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## Interview with Fay Chia Lee

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# Fay Chia Lee

20 May, 2006 – Innisfail, Queensland, Australia

Interviewers – Paul Hillmer, Sao Lee

Translator (for interviewer) – Sao Lee

Translator (of recording) – Ger Vue

Editor – Paul Hillmer



Fay Chia Lee (L) with two fellow soldiers in Laos, and at right, standing by his shaman's altar in his home in Innisfail.

*Fay Chia Lee was born in Thay Thao, Laos and enlisted in General Vang Pao's army at a young age. (It is often the case that Hmong people born in Laos do not know their actual birthdays Mr. Lee said he was 63 in 2003 and joined Vang Pao's army at age 14, which would have been c. 1957. Vang Pao did not start recruiting an army until 1961.) Mr. Lee describes many battles in which he participated, especially the siege of Na Khang in 1967. He also discusses battle tactics, military equipment, interactions with pilots and aircraft, and his assessment of Pathet Lao and Vietnamese forces. He recounts his escape from Laos in 1975 and his relocation to and subsequent life in Australia. Since this interview happened quite suddenly, and because Mr. Sao Lee had already heard Hillmer interview several other people, he asked numerous questions in Hmong first, and then provided a summary to Hillmer. Then Hillmer asked several questions toward the end. Mr. Ger Vue provided a more thorough translation after the fact. Redundant parts of the recording, where the same ideas were expressed in English and then translated into Hmong, or vice versa, have been eliminated from this manuscript.*

## **You can begin with your name and then go from there.**

My name is Fay Chia Lee and I'm currently 63 years old. My parents gave birth to me in **Thay Thao** and raised me in Xieng Khoua. At the age of 14, I enlisted as a soldier with General Vang Pao and fought in many battles throughout Laos.

## **Can you mention your parents?**

My name is Fay Chia Lee --- my grandfather is called Tong Yia and when he died my great grandmother remarried. While married to my grandfather my grandmother gave birth to my dad and my aunt. Then my dad married my mom and gave birth to me and my two brothers. Only one of the two brothers that I have is still alive – one was killed by the Vietnamese.

## **Can you talk more about your leader?**

35 When I was a soldier, I was in Kon Pham (Battalion) 24. The lieutenant colonel of this battalion was  
36 Kom Dam Lee Chaw, who was Lee Tou Pao's younger brother. I was by his side during the battles  
37 at Long Hey and back as well as other places such as Tha Lee Noi, and Thaw Seng.  
38

39 **Do you remember specifically the year in which each battle took place?**

40 Yes --- In 1964 we fought in Pha Boun, Pha Kay, south of Long Hey to Ban Ban, Da Thong. Also  
41 to Sa Nque, Poot Kone, and Vietnamese soldiers in Lon Ther or around there. Near the end of 1964  
42 our army shattered in Na Khang, fleeing to Mun Pa, Mun Nka and Mun Mao. We stayed in Mun  
43 Mao for a bit and while in Mun Mao the general sent choppers to pick us up and dropped us in Mun  
44 Nka. We spent 6 months training in Mun Nka and then the general sent us to fight in Thao Vien  
45 Thao Tung to Phu Saw. In 1967 we fought in Na Thaw and after that was sent to fight in Na  
46 Khang. It was during this year that that General Vang Pao was shot in his arm. When the bullet  
47 struck him I was near the chopper base. When Na Khang fell we fled to Sa Pa Kha for a while and  
48 then to Phu Khoum and stayed there a while too. While in Phu Khoum the General sent us to fight  
49 in Muong Heim. We were in Muong Hiem for over a year. After over a year – Lieutenant Moua Cha  
50 and his men came to replace us so we could exit out and participate in more training in Mun Nka.  
51 We were in Mun Nka for one year and then went back to fight in Thao Vien Thao Tung, Mun Pa  
52 Mun Nka and PeSaw. After these battles we went to Pha Poon and then stayed in Long Tieng for a  
53 bit. After that we took whatever duties were required of us, including fighting in Ka Long, Cha New,  
54 and towards where General Cha Rtu (ox) and then towards the city Pho Pha Lai. After these battles  
55 the country began to fall, and destruction came for our people. Everyone fled in various directions.  
56 When the country collapsed, General Vang Pao couldn't stop it and fled to Thailand first. We were  
57 former soldiers in the past, so we could not stay in Laos and the only option was to exit and follow  
58 the General into Thailand.  
59

60 **Were you a soldier up to 1975 when the country collapsed or did they discharge you in 1973  
61 as they did with many others?**

62 No, I was a soldier up until 1975. I was never discharged, but did ask for a rest or break. It was while  
63 on this time off that the country fell apart.  
64

65 **Did they ever ask you to find a replacement since you had asked for a break or rest?**

66 No, they just told me to go and rest. No replacement because I had intentions of going back after  
67 the rest. I requested a year. The country then collapsed and then that was that and I was no longer a  
68 soldier.  
69

70 **This probably meant that when you went to rest, it may have been during a timeframe in  
71 which the war was slowing down.**

72 Yes, less battles so the war was slowing down. So after the collapse and the General fleeing, we all  
73 followed him and came to live in Nong Khai (Thailand) up until being approved for refugee status  
74 to go elsewhere.  
75

76 **When you left Laos – which direction did you go?**

77 I was in Long Tieng and then went to Pha Khet and then to Ban Son. I stayed in Ban Son for a bit  
78 and then fled to Vientiane.  
79

80 **How did you come – was it by foot or car.**

81 I paid people, so basically took a taxi  
82

83 **Were the roads already blocked at that time?**

84 Yes, but we were soldiers, so we had the documentations to cross. I came with Txiv Naw Chaw or  
85 Kum Da Cha Lee. He was one of my Lieutenant Colonels. At that time Kom Ai was one of the  
86 head Generals. He gave orders that all the old soldiers were to report to Nam Mu for training. So we  
87 fled with our families for training. Family members were welcomed, so all families of old soldiers  
88 came along too. We got to Nam Mu and received messages that there would be cars to pick us up  
89 for Vientiane. After that, we heard that there were no more cars so we had to find our own rides. So  
90 we found our rides and arrived in Vientiane. We were supposed to be training in Vientiane, but  
91 Phanya (Touby LyFong --King's advisor in the ministry of transportation) said "NO" because we  
92 had to flee to Thailand. If we stayed we would be killed. There were about nine families total that  
93 made the trip. So once we found out about the news, we slowly made our way across Laos and into  
94 Nong Khai, Thailand. We stayed in Nong Khai for two years. It was during that time that Hlob  
95 [reference to his older cousin] Za and your family were granted refugee status and came to this  
96 country [Australia] first. Once you [Sao Lee] were here you were able to get me. Your mom was the  
97 one who sponsored me so that was how I was able to come here. Others, however went to America  
98 because they had sponsors in the US. There was a picture that was taken of me from him. It was  
99 taken in 1969 after we fled Na Khang and stayed in Phu Khoum. There was a small studio there and  
100 that's how we got this film (photo). I still have it till this day.

101

102 **So you never stayed in Vinai.**

103 No, we never stayed there – we were only in Nong Khai and then just left from there directly.

104

105 **Could you go back and explain a little more about when you were a soldier in Laos. How**  
106 **many battles were there that you fought in that had many deaths and casualties and where**  
107 **did it take place.**

108 The battle that many soldiers died and basically one aligned after another was in Na Khang. Some  
109 were left to die and we carried the ones in which we could.

110

111 **Was it only your side that had many deaths or did the opposition (Vietnamese) have it also?**

112 I am not aware of how many Vietnamese soldiers died, I was only aware of what was happening on  
113 my side. I only knew because we had a buddy type of system and once the person next to you was  
114 shot, all you could do was jump over him or cross him to keep on going.

115

116 **That year was 1967?**

117 Yes it was 1967 in which we fought in Na Khang. About 1966-67 year. This battle we lost the most  
118 soldiers. In regards to other battles – at Nong Neua – it was less because it was only a battalion  
119 against another battalion. But the big one was Na Khang because the General had ordered all the  
120 battalions to go and fight. So in all it was at this battle zone in 1967 that a lot or the most of the  
121 Hmong soldiers died. My battalion had about 7 deaths. Four of them were Hmong and 3 were Lao  
122 Theung. We were Battalion 24, which was part of the Laotian Army so I was only aware of my  
123 group. However, a lot of the General's CIA or CICU soldiers lost their lives. As we fled and ran, we  
124 already saw bodies lined up on the ground – there about five or six of them.

125

126 **Was it only Hmong soldiers?**

127 No, Hmong and Lao Theung... The soldiers were made up of Hmong and Lao Theung. I recall on  
128 the way back during that battle I saw three Hmong and two Lao Theung soldiers lying there dead.  
129 We encountered three Vietnamese soldiers smoking while retreating back and shot and killed all  
130 three of them. The Vietnamese soldiers were supposed to be on guard, but were talking and

131 smoking, so we spotted them first and that's how we shot and killed them. They were purposely at  
132 that exact location to stand guard because that it was the exit route for us. So we had no choice, but  
133 to kill them, because they were there to kill us and block our retreat. If they didn't talk, I'm sure we  
134 wouldn't have seen them and may have been shot at or killed by them, but they talked, so we heard.  
135 This place or location was called Ba Lan, which is south of Na Khang. All of the soldiers in our  
136 battalion fled and scattered during the big battle in Na Khang. Soldiers went separate ways and it  
137 took nearly two months before all of us found each other.

138

139 **So when the base collapsed – everyone fled separate ways?**

140 Yes, some fled to Bouam Loung, some to Phu Kong, some out to Phu Vai, some to Sa Pha Kha. So  
141 since everyone was scattered, it took two months before we could reconvene or find each other.

142 There was another battle at Thao Vien, but that was smaller. I lost one of my relatives there.

143 However, in regards to my own comrades or fellow soldiers in my squad, one could say that I was  
144 very fortunate and lucky. I had five fellow soldiers whom I knew well that died, other times when we  
145 combined with other squads that made up a platoon of 12 – 24 soldiers. In these battles that we  
146 combined with others, I was the only person not wounded and at times there were only four of us  
147 that came out alive. Another bigger battle site besides Na Khang was at Thao Vien Thao Thang. The  
148 battle at Thao Vien was in the year 1965, so it was before the Na Khang battle.

149

150 **So you fought at Thao Vien first before Na Khang.**

151 Yes, we fought there first and then after that I got married. So it was 1964-65 timeframe that we  
152 fought at Thao Vien Thao Thang. This was a very intense and heavy battle, it was so severe that the  
153 trees within the jungle that we fought nearly all demolished because of all the bombs, explosives,  
154 and bullets that was used. At this battle the enemy used heavy artillery. This was no laughing matter;  
155 it was very serious and intense. It was also frightening as I clung on to my spirits at times. Most of  
156 my friends were wounded and some died, but I was very lucky. My older cousin Nao Chue was hit  
157 twice by bullets, but we all have our own luck, and fortunately I didn't get hit. My friend who was  
158 next to me during the battle also was wounded, so I was very lucky by not getting any wounds.

159

160 **So in regards to intensive warfare, the first one was at Thao Vien and then by Na Khang.**

161 Yes. I also have to tell you that while we were fighting in Thao Vien – The Laotian somehow  
162 mistakenly thought that our base was that of the enemies and drop some bombs on us, too. We  
163 were very fortunate.

164

165 **Good thing that you mentioned choppers and air raids. Was there ever a time in which you  
166 called on the Laotian Air specialist – particularly pilots like Lee Lue and so forth to come  
167 and help you all out during your battles.**

168 Yes we did – we called them the vast majority of time. When we were in Phu Ba Loi (in Thao Vien),  
169 the Laotian or ally chopper that was assigned to shoot at the Vietnamese base on the top of the  
170 mountain thought that the enemies base was down below. However, it was us that was down below.  
171 We requested Lee Lue to lead the air raid, but he was already assigned to another mission. So the  
172 pilots that came were all Laotian. The pilots were sent from Vientiane and somehow there was a  
173 communication problem amongst them and General Vang Pao because of weak radio signals. We  
174 were hiding down below the base and you could say in a somewhat open rice field or farmland. So  
175 the pilots just dropped those bombs on us without noticing. Fortunately, there was no one hurt  
176 because we fled in time to safe ground. We had built trenches that had tunnels so we all hid in the  
177 tunnels in time to not get hurt. There were two incidents in which we were accidently bombed. The  
178 first was at Phu Ba Loi and the second one was at Phu Saw. Fortunately, both these incidents only

179 caused one person to get hurt. It was a Phoua Ther soldier at Phu Saw that was wounded. It was  
180 because it was the Laotian pilot and the communication barrier that caused the accidents. If it was a  
181 Hmong pilot, they would have understood where we were based from our explanation of the area.  
182 The Laotian pilots flew high so mistakes for bombs were increased, however Hmong pilots flew  
183 lower to be more exact on the location. I had a cousin who was with another battalion in a different  
184 battle and the Laotian pilots did the same thing to them. These Laotian pilots nearly wiped out three  
185 battalions of soldiers because of this mistake.

186

187 **Did you ever call on the American choppers?**

188 Yes, Americans sent jets with B-52 a lot during our battle at Na Khang. These were used during the  
189 day for air support. At night, the choppers that were used was the ones that were called Spookies,  
190 and they were only used to fire lights in the air so we could know where to run and see where we  
191 were running. The Hmong soldiers again during this battle at Thao Vien had five deaths in our  
192 battalion.

193

194 **Yes, I recall a lot of bodies sent back to Long Tieng during that timeframe. Did you see any**  
195 **American choppers get shot down and did your battalion or other ally battalion go and save**  
196 **any of those American pilots?**

197 No, The air support that came where we were located was never hit. So I and the soldiers in my  
198 battalion didn't see any American choppers go down. There was a time during the battle at Pha Loi  
199 that a porter plane assigned to drop food (rice) was shot. There was a Hmong navigator with the last  
200 name Vang in the helicopter. We had told him and the pilot to steer northeast after they dropped  
201 the rice because that was where we were, however we didn't know what the Hmong navigator said  
202 in English to the American pilot and they steered in the opposite direction. Suddenly we just heard  
203 gunshots and the plane was hit. It was very lucky that the pilot was able to steer his way across the  
204 enemy lines and fortunately into an area we also controlled. Fortunately, the American pilot and  
205 Hmong navigator weren't killed and escaped with minimal injuries even though the plane lost both  
206 of its wings. The American pilot had multiple cuts on his face and the Hmong pilot was wounded  
207 on his right arm. The windshield glass shattered, too. However, the wounds weren't life threatening.  
208 We retrieved them and were able to call for first-aid choppers to get them out to tend to their  
209 wounds. They were sent from Long Tieng to drop off food, so this was the only American pilot or  
210 plane we saw go down. After a week, the plane was retrieved.

211

212 **Uncle, Paul would like to ask why did you come to Australia instead and not go to the**  
213 **United States of America?**

214 I did my paperwork to go to America first. At the time the CIA that came to watch or look after us  
215 and help us with documentations and so forth was called Jerry [Daniels]. At first there was another  
216 guy named Todd-Pa or something and then Jerry came after him. So Jerry tested with our skills and  
217 so forth and he knew us fairly well. So after the test, it showed that we were the dumb ones because  
218 we didn't know the English language that well and our military ranks were not also the highest. This  
219 meant that we were to be the LAST bunch. There seemed to also be an order of people who went to  
220 the US first because of their military ranks. So the first bunch qualified to go to the United States  
221 were the high ranking officials like the General, the Lieutenants, Colonels, and so forth down the  
222 chain of command. So the wait would have been extremely long. I waited two years and six months  
223 and that's when I decided to do paperwork to go to Australia and was granted to come to Australia,  
224 so I made a decision to go to Australia instead because I didn't know how much longer it would take  
225 before I would go to America. When I was already on my way to Australia and in the Bangkok  
226 airport, my name then appeared on the list to go to the USA. I could have gone because I had the

227 proper paper work as a soldier, but I made a decision that I was going to go to Australia since I was  
228 already heading there. If I would have said I was to go to America, I would have had to go back to  
229 Nong Khai and I didn't want to do that.

230  
231 **When you enlisted as a soldier, were you given any training of any kind or did they just hand**  
232 **you a gun and set you off with a battalion?**

233 Well it was hands-on learning. I mean we were given a gun and placed in a battalion. So for two  
234 years our training was literally in warzone/battles or as we learned. It wasn't until after these two  
235 years that we finally given some type of training for six months.

236  
237 **Was this training in Laos only?**

238 Yes, it was only in Laos and it was in Mun Nka. So we had six months training there then went back  
239 to fight the war for a year and then came back again to do another six months of training. So in all  
240 total I had over about a year of organized military training. The training that we had was very  
241 focused on combat and survival skills. So this wasn't like an educational setting, it was hands on and  
242 strategic lessons to help us fight and survive.

243  
244 **The guns that were given you all of the soldiers, what type were they.**

245 They were automatic eight-rounders, fifteen rounders , and M16s.

246  
247 **Were the M16s given to your battalion later on?**

248 Yes, but the vast majority of my battalion had only the eight and fifteen round guns. The M16s went  
249 to the General's SU (special unit). So we mainly used the eight and fifteen, but also had access to the  
250 60mm, 80, 100 round mortars. I have to be honest and say that my hearing is a little harder because  
251 of the usage of the 75mm. I used the bigger guns for nearly a month and because of that it really  
252 caused damage to my ears and hearing. I'm very positive that if I went to America I would have  
253 applied for disability services because of hard of hearing.

254  
255 **So there was a group training a Pha Dong during the year 1961-62– and they were training to**  
256 **learn how to shoot the guns, assemble and disassemble the guns and so forth. Did your**  
257 **training involve any of these type of training?**

258 No, we never did any of those training. We were handed a gun and became soldiers and although we  
259 never got any training of that nature, there were other fellow soldiers within the battalion that taught  
260 us as we went along together. So they taught us all of these things as we went along, things such as  
261 how to shoot, assemble/disassemble, greasing the gun, and so forth. So from observation and hands  
262 on experience we soon became experts at it.

263  
264 **In your opinion, do you think that there was any hope in protecting or keeping Na Khang?**  
265 **Although the odds were against you all since the man-power wasn't there and the**  
266 **Vietnamese had better firearms and more men. Could there have been any hope keeping it?**

267 The Vietnamese soldiers are very unique. Their war-style is very unique. Victory for them can lead  
268 to a lot of deaths. So basically it's like the concept "die winning at all cost." They somehow didn't  
269 seek to include a retreat plan, but kept on pushing forward even if their comrades had fallen. It's  
270 unique because not all of the soldiers had guns. In a squad of let's say five soldiers, only two would  
271 carry the rifles, the others would either carry grenades or other stuff. So the best example would be  
272 if the soldiers were marching forward and one of the ones with a rifle suddenly got shot and died.  
273 Automatically one of the soldiers without a gun picks it up and continues. So they literally died  
274 winning without any retreat. However, for us, if we know there is no other way, we have to retreat.

275 Once we retreat we can call for more back-up or plot or strategies. No retreat for the Vietnamese  
276 soldiers. If there are two, both of them will shoot and fight until they die, if there are three, exact  
277 same thing: no retreat. The two Vietnamese soldiers that shot the General were part of the group  
278 that came and shot at us at that base the whole night. After that night, once day arose – all the other  
279 Vietnamese soldiers fled except those two. Once daylight came around they hid in these bushes that  
280 didn't seem as if anyone could be there. They slept there during the day and when the general went  
281 close – that's how he got shot. Of course they died immediately, too, because they were spotted and  
282 shot down, but who would have known that they were there? We all definitely weren't aware. So  
283 back to what I was saying, no retreat. Die to win. So this is where we could not handle them. Our  
284 soldiers can't accept that concept. If three or four of us dies, we retreat and pull back to strategize  
285 before going forward again. This is a concept that we just couldn't accept and endure. Even if there  
286 were five of them and we had a small platoon, it was hard to know how many there were, because if  
287 one dies the other continues on and it won't make us aware of how many there may be. So this is a  
288 reason why we couldn't keep up with them. I'm sure the American soldiers know how difficult the  
289 Vietnamese soldiers were, too. The battle at Na Khang was like this and on top of that, Na Khang  
290 was very close to Bien Who, which is a city in Vietnam. On top of that, a piece of the Laotian land  
291 was also surrendered or lost to the Vietnamese from fighting. So they had premier location and  
292 massive amounts of men to fight till the death. They also occupied the Road/Highway 7 and with  
293 the location that they had on the Road/Highway 7 – they used their heavy artillery and big guns to  
294 shoot us. It was already unbearable getting shots from those big guns. Air support was sent  
295 constantly to destroy the heavy firearms, but there was no luck. The jets and choppers would go out  
296 all day and bomb/shoot at these locations, but at night the heavy guns still shot back at us with the  
297 same intensity. Bullets and heavy firearms rang in the night and we didn't know where any of it came  
298 from. The day brought silence, though. So since the choppers were fighting for us intensively in the  
299 day, the Vietnamese made sure to hide their weapons carefully so none of it would be destroyed. At  
300 night, though they fired back. However, if the Spooky jets (jets that shot up fire/light) came, there  
301 would be no shots fired from the Vietnamese. This was so that we wouldn't know where they were  
302 hiding their heavy weapons, but on the evenings in which the light jets weren't there, fires erupted  
303 again.

304  
305 **Uncle, from your perspective how many percentage of the enemies that you fought were**  
306 **Vietnamese and how many were Laotian (Pathet Lao) because he asked an American**  
307 **general and the general said he only saw all Vietnamese soldiers.**

308 I would agree with him, since there was hardly any Pathet Lao soldiers. The Pathet Lao soldiers were  
309 typically only messengers and perhaps maybe in a platoon you may find one or two, but the vast  
310 majority of them were Vietnamese. Even when we would pick up the radio and intercept messages  
311 from the enemy, it was only in Vietnamese language. There was **never** a time in which you would  
312 hear any Laotian words. I strongly believe that the enemy battalions up near Na Khang had possibly  
313 one or two Pathet Lao soldiers and one Hmong. These Vietnamese were very fierce and not scared  
314 to die.

315  
316 **The important thing was that they were not scared to die so they weren't afraid of anything.**  
317 **That's why we lost.**

318 Yes, they're definitely not afraid of death and even if they all died fighting, so be it. There will just be  
319 another NEW batch to come and fight again. So there was a lot of Vietnamese and they didn't care.

320  
321 **Yes, possibly 10-20 million [this is Sao Lee's conjecture], so even if the casualty is 200,000-**  
322 **300,000 deaths, it didn't matter to them.**



323 I would say that of the soldiers that fought at Na Khang, Pathet Lao soldiers that fought possibly  
324 were 10% only. Ninety per cent then were Vietnamese.

325  
326 The friends and fellow soldiers in my battalion that fought alongside me --- only a couple are still  
327 alive today. Some died in the USA, others in Laos and Thailand. There are some in Laos, three in  
328 France, and a couple alive in the USA. Many of them went to the US, but since they had wounds  
329 from the war – they died in the USA.

330  
331 **Since we know that the Vietnamese soldiers were ruthless and not afraid of death. Was there**  
332 **any possible way that they could have been defeated?**

333 If it is the current situation in Laos and it being headed by the Laotians, then YES we can develop a  
334 strategy. However, if it is still the same Vietnamese soldiers back then ---- then there is NO strategy  
335 at all. If the enemy is headed by Laotian Pathet soldiers then I am not afraid at all. However, this  
336 changes when the Vietnamese comes into play and I now know I can no longer enter that battle.  
337 Vietnamese soldiers do not retreat nor do they re-plan. They set up their mission and you go  
338 through with it. If you die then you're dead, if you survive and come back – they're still going to kill  
339 you anyway. So very strict and specific orders. If the mission is to go and shoot at a base, if you are  
340 not successful and you come back, we kill you. If the soldier returns he will be killed immediately. So  
341 because of this that's why they were so fierce, there was no way out except death.

342  
343 **Did you feel as if you were you supplied enough equipment / weapon or was there a lack of**  
344 **it?**

345 The firearms and equipment were great. The enemies' firearms and equipment were great, too.  
346 However, when they came – it was only to die – that was their mission. Our mission was not to die  
347 – and our soldiers had families and didn't want to die because we wanted to return to them. So their  
348 order was to kill regardless, because either way they were going to die. So back to what I was saying  
349 earlier, if the order was given to attack a base, they do it, and if one falls, then they pick the gun up  
350 and continue. This is because you might as well, since regardless of what you do, you're going to die.  
351 There's no turning back since there is no way back. The only way was forward towards death or  
352 victory. This was the main reason why we lost to the Vietnamese.

353  
354 During a battle I was very lucky. I was with four other people, one person to the right, the other to  
355 the left and the last two in front of me. They all died. So I was very lucky. There was one time at a  
356 battle in Mua Ong – I was the first person in front of everyone, the Vietnamese soldier shot at me,  
357 but it didn't hit me. I heard the bullet and even heard it pass by, it hit the Lao Theung soldier behind  
358 me and he died. I know that their intentions was to shoot me, but it didn't hit me – only the person  
359 behind me.

360  
361 **You talked about your picture and that the person in the middle had passed away, did you**  
362 **have a lot of close friends / soldiers who died?**

363 Yes, they're all dead. My closest friends, the ones with which I shared a plate, the ones in which we  
364 shared one piece of meat, they are all dead. They all died because of the war and in these battles. I've  
365 seen my friends die right in front of my eyes, it's like us sitting here and we have another one sitting  
366 over there. Before you know it, you hear gunshots or bombs and your friend suddenly is dead.  
367 Sometimes with the bombs, their body parts fly everywhere and it all happens right in front of you. I  
368 also served as a medic and the corporal or leader in my squad of 16, so I carried the medications. So  
369 attending to some of the wounded gets you all bloodied up, too. There was never any formal

370 training on how to heal the wounds or give the shots, but I did it because you had to in the nick of  
371 time. You had to learn it fast and I did it to the best of my knowledge.

372

373 **Was it hard for you to see your fellow soldiers, family and friends die in front of you? Did it**  
374 **take an emotional toll on you?**

375 It's like this: at that time everyone was scared to death. I was scared to death and also knew that  
376 there was nothing that I could do. If you didn't maintain a calm state of mind, you wouldn't know  
377 how to react to survive. There was no time for hesitation because if you did, you wouldn't be aware  
378 that the next second of minute could be your last or your friends' last. This meant that you had to be  
379 alert and even if you were scared, you had to move past the fear. If I showed that I was scared or  
380 had fear inside of me, it would have caused fear amongst my fellow soldiers and they would even be  
381 more afraid. So as scared as you may be – you had to be calm and maintain poise and command  
382 your soldiers so they wouldn't be afraid. Whoever was shot and died, we would either bury them  
383 there or return them back to their families. For the Lao Theung soldiers we tended to bury them on  
384 site a lot. However, the vast majority of the Hmong soldiers, not all of them, we would carry them  
385 back even if they were dead, since we knew their families and that their families wanted to bury  
386 them. This only happened when we were in last chaotic situations and battle sites. If we were in  
387 bigger battles and more dangerous sites, we didn't even bury the dead – just cut a couple of banana  
388 tree leaves to cover them and leave. For me to be afraid – everyone one was afraid and scared, but  
389 as a commander of the unit – you had to show no fear so your soldiers could also do the same.

390

391 **With the American soldiers what they experienced and saw in the war caused a lot of**  
392 **problems mentally and emotionally when they came back. So because of the war and the**  
393 **traumatic events that you experienced – do you have any post-traumatic issues or problems?**

394 No, I don't have any issues or problems at all. It's because I don't think about it. American soldiers  
395 even talking about the ones going to Iraq – they train and train and then go to war. So the feeling  
396 that they first get going into is definitely the same feeling that we all got when we went to war for  
397 the first time. The first time is always the scariest. For us it was different because the war, battles,  
398 shooting, sounds of death, sounds of bullets, and the experience of death soon became a part of life  
399 for us. It was as if we became accustomed/immune to it and used to it, so it soon became normal  
400 for us. So this took out all the fear or trauma as it became a part of life. This is different from the  
401 American soldiers though because they weren't used to seeing all of this. They may have only fought  
402 in one battle or been to one place and shipped back out. So they saw horrible things only at that  
403 location and for that timeframe which was shorter. For us, we fought many battles and for many  
404 years throughout and moved from place to place, killing everywhere. So the events became normal  
405 to us and because of that it helped us not suffer from post-traumatic problems.

406

407 Lee Lue was very smart and clever – and he was very accurate – but to be accurate you had to fly  
408 lower and that increases your chances of getting shot down and that was how he died.

409

410 **Do you think that the partnership between the Hmong and the Americans was a good one**  
411 **or do you think that the Americans were only there to convince you to fight?**

412 The Americans partnership and help was for good intentions. It was not because of the Americans,  
413 but because of the Laotian government's lack of involvement that caused things to not be as good.  
414 The Americans truly helped, as they supplied the best weapons, equipment, and food for us. So they  
415 did all that they could, but because our Laotian government did not support us, we couldn't do any  
416 more than what we did and lost.

417

418 **What are your thoughts on General Vang Pao as a leader during the war and for the**  
419 **Hmong?**

420 Of all the leaders in Laos either Hmong or Lao – General Vang Pao is by far the best leader of them  
421 all. He loved his soldiers and he loved his people or citizens. If the people did not have anything to  
422 eat – he went to ask or beg for food for them. He was very busy scouting the battle field day in and  
423 day out, ensuring that soldiers were safe and he played a very active role in keeping us safe. Amongst  
424 all the military leaders – he is the number one leader. The other Laotian Generals never did  
425 anything.

426 **Do you think that there could have been any improvements amongst the Hmong**  
427 **leadership?**

428 General Vang Pao and us did all that we could. We were placed the closest to the Vietnamese border  
429 or nearest the enemy lines. However, the Laotian Generals were placed further so they never fought  
430 as heavily or did as much. As much as we did and as much as the General did – the Laotian  
431 government and military leaders blamed him and never had any respect for him, forcing him out of  
432 the country. If everyone fought as much the war outcome may have been different.

433  
434 **Did you ever work with the CIA directly or did they just come and go?**

435 We never saw them, we only saw Jerry come around for assessments. Jerry came often with General  
436 Vang Pao to see what was going on and so forth. However, there were never any CIA soldiers that  
437 would go with us to fight in the jungle. They were just there to do some orders and then leave.

438  
439 **When you asked for leave and were on leave – did you ever think that the war was going to**  
440 **be lost? Upon learning that your side lost the war, how did you decide to figure out what**  
441 **was it that you needed to do now since there was no more war in the country? Were you**  
442 **prepared to just start living life and finding work etc...or did you have plans to leave the**  
443 **country?**

444 From the way that we fought and our intensity – I felt that we were not going to lose this war. We  
445 did not know what happened, but the Laotian government, the political leaders went to meet with  
446 the Vietnamese government. Perhaps the CIA may have been involved too. However, because of  
447 this meeting, money and oxen/cows were given to the Laotian military leaders to leave. These  
448 Laotian Generals and officials were older, about 60-plus, but they were still effective. However, they  
449 were given money and ox/cattle to stop and go into retirement and be farmers. The Laotian  
450 government and the King himself had told General Vang Pao that the country was stable and that  
451 letting go of these military leaders was OK. So because the General trusted them he agreed with the  
452 discharge or retirement of these officials. So when these officials left, the Vietnamese took that  
453 opportunity to seize control. And because all the key officials who were fearless left, those that  
454 remained could not handle the pressure and because of that we lost the war. If the General would  
455 have never trusted them and not allowed the release of these officials, I'm sure we would have stood  
456 our ground. So the country lost because of selling itself out. I mean even the KING was involved.  
457 They were able to get the KING to tell General Vang Pao that the country was stable. So because of  
458 this communication, the General OK'd the military officials to leave and these officials, although  
459 they were older and heavy users of opium, they were still very effective.

460  
461 **Could you talk a little when you arrived in Australia, why you moved here and what your**  
462 **occupation was or is?**

463 When I arrived in this country it was 1978. On April 28, 1978 I arrived in Sydney, Australia. I stayed  
464 and lived in Sydney for 15 years and worked in a company that made car parts. I worked in that  
465 company for 15 years. I became tired of working there after 15 years and came here to buy some of

466 the farm land to farm. The land that I bought is about 90 acres, and I plant banana trees. In regards  
467 to this country, they are very loving and supportive. I did not experience poverty because I was able  
468 to work. If you're lazy then you will not survive, but if you work hard, there is plenty to eat and  
469 enjoy. Coming to this country was great. There is no war, and the government is very helpful.

470  
471 **What are the positive and negatives of living here with fewer Hmong compared to that of**  
472 **living in the USA with a lot of Hmong?**

473 I would say that living with fewer Hmong is better. When you have fewer Hmong living together,  
474 there will be less problems, tension, gossip, and children will less likely join gangs or be bad. If there  
475 are Hmong children that go join gangs, it is only a few. However, compared to St. Paul or in the US,  
476 there are a lot. The elders are also getting themselves in trouble and ruining their families by  
477 partaking in bad activities. I've been in Australia all this time, and can recall no more than five  
478 women whom went and cheated on their husband or are divorced. So we have no problems here,  
479 but I do worry a lot about the Hmong people in the US. This is because a lot of Hmong people do  
480 not work and they don't want to work. For this reason, it will cause a lot of hardship for them in the  
481 future. If they work then no worries, though.

482  
483 **Do you have anything – friends, relatives, memories – that makes you miss Laos these days?**

484 Yes, I do still have some friends, two sisters, and some relatives there. So of course I miss Laos very  
485 much. I have visited them twice already, but when I think about the war and the government policy  
486 that they hold – I don't like it and don't long to live there anymore. Although Laos has changed – it  
487 doesn't fit me anymore. Laos still has a lot of poverty, so it's a lot better staying here since there are  
488 opportunities to find work. There is no war here, I sleep very well here at night, and have a lot of  
489 opportunities here that can help people build wealth to ensure that you and your whole family can  
490 prosper. You do have the opportunity to find ways to work for money in Laos and some do, but for  
491 those who don't – it is extremely difficult. That's why there are so many that call or send letters  
492 begging for money, and it's tough because I don't have any money to send them. They cry and  
493 even beg just for money to buy the smallest things like maybe chili peppers. So this is a big problem  
494 for our people in Laos.

495  
496 **What do you think about the Hmong children of the future? Will they still cling on to the**  
497 **culture or do you think that they will learn English and forget about the culture/heritage?**

498 In my opinion, in the next two generation, the children will lose our traditions, practices and even  
499 language. We elders would like for them to learn our traditions and practices, but they don't like it.  
500 On top of that, they don't even know how to speak Hmong to us, so how can they even learn when  
501 they don't know the language anymore? So in my opinion, within the next two generations there will  
502 be no more Hmong. Or better yet, there will be Hmong people, but not Hmong practice and  
503 tradition. The physical appearance and name and everything will be Hmong – but they are no longer  
504 Hmong because they don't know the language and the traditions.

505  
506 **If you had a young boy or girl that came to ask you why there was a war in Laos – or how**  
507 **would you explain it to him/her?**

508 I wouldn't know how to explain it to him/her, but if they asked about the war then I'll explain the  
509 same thing or way that I did to him [the interviewer]. Even if my own child asked me, I would say  
510 the same thing. I may explain when we were in Laos, we followed the orders of the leader of the  
511 village and if he said we should all go fight in this war, then we went. We went from city to city  
512 fighting, so we had **no** opportunity for education. We just went and kept fighting even though we  
513 did not know how the fight started. You get older, let's say to be the age of 14 and the village leader

514 just says whoever is 14 or older will now become soldiers – so that’s what we did. So we never knew  
515 who started what and why the war began.

516

517