

MEKONG EXPRESS MAIL



The newsletter of the Thailand-Laos-Cambodia Brotherhood, Inc. Volume 24, issue 4

WWW.TLC-Brotherhood.com

Editor's Notebook

2023 Reunion Celebrates the Hmong Community

By John Harrington

The remarkable saga of the Hmong tribe of Laos from their resistance to the Communist takeover of their country to their long odyssey to the United States is one of the most notable stories of the long and difficult tale of the Southeast Asian War that engulfed Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, and to some extent Thailand, during the 1960s and 1970s. Their experiences and eventual triumph were the focus of the September 2023 Reunion of the Thailand Laos Cambodia Brotherhood. And it made for one of the most fascinating and engrossing reunions in our history.

When the Laos resistance to the Communist takeover was collapsing in 1975, the Hmong tribe was not initially being considered for resettlement in the United States; however, through the heroic efforts of several TLCB members, notably MacAlan "Mac" Thompson and Lionel Rosenblatt, the Hmong tribe members were eventually accepted as refugees.

They now have established several significant communities in the U.S. While there are measurable populations in California, Wisconsin, and other areas, by far the most populous and impactful is in the Minneapolis-St. Paul area of Minnesota. And at the invitation of the TLCB, a large group of them were guests and the central focus of the September reunion in St. Paul.

The impact of the Hmong in the area is incredible. As recounted in the presentation of Lee Pao Xiong, founding director of the Center for Hmong Studies at Concordia Collage in St. Paul (see page 3), the Hmong economy in Minnesota is over two billion dollars. Examples are: Over 9000 Hmong businesses generate over a billion dollars in sales each year, Hmong Minnesotans pay an estimated \$138 million in state and local taxes, and Hmong renters pay \$7.6 million monthly to property owners.

To quote Lee Pao further, "If you like to eat organic food, you are most likely eating produce grown by Hmong farmers in Minnesota. If you are eating strawberries from California, you most likely are eating Hmong-grown strawberries. If you stopped by a Chinese, Japanese, or Thai restaurant in Michigan, you are most likely eating in a Hmong-owned restaurant. Finally, if you buy flowers from Seattle, they are most likely Hmong-grown flowers."

As a further in-depth part of the reunion program, Lee Pao led a panel discussion on the evacuation of the Hmong from Laos. Included in that presentation were Captain Xai Nou Vang, who was instrumental in getting General Vang Pao out of Laos and Major Gia Tou Ly, who was recruited at the early

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age of 15 by Vang Pao, and who served for more than 14 years before escaping to Thailand and eventually the U.S. Highlights of their presentation begin on page 5.

Another significant highlight was a letter from Betty McCollum, United States Congressional Representative from Minnesota's 4th District, written to the members of the TLCB, noting that "Your mission is truly noble and embodies the powerful spirit of the American people."

The TLCB was further recognized by the Minnesota State Senate resolving that Saturday, September 16, 2023, is "The Thailand, Laos, Cambodia Brotherhood Day." See page 4.

For this TLCB member, the events of the 2023 Reunion enhanced the value of my membership. I originally joined the Brotherhood because I was impressed by its Assistance program providing educational funds for schools and scholarships for Thai and Laotian children. Although I had enjoyed and learned much from 12 months in Phitsanulok, Thailand, way back in 1967 and 1968, I always felt that I should have contributed something more to



the people of Southeast Asia. The TLCB's Assistance Program satisfied, to some extent, that need; however, the clear gratitude demonstrated by the Hmong of Minnesota to the TLCB membership greatly expanded that sense of contribution on our members' part. The Hmong in Minnesota, and quite surely in other communities as well, appreciate what we are doing back in SEA, and how some of our members mentioned above, helped them find homes in the U.S. Not only have they settled successfully, but they have also become significant contributors to their communities. And for that, the TLCB can be proud of the Hmong people's achievements as well.

Nearly all of this issue of the *MEM* is devoted to the program of our 2023 TLCB Reunion. Read it closely and enjoy it.



MEM Staff Recognized by TLCB Board of Directors.

At left, Editor John Harrington, and below, Distribution Manager John Duffin were presented monogrammed notebooks in recognition of their service on the staff. Bill and Thelma Tilton were each similarly recognized by the Board.



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Reunion 2024: Pensacola, Florida

Welcome from Professor Lee Pao Xiong, DPA to the Thailand, Laos, and Cambodia Brotherhood Reunion, September 15, 2023

Welcome to Minnesota, the Hmong capital of the world. Now, you may wonder how the Hmong ended up in cold Minnesota. If you saw Clint Eastwood's movie, *Grand Torino*, you would understand. In the movie, Clint Eastwood asked the young actress, "How did you end up here?" She said, "the Lutherans."

Last month, the former governor of Minnesota, Governor Al Quie, passed away. He was instrumental in the resettlement of the Hmong in Minnesota in the early 1980s. In the fall of 1979, after his trade trip to China, he came down to Thailand and visited many of the refugee camps, in particular Ban Vinai. He described what he saw after a short tour as, "another Holocaust, human wreckage and suffering beyond belief." After his return, he lobbied local Lutheran Churches in Minnesota to sponsor the Southeast Asian refugees. Minnesota officials also lobbied the US State Department to send refugees to Minnesota.

After almost 50 years since leaving Laos, the Hmong are thriving here in Minnesota. In 1979, when my family moved to Minnesota from Bean Blossom, Indiana, only 2,000 Hmong were here. Now there are over 103,000 Hmong living in Minnesota, making it the largest concentration of urbanized Hmong in the United States.

According to Dr. Bruce Corrie, an economist and a colleague of mine at Concordia University, St. Paul, the Hmong Economy in Minnesota is estimated to be over \$2+ billion dollars and includes over a billion dollars in buying power. Over 9000 Hmong businesses generate over a billion dollars in sales each year. Hmong Minnesotans also pay an estimated \$138 million in state and local taxes. Our renters also pay \$7.6 million monthly to property owners, fueling the local real estate market.

What does this mean? If you like to eat organic food, you are most likely eating produce grown by Hmong farmers in Minnesota. If you are eating strawberries from California, you are most likely eating Hmong-grown strawberries, because they control 70 percent of the strawberries market in California. If you stopped by a Chinese, Japanese, or Thai restaurant in Michigan, you are most likely eating in a Hmong-owned restaurant. Finally, if you buy flowers from Seattle, you are most likely buying Hmong grown flowers.

Anyway, the Honorable Minnesota State Senator Fong Hawj will share more success stories with you tomorrow night at your banquet. While you are here, do make sure to visit our restaurants and markets. We have Hmongtown Marketplace, an indoor and outdoor marketplace, not far from here and Hmong Village on the Eastside of St. Paul. So, welcome to Minnesota! Glad that you chose our state as the location for your reunion.

Panel Discussion on the Evacuation of the Hmong from Laos

In the shadows of the Vietnam War, the CIA conducted a secret war in Laos that relied on Hmong soldiers to prevent the threat of Communism from spreading deeper into Southeast Asia, of which many of you were a part. During the war, the Hmong lost over 30,000 individuals, and after the war, the Hmong lost an additional 50,000.

After almost 50 years, the war didn't really end for the Hmong. Many of us continued to be harassed at the gate of entry by a Lao immigration officer as we attempted to enter Laos.

There are still remnants of Hmong hiding in the jungle of Laos. The Lao government still viewed the overseas Hmong with suspicion.

I was just in Washington, DC serving on a panel along with Afghan Refugees, talking about the similarity between the experiences of the Afghans and the Hmong. I mentioned that at least for the Afghans, they had a whole month to evacuate the refugees from Afghanistan. For

the Hmong, we had only three days and three planes, sent by Brigadier General Heinie Aderholt, to evacuate the Hmong. In total, only 1,600 individuals were evacuated by plane out of Laos between May 12th – 14th, 1975. The evacuation was not always smooth.

So today, I have on the panel Captain Xai Nou Vang, General Vang Pao's house manager as well as personal security detail. He was there at Tha Thong Tha Vieng when Colonel Bill Lair and General Aderholt came to see General Vang Pao for the first time, creating a partnership between the United States and the Hmong. More importantly, Captain Xai Nou Vang was the person who orchestrated and assisted in the evacuation of General Vang Pao on May 14, 1975.

Also on the panel is Major Gia Tou Ly. Like Captain Xai Nou Vang, Major Lee's military career started in 1961. He worked closely with General Vang Pao, CIA Case Officer Jerry Daniels, as well as CIA Operations Officer George Bacon, "Kayak." During his service, he was grazed in the head by an AK-47 bullet and survived two helicopter crashes.

More importantly, his battalion was assigned to provide security surrounding Long Tieng during the evacuation. After the completion of the evacuation, the communist battalion commander declared a truce and met with Major Gia Tou Lee and his troops.

Now, these two distinguished gentlemen will share their personal experiences regarding the final days of the war. So let's give them a round of applause to welcome them.



Lee Pao Xiong, right, translating Capt Xai Nou Vang's amazing recounting of how he helped General Vang Pao escape Laos when Communist forces took Laos in 1975.



A Senate resolution

honoring members of the Thailand, Laos, and Cambodia Brotherhood

WHEREAS, during the Vietnam War, the Central Intelligence Agency and the United States Armed Forces recruited, organized, trained, and financed Hmong and Lao troops to assist the United States in their efforts to contain communism in Southeast Asia; and

WHEREAS, thousands of Hmong and Lao courageously fought alongside or were supported by American troops stationed in Thailand, and as advisors in Laos, against the communist forces in Southeast Asia; and

WHEREAS, many of the American service members were not officially stationed in Laos because by doing so they would be violating the Geneva Conference of 1954 and the Vientiane Agreement of 1962; and

WHEREAS, many members of the Thailand, Laos, and Cambodia Brotherhood, Inc. (TLC), were not considered Vietnam veterans because they served in the Vietnam War outside of the borders of Vietnam; and

WHEREAS, the TLC was founded as an organization and a place for those veterans with membership throughout the world, including Minnesota, to share their experiences and comradeship, preserve their history, and educate each other and the public about the specifics and overall scope of the war in Southeast Asia, especially as waged outside the borders of the Republic of Vietnam, much of which was long held secret; and

WHEREAS, the TLC's mission is to honor comrades who did not return and to keep the memory of their sacrifices alive and provide humanitarian aid to the needy people of Southeast Asia in memory of those who did not return from the war; and

WHEREAS, to reconnect with their Hmong allies from the Secret War of Laos, the TLC Brotherhood chose Minnesota as the location for the 24th annual reunion; and

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED by the Senate of the State of Minnesota that it hereby recognizes Saturday, September 16th, 2023, as the Thailand, Laos, and Cambodia Brotherhood, Inc., Day; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Secretary of the Senate is directed to prepare an enrolled copy of this resolution, to be authenticated by the Secretary's signature and that of the Chair of the Senate Rules and Administration Committee, and transmit it to the TLC Brotherhood.

Tom Bottern
Secretary of the Senate

Kari Dziedzic
Chair, Senate Committee on
Rules and Administration



Fong Hawj
State Senator, District 67

TLCB Day in Minnesota!

Shown at left, the Minnesota State Senate declared Saturday, September 16th, 2023 "Thailand, Laos, Cambodia Brotherhood Day in Minnesota, thanks to the good offices of State Senator Fong Hawj, who was the banquet speaker that evening.

TLCB Member Art Crisfield Wins Quilt Raffle

Here is Art's reply to our notice that he won:

Thank you, Bill. I'm "overcome" as they say in Nelson Co. I've never won with a ticket in a raffle or lottery before! But this one is special indeed. Best wishes to everyone at the reunion. I have wonderful memories of the good works the TLCB contributions give to Lao schools across Xieng Khouang. My bed has had a Tai Dam quilt on it since 1975. It's time for it to retire!

Best to you, Bill.
From, Art

Below, as witness, Minnesota State Senator Fong Hawj looks on as Ying Vang-Pao, the daughter of General Vang Pao's 5th wife, Chia Moua, draws the winning raffle ticket. Ying's mother is the sister of the famous Colonel Chao Pao Moua of Lima Site 32 Boum Long.



My Perilous Journey to Freedom

by Major Gia Tou Lee

My name is Gia Tou Lee, also known as Reverend / Major Gia Tou Lee or Husky (my CIA code name).

My military career started in 1961 when the country of Laos was under the threat of communist expansion. Under the direction of President John F. Kennedy, the U.S. CIA began recruiting, training, and paying Hmong soldiers to support the U.S. military interests in their homeland. At 15 years old, I was recruited by General Vang Pao (VP) and Colonel James W. Lair to serve in the United States Special Forces unit called “Auto Defense de Choc” (ADC) at Zone 6A, Lima Site (LS) 18, Village of Tha Lin Noi, Laos. Later, the ADC became U.S. CIA Special Guerrilla Unit (SGU), also known as the CIA’s Secret Army to fight against the Communists in Laos and to block the Ho Chi Minh trail on America’s behalf.

I was appointed by General Vang Pao (VP), the Commander of Royal Lao Military Region II (MR II), and Jerry “Hog” Daniels, the CIA’s Chief Case Officer, to work with VP and the Hmong in Long Cheng, LS 20A, the CIA’s most secret headquarters in Laos. I also worked with General Noupheut Daoheuang, the Commander of Royal Laos Military Region III (MR III) in Savannakhet, LS 39. During my 14-year CIA-backed Secret War career, I served in various capacities and departments including: Secretary of Logistics, Secretary of Second Bureau of Enemy Information and Investigation, Secretary of Third Bureau of Strategy and Planning, Subdivision Xieng Khouang Chief Military Police, Army Recruiter, Forward Air Guide, Chief Joint Operation Control Center, Field Operations Officer, Battalion SGU 202 Chief of First Staff / Promotion and Finance, and Battalion SGU 202 Commander.

As an officer, I risked my life to direct and guide air bombers in Xieng Khouang province and along the Ho Chi Minh Trail to disrupt the North Vietnamese Army from supplying troops and weapons into South Vietnam. I rescued wounded comrades from the battlefield, downed American bomber pilots,

Burr Smith, left, and Jerry Daniels, both CIA, at a New Years event in Long Tieng. Smith was “Mr Clean” and Daniels was code-named “Mr Hog” Photo from the Mac Thompson collection of the Center for Hmong Studies, Concordia University St. Paul.



and retrieved those killed in action.

In the early 1970s, VP and Hog assigned me to work with George Bacon (Kayak), who was a CIA Operation Case Officer stationed in Long Cheng. Kayak and I flew daily to provide military support and logistics at the frontlines and to assist Col Cher Pao Moua, the Commander of MR II’s Regiment 27, at Bouam Long, LS 32; Phou Vieng, LS 6 and Phou Cum, LS 50.



Major Gia Tou Lee kept the audience on the edge of their seats at the TLC Brotherhood Reunion. Photo Bill Tilton

These were the most dangerous, invulnerable, and impenetrable positions in Laos for over 14 years. I faced several near-death experiences and was wounded in action when an AK-47 bullet grazed the left side of my head. I survived two helicopter crashes despite having to jump out—without a parachute—from one of them. My highest military rank was major.

Long Cheng Falls

Wednesday, May 14, 1975, Hmong Special Guerrilla Unit (SGUs) lost Long Cheng, LS 20A, the Royal Laos Region II and the CIA’s most secret headquarters in Laos, to the Communists. A few days before the Communist troops arrived at Long Cheng, LS 20A, the CIA ordered the 3,500 Hmong superior officers and their families, including my battalion commander and his assistant, flown out of Long Cheng to safety in Thailand. My commander appointed me to take his position as battalion commander. I decided to stay because about 300 of my soldiers were still in the frontline around northeast of Long Cheng. One hundred of them stayed with me at Long Cheng Hospital.

My commitment was to stay with my family, my soldiers, and my country. I knew my surrendering to the Communists was dangerous, and I did not know what would happen to me. So, I moved my family to the area near Pha Khao, LS 14, which is closer to Phou Bia where the Hmong hid. On May 14, 1975, at 1 PM, when the Communist Army Commander, General Kham Ai and his troops arrived in Long Cheng, he sent a few of his soldiers to see me at the hospital, with word

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that the general wanted to visit my soldiers at 3 PM; so, I got my soldiers ready for his visit.

Unwelcome Offer

When he arrived, in his speech, he said that there was no more war, and we came to join for peace for our country and to find prosperity for our people. He announced that anyone who held a rank or position would not lose it but would be sent to a “re-education” camp to learn their rules and regulations so we could work together. When he talked about re-education camp, I knew that it was the “lifetime punishment” camp. Those who attended would have to learn communist doctrines and accept their rules and regulations. He also asked for the names of the officers and soon began purging anyone who had been loyal to the United States and the Royal Lao government.

At the time, I realized that if found, I would be punished for being a SGU and Royal Lao Army Officer who fought for over 14 years against the communist forces alongside General Vang Pao, General Noupheut Daoheuang, and the CIA officers. I understood that I had no choice but to leave Laos. After General Ai left, I met with my soldiers and told them, “Just be patient. I will go to see Gen Chao Monivong and Col Youa Vang Lee, the new Region II commanders for their advice.”

On May 19, 1975, I and a few officers went to meet with Col Youa Vang at his home. We proposed our safety plan. We wanted him to talk to the Communists to divide the city of Long Cheng into three sections: The west for the communist troops, they can carry guns; the middle section for fellowship, we cannot carry guns; and the east section for our troops and we can carry guns. But Col. Youa Vang said, “No we cannot do that, because now the Communists have power over us, and

we must do what they want us to do.”

We got angry. We just left without saying a word to him. I returned to the hospital and summoned my soldiers together and told them to go home to find their families. They should not return to Long Cheng unless I directly contacted them or if they heard my broadcast on the radio. I never did because the Communists aggressively began to persecute our Hmong people.

On Thursday, May 22, 1975, at 1:30 PM, I paid a Laotian helicopter pilot 250,000 kip [about \$345 at that time] to fly me from Long Cheng, LS20A, to Pha Khao, LS14 to pick up my wife, my three children, my mother, and my two sisters and their families—19 people in total. From Pha Khao, we flew to a rice field near Vientiane, the capital city of Laos. We hired a taxi pickup truck to go to Vientiane.

On the road, we faced our first serious threat—a Communist roadblock. A Communist guard asked the driver, “Any Hmong people in here?” He answered, “I don’t know.” When I was directly questioned, I confessed to being Hmong, but quickly added that I had a house in Vientiane and was just returning home. “Get out here, I know you want to escape to Thailand,” the guard said. “That’s not true,” I lied. “I have a house in Vientiane.”

We were ordered to get out of the truck and would be sent back to where we came from. So, he left to find transportation. We waited for about half an hour with extreme anxiety. I seized an opportunity to talk privately with another guard who seemed to be Laotian police and gave him 15,000 kip as a bribe. I convinced him to assume more authority and not let the Communist guard order him around. Later, when the Communist guard left, the Laotian guard released us.

Upon arrival in Vientiane, our large group divided into two smaller groups and took separate taxis. Again, my taxi was

stopped by a police officer who accused me of trying to escape to Thailand. This time, I was taken to the police station, and showing great respect, I continued to insist that I was just returning to my home in Vientiane. “Come with me, I will show you my house.” I lied even though I feared what would happen if they discovered the truth. After several hours, they released me, and I went to my cousin Ong Lee’s house. In the evening around 8 PM, my family was inside, but I remained on lookout duty. I was

*Escape continues
next page*



Special panel presented to the TLCB Reunion at St. Paul by the Special Guerilla Unit, Veterans and Families (SGUVF). From left, Mr. Tong Fang, SGUVF president; Major Gia Tou Lee, Captain Nou Vang, and Prof. Lee Pao Xiong, who furnished the photo.

also searching for a way to get us to Thailand.

A Laotian man stopped to chat with me and asked me if I knew anyone who wanted to go to Thailand. I answered, "No." He told me that he had safely transported many Hmong families to Thailand and said that he was willing to help anyone. Finally, I asked him how much he charged for a person. He said, "Only 100,000 kip [\$138 in 1975] per family to take them from here to the Mekong River, and another 100,000 kip for the boat ride across the Mekong River to Thailand." I left for a few minutes and returned to tell him that there were families who wanted to go, but they did not have enough money. He said he had his own truck and would help the two families for 150,000 kip. We agreed on that price. That evening, a Hmong widow and her ten-year-old daughter asked me for help. They wanted to escape to Thailand, but they did not have any money. I agreed, now we have 21 people in all.

Thailand...but not so easily!

We got on his pickup truck and went to his home to begin our journey to Thailand. It was our lucky night as torrential rain hid us from the Communist border patrol. Around 2 a.m., the Laotian man told me that we needed to go. Then we got onto his truck and drove to the Mekong River where a small fishing boat was waiting for us. We quietly slid down to the river's bank and got into the boat that took all of us across to Thailand. We were very frightened and exhausted, but we climbed the riverbank in Thailand and hurried through a clearing into the brush. We arrived in the City of Si Xieng Mai, Thailand around 4:30 a.m. on May 23, 1975. Around 6, a Thai policeman came with a bike to question me, "Do you have any guns, opium, or money?" I told him, "No." He said, "You will be sent back to Laos if you do not tell the truth." I begged him not to send us back. He refused and told me, "Wait here while I go find taxis to take you back to Laos."

After he left, a taxi pickup truck arrived, and it scared us to death, but I did not see the police in the truck. So, I spoke to the driver and asked him to take us to Tha Bo City, Thailand where a camp had been organized for Laos War refugees. With God's protection and guidance, instead of being sent back to

Laos, I paid 300 Thai Baht to the driver who took us to the camp before the policeman returned.

When we arrived at the refugee camp, it was overcrowded and had poor conditions and limited food supplies. On Tuesday, May 27, we were relocated to the Nam Phong refugee camp in Chang Wat Khon Kaen, Thailand. We lived there until March 5, 1976, when we were relocated to Ban Vinai, another refugee camp in Chang Wat Loei, Thailand. On Sunday, March 28, 1976, after nearly a year in the refugee camps, my wife, my four children, my mother, my brother, and I took a bus to Bangkok and began our long-awaited journey to the United States of America.

The U.S.A. At Last

On March 29, 1976, we boarded a Pan American Airways flight bound for America. After several connections, we arrived at San Francisco International Airport where we boarded our final connecting flight to Milwaukee, Wisconsin. On Friday, April 2, 1976, at 1 a.m., we finally arrived in Watertown, WI, a small city an hour's drive west of Milwaukee. It became our first hometown in America. St. Luke's Lutheran Church of Watertown sponsored our family. My journey to freedom was dangerous and challenging because I did not know what would happen from one moment to the next as my family and I escaped the Communists.

Along with thousands of other Hmong, I became a war refugee as we fled our homes and country. During my journey, I left behind the people who I brought with me from Laos. I also left my other siblings, cousins, and extended family to suffer in the refugee camps in Thailand when I emigrated to America; however, all of this was necessary because of my involvement in the CIA's Secret War in Laos during the Vietnam War.

The most amazing part is that I understand now that God planned everything for me. He protected my family and brought us to a wonderful country where we received a new, better life with Jesus Christ. He has also blessed us with good health and everlasting love. And, most important of all, the Lord called me to preach and broadcast His love and salvation to lost souls, to train pastors and leaders, and to establish churches throughout the world.

Thank you



2024 Reunion

 **Pensacola, Florida** 

September 15-18 (Sun-Wed) at the Holiday Inn Pensacola, located at 7813 N. Davis Hwy.

RESERVATIONS: (850) 472-1400

(Tell them you are with the TLCB)

ROOM RATE: \$125.00/night + tax of 12.5%. Good for 3 days prior to reunion and 3 days after. Includes free Wi-Fi, parking, buffet breakfast.

RATE CUTOFF DATE: 08-28-2024

Look for more details about this stupendous event in the March *Mekong Express Mail!*

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Brotherhood page

DUES NOTICE

Brotherhood dues are payable (\$30/year) in January each year. Members receive an invoice card and a payment envelope already addressed, enclosed in *this* issue of the *MEM*. *Please look for it.*



TLC Brotherhood Reunion 2023 at St. Paul,

Joint memorial wreath-laying at the Hmong Monument. From left, Les Thompson, Zong Lor Thao, Neng Chang Xai Vang, TLCB President John Sweet. Photo Lee Pao Xiaong.



TLCB President John Sweet, Rev Dr Robert Holst, and Assistance Chairman Les Thompson at the Vietnam Monument wreath-laying.



Minnesota; President's Banquet and Guests

Below, we were honored to have State Senator Fuong Hawj, the first Hmong legislator in the United States, speak at the banquet. At right, SGUVF President Mr. Tong Fang at the Hmong Monument





Newest Members in the TLC Brotherhood

The ten members listed below joined between the September 2023 issue of the *Mekong Express Mail* and this printing. You can find more information on our website database.

The MEM wishes you all a sincere “Welcome Home.” We are delighted that you have joined us.

No.	Branch	First Name	Last Name	City	State
02043	USAF	Jeffrey	Kametz	Easton	PA
02044	USA	Michael	Pratt	Binghamton	NY
02045	USAF	Daniel	Salisbury	Alto	MI
02046	USAF	Tony	Mackey	Asheville	NC
02047	USA	Donald	Williams	McAlester	OK
02048	USN	Thomas	Bonglamphone	Vancouver	WA
02049	USAF	John	Miller	Fairfield	IA
02050	USAF	James	Laughter	Palm Bay	FL
02051	USAF	Henry	Beltran	Midland	GA
02052	USAF	Dana	Burth	Orlando	FL

Two-part Memorial Service on the grounds of the Capitol of Minnesota. Shown below, Reverend Dr. Robert Holst conducted Part 1 of the joint TLCB/SGUVF Memorial Service at the Hmong Monument, on the grounds of the Capitol of Minnesota, in St. Paul. Dr. Holst served for many years as president of Concordia University, St. Paul. Part 2 of the service and wreath-laying was conducted at the Minnesota Vietnam War monument by TLCB Chaplain George Shenberger. The bronze Hmong Monument depicts significant events in the Laos/Vietnam War and scenes of significance to Hmong people.

Most of the events of the 2023 TLCB Reunion were arranged, facilitated, or performed by Prof. Lee Pao Xiong, who was born in Long Chieng, LS-20A, and escaped Laos as a child. Lee Pao is the Founding Director of the Center for Hmong Studies at Concordia University, St. Paul, where he is a Professor of American Government / Political Science and Hmong Studies. Among his many accomplishments and honors, he was appointed by President Clinton in 2000 to serve on the *President’s Advisory Commission on Asian-Americans and Pacific Islanders* to advise the president and federal agencies on issues relating to the 10 plus million Asian Americans in the United States, making him the *first Hmong presidential appointee in the nation*.



Escaping Laos with General Vang Pao, Special Guerilla Unit Commander

by Captain Sai Nou Vang

Vang Pao's personal bodyguard and house manager

NOTE: This article is transcribed from a vocal translation by Professor Lee Pao Xiong of Concordia University, St. Paul. The speech, translated from the Hmong language, was given by Captain Sai Nou Vang to the TLC Brotherhood Reunion attendants at St. Paul on September 15th, 2023. It is a description of the escape from LS-20A, Long Cheng (or "Tieng,") of General Vang Pao as Communist forces swept into the headquarters area during the fall of the Kingdom of Laos in 1975, in a period of confusion and great danger, particularly for Hmong leaders. While we have made minor clarifications, and added some words in brackets, we have scrupulously retained the sense and meaning of this historic telling. Ed.

As spoken by Sai Nou Vang in Hmong Language:

Regarding the Vientiane Agreement of 1973, we were low ranking soldiers, so we had no part in knowing or dealing with the affairs of the agreement itself. There were a few important items in the agreement. In February or March, the Paris Accord was signed in Paris, France. Then, in correlation to that, there was the Vientiane Agreement of 1973. The main goal was to call for a cease-fire to stop the fighting in 1973. [In addition to] that, the Communist Pathet Lao and the Royal Lao were to form a coalition government with a joint effort to build up Laos. That's basically the summary of the agreement. The agreement also called for the removal from Laos of all foreign forces allied to each side; however, the other side was clever. They said one thing but did another. They talked about the back but did what's in front. They talked about the front but did what's in the back.

For us, whatever was said in the agreement, that was what we did. So, General Vang Pao was required to pull out all the Thai military forces and CIA personnel in Military Region 2. All foreign forces were to pull out by the end of 1974. General Vang Pao pulled out all the Thai Forces back to Thailand. Most CIA personnel were out. Only a few advisors remained temporarily. Jerry [Daniels] and Burr [Smith] were the only two who remained permanently. But the Communists did not pull out their allied forces as agreed. So, the reason there were more battles afterwards was because the Communists sent more troops instead of pulling out. They began invading areas that belonged to the Royal Lao Government and the General.

The General was upset and appealed to the King and [Prime Minister] Souvanna Phouma regarding the invasions. He questioned them as to why the Pathet Lao did not honor their part of the agreement. Instead, they sent more troops to invade our land. The King said that he did not know. This was according to what I've heard from the General. So, the King told the General to go and see Souvanna. The General

was frustrated and not sure what to do. No matter what, they were invading and kept on coming instead of withdrawing. We withdrew but they didn't. They did not honor the Agreement, by sending even more troops. He commissioned GM-24, which Colonel Moua Kao commanded, and sent them to that area.

Colonel Moua Sue's battalion also went down there to assist, so, when this happened, the Communists accused the General of wanting a war. At the time, the General's military leaders were meeting with him constantly. I was a low-ranking soldier, so I was not in any of the meetings. But each time they came out, everyone had a sad face. There were times when I would serve them drinks or stand by the door listening. They were talking about resistance—resist because this was the General's thought. He didn't want us to be a people without a country; therefore, we must resist and fight because there is an agreement there to negotiate.

Colonel Soua Yang asked where we would locate our resistance base—at Long Cheng, or somewhere else. That was how it concluded with relocating to Xieng Lom for the resistance effort. If we lost the war, we could just cross over into Thailand and ask them to open the door for us. That was the plan.

All these events happened between January and April. Around February, the General called me up to his office and said he wanted to talk to me. He said to me, "Take your wife and go up to my in-laws, Phicha Fachue and Khoua Mai Thao, in the Xieng Lom area and tell all the Hmong to rise up, and I will relocate the soldiers and all the Hmong in Long Cheng to that area, and we will resist the Communists." All I said was, "Yes, Sir!" He said, "I'll give you a plane. I will be sending Amasat to Thailand to talk to the Thai government and see if they are willing to join hands. I will ask Colonel Vang Ger to go to Cambodia and see if they are willing to assist as well." He commissioned Commander Zang Teng to go to Palakemthau and meet with a prophet down there. "From there, they will meet with the Thai resistance army and request their assistance as well. If they all agree to join hands, then we will relocate into one town and resist the Communists and negotiate for terms based on the Agreement." All I said was, "Yes, Sir!"

I waited day after day, but he didn't commission any plane to send me on the mission. It was more than a month. Then I asked him [about it]. He said, "There is a change of plan. There will be no resistance. There is no more support from the Americans. There are many groups who want to destroy us, the Americans have said. Both the Pathet Lao and the Royal Lao, the Vietnamese, and the Chinese are trying to destroy us. Where can we draw the strength to resist? The Americans

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have withdrawn their support. Therefore, let us stand down.”

Before the evacuation, the General went to Luang Prabang to talk to the King, but the King was not willing to deal with the problems, and he told the General to go and meet with Souvanna. It was the 5th or the 6th of May, 1975 that the General went down to Vientiane to meet with Prime Minister Souvanna Phouma. He said to Souvanna, “According to the Vientiane Agreement, all foreign forces were to pull out. But the Pathet Lao continued adding more forces instead. As the Prime Minister, what do you have to say?” He told the General, “I can’t do anything about that. They are operating within their own boundaries. They have not brought any war to you. It was you that had bombed them and created problems.” The General was very upset. He took off his stars and put them on Souvanna’s table. He said, “I give back to you today, the authority and power you bestowed on me to oversee Military Region 2. But I believe that from tomorrow on, you and the country will fall as well.” Then he stepped out and came back to Long Cheng along with a CIA advisor and Vang Bee, the pilot.

Warning, Slammed Fist, and Tears

Then, I believe it was on the 9th, a colonel came up from Vientiane and asked General Vang Pao to go down for a meeting. Souvanna had also called him to go down and meet on the 11th of May in Vientiane, to talk about the concerns the General had voiced. The General was prepared and ready to go down for the meeting on the 11th. The meeting was to be held at 11:00am. Then, in the very early morning of the 11th, there was a Hmong man named, Chia Doua Kue who was blind in one eye and wore a red hat like mine here [gestured]. He came early and said to Doctor Chu, “You have to tell the General to stay home all day today. He cannot go anywhere today. You have to tell him. If you don’t tell him, you are responsible.” So, he went to the General and said, “General, Chia Doua came and asked me to tell you not to go anywhere today.” The General yelled at him and said, “Chu, have you gone crazy as well? The country is about to fall, and you are telling me crazy stuff like that? Get out!” Doctor Chu was the General’s personal doctor ever since they were still in Xieng Khouang. So, Chu just went back into his office.

A bit later, I drove by, and Doctor Chu saw me through the window. He waved at me and asked me to stop, so I parked the car at the kitchen house and came to him. I asked him what he needed. He said to me, “Uncle Cher Cha is not here; therefore, you go and talk to the General. Chia Doua came and asked me to tell him not to go anywhere, but he insisted on going down to the meeting. Maybe he should not go. You have to go and tell him.” I answered him, “I can’t. You are his personal doctor and you got yelled at. He will do the same to me.” He said, “You must tell him. If Uncle Cher Cha is here, he would be the one to tell him, but he is not. So, you do it.”

I ignored what he asked and just went inside the house to converse with some of the people in there. After a while, I thought to myself, I really should tell him just in case there might be something bad happening. So, I went up and saluted him, like this [gestured]. At that time, I wore a hat just like this [gestured]. The General said, “Nou, what is it that you want?”



Capt Sai Nou Vang spoke in Hmong at the reunion panel, showing the emotion he still feels for the unnerving and unpredictable events that occurred when Communist forces overran Laos in April of 1975 and his duty was to protect and assist General Vang Pao when many people sought to kill him before he could escape the country.

I said, “I’m here to tell you what Doctor Chu told you.” He said, “Chu told me already.” I said to him, “General, you are a brother and a Hmong leader. Sometimes, people are your savior. You always have someone who saved you. If someone comes and tells you something like this, you should listen and not go.” He said the same thing to me as he did to Chu. “You don’t know anything at all. Our country is about to fall. These crazy people are from the Communists. They came here to trick us. That’s the Communist tactic. Those are just crazy people. Get out!”

So, I stepped out, and I went back downstairs for about 20 or 30 minutes. Then he came down, put his handgun on the table and was getting ready to go to the meeting. Then he asked if anyone had told pilot Vang Bee to get ready with the plane. It was chaotic, so some of the soldiers had left. There was only Vang Moua, Cher Yang, and Fai Dang. They told him someone had notified Vang Bee already. So, the General climbed back upstairs. I sat for a while and kept thinking, “He is a very tough and strong-willed person. If I don’t stop him, something terrible may happen.” My heart was troubled, and I just didn’t have a good feeling about him going. I thought that I had to try my best to convince him not to go. If he goes and gets killed, at least I have done my part, so, I went back and stood straight saluting him. He asked, “You have something else to say?” I said to him, “I’m here to prevent you from going.” At this time, he was in his first wife’s bedroom. He slammed his fist in anger on his wife’s bed. “You idiot, you have no idea what is going on. Stop standing there. There are lots of things to do. Get out!” I didn’t get out. I sat right down and leaned against the door instead. I said to him, “General, you are the leader. You’ve always said you love the Hmong people. Win or lose

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does not depend on you going to the meeting today. I believe if you go, you lose, but if you stay, you win. I cannot let you go. If you must insist on going, go ahead and kill me right here. Otherwise, I have to prevent you from going.” He got really mad at this point. He didn’t care what I had to say. I cried at this time, and I didn’t move. He yelled at me really loud. Chue heard it, so, he knocked on the door hard. I asked who it was. Chue responded. I opened the door, and he asked what was going on. I answered him, “Nothing. I was just trying to prevent your dad from going to the meeting.” He said to me, “Get out; I’ll stay with my dad.” I stepped out. I thought to myself, he didn’t listen, so forget it.

I stepped out with tears and drove home. I stayed home for about 40 or 50 minutes, but no plane was flying out, so I came back. When I got back, his [things] were still on the table. Pilot Vang Bee was there already. I sat down for a few moments, then I heard him calling for me from the second floor. He called, “Nou... Nou!” But I didn’t answer. Lt. Vang Neng, who now lives in France, said to me, “The General is calling you.” I told him not to worry about it. The General called one more time, so Neng said, “Let’s go.” We both went up to see the General. When we got there, he was pacing around, emotionless. Neng said to him, “Uncle Pao, Nou’s job is to protect you. That was why he tried to stop you. Please forgive him.” Then the phone rang and Neng picked it up. It was Nyia Ying, calling from Vientiane. First thing he asked was, “Has ‘215’ flown out yet?” Neng answered, “No, he is still here. You want to talk to him?” The General interrupted and said, “Tell Nyia Ying I knew about all of that already.” So, Lt. Vang Neng told Nyia Ying that the General knew already. Neng asked the General what that was about, but he didn’t answer Neng. He just continued pacing around. He was emotionless.

Whenever the General had a straight and emotionless face, it was frightening, whether he is smiling or angry. I’ve been with him long enough to see many things that happened when he got angry. I have not even mentioned those to you, the things that I have seen with my own eyes. I was really afraid already, so I didn’t say anything. Then, he turned and said to me, “Nou!” That’s all he said. Then I answered, “Yes, Sir!” He said, “I didn’t know you have that much courage to argue with me all morning!” He didn’t say anything else. Now, I got even more afraid, and I was thinking about finding ways to escape through the door because I knew that at moments like this, it’s either a punch and a kick or the sound of a gun. I was ready to either die or find ways to escape. Then he said, “If it weren’t for you, I don’t know how I would have ended up in Vientiane.” I didn’t know what was going on, so I didn’t say

anything. Lt. Vang Neng asked the General, “Uncle Pao, what are you talking about?” He said, “Jerry [Daniels] called. The CIA agents at Wattay Airport in Vientiane warned me not to go to the meeting in Vientiane. The meeting at 11:00 AM was set up by Souvanna and the Communists to kill me. If they can’t capture me, they will kill me in flight. That’s the CIA’s report, so I know everything already.”

At this point, Neng and I were relieved. But I didn’t say anything. Neng and I just came back downstairs. At that moment, no one was able to see him. Later on that day, he called for me again, and he said to me, “Tomorrow afternoon I’ll be leaving for Thailand. I’ve made up my mind, so don’t try to stop me like what you did before.” Now, I got even more discouraged. I’ve guarded him in many good ways, but when it’s time for him to leave, he actually tells me not to do anything. I was very upset. So, I said to him, “Yes, Sir, that’s fine.” And I



General Vang Pao

said, “If that’s all then, I will have to go and tell my fellow soldiers to prepare to leave for Thailand as well.” So, I stepped out and left.

I came and asked Fai Neng, Tong Va, and Va Xeng to tell some of the soldiers to prepare. I said to them, “If the General leaves, I’ll lead you and we will trek over to Thailand as well.” So, the soldiers started packing up. The General saw the soldiers leaving and he asked Vang Moua to come and get me. He was asking why I had told all the soldiers to go home, so I went back. He said to me, “I told you I’m leaving, but not today. Not until tomorrow.” Tomorrow was the 12th. “Wait until I get on the plane before you go anywhere. You can’t just tell the soldiers to leave!” I said to him, “They’re just going to my house to prepare some dry rice.” He told me not to go anywhere and to follow him to the bedroom. I followed him and

he pulled out a case containing 10 million kip [\$13,800 then]. He gave me five million kip and a car key, and he told me to drive his blue car and take the money to a commander, whose name I don’t remember. He said to me, “Give him the money and the car so he may have money to spend and a car to drive if he flees to the Muang Mao area.” I delivered the car and the money to that commander. Then I came back, and he told me to divide the rest of the money among my soldiers. I said to him, “I will do that.” So, I gave the money to Fai Neng and Tong Va to distribute. There were only 64 soldiers left at that time, and they distributed the money among the soldiers.

Then the 12th came but he didn’t leave yet. There was a reason why he did not leave. It was because his in-laws, Nyia Chou and Cher Pao, the two people whom he loved and cared for the most, refused to get on a plane to fly out to Thailand. They wanted special treatment and would accept only a special

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plane to take just their families out. If they had to scramble to get in, they would not come because Cher Pao had been fighting hard for the country. So, to come and have to scramble for a place in the plane like the rest of the people, he did not want to do that. They continued refusing to get on the plane. There were no more planes to fly them out on the evening of the 12th. That was why the General called me to go and meet with him.

The In-Laws

We stepped into his second wife's bedroom, and we both sat down on the bed. He said to me, "Whether it be today, tomorrow, or the following day, if the in-laws are not going, I can't leave. They must be going first; therefore, you are with me. Whenever I go, you go. Tell the soldiers to go and wait at Phuka. After we get to Thailand, I will send four planes to come and pick them up. There are sixty-four soldiers left, correct?" the General asked. "So, let's do that. Tell the soldiers to cut the barbed wire rolls behind the kitchen house. Cut and then put it back as is. When we are ready to leave, I'll lift the barbed wire and get out while you drive to Moua Xue's house and wait for me there."

But, going where? I didn't know. That was all he said to me. He didn't tell me the next step we were going to take. Maybe he didn't trust me enough; I don't know, so I said to him, "I'll do that." I told Sergeant Tong Va, who now lives here, and Fai Neng, to go and cut the barbed wire fence, which consisted of three rolls of razor-barbed wires, two in the bottom and one on top. In the middle was a barbed-wire fence, with one roll of razor-barbed wire was on the outside, one inside, and the one on top. It was fenced around the General's compound. I put up that fence after I came back from my training in Thailand. They cut the fence and put it back to look as it was.

On the 13th, the two in-laws were still at home, refusing to come. Around 4:00pm, the General said to me, "You go and pick them up. We will drop them off at the rice warehouse next to the runway. Do not let anyone know about it. Bring them here and then drop them off there and put them on the first flight out tomorrow. According to our intelligence, the Communists had come near to Na Su already. It would be difficult, and there were those who had surrounded us on these mountain ranges already. So, we will have to leave tomorrow."

I went to pick up in-law Cher Pao's family and dropped them off next to the rice warehouse. After two trips, I went and picked up Nyia Chou's family and dropped them off there as well. The two families were to get on one flight; so, tomorrow, the 14th, the first flight was to pick up Nyia Chou and Cher Pao. It didn't matter which direction the plane came in from, it had to fly their families out first. After that, the second and third flights could pick up the rest of the seven groups of people, so I picked them up and dropped them off there, and I reported back to the General that I had dropped them off.

It was not dark yet but there were no more planes flying out. Later, Jerry [Daniels] brought eight lights, and he told me to line up soldiers along the airstrip. I told Fai Neng and Tong Va to take the lights to the airstrip. Jerry said that the planes would fly people out all night. He said to the soldiers,

"When the plane comes, wave your lights like this; so when the planes fly in, they will know that the lights are the edge of the airstrip." That was the plan because the planes were to be evacuating people all night.

That night, Mayor Neng Tong was scrambling to get on the plane as well, as people squeezed and stumbled onto each other, and the old man got hurt in the process. He was brought over to the General's house, which was packed with people. There wasn't even any room to walk around. It was full of people outside the gate of his house as well. Some people were there to collect their wages for working at the General's farm. People were fleeing, so some were afraid they might not get paid. There were a lot of people. After evaluating the situation, he said to me, "We have to get out tonight, but we cannot let anyone see." I asked him what he wanted me to do, and he said to me, "Go up to the roof and tie a rope to the two water pipes and lower it down the other side of the house. When it's time to leave, we will go down using the rope so no one can see us."

I found a rope and tied it, but it reached only two levels down. I gave it some thought and knew it would be very hard to get down the rope, so, I came down and said to him, "Sir, I don't think you can get down the rope because of your injured arm. It would not be good if you fall and hurt yourself. Let's not do that. Whenever you want to leave, just let me know and I'll lead you out. Let's not risk you getting injured." Then he asked, "How do you intend to get me out? I don't want anyone to see me." I said, "I intend to lead you out without anyone seeing." "I'll do what you've said," he responded. It was chaotic all night until 4:30 or 4:50 in the morning. He asked Chue to come out and get me. Those who are still [close to him], so we can communicate between me and him, are Neng and Chue. His bride came and married him because they were afraid that they might not be able to if we fled. So, we went up to meet with them. He said to me, "Whenever you are prepared and ready, come and get me and we'll leave. Go get ready, then come and get me," he said.

The Hat Trick

So, I went out to my military vehicle and drove it right up to the front stairs of the house and left the door open. I went upstairs and told him that everything is ready, then I put on my old hat. I put on an old hat similar to this one, with a narrower edge. I said to him, "If you're ready, we can go." He said, "People will see us!" I said, "They won't." So, I took off my hat and put it on him. We came down and I held him close to my side like this [demonstrated]. There were a lot of people in the room. The door was right about there [gintured]. We came down one and then two sets of stairs. Here was the living room and over there was the kitchen [pointed]. The room was packed with Mayor Neng Tong's people close to the door. We made a quick turn, then stepped out the door and into the car. I closed the door and drove out, away from the gate. No one saw us.

Then we drove out to the airport, and he told me to take him to where his father in-law, Cher Pao, was. I drove him straight to his father in-law, but he didn't get out of the car. There was no one else but him and me in the car. He had two other Japanese

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Hmong refugees attempting to board C-46 flown by TLCB member Les Strouse in the 1975 panic-stricken evacuation of Long Tieng as Communist forces swept into the area. Les wrote about the "The last, nerve wracking, flight out of Laos" in the March, 2003 issue of the *MEM*, and reprinted in the June, 2015 issue.. He also contributed articles in the March and December, 2001 issues, and the March issues in 2004, 2005, and 2011. Photo from the Hmong Studies Center, Concordia University St. Paul.

cars, but we didn't take those. We drove my military vehicle instead. He told me to go and talk to his father-in-law, and he said to tell them that they will get on the first flight when the plane comes. "Tell them not to worry. I won't leave without them." So, I went and told them what the General wanted me to tell them. Then I turned around to walk back and father-in-law Cher Pao said, "Vang Nou, tell Vang Pao, if I don't get to go on this flight, the next war will be between Vang Pao and Cher Pao." All I said was, "Yes, Sir," and came back to the car and drove us along the airstrip and told him what father-in-law Cher Pao said. He said, "No need to worry, there are places for them." We came to where the groups of people were. He told me to say to them, "No one is allowed to squabble and fight to get in. Whoever fights their way in will be ejected. Wherever the plane stops, that group will get in first. Tell that to every group."

I stopped at different groups and told them, and after we went around telling people, we drove to Jerry's house. It was around 5 or 6 in the morning. Dawn was just about to break, early morning of the 14th. When we got to Jerry's house, there was only Nyia and Jerry. At the General's house, there was Amusat, sleeping up in Tou Lue's office. Lt. Vang Neng and his wife were up there as well. I'm not sure where Chue was at that time. They weren't with us because no one knew we had left. We stayed at Jerry's house for a while.

Then [the General] asked me how much money was left. "How many cases left?" "Two cases," I answered him. He said, "Go get them." I came back to the house and climbed up to his first wife's bedroom and brought out the two cases of money. It was 10 million kip per case. I loaded the two cases of money into the vehicle. At this time I changed vehicles, to his Jeep. I loaded them up and transported them back to the General. Vang Neng and Chue were the General's personal assistants and bodyguards. They had already come to Jerry's house. When I got back, he said to me, "Take one case and distribute to your soldiers. Tell them not to screw up. Tell them to walk to Phuka Mountain. The moment you and I fly out, we will send four helicopters to pick them up. Do it today. We'll fly out in the evening".

I brought the case of money to Fai Neng, Tong Va and Wa Xeng to distribute among the soldiers. After I gave them the

money, I came back. At this point, it was already dawn. The people in the General's house didn't see me going there anymore, so they went upstairs to check, and the General wasn't there. They knew that he must be at Jerry's house, so they all came there. The skyway in front of Jerry's house was packed with about two hundred people. It was late morning now, because sunlight had covered all of Long Cheng.

We were just waiting for the airplane to come and pick up the in-laws anytime now. He asked me what the situation was like outside,

and I told him that all the people at this house were outside. He asked me, "What should we do?" I said to him, "We may have to use the same plan." He said, "No, go get a shovel and break that window. We'll get out through the window. Have Chue wait for us somewhere with the car." I said yes, and then used a stool to climb up and measure the window. It was about 8 by 12 inches. I said to him, "It's not going to work, General. It may fit your head but not your shoulders. Let's get out as we did before. I will go and get all the soldiers to come here." He said, "Let's do that." So, I went to talk to Fai Neng and Tong Va and they brought all 64 soldiers.

Beware the Long Coats

The reason he did not trust anyone and was not confident going out was because reports had come in that there were people among the crowd who were planning to assassinate him. There were those who had long coats on, and we suspected these might be people with weapons, which is why he didn't want to get out. So, I brought all the soldiers there. Then he asked me, "What is your plan?" I said to him, "Here is what we are going to do. I'll place two soldiers on that hill. That way if anyone attempts to go up there and shoot down at you, the soldiers will see and stop them. As for the crowd, I will have a soldier guarding each person who has a long coat. When we come out, the soldiers are to shoot anyone who makes a move. What do you think?" I asked him. He said, "Let's go with that." So, I came out and had three soldiers standing on each side of the door, like this [gestured]. Guns drawn and holding them like this [demonstrated]. The field was packed with people.

After that, I took Chue along with me and showed him where to meet up with us after we got out. I had already scouted the route, so I took him to the meeting point at an alley. I said to him, "If I come out with no hat on, that means your father [Vang Pao] is behind me. At that moment, drive your car to this spot, leave the door open, and we will meet here." He said, "I will do that." At that time, there was Lt. Vang Neng, Chue, and Amusat. These three were to be in the car, leaving with us. At that moment, [Vang Pao's] in-laws had flown out already. The second flight had already flown out too. I came and told the General, "We are ready to go." "Let's go then," he said. I

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said, "I've told the soldiers that if I come out with no hat on, the General is behind me. At that moment, move in together to protect the General like this [demonstrated positions] and walk with us to the back of the house. Once we are gone, come back and stand guard as usual until I come back."

We got out and rushed to the meeting point. Chue, Amusat, Neng, and the case of 10 million kip were in the car. He stepped in first, then I followed. He asked me to lead him to a certain place, but he did not tell me where the next point would be. He never told me, "We will be going—here, here, and there." I only knew as much as where he told me to go. We got in the car and Chue asked, "Dad, where are we going?" "Just go," he said. We drove past Colonel Soua Vang and Joua Yang's houses where the road splits. He said, "Drive to the hill up there!"

Disappointment

We drove up the road which led to the King's house, then we cut behind the King's house along the top of the hill and down to where the fishpond was, and we came to a stop. He asked, "Where is the smoke flare canister?" "I got it," I answered him. "Throw it," he said. I opened the canister, and yellow smoke rose. There was already a white USAID airplane circling down in the Na-nying area waiting for the General. Jerry had already called and set all of this up. I just didn't know about it. They've already planned everything well. The plane flew up from the valley, landed by the fishpond, and turned and faced downhill. I threw in the case of money. Then Chue and Amusat stepped in. We were just standing there because the plane was small. The General said, "You two go back to Long Cheng."

I almost died at that moment. I was so disappointed and sad. He told me to be with him. But when he left, he didn't take me along. That was the most disappointing moment in my life. I didn't know that there was already a plan number two.

He held on to the sides of the door like this [demonstrated] and took one step up. I was not sure what he was thinking. But he stepped back down and pointed his finger like this, one round [demonstrated "OK" gesture] like this. Then he stamped his feet twice and climbed up to the plane.

They closed the door, and the plane took off and flew back to Na-nying. I was so sad and upset that day. He asked me to stay with him through it all, but at the end, he left me behind. I was so sad and upset, I almost died.

Neng was the driver and he said, "Let's go!" Both of us did not know that there was a plan number two. When we got back, Neng told Jerry that VP was okay. Vang Nyia told us to head to the Porter Aircraft first, they will follow, and we would fly out. We went to pick up Neng's wife at his house, came to the airplane, got in, and sat there waiting. We waited for about five to ten minutes, then Vang Moua, one of the bodyguards, came knocking on the airplane door, demanding us to open it. I said, "No!" He had a rifle, so he demanded that we open the door, or he would shoot. Neng told me to open the door and he climbed in. Now there were four of us on the plane. Nyia came, carrying half a case of beer with him, and tossed the half-case

of beer in front of us. I pushed it to the side. He climbed in to sit with us while Jerry got in and sat in the front. Our plane took off; we circled two rounds, climbing above the King's mansion. I could see another plane taking off. Jerry told Nyia a large military leader was hi-jacking a plane; therefore, there would be no more evacuations, and he called off all evacuation planes. The last flight was the one Colonel Vang Ko hi-jacked.

From there, we flew to Phuka. When we got there, I looked down and saw General Vang Pao's airplane parked on Phuka airport. He was giving away the ten million kip, that I had put in his plane, to the villagers of Phuka. Looking from above, it looked like they were having a New Year Festival down there. There were people running in and out, gathering around in the airport runway. We were circling above, waiting for the General. Once the crowd was cleared, his plane took off and we followed each other and flew to Muang Ca. But at that time, I did not know that we were going to Muang Ca. The other airplane kept following us. Once we got to Na-mu, I realized that we were going to Muang Ca, my old village, where we landed.

There was still 4 million kip left in the money chest. Chue brought the chest with him, and the General, Amusat, and Chue got out of their plane and climbed into ours. The other plane took off and then ours. The General and I sat facing each other. He waved, calling for me. I leaned forward and he said, "It's okay. Let this country fall. By the time we come back, all the trees in this jungle will be as big as a giant wok." All I said to him was, "Yes Sir."

We flew above Banana Market, then he leaned forward toward me and said, "All these Lao and Hmong leaders are evil. Let us leave this country behind. When all of these evil people have passed away, we'll bring good and educated people back to develop the country." He shed some tears when he said this.

We flew out to Thailand and arrived at Udon Thani Province. Noi and a few Thai officials were there to welcome us. They took the General with them and we were left waiting in a room for about three hours. They brought us food. The next morning, around 9 am, the General came back, and they drove us to the airport. We all got on a Dakota [C-47] Aircraft and were taken to Namphong.

That was the summarized story of how I helped with getting the General out of Long Cheng. I can only talk about my own personal experiences with the General. I share this as history for all of you to treasure.

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