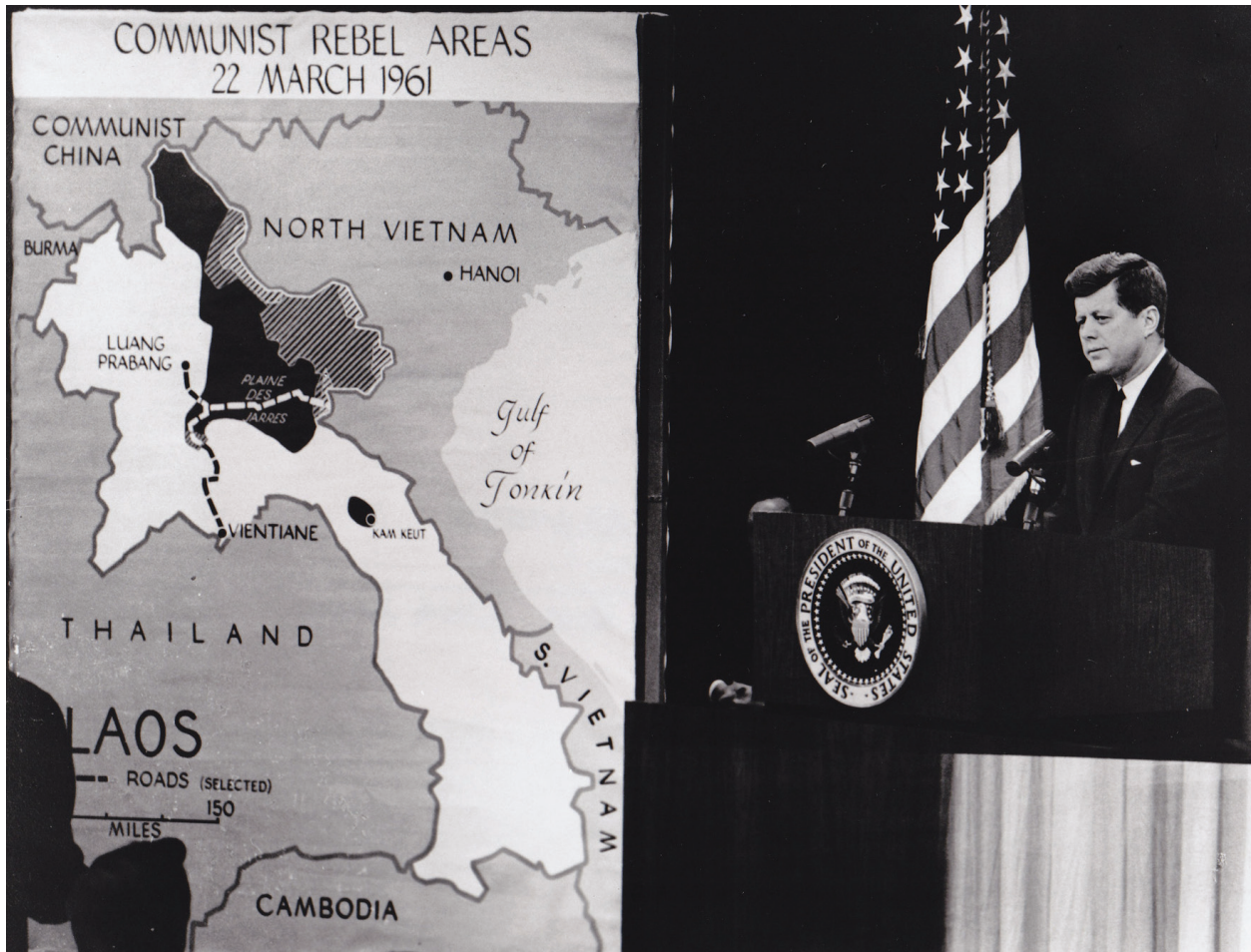




either run south for our survival or, if, someone supplies us arm-support, medical, and food then we will fight to protect our women, children and the country.” Lair then understood Major Vang Pao’s need and ambition to fight against the Communists.

Lair returned to the CIA Headquarters to consult with his superior, Chief Gordon L. Jorgensen, to arm Major Vang 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 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 Communists 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 involved in the Vietnam conflict. At Lair’s request,

A United States Green Beret demonstrating to the SGU soldiers how to use M-57. Top right: A Thai PARU explains to the newly SGU soldiers how to use their weapons



President Kennedy briefs his staff the important of the country of Laos to winning the war in Vietnam. The shaded part of the map of Laos was where the heaviest of military fighting that took place between the SGU and Communist forces.

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 had met with Eisenhower about the dire situation in Laos in which he stated in his first press conference at the State Department's Auditorium on March 23, 1961. Kennedy is quoted 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.”

And 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 Communists’ 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

President Kennedy welcomes King Sisavang Vatthana and his delegation to Washington, D.C., to strengthen their relationships and effort to the Secret War inside Laos.



Long Tieng, LS20A, was the Headquarters of Military Region II where the SGU and CIA field officers conducted the Secret War against Communists NVA and Pathet Lao forces penetrating and overtaking Laos.

meeting was held in Geneva to iron out a settlement to the pressing problem for 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 out its military advisers and support staff. Air America, a CIA-hired air support, 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 comply 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





Many SGU soldiers' responsibilities were to search-and-rescue down-American pilots in Laos, such as with this case. In some cases, as many as 100 SGU soldiers trying to rescue one downed American pilot.

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 Communists 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 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 hold. The SGU played a critical role for the CIA in rescuing American- shot down pilots 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 gotten more difficult to report moving enemy targets. They 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.



Top: Hmong and Lao SGU trained T-28 pilots.

Above: Air America helicopter unloading ammunition to the SGU soldiers in the frontline.

Soon the two became successful air bombers, proven that the pilot program became effective in training more SGU soldiers to take the air to support the troops on the ground. Many SGU bomber pilots flew and attack enemy movements until they died.

Air America's role became more critical in supplying 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 US Government special budget through 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 avoided the United States from violating the Geneva Accords. This CIA clandestine military operation in Laos was not properly told and 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 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 Premeir Mao Zedong in Peking on America's interest in 1973, this resulted in the ending stage of the war. The arrangement for the closing down of the Secret War in Laos, which was a 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. 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 Cheng, 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

Top left: President Nixon meets with Chinese Premier Mao ZeDong that offically ended the Vietnam War in 1973.

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



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

behind in their outposts. As a result of helping the CIA-sponsored Secret War, more than 35,000 Hmong-Lao SGU soldiers had been killed; where the majority had died in direct military engagement against the Communist forces in Northeastern Laos. The total numbers of killed and wounded civilians were unaccounted for. Then the Communist Pathet Lao started arresting the rest of the 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 the SGU soldiers and their families out of Laos, which the vast majority were the Hmong. Hundreds of thousands of Hmong soldiers sought safety in Thailand. While a vast majority were killed or had died of starvation and diseases as they made their way to seek safety and freedom in Thailand. As many families tried crossing the Mekong River, some had drowned and never saw the other side of the river. In Thailand, some 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 still 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 the sacrifice of the Hmong for the American's caused in Laos in Washington, D.C.,

“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.”

A plaque commemorating the sacrifice of the US Special Forces, the SGU soldiers, during the Secret War at Arlington National Cemetery in Washington, D. C., in 1997.

The SGU's sacrifices for the United States were 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 provided the SGU soldiers and their widows to gain their US citizenships with the help of interpreters and with less questions. However, today the SGU veterans continue to gain access to the VA benefits because this 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, far right, addresses the resettlement process to newly arrived Hmong refugees in our new home, America.



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

**In God we trust, with the Americans the Hmong trust.**

*“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.



Copyrighted © 2010 by the SGU Veterans and Families of USA, Inc. All photos are courtesy of the SGU Collections, JFK Presidential Library & Museum, James W. Lair, and Kong Vang. Text and language were prepared by the SGU staff (VX, TZV, XPV & NV).

---