

**Lee Pao Xiong, Director
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"Good afternoon, Mr. Chair and members of the Committee. My name is Lee Pao Xiong, and I am the director of the Center for Hmong Studies at Concordia University. I am also the Co-Chair of the Hmong Committee of 100, a 501c4 organization. Thank you for hearing this bill.

I stand before you as the son of a Hmong Special Guerrilla Unit (SGU) veteran. My father, like so many others, was recruited when he was only seventeen years of age, to fight in a war not his own. Years before, his older brother, a member of the legendary Battalion 1, had answered the call, only to perish in defense of American interest in Laos.

My father's story is one of extraordinary sacrifice. He was twice sent to Thailand for specialized training, becoming a master of paratrooping and heavy artillery, wielding weapons like the 105mm and the 155mm Howitzer. He fought in almost every major battle, from the heights of Phou Pha Thi, a US Airforce radar installation, which got overrun by Vietnam Commandos in 1968, to the valley of Long Tieng, the CIA and General Vang Pao's headquarter in

Laos. At Boum Long or LS32, the thunder of his guns silenced his right ear, a permanent scar of his service. Today, he battles skin cancer, a cruel reminder of the gunpowder that saturated his body. Next month, he faces his fifth surgery to remove more cancer nodes.

Mr. Chair and members of the Committee, my father is here in the audience, along with few of the remaining SGUs. I like to ask them to stand up!

Let us be clear about the context of my father and the SGU's sacrifices. The Geneva Accords of 1954, 1961, and 1962, meant to ensure Laos' neutrality, but the United States and North Vietnam, driven by Cold War strategy, bypassed these agreements, choosing to wage a secret war through the Hmong and other Lao SGUs. They were recruited, funded, trained, and paid directly by the CIA to serve as surrogate soldiers of the United States' Armed forces in Laos, paying an unimaginable price. Over 30,000 Hmong SGUs died in the war, and another 50,000 perished fleeing persecution by the communists after 1975.

CIA Director William Colby acknowledged the debt owed: without the Hmong, 50,000 more American names might grace the Vietnam Memorial

Wall in Washington, DC. From 1962 to 1975, these Hmong soldiers held back 70,000 North Vietnamese troops, preventing them from overwhelming American forces in South Vietnam.

Mr. Chair and members of the Committee, fewer than 1,000 of these heroes remain in Minnesota. Their numbers are dwindling, their stories fading. We have a moral obligation to honor their service, to acknowledge the sacrifices they made for a country that was not their own. I implore you: Please support this bill. Let us not allow these aging Hmong and Lao SGU's legacies to be forgotten. Thank you."