

Here is Alfred McCoy's briefing paper.

GENERAL VANG PAO: A Review of Sources
[April 10, 2007]

I. TRENDS:

In assessing the merits of the Madison school board's decision to name a school for General Vang Pao, there are two factors that might give one pause.

In aftermath of the Vietnam War, books by authors ranging from the staunchly pro-Vang Pao Jane Hamilton-Merritt to Christian missionary William Smalley and commercial author Christopher Robbins have been unanimous in reporting that Vang Pao ordered extra-judicial executions of enemy prisoners, his own Hmong soldiers, and Hmong political opponents. All base these allegations on interviews with eye-witnesses which include CIA operatives, American pilots for the CIA-owned Air America, and Hmong whose communities supported the CIA's secret army.

Over the past 20 years, moreover, General Vang Pao has served as head of several Hmong organizations reportedly involved in questionable fund raising for a variety of Hmong community causes - - an anti-communist resistance group, the United Lao National Liberation Front, whose leader Kao Thao was convicted of embezzlement in California in 1990; a welfare assistance group, the Lao Family Community; and a citizenship advocacy group, the Lao Veterans of America.

II. VANG PAO & EXTRA-JUDICIAL EXECUTIONS:

Over the past 25 years, four books, reflecting a wide range of political perspectives, have been published with statements that General Vang Pao, while an officer in the Royal Lao Army and head of the CIA's Secret Army from 1962-1975, was responsible for the extra-judicial execution of his own soldiers, enemy suspects, and political opponents within the Hmong community. Here are extracts from those sources:

1.) Christopher Robbins, **Air America** (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1979):

"A Meo [Hmong] soldier on the ridge watched the plane crawl slowly toward him and in a moment of boredom fired off a shot. The bullet went straight through the pilot's heart and killed him instantly while the plane crashed into the mountain and burned, killing everybody on board. The soldier was executed on the spot by Vang Pao." (page 122).

The book quotes Air America pilot Wayne Lennin saying about Vang Pao:

"VP was exceptional. He did a lot of things people didn't like -- he'd summarily execute somebody who didn't do their job. But he kept the whole thing together, and if they hadn't had him it would have fallen apart long before it ever did." (page 139)

2.) Christopher Robbins, **The Ravens: The Men Who Flew in America's Secret War in Laos** (New York: Crown Publishers, Inc., 1987):

"In a later run-in with Long Tieng base chief Tom Clines, Vang Pao ruthlessly demonstrated who was in charge. Six prisoners had been brought in by the Meo [Hmong], and Clines demanded that his men interrogate them. Vang Pao nodded to an aide, who immediately had the men taken outside and shot. The CIA man took the point. "What I meant to say, general, is that I would appreciate it if you would allow us to interrogate prisoners, please.'" (pg. 125).

3.) Jane Hamilton-Merritt, **Tragic Mountains: The Hmong, the Americans, and the Secret Wars for Laos, 1942-1992** (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993):

The book quotes Air America pilot Fred Walker's eye-witness description of Vang Pao's execution of a prisoner in January 1962:

"Colonel Vang Pao comes in and eats lunch. While he's eating, one of his aides comes over and says something and points to the young guy squatting in the corner. Suddenly, Vang Pao spits out the sound 'Ba!' A couple of soldiers stood up and took the prisoner outside. Vang Pao continued eating. A few minutes later, I heard four shots." (page 98)

4.) William A. Smalley, Chia Khoua Vang, and Gnia Yee Yang, **Mother of Writing: The Origin and Development of a Hmong Messianic Script** (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990).

The book describes the murder of Shong Lue Yang, a messianic leader and inventor of a Hmong writing system as follows:

"It was mid-February 1971 that Shong Lue Yang, Mother of Writing, Savior of the People, was assassinated at the age of forty-one....About nine o'clock in the morning, two of the party of assassins came toward Shong Lue's house, while the others stayed on guard....Then they went on and shot Shong Lue and Bau [his wife] inside their home. Shong Lue's and Bau's three-year-old son, Ba..., darted to the jungle. The assassins shot at

him, wounding him in the leg, but he managed to get away...All of the suspected assassins are known now, their identities learned in various ways. They were all soldiers in General Vang Pao's army..."

"After Shong Lue was assassinated, a student named Yong Lee Yang..., who had been one of the twelve clan representatives at Kiaw Bouia or Fi Ka, and so had been trained by Shong Lue as a leader, built a round house for worship and continued teaching the Pahawh Hmong [writing system] in his own village of Houi Kinin...in the Long Cheng area. Once more the Hmong people in the surrounding area gathered to study in increasing numbers, until there were five hundred of them..."

"The process of spreading the Pahawh Hmong [writing] continued until November 1971, when Yong Lee Yang was also killed in his Houi Kinin home. The assassins were dressed in the uniforms of government soldiers. They came early in the morning, armed with bazookas of the type supplied by the American CIA, weapons powerful enough to piece tanks and blow up bunkers. With these weapons, they killed not only Yong Lee, but also five other people, wounding sixteen as well. Then the next evening, at 4 p.m., two T-28 bombers, also of the type provided to General Vang Pao's army by the CIA, flew twice over the village and destroyed the round worship house.

"That disaster ended the spread of the Pahwah Hmong until the Royal Lao Government collapsed and the Hmong people began to leave Laos, beginning May 14, 1975." (pages 37-39)

III. FUND-RAISING & CORRUPTION BY LEADERS ASSOCIATED WITH VANG PAO:

Since the late 1980s, there have been reports in the national and regional press that organizations associated with General Vang Pao have engaged in fund-raising activities, some questionable, among Hmong refugees in the United States.

1.) Ruth E. Hammond, "The Great Refugee Shakedown: The Hmong Are Paying to Free Laos -- But What's Happening to the Money?" **The Washington Post** (April 16, 1989), page B-1.

"Since 1981, when the United Lao National Liberation Front, or *Neo Hom*, was founded in the United States by exiled Laotian military leaders, a substantial number of Hmong families here say they have paid \$100 down plus \$10 a month into that organization's coffers. The funds, they've been told, sustain resistance against the communist Lao People's Democratic Republic. The president of the Neo Hom in the United States, Hmong Maj. Gen. Vang Pao, travels periodically to Hmong resettlement communities here and abroad to promise imminent victory and to appeal for funds..."

"A member of one of the smaller Hmong clans, who requested anonymity, said that in the mid-1980s, 20 families of his clan in Minnesota donated \$20,000 in cash to support the Hmong resistance. He says that in 1986, his brother, who had personally donated nearly \$10,000, accepted Vang Pao's offer of a resistance job in Thailand. He found no evidence that the promised supplies had been purchased, and Neo Hom leaders told him that 'almost none' of the money collected in the United States had ever reached the resistance."

2.) Seth Mydans, "California Says Laos Refugee Group Has Been Extorted by Its Leadership," **The New York Times** (November 2, 1990).

"For years, some members of the most primitive refugee group in America, the Hmong, have complained, mostly in whispers, that the anti-Communist leader who fled here with them from the remote mountains of Laos has been extorting money from them.

"Now the California Department of Social Services has given substance to those grievances, charging that Gen. Vang Pao's resistance organization has demanded contributions from Hmong refugees in return for welfare assistance through a state-financed social service group he controls.

"The department, completing an 18-month investigation, recommended last month that country welfare offices cancel their contracts with the social services organization, the Lao Family Community.

"Kao Thao, a leader of the resistance group, the United Lao National Liberation Front, has been arrested and has pleaded guilty to two counts of embezzlement and misappropriation of funds...

"'It's sad to see Hmong ripping off Hmong,' said one refugee who spoke on the condition that his name not be used. 'I'm concerned about corruption with the Lao Family Community. It's not run by the people who are appointed to run it. It's run by corrupt political officers.'"

3.) Sean Madigan, Tom Hamburger, and Rob Hotakainen, "Deal on Hmong vets bill reached," **Star-Tribune** (Minneapolis, MN: May 19, 2000), page A-1.

"Washington, DC—Congress moved closer Thursday to approving a bill that would make it easier for Hmong veterans to become citizens after negotiations dropped a controversial veterans organization from the legislation.

"The change was made at the request of Sen. Rod Grams, R-Minn., who said it would have set a bad precedent to name an

advocacy group such as the Lao Veterans of America in the legislation.

"That change was welcomed by many academicians and former military leaders. They worried that the Lao Veterans, based in Fresno, Calif., was an inappropriate group to be named in a citizenship bill.

"'I can't believe that anyone would have let them slide in this bill,' said retired Air Force Brig. Gen. Harry Aderholt, who directed U.S. forces in the Secret War.

"In an interview, Aderholt said the Lao Veterans represented just one faction of the deeply split U.S. Hmong population and warned that it would be a mistake to give them a role in deciding who gets citizenship benefits...

" 'The Lao Veterans of America are quite prejudiced,' Aderholt said of the group's attitude toward other Hmong veterans who aren't affiliated with the organization.

"In addition, Aderholt and others expressed concern that the Lao Veterans' strong association with Hmong Gen. Vang Pao would be a detriment. Vang Pao is honorary co-chairman of the group and is widely recognized in the Hmong community as the organization's unofficial leader..."

"The change came after Hmong scholar Yang Dao a former instructor at the University of Minnesota, wrote to members of the Judiciary Committee on Wednesday, urging the Senate not to name any one group.

"The letter warned that 'allowing only a single group of Laotian veterans to certify the citizenship status would jeopardize the process of naturalization by promoting corruption, fraud, distortion, and injustice.' It did not mention the Lao Veterans by name..."