

The Vietnam War: Hmong Soldiers' Personal Experiences in the Secret War

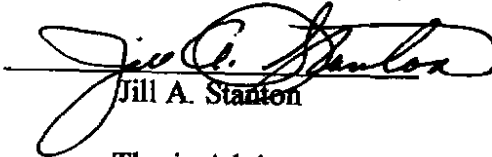
by

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ABSTRACT

The main purpose of this historical research is to reveal the true stories of the Vietnam War from two Hmong individuals who participated in the Vietnam War. Their stories will pass down to their children and future generations when they are no longer living. This research will describe the two individuals' personal experiences in the Vietnam War and how they managed to escape to safety.

The two Hmong soldiers were selected with age in mind, one having served as a teenager, the other as an adult. By having two different ages, there will be two different perspectives about the Vietnam War.

The instrument used in this study was developed and designed by the researcher and was an interview questionnaire. The interview questions were written in two languages, Hmong and English, back to back. The questions were used as a guideline.

What the individuals chose to tell the researcher may have gone outside the boundaries of the survey questions.

The results of the study are based on the comparison of the two individual soldiers' lives, who were involved in the same war and hearing their perceptions of the war. This study shows that Hmong soldiers, involved in the Vietnam War, joined hands with the Americans proudly, but have some reservations and regrets in terms of the price paid by the Hmong people for being allies with the U.S. Further research is needed to document more Hmong soldiers' experiences in the Vietnam War. In future research studies should include how the war experience of Hmong soldiers impacts their lives in the U.S. and those of immediate family members. What counseling implications might this have for the individual and the family? This could provide more understanding of what Hmong people have gone through during and after the Vietnam War and what services might be helpful to those who may want to get help from professionals.

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I will like to express my gratitude and appreciation to Dr. Barbara Flom, my graduate Program Director and also to my Research Advisor for her valuable assistance, expertise and direction with this study in getting my thesis complete. Without my Research Advisor's support, I would not be able to accomplish my thesis.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank my grandfather and father in helping me finish my thesis. This research study is dedicated to my grandfather and father for revealing their personal life experiences serving in the Vietnam War and then settling in America. Their stories and memories will now be passed on to the next generations when they are no longer living. The purpose of this research study was to document the experiences of two family members so that when my children or future generations ask about how we got to America, this research study will tell them. It will also inform other Americans about the role of the Hmong in the Vietnam War.

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Chapter One: Introduction

Introduction of the Vietnam War

There is not a lot of literature or history known about the Hmong taking part in the Vietnam War, which makes it harder for people to understand why the Hmong people got to come to the United States. The specific purpose of this study was to reveal Hmong soldiers' personal experiences from the Vietnam War. By doing this, new generations of Hmong, as well as other Americans, may come to understand how the Hmong got to America.

Since this was a secret political war, most civilians were not told what was really going on in the Vietnam War. Many people who had never been to war were sent to war. The outcome of the Vietnam War was a great disappointment to many people in the U.S. Since there was not much historical information about the Hmong during the Vietnam War, most of the current resources have come from personal experiences of Hmong men and women who were either involved in the war, who have lived through the war, or from reporters covering the war.

Many people, both soldiers and innocent people, lost their lives in the Vietnam War. It was a war with many untold stories. Many people took part in the Vietnam War, battling against the communist North Vietnamese who were led by Ho Chi Minh. "During Ho's time in France during World War I, he became a founding member of the French Communist party. The Russian Communists noted his abilities, and by 1923, Ho found himself in Moscow to receive training; and by 1930, he had founded the Vietnamese Communist Party" (Dunnigan & Nofi, 1999, p.29).

"The United States was involved in helping South Vietnam from 1950 to 1975. The war started in 1969" (Dunnigan & Nofi, 1999, p.300). The Americans feared the idea of communism and the domino effect that could take place in Asia; therefore, the Americans wanted to prevent

this idea by helping South Vietnam. If North Vietnam took over South Vietnam and became a communist country the fear was that, soon the neighboring countries would follow. The idea that Americans wanted world peace and Americans wanted to stop the spread of communism has led U.S. government to send off troops to defend the spread of the domino effect.

During the war in Vietnam, the United States spent a total of \$155 billion (Dunnigan & Nofi, 1999). However, Thayer (1985) indicated that the United States spent approximately \$150 billion. According to Langguth (2000), the war started in 1954 and ended in 1975. Many of the total costs reported during the war came close, depending on what year the author noted the war actually started. Many of the authors indicated varying dates of the war, which could impact the total amount spent in the Vietnam War. The cost of the Vietnam War was important to know because Americans have to pay taxes and moreover, the government kept the war a secret. Therefore, it is important to let Americans know how much of the tax money was spent in the war. The cost became an issue because the war was not popular with many Americans. Many Americans had protested, many citizens were drafted to war, and the number of deaths was tremendous. The numbers of deaths is still a mystery because not all of the bodies have been found.

Dunnigan and Nofi stated that North Vietnam had formed an alliance with China, the Soviet Union, and other small communist countries. The Chinese seem to have maintained about 20,000 troops in northern North Vietnam through most of the war, primarily engineering and logistical personnel, helping to maintain the flow of supplies from China (Dunnigan & Nofi, 1999, p.284). According to Karnow (1997), Dunnigan and Nofi (1999), and Gilbert (2002), Ho Chi Minh was a proclaimed communist, and he was helping China and the Soviet Union; therefore, both of those countries were willing to aid Ho Chi Minh during the war. According to

Edmonds. Ho Chi Minh joined the French communist party in 1920. In 1923, Ho traveled to Moscow to work for the Communist International (Comintern). After a year of being in Moscow, he was sent to China where he created the Vietnamese Revolutionary Youth League, a precursor of the Indochinese Communist Party (ICP). Ho established the ICP in 1930. Soon afterwards he was arrested by the British for eleven years. In prison, he wrote poetry about his Vietnamese culture to keep him alive. He was released in 1943; Ho went to ask the Americans for help. The United States denied Ho Chi Minh's ideas of running North Vietnam. Ho Chi Minh continued to search for allies, which he found. Ho Chi Minh contacted communist countries in the late 1900's.

In 1945, Ho and the American Office of Strategic Services (OSS) reached an agreement whereby Ho would provide intelligence about Japanese movements and help rescue downed American pilots in return for American weapons (Edmonds, 1998, p. 30-31). According to Edmonds, the Americans helped train Vietnam forces for battle. The Americans were pleased how Ho wanted Vietnam to become an independent country. "The Americans will help Ho write the Vietnamese Declaration of Independence. Soon after, the French regained control of Vietnam. By 1959 it became clear to Ho that armed struggle would be necessary to reunify North and South Vietnam under communist control" (Edmonds, 1998, p. 32).

Ho allies were able to see how his communist ideals and Ho was able to receive help from his allies. In addition, Ho had participated in many communist organizations; therefore, his allies were willing and able to help him.

"Ho Chi Minh Trail ran from North Vietnam to South Vietnam neighboring kingdoms of Laos and Cambodia. The trail was not a single route, but rather a complex maze of truck routes, paths for foot and bicycle traffic, and river transportation systems. The Ho Chi Minh Trail (The

trail was named for the leader, Ho Chi Minh) is a populated region of rugged mountains (1,500-8,000 feet), triple-canopy jungle and dense primeval rainforests” (Wikipedia, 2007). The Ho Chi Minh Trail was a supplying route; it was convenient to use the trail to avoid any disaster that might cause the supplies to be destroyed. The Ho Chi Minh Trail was an advantage to North Vietnamese; it was used to carry supplies to North Vietnam’s troops. Many of North Vietnam’s troops were stationed as lookouts for carrying food supplies (Dunnigan & Nofi, 1999). The Hmong were engaged as a small military force (paid for and supported by the United States) that launched attacks on the Ho Chi Minh Trail and its related installations, as well as reporting on North Vietnam’s activities. The Ho Chi Minh Trail is covered with two thousand square miles of mountains, jungle, and swamp. North Vietnam carried about ten tons of supplies a month down the trail. Once engaged in the war, the United States Air Force bombed 80 percent [of the supplies before the supplies] reached to South Vietnam (Dunnigan & Nofi, 1999, p. 299).

In 1959, North Vietnam decided to use Laos as a route to move troops and supplies to South Vietnam. The United States agreed to “neutralize” Laos because South Vietnam was seen as a more suitable battlefield for the struggle between communism and the West (Dunnigan & Nofi, 1999, p. 174). The Neutralist of Laos was signed in Geneva on July 23, 1962. It was viewed negatively by the United States and positively by North Vietnam and Communist China. The agreement was that no foreign troops or military personnel were allowed into Laos’ territory. The United States could not step into Laos’ territory without permission from the Laotian government (Dommen, 1964, p. 224).

Troops after troops were sent to Vietnam, but the war did not end. During the time of the Vietnam War, the United States was one of the wealthiest countries in the world and also a democratic country. According to Karnow (1997) and Taylor (2003), in 1954, President

Eisenhower warned the American people that if North Vietnam took control over South Vietnam then soon all of Southeast Asia would become a communist region—the domino effect, which was the idea that if one country becomes a communist country, others would follow. This was one of the reasons why President Eisenhower sent troops to aid South Vietnam (Taylor, 2003). “During the time of the Vietnam War, the United States had gone through several Presidential elections, trying to bring troops back home; unfortunately, the war continues” (Taylor, 2003, p.5-6).

Not only the United States and South Vietnam were allies at the time. According to *Dunnigan and Nofi (1999)*, between 1960 and 1962, the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) made a deal with many of the Hmong tribes in more isolated areas of Laos to fight the communists (North Vietnamese). The deal was granting the Hmong people access to come to the United States after the war ended, no matter what the outcome or circumstances might be.

In the nineteenth century, the Hmong were allowed to settle in Laos if they agreed to keep the Viet Cong and lowlanders from entering into Laos. Viet Cong is a guerrilla force with the support of the North Vietnamese Army, fought against South Vietnam in the late 1950s-1975. The Viet Cong is a derogatory term for Vietnamese communists trying to take over the south. The Hmong for many years did not like the Vietnamese. According to *Karnow (1997)*, the Viet Cong and communist lowlanders had been taking Hmong’s many good belongings as well as staying in Hmong villages with armed forces. The Hmong had no choice but to allow the Viet Cong or communist lowlanders to enter their villages and take whatever they wanted (*Dunnigan & Nofi, 1999*). The CIA began to arm the Hmong so that these hill tribes could defend themselves against the Communist lowlanders and North Vietnam. CIA officers came across a Laotian army officer who happened to be a Hmong. Vang Pao was one of the very few

Hmong serving as an officer in the Laotian army. Vang Pao agreed to lead the Hmong in aiding the United States during the war. By 1962, over 10,000 Hmong were armed and trained. In mid-1962, Vang Pao gathered a total of 30,000 Hmong fighters to fight in the war. Although many of the CIA officers were forced to flee to South Vietnam, many of the Hmong villagers stayed back to defend their village (Dunnigan & Nofi, 1999, p.174).

During the war, Hmong people who were not soldiers in the Secret War did not have many choices; they either tried to escape to Thailand or became a member of the Viet Cong. Many Hmong who tried to escape to Thailand died on the way. Some were killed by Viet Cong and some were killed by hidden bombs, while others were killed from starvation. Not only that, many people were left to die because they had been seriously injured; therefore, it was believed that the injured would slow down the rest of the group or family, which also increased the chance of everyone getting killed (if the Viet Cong found them or caught up to them). Because most Americans didn't know about the recruitment of the Hmong by the CIA this became known as "the Secret War". According to T. Lor, who is a community representative at the Hmong Community Association in Wausau, WI (personal communication, June 19, 2006), there was a road that branched into three paths. People who wanted to go to Thailand took the right road. Those who wanted to go to Laos took the middle road, and those who wanted to join an alliance with the communists took the left road. One important reason for becoming an ally with the communists was that your family would be safe, but you would have to kill your own people, those who had not joined an ally with the communists. "I remembered seeing many people traveling to Laos and Thailand. My family and I decided to go to Thailand, but the journey to Thailand was not an easy one" (T. Lor, personal communication, June 19, 2006).

During the Vietnam War, to escape to Thailand, the Hmong scattered out and hide in the mountains. Some families were able to carry with them a few bags of food supplies, while others were not able to carry with them any food supplies. Hiding in the mountains, one of the biggest concerns was starvation not having any food available, but at the same time, they were being chased by the North Vietnamese. Going through hardship and trying to escape, many of the Hmong elders saw many horrors along the way to Thailand. After reaching Thailand or Laos, the Hmong were put into refugee camps. According to T.Lor. (personal communication, January 19, 2007) if the Thai villager spotted any survivors they were to take the survivors to the military camp. The Thai military camp is where all of the refugees were registered and being taken care of. The Thai government arranged the refugees into a camp until it was full. The refugees were not given any choice to relocate. The Thai government and the United States had an agreement to help any survivors who had crossed over the Mekong River. Thailand is a monarchy meaning there are a king and queen, who run the country. In addition, Thailand is a democratic country; therefore, the Thai government agreed to help the United States. Those who remained in the mountains continued to be pursued by the North Vietnamese, day after day (Yang, 1995). From there, arrangements were made to leave the refugee camps and go to different countries, one of them being the United States.

Statement of the Problem

The purpose of this research paper is to document two Hmong soldiers' personal experiences during the Vietnam War through interview questions. The interview questions will be given out in the fall of 2006. A thorough review of existing literature written about the Hmong during the war is also used to support this research.

Research Objectives

Specific research objectives were to:

1. Examine Hmong soldiers' personal experiences from the Vietnam War.
2. Analyze the effect of the Vietnam War on some Hmong soldiers.
3. Few stories exist from Hmong veterans of the Vietnam War. Most of the stories

recorded lend themselves to the process of relocation rather than the actual war experience.

Many Hmong don't want to talk about the war.

Assumptions of the Study

There are several assumptions of the study:

1. The memories of the soldiers are accurate.
2. The interviewees will be more comfortable telling their stories because the

interviewer is a family member.

Definition of Terms

The following is a list of terms used in the study.

Agent Orange - "Agent Orange was the nickname given to a powerful herbicide and defoliant used by the U.S. military in its Herbicidal Warfare program during the Vietnam War. Agent Orange was used from 1961 to 1971" (Wikipedia, 2007).

Chao Fa - "Prince of the Sky," originally a mystic sect in northern Laos. After the communist took over in 1975, a faction of Hmong resistance followed Chao Fa leaders. Later, outsiders often mistakenly called all anticommunist resistance Hmong Chao Fa" (Merritt, 1993, p. 559).

Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) - "CIA is a civilian intelligence agency of the United States government. Its primary function is obtaining and analyzing information about foreign

governments, corporations, and persons in order to advise public policymakers. Additionally, the agency sometimes engages in propaganda and public relations efforts. It also serves as the government's paramilitary hidden hand via covert operations at the direction of the President and under oversight by Congress” (Wikipedia, 2007).

Domino Effect - “A theory that speculated if one land in a region came under the influence of Communists, then more would follow in a domino effect. The domino effect suggests that some change, small in itself, will cause a similar change nearby, which then will cause another similar change, and so on in linear sequence, by analogy to a falling row of dominoes standing on end” (Wikipedia, 2007).

Geneva Conference (1954) - “It is an agreement reached that recognized that what had formerly been French Indochina was now three independent states: Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam” (D.C. Everest, 2005, p. 318).

Hmong - “A term meaning “free man” in the Hmong language. The Hmong are a group of people with a specific culture and language, who live in scattered areas including China, Thailand, Laos, Vietnam, France, and the United States” (D.C. Everest, 2005, p. 33).

Ho Chi Minh (1890-1969) – “He was born in Nguyen Sinh Cung in the central Vietnamese province of Nghe Tinh. Ho is most famous for leading the Viet Minh independence movement from 1941 onward, establishing the communist-governed Democratic Republic of Vietnam in 1945 and defeating the French Union in 1954 at Dien Bien Phu in Laos. He led the North Vietnamese in the Vietnam War until his death” (Wikipedia, 2007).

Ho Chi Minh Trail - “A trail outside of Laos that the North Vietnamese used as a supply route” (D.C. Everest, 2005, p. 318).

Mekong River - "River comparable in width to the Mississippi River between Laos and Thailand that many Hmong had to cross to escape to Thailand" (D.C. Everest, 2005, p. 318).

Re-education Camps - "Camps in Laos where the communists took those who fought against them; those taken to the camps were tortured and/or killed" (D.C. Everest, 2005, p. 319).

Pathet Lao - "Communists in Laos who fought against the Hmong and United States in Laos" (D.C. Everest, 2005, p. 318).

Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) - "Is the term for a severe and ongoing emotional reaction to an extreme psychological trauma. The latter may involve someone's actual death or a threat to the patient's or someone else's life, serious physical injury, or threat to physical and/or psychological integrity, to a degree that usual psychological defenses are incapable of coping." The symptoms of PTSD are flashbacks, emotional detachment, and jumpiness (Wikipedia, 2007).

Secret War - "The name given to the CIA-backed war against communism fought in Laos" (D.C. Everest, 2005, p. 319).

Vang Pao - "Hmong leader and general who was supported by the American CIA; he left Laos in 1975 and resettled in the United States. Pao has continued to promote resistance in Laos against the communist government" (D.C. Everest, 2005, p. 318).

Viet Cong - Is a guerrilla force with the support of the North Vietnamese Army, fought against South Vietnam in the late 1950s-1975 (Wikipedia, 2007).

Vietnam War - "Vietnam War (also known as the Second Indochina War and colloquially as Vietnam or Nam as well as the American War) was a conflict in which the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRVN, or North Vietnam) and its allies fought against the Republic of Vietnam (RVN or South Vietnam) and its allies. North Vietnam's allies included the National

Front of the Liberation of South Vietnam, the Soviet Union, and the People's Republic of China. South Vietnam's allies included the United States and South Korea. United States' combat troops were involved from 1965 until their official withdrawal in 1973. A large number of military civilian casualties resulted from the war, which officially ended on April 30, 1975 with the capitulation of South Vietnam" (Wikipedia, 2007).

Limitations of the Study

There are several limitations to the study:

1. Due to having a conversation about the Vietnam War, traumatic memories can reoccur; therefore, some responses to some of the interview questions may not reveal the depth of the experience.
2. Only two Hmong Vietnam Veterans were interviewed in this study. Their experiences cannot be generalized to apply to the experiences of all Hmong who served in that war.
3. Participants may choose to not answer some of the questions being asked.
4. Because of the familial relationship of the researcher to the interviewees, reporting the results could have been affected by researcher bias.

Chapter II: Literature Review

This chapter is a brief literature review of Hmong history and involvement during and after the Vietnam War. The term “Hmong” is currently used to represent our people. In the past, the term “Hmong” was used by many ethnic groups. Different ethnic groups referred to the Hmong people by different names. For example, Meo, the Chinese used to indicate that these people are savages was sometimes used to refer to the Hmong people (Dunnigan & Nofi, 1999, p. 184). The Chinese and the Hmong had lived for many centuries together. The Hmong usually lived in the mountains and the Chinese usually lived in the low plains. The Hmong had their own kingdom. The Hmong practiced polygamy and the king was expected to have many wives and children (Quincy, 1995, p. 44). According to Quincy (1995), the Hmong play a tremendous role in the Chinese history as the Hmong were ancient people who occupied the fertile Yellow River basin long before the Chinese themselves migrated into the area. The Chinese history record does not even mention the Hmong; although, the Hmong were viewed simply as the first enemy of the Chinese people. The Chinese people once called the Hmong “Miao” as in savages because they lived in the mountains and were thought to be “crazy people”; therefore, the Hmong were not welcome in the Chinese empire. The Chinese sometimes called the Hmong barbarians and wild people, which often led to one battle after another. There have not been any resolutions on peace in the Hmong and Chinese history (Quincy, 1995, p. 36-37).

The Hmong fought many difficult battles against the Chinese for centuries; although, the Hmong were out-numbered by the Chinese, the battles continued. The Hmong kept moving toward southern China due to the number of losses of people during battles. The Hmong didn't have any success but kept moving. The Hmong were defeated by the Chinese General Ty Ching. Ty Ching forced the Hmong out of their kingdom. This was the end of the Hmong's Golden

Age. After the fall of the Hmong Kingdom, the Hmong were scattered throughout China, but they were mainly forced to move south of China (Quincy, 1995, p. 49).

The Hmong didn't call themselves "Hmong" until 1970s. The term Hmong means "being free" to be what they wanted to be, free from slavery, free from the Chinese and free to do what they want. Some Hmong have stayed in China and others in Laos, Thailand, and Cambodia (D.C. Everest, 2005, p. 33).

The Vietnam War involved many countries to prevent from the domino effect, which took place in Vietnam. Many lives have been lost because of the war and yet, it was not made known to the majority of Americans that the Vietnam War was assisted by Hmong men and boys. The Hmong joined proudly with the Americans to fight against the North Vietnam and in return, Colonel Billy (CIA name) promised to bring the Hmong population to America. The Hmong had lived their entire life in the jungle and were knowledgeable in the geographic areas of the war. During the Vietnam War, many Hmong people were living in northern Laos and were asked by the United States to join forces because of the Geneva Conference in 1954. "It is an agreement reached that recognized that what had formerly been French Indochina are now three independent states: Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam (D.C. Everest, 2005, p. 318). The second Geneva Conference during 1961-1962 was to help resolve conflicts in Laos. As a result of the second Geneva Conference, Americans agreed not to step foot into Laos' territory. The United States promised not to send "any foreign troops or military personnel" into Laos. The United States recruited the Hmong to fight against the communists, since the United States could not step into Laos territories. The Hmong were recruited to fight heavy on the Ho Chi Minh Trail because of the Geneva Conference (D.C. Everest, 2005, p. 36). After the war ended in 1975, many Hmong people had no place to live and were put into refugee camps either in

Thailand or Laos. Many of the Hmong people came to the United States. Although many literature reviews did not mention Hmong people helping the United States in the battles against North Vietnam, the truth is the Hmong joined in an alliance organized by the Americans with the United States in their battle against North Vietnam.

Hmong History

Approximately 5000 years ago, the ancestors of the Hmong lived along the lower reaches of the Yellow River in China. The Hmong lived peacefully until the King of China declared war on them. In each dynasty, the King of China pursued the Hmong to join their religion (Buddhism) and if they would not, wanted to driven the Hmong out of their territory. The Hmong and the Chinese people had many conflicts over many centuries. The Hmong had many rebellions toward the Chinese over many dynasties, where the Hmong were defeated and forced to move southward to Indochina by the end of the 19th century. After they left, most settled on the mountaintops of Indochina: Laos, Thailand, Burma, and Vietnam (Yang, 1995).

Many Hmong traveled a long and difficult journey from China to Indochina by foot. The result of the journey was hardship, starvation, and death. In their journey to Indochina, Hmong migrants had to walk over steep mountains, through narrow gorges, and jungles. Along the way to a new settlement, many people, particularly the elders, could not survive the long journey. They died and were buried along the way. When food ran out, many families had to exchange their children for millet cakes. In other cases, even wives were traded for food. This was the "Trail of Tears" for the Hmong people. Despite these hardships, many Hmong survived and reached their destinations (Yang, 1995).

Theories of Hmong Origins

Thao (1999) indicated that there are four theories of Hmong origins. As of today, many Hmong have no idea where exactly they were originally rooted. According to T. Lor (personal communication, June 19, 2006), he was told of a folktale, a piece of history about Hmong people's homeland. In this folktale that T. Lor's father told him, the homeland of the Hmong people was Mongolia because the word "Mongolia" referred to the princess's name (Moua Kao Lee), the prince of a foreign country near China who came to marry one of the Hmong women; therefore, the country was named after her. Many people stated that the Hmong originally lived in China and when the Hmong were defeated, they traveled down south to Thailand and Laos. There was no recorded history of the Hmong because Hmong writing had not yet been developed. There are four common theories of origin. The four theories were passed on as oral stories from generation to generation. Most modern Hmong value one or the other, so no one of the theories is more or less accepted. According to Thao, since Hmong people did not have any writing system of their own; their early history was recorded by Western and Chinese scholars.

Theory of Mesopotamian Origin.

This theory holds that Hmong people originated in the Mesopotamia region, which encompasses present-day Iraq and Syria in the Middle East. Savina, a French Catholic Missionary, who studied Hmong culture and history in Laos and Vietnam, introduced this theory. After several years of research, Savina argued that the ancestors of the Hmong were a subgroup of the Turanians, an ethnic group forced out of the region by the Aryans. According to this theory, the ancestors of the Hmong then migrated from central Asia through Turkestan, Russia, Siberia, Mongolia, Manchuria, Honan, Tibet, and the plains of the Yellow River (Thao, 1999, p. 29).

Theory of Ultimate Southern Origin.

This theory was advanced by Eickstedt, an expert on Hmong history. This theory holds that the Hmong originated in southwestern China, which is present-day Myanmar (Burma) and Tibet before migrating further into China as far north as the Yellow River (Thao, 1999, p. 29-31).

The Theory of China Origin.

Many experts on Hmong history argued that the Hmong were in China before the Chinese because it is the Chinese who mentioned the Hmong in their history as the "Miao." The Hmong had already occupied the Yellow River basin by the twenty-seventh century B.C. Historian Geddes estimated that the Hmong were driven off the plains of the Yellow River between 2700 B.C. and 2300 B.C. The theory of China origin probably has the most support among historians (Thao, 1999, p. 31).

The Theory of Russian Origin.

Larteguy, who researched the Hmong in Southeast Asia in the 1950s, advanced the theory of Russian origin. Larteguy argued that the Hmong at one time had occupied the huge Siberian plain around Lake Baikal, located in Russia, north of Mongolia (Thao, 1999, p. 32).

Chronology of Hmong History

Thao indicated a chronological history of the Hmong as listed below:

2700 B.C.: The Hmong occupy the Yellow River region of China

206 B.C. - 220 A.D.: The Hmong were forced out to the Kansu region of China as a political buffer by the Chou Dynasty.

618 A.D.: The Tang Dynasty re-conquered the Hmong territories in present-day China.

907 A.D.: Sung Dynasty

1360-1644 A.D.: Ming Dynasty

1644-1911 A.D.: Manchu Dynasty

1810-1820 A.D.: Many Hmong migrate out of China to Laos by way of Vietnam, Burma, and Thailand.

1917-1922: The Mad War (Rog Phimbab) led by Pa Chay against the French.

1941-1945: World War II (Known to the Hmong as Rog Yivpoos - the "Japanese War")

1946: The Beginning of the Cold War.

1963-1975: The Vietnam War and the U.S. Secret Army in Laos.

1975: Hmong Refugees move to Thailand.

1976 to Present Time: Hmong refugees move to the United States, France, Australia, French Guyana, and Canada (Thao, 1999, p. 28).

Hmong in Vietnam War

According to Dunnigan and Nofi (1999) and Taylor (2003), the Vietnam War (also known as the Second Indochina War and colloquially as Vietnam or "Nam" as well as the American War) was a conflict in which the Democratic Republic of Vietnam and its allies fought against the Republic of Vietnam and its allies. Vietnam was divided into two sections known as North Vietnam and South Vietnam. North Vietnam was a communist country, trying to take over South Vietnam, an independent country. North Vietnam's allies included the National Front of the Liberation of South Vietnam, the Soviet Union, and the People's Republic of China. South Vietnam's allies included the United States and South Korea.

Before the Vietnam War, American troops were sent to aid South Vietnam because of the French revolution against the North Vietnam. The French were involved in the war due to the previous Indonesia War with North Vietnam. The French had a good relationship with the

Hmong and decided to help out. The French just came out of a war where money was an issue. The Americans spent millions of dollars to help the French with supplies including weapons and ammunitions. President Eisenhower continued Truman's policy of assisting the French in Indochina. The Americans did not get involved until two Americans were killed. This gave reason for the Americans to participant in the war. The Vietnam War started in 1959, when two American servicemen (Major Dale Buis and Master Chester Ovnard) were killed by Viet Cong on an attack on Bien Hoa (Summers, 1985; Taylor, 2003). According to Summers (1985), at the time of the incident in 1959, approximately 760 U.S. military personnel were in Vietnam. The United States wanted to station its troops in South Vietnam, fearing that North Vietnam might decide to attack South Vietnam because North Vietnam has more military weapons.

The Hmong were involved with the Vietnam War starting in 1960 through 1975; the Hmong were strong fighters for the United States against the communists. For 15 years, Hmong life was not the same as before the war. There were many family members killed or lost. As a result of the war, many Hmong wives lived without their husbands and children. An estimated 25,000-30,000 Hmong died during the war as a direct result of supporting the United States (Yang, 1995). The numbers vary, but many more lives were lost in making the escape from Laos to Thailand's refugee camps.

According to Dunnigan and Nofi (1999) and Merritt (1993), the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), from 1960 to 1962, made a deal with many of the Hmong tribes in more isolated areas of Laos to fight the communists. Vang Pao, who was Hmong, was one of the Laotian officers and was asked by the Colonel Billy (CIA name) to gather Hmong to help fight for the United States. By 1962, many Hmong were trained and armed with weapons, ready to defend their homes and take control of the Ho Chi Minh Trail. The Hmong were stationed heavily on

the Ho Chi Minh Trail due to the Geneva Conference (1961-1962) of Laos being a “neutralization” country. This means that the Americans cannot step foot into Laos’ territory and that is why the Americans recruited Hmong soldiers to fight in Laos.

The Hmong were lead by Vang Pao. Vang Pao’s plans were to organize a Hmong guerrilla army and harass the communists once they entered the plain, cut their supply lines, and bog them down. Vang Pao had served in the French (Indochina) for seven years, organized by a French Special Services officer name Max Mesnier. Vang Pao had attended a private school at Nong Het in Laos. While attending school, Vang Pao worked as a translator and messenger for the French commandos. Later, the French took Vang Pao into their arms and put him into an officer candidate school at Dong Hene in Laos (Quincy, 2000, p. 160-162). Vang Pao worked his way up to become an officer in the French military and later lead the Hmong against the Viet Cong.

During the Vietnam War, many Hmong troops were stationed along the Ho Chi Minh Trail to protect the supply route through Laos because of the agreement of neutralization policy; Americans were not allowed ground troops initially. The Hmong were stationed heavily on the Ho Chi Minh Trail. Since the Americans cannot enter into Laos, the Hmong were given a very important task, which is to stop the supply route from North Vietnam to South Vietnam. The Americans were to help the Hmong by bombing the supply routes. The Hmong ran more missions than a single American’s plot. One of the tasks given to the Hmong troops was to help rescued American pilots when they were being taken down. There were dozens of Hmong who died in order to rescue one American pilot. Also, over 100 Hmong pilots were recruited and trained by the U.S., and they ran mission after mission until they were all killed. Hmong courage seemed to know no bounds in the fight for freedom (Lindsay, 2002).

According to Thai officials, for years after the war and the Hmong migration from Laos to Thailand, 50 to 60 dead Hmong bodies were fished out of the Mekong River per day with nets (Lindsay, 2002). The Mekong River separated Laos from Thailand and had to be crossed by those fleeing Laos to refugee camps set up in Thailand. It is estimated that about 18,000 Hmong soldiers had been killed in battle along with an uncertain number of women and children. When the Americans pulled out of Vietnam, the Hmong were left to fight on their own. At great risk from retaliation from the communists, more than 100,000 Hmong fled to Thailand. It is estimated that 30,000 Hmong died trying to get to Thailand and over 100,000 died during the war (Who Are...?, 2002). According to Lindsay (2002), there were about 100,000 Hmong people who died during the Vietnam War. Overall 100,000 Hmong lost their lives during the war. Many people were killed by the Viet Cong, many suffered and died from famine and many more died from crossing the Mekong River.

When the United States pulled their troops from Southeast Asia in 1975, Laos fell to the communists. The Hmong became a favorite target for the North Vietnamese and the Pathet Lao. The North Vietnamese and Pathet Lao are a group of communist that side with Ho Chi Minh against the Hmong resisters and the United States during the Vietnam War. The fields and houses of any pro-American Hmong villages were burned, their animals slaughtered, and the people chased down and killed (Yang, 1995). In mid-May 1975, the Americans helped airlift about five thousand Hmong from Long Chieng (Laos) to Nam Phong (Thailand). Before leaving Thailand, Vang Pao prepared the Hmong at Nam Phong for his departure and leaving the Hmong refugees behind. "Many of the tribal elders angrily denounced Vang Pao to his face and declared that he had led them to their destruction and that they would never follow him again". Many of the Hmong refugees were extremely angry at Vang Pao due to the fact that he was going to leave

many of his followers behind by coming to America. While departing to the United States, Vang Pao left three Hmong soldiers to monitor things while he is away (Quincy, 2000, p.444-445).

According to Mintz (2003), it is estimated that 58,132 Americans were killed in the Vietnam War. There were more than 150,000 wounded, and approximately 21,000 were permanently disabled. There were more than 3 million Americans, with an average age of 19, who served in the Vietnam War. There were about 100,000 Americans who fled from the United States to avoid serving in the conflict, and approximately 50,000 American servicemen deserted. Because of the war, the U.S. Veteran's Administration has estimated that 830,000 Vietnam veterans have suffered symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder, in which 480,000 were so deeply affected that they can be considered disabled.

Several hundred thousand American troops and Hmong were exposed to defoliants such as "Agent Orange". "Agent Orange" was the nickname given to a powerful herbicide and defoliant used by the U.S. military in its Herbicidal Warfare program during the Vietnam War. "Agent Orange" was used from 1961 to 1971. The purpose of using Agent Orange was a program that was twofold, one to destroy the "cover" provided by the jungle-like forest, and another to deny food to the enemy (Wikipedia, 2007). Mintz estimated the cost of the war in Vietnam during the Kennedy, Johnson, and Nixon administrations to be \$176 billion (Different estimates because of actual years counted as "Vietnam War").

Many Hmong fled through the jungles of Laos and crossed the Mekong River to Thailand. They were put into refugee camps and waited to be placed in countries that would agree to take them. The United States, Canada, and France were among the first choices for the Hmong. The largest Hmong populations in the United States are concentrated in California, Minnesota, and Wisconsin (Yang, 1995). The United States recognized the sacrifices made by

Hmong soldiers, fighting for the U.S. and began accepting Hmong refugees into the United States as of December, 1975. By 1990, about 100,000 refugees had entered the United States. Today approximately 250,000 Hmong are in the United States and a similar number still live in Laos. Over 5 million Hmong people are in Southern China under communist rule (Lindsay, 2002).

Later in 1975, many Hmong and Lao soldiers and families settled in the United States. Many of the Hmong families are still waiting for reunification. The Laos Veterans of America (LVA) was established to recognize those soldiers who fought during the Vietnam War. This is a non-profit organization. The headquarter of LVA is located in Fresno, California. The LVA was the largest Hmong organization in the United States. Members of the LVA have been awarded with medals and recognized for their efforts during the Vietnam War. The Hmong and Lao veterans asked Congress and the President of the United States to grant those veterans and their families' full U.S. citizenship, and the Hmong Veterans Naturalization Act was enacted on May 26, 2000 (Vang, 1998).

Hmong Living in America

Still, as of today, many Americans do not know the whole story about the Vietnam War and why Hmong immigrated to the US. Many lives and homes had been lost. Numbers of bodies had not been discovered after the war and no one really knows where the missing bodies are. According to T. Lor (personal communication, June 19, 2006), "During the war, my family left my disabled sister in the jungle with one bag of rice. After the war, my family went back to the place where she was left behind. She was nowhere to be found. My family had no idea where she could end up. My family predicted that she might be killed by the Viet Cong, since she was easy to target."

“Reflection” is a Hmong folk band in the United States. They have written many great songs. On July 4, 2006, in Saint Paul, Minnesota, home to about 50,000 Hmong, they released a music video about the Hmong culture. This quote was taken from the music video: “Our people have been persecuted for many centuries. We lost our king, our country, and our old way of life, but even through so much hardship and pain, we managed to keep our culture, language, and spirit through the art of embroidered cloth and folktales. In America, our culture is slowly fading away. That is why we must teach our children about our culture. They need to know who they are and where they come from” (Reflection, 2006).

Although Hmong traveled to the United States, their culture, religion, and language still remain. Each year, many cities hold Hmong New Years to celebrate the ending of one year and the upcoming New Year. At the Hmong New Year, it is a time to represent Hmong heritage by wearing Hmong clothing. Many events take place in the Hmong New Year such as ball-toss, music, dancing, jokes and laughter, etc. Many people come to celebrate and share many memories of their lives.

However, living in the United States, many parts of the Hmong culture are disappearing, and it has been difficult for the Hmong people to survive in a society where the Hmong are not a familiar part of the history. Today, many Hmong people are adapting to American society. Although many Hmong people are adapting to American culture, many Hmong people still remember the human cost of the Vietnam War.

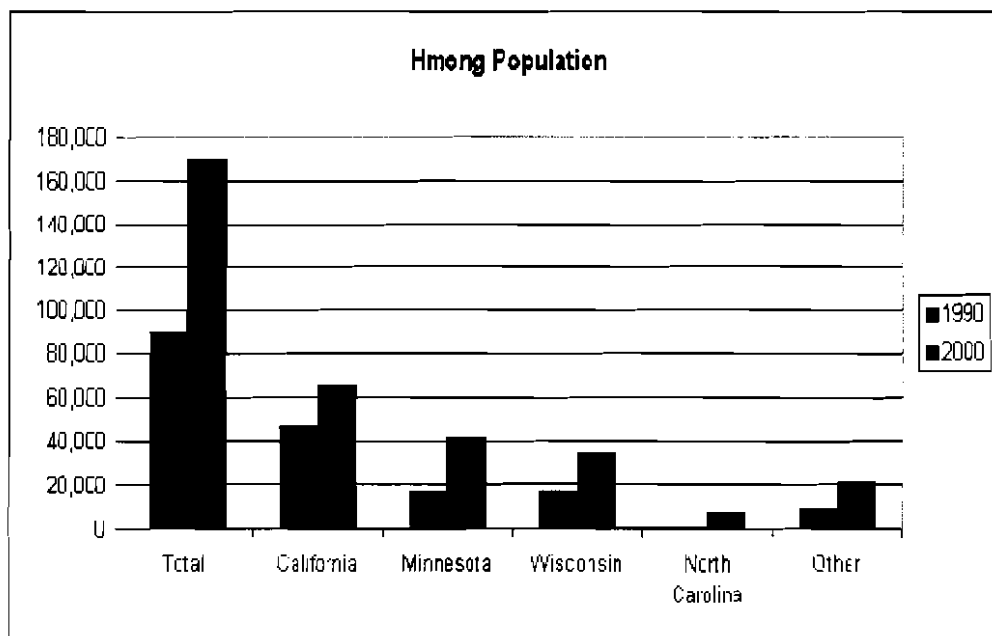
N. Lor stated that, “I could never forget my own race and where I came from. I am very sad that this generation’s children are not willing to take the time to understand who they are, which makes me very angry. I believe when I die my grandchildren will not going to know my history and who we are. I don’t understand why today Hmong people are going to church. Since

they are Hmong, they should believe in Shamanism like old times. Living in America is not the same as living in Laos. In Laos there's the freedom to do anything that you wanted to do and in America it is impossible to do what you really wanted to do. For example, chicken fighting, which that is animal cruelty; therefore, it is not the same no more. If I ever have the chance to go back to Laos or Thailand, I would be very happy to go back" (personal communication, June 19, 2006).

Most Hmong came shortly after the end of 1975. However, many of the immigrants did not come to the United States until the early 2000's. Table one shows the growth of Hmong people in the United States from 1990-2000 in the majority areas of Hmong settlement ([requested permission], University of Eau Claire, Hmong Population Research Project, http://www.uwec.edu/econ/Research/hmong/H2000_us_census.htm).

Table 1

2000 U.S. Census--Hmong Population Growth



After the war, many of the Hmong scattered throughout Southeast Asia. Many of them were put into refugee camps, either in Laos or Thailand. Many Hmong became citizens in some other countries to avoid staying in the refugee camps. Table two shows countries where Hmong people settled and the estimated population in 2000 ([requested permission], United Hmong International, Inc., and Lao Human Rights Council, Inc., <http://home.earthlink.net/~laohumrights/2000data.html>).

Table 2

Hmong Population in the World year 2000

Countries	Estimated Figure in Year 2000
1. Mainland China	9,700,000
2. Vietnam	1,200,000
3. Laos	400,000
4. Thailand	300,000
5. USA	300,000
6. Burma (Myanmar)	100,000
Total Estimate of Hmong Population	12,000,000

After General Vang Pao came to the United States in May of 1975, there was still much Hmong resistance against the Pathet Lao communists. The resisters called themselves "Sky Soldiers" (Sky was the CIA codename for U.S. military operations in Laos), also called Chao Fa. Thousands of Hmong went to the hills, dug up rifles they had buried, and organized their

continued resistance movements and many have not been heard from again (D.C. Everest Area Schools, 2001, pg. 29).

Many of the villagers became Chao Fa and lived in the mountains or hills. Their determination was to get to Thailand safely. Not all of the Hmong survivors made it to Thailand, but those who remain in Laos still continue to live in the mountain. The Pathet Lao government used a variety of means to crush the resistance movements inside Laos. Hmong settlements were burned to the ground and their inhabitants executed. Poisonous chemicals were sometimes dropped on resisters and civilians living in the jungle regions. Many were sent to "re-education camps" where they were instructed on the new ways of the communist government (D.C. Everest Area Schools, 2001, pg. 30).

Current Issues

As of today, many Hmong are still under communist control, and many are still hiding in the mountains, being chased day by day. Recently, the Thai government started digging Hmong ancestors' graves in Thailand, which enraged the Hmong. The Hmong were very frustrated how the Thai government was digging their loved ones grave. In the Wausau Wisconsin community, the Hmong population stated that the Thai decided to dig their ancestor's graves because the Thai government wants to build more constructions such as roads and houses. Many of the Hmong complained to the Thai government for digging up their ancestors. According to T. Lor (personal communication, June 19, 2006), the Thai government said that the water was contaminated by the graves; therefore the graves must be removed. The Hmong had no power; therefore, it was hard for the Hmong to do anything about it.

After the Vietnam War, many Hmong settled in America. As a result of the war, many Hmong suffered from post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), a mental illness cause by a

disturbing outside event that cannot be forgotten. The symptoms of PTSD are flashbacks, emotional detachment, and jumpiness (Wikipedia, 2007). Many of the Hmong did not seek help and kept the pain inside. The memories of the Vietnam War will never vanish and many have died in their sleep. In the early 1980's, many Hmong died in their sleep, but medical doctors could not find the answer to why so many Hmong had passed away. Post traumatic stress disorder may be linked to why Hmong have died in their sleep, but no one really knows. The answers are still unsolved.

Shortly after the Hmong arrived to the United States there were many cases of Sudden Unexpected Nocturnal Death Syndrome (SUNDS). Many of the middle aged Hmong males, who appeared to be healthy, went to sleep and never woke up. The Hmong practiced Shamanism, which believes that the soul has left the body. There is nothing comparable to soul loss in Western medicine, which focused on disease and organ systems, not a person's spiritual reality (Erickson, 2001). As of today, many Hmong still believed that when a person died in their sleep the soul has left the body; therefore, a Shaman will perform a spiritual ceremony to bring back the soul to the person's body. According to Shamanism, the spiritual ceremony performed by the Shaman will supposedly bring back the person's soul into his or her body. According to T. Lor (personal communication, October 12, 2007), "I believed in shamanism because it worked for me and my family had believed in shamanism for a long time. I only used western medicine when it is required a decision [to make] of life and death when one of my family members are at the verge of death. I also believed that western medicine helps cure people's diseases, but not the soul. I had experienced many times my soul had left my body and my body was very weak. I went to the hospital to get a check up and the doctor said there is nothing to worry about. I know my own body more than the doctor and still the doctor didn't find anything strange about

my body. I came home and I felt like I had no strength left. I thought I was going to die. I looked around for a Shaman to perform a spiritual ceremony and after the Shaman performed the ceremony I felt better and gained more strength. If it was not for Shamanism then I would have been dead by now.

Chapter III: Methodology

This chapter will describe the process for collecting Hmong soldiers' personal experiences during the Vietnam War. Data was collected by interview over the course of two weeks. In the interview process the session was taped by using a small tape recorder. The sample of the participants was two Hmong soldiers who served in the Vietnam War, one who served as a teenager and one who served as an adult.

Description of the Subjects

The subjects included in the study were two Hmong soldiers from Wausau, Wisconsin. Wausau has become home to approximately 37,000 Hmong refugees according to the 2000 US Census. The participants' ages were 16 years old and 36 years old when they began their duties as soldiers. Their memory of the Vietnam War has been 30 years gone. They will tell their stories of how they survived the war and came to America. They are from the family of the researcher and are currently 44 years old and 70 years old in age. They escaped at the end of the war, went to "Area 52" refugee camps in Thailand and relocated to the United States in 1989.

Process Selection

The subjects in the study were not randomly sampled. Since the researcher had a close connection and access to the Hmong community in the Wausau area, the participants were selected from this community. The two participants were selected for 3 reasons. The first reason was because not a lot of information about Hmong veterans' personal stories about the Vietnam War has been documented. The second reason was because their stories are important to pass on to their grandchildren and future descendents of how they survived the Vietnam War and come to America. Finally, hopefully more Americans will come to understand the role of the Hmong in that war and the promises made to them by the U.S.

Instrumentation

A consent form for participation in the research study was written in both English and Hmong and was sent to the participants along with the questions for interviewing before the actual interview began (Appendix A). The participants could refuse to participate in the research at any time. If the participants had questions regarding any of the questions or refuse to answer any of the questions, they could refuse by telling the researcher ahead of time. In addition, giving the questions to the participants ahead of time allows the participants to think about what and how they want to answer the questions. The interview process occurred over a two week period of time.

The researcher came up with his own instrument for the interview process, developing a questionnaire survey (See Appendix B). The instrument was used in this research by conducting interviews with the Hmong soldiers. When conducting the interview a tape recorder was used to record information.

Data Collection Procedures

The participants' identities are protected; however, they have requested that their surnames be used when referring to them. In this research study, these two participants will be referred to as Chong and Wa. They voluntarily agreed to participate in this study before the researcher gave them the survey. The researcher had direct contacts with the participants. The researcher spent one week with each of the participants to gather information for the questionnaire survey. The interviews took place orally in the privacy of their homes. The researcher explained to the participants that the research was voluntarily, and that they could quit at anytime before or during the interview process. Copies of the interview questionnaire were distributed one week before the interview actually took place. They were informed that their

privacy and identity would be protected and kept confidential. They understood that the researcher would use their Hmong surnames but not their clan names. They agreed and consented to the use.

Data Analysis

This is historical research; therefore, the data analysis is answered by the researcher's self-developed survey questionnaire. The questionnaire survey was developed in an effort to determine the similarities and differences from the participants' perspectives of the Vietnam War. The data collected was organized and analyzed in order to compare the two participants' perspective, as a teenager and an adult serving in the Vietnam War.

Chapter IV: Interview Results

The following information has been written as it was taken from the participants' responses by the researcher. The answers to each survey question will be written from the first person view. The format of chapter IV is written in questions followed by the participants' answers. The questions were asked by the researcher in chronological order from the interview survey. The participants did not refuse to answer any questions at any time. The participants answered all the survey questions in a story format. Then the researcher took both participants' stories and put them together to answer the questions being asked. The interviews were recorded and then the researcher reflected back, in Hmong, the stories told by the participants to make sure the questions were answered correctly.

Wa's Personal Experiences in the Vietnam War

How old were you? What were you told about the war?

I will now explain the war as it happened in Vietnam; fighting for our lives to survive against the Viet Cong. I have been a soldier since I was 16 years old. My family lived in a little village in Laos called Pooh Hay (Phus Hej) [this is a place you will not find in a map; it is a place Hmong people will recognize, and know where it located] in the center of Laos.

After the CIA had left Vietnam in 1975, the Viet Cong came to my village and started killing suspicious people that might have been involved with the Americans. Our crops and animals were destroyed and killed; therefore, there was nothing left to farm. The Viet Cong were in control of the village and they killed many innocent people. The Viet Cong controlled the village during the day and left at sun down. The villagers were not allowed to step outside of the village. We had no choice but to leave our village and hide. Chao Fa is a group of people that resisted against the Viet Cong. They were trying to escape to Thailand for safety. All of the

villagers decided to become Chao Fa and lived in the mountain, hiding from the Viet Cong. This was a time of crisis. My family went to the mountain westward bringing what we can carry such as food supplies (a pot and rice). We left all of our personal belongings behind.

In the mountain, the villagers went and dug up weapons that the CIA had left behind. With the weapons, villagers were able to protect themselves from the Viet Cong. Survival in the mountain were not easy. There was not enough food for everybody; therefore, people were dying because of starvation. We had no choice but to dig for potatoes and bamboos for survival.

My family stayed in the mountain for one year, until the Viet Cong were in the mountain killing innocent people. When this happened my family started to move westward toward the Mekong River in hope of crossing the river to Thailand for safety. However, my nuclear family and my brother decided to move back to the mountain near Pooh Hay (Phus Hej) instead of trying to crossover to Thailand with the rest of the family. With the Viet Cong always on patrol of the village, it was difficult to farm, but we have decided that it would still be best for us to live on the mountain verses always on the run from the Viet Cong without food supplies.

What were your duties as a soldier?

As a soldier, my duties were to keep my families alive and cross over the Mekong River to safety. I was not in any part of a squad unit or anything like that. When the war broke out my families were separated and left me in charged of the rest of the families. A few families in the village decided to join my family to flee to Thailand. There were a total of six males equipped with guns and I was the youngest. We had made up our own little unit trying to escape from death. At the time we were trying to set out of the village, I was not equipped with any weapon. The men in the group told me that I have to be in the look out for Viet Cong soldiers, while we tried to escape. I was put in charge of spotting scouting Viet Cong soldiers since I was not

equipped with any weapons. I was mostly apart from the rest of the group at least a quarter mile. Before we move to any new area, I would have to scout the area first and then go back and get the rest of the group if it was safe to do so. By doing this, if I ever got caught it would only be me not the whole group. I did not agree to this duty, but at the moment there was not any choice for me to choose. While scouting, I was scared to death, not knowing if I will get caught or not and if I did get caught what would happen to me. I remembered scouting each area with fear and my body would not want to move. I could hear the loud gun fire and exploding bombs from a distance. Once we have made it safely to the Mekong River, my duty was to make sure every member of the group made it safely across the Mekong River.

During the war, where did you hide for safety?

For four years, my family and my brother lived on the mountain. Finally, in 1979, I decided that it is time to set out to Thailand for my family's safety. Everyone agreed to try to cross over to Thailand. Everyone gathered their weapons and children, preparing to leave the mountain side. This was our second time attempting to head to Thailand. There were about 10 people in our group, trying to make it safely to the Mekong River. I was carrying two guns, an M-16 and an AK rifle. The M-16 was one of the weapons left behind by the CIA. The AK rifle was taken from a Viet Cong soldier that I had killed. That was how I had gotten a hold of two guns. I used the guns to protect my family and myself while we were on the run. However, the M-16 only had 100 bullets left and the AK rifle had no bullet. There were times I wanted to use my M-16 to kill animals for food, but I did not dare to use my M-16 for I knew that the M-16 is my only weapon for protecting my family from the Viet Cong. I was afraid that if all of the bullets were out, it would very easy for the Viet Cong to catch my family.

Your journey to Thailand, what was the journey like?

Thousands of people rushed to Thailand for safety; however, I believe that only 1% of the Hmong population actually made it to Thailand. This was a time of risk, whether you are going to live or die. I saw thousands of dead body lying everywhere during my journey to the Mekong River.

On the journey to the Mekong River, thousands of innocent Hmong people were killed by the Viet Cong soldiers as well as starving to death. When we arrived at the Mekong River, I saw many of the Viet Cong soldiers killing innocent Hmong people for fun. I witnessed the Viet Cong soldiers tied a Hmong soldier and tortured him to death. The Viet Cong soldiers took his clothes off and used a knife to cut his skin open. I can still remember the crying scream of the young Hmong soldier. I could not do anything to help because there were so many Viet Cong soldiers patrolling the area and we did not have enough people to take on the Viet Cong.

During the journey to the Mekong River, most of the villagers that went with my family lost their lives. There were not many of us left at the end of the journey. The Viet Cong soldiers patrolled the Mekong River 24/7 [24 hours a day, 7 days a week]; therefore, it was impossible for us to go near the river. My family decided to move back to Pooh Hay (Phus Hej) for safety again. However, the rest of the villagers continued to move on. I do not know whether they made it safely to Thailand or not. My family wishes them the best of luck.

After we separated ways with the group of villagers at the Mekong River, we made our way back to Pooh Hay (Phus Hej); however, we decided again to go back and try to cross the Mekong River, for that is our only hope for survival.

Once we reached the Mekong River, we had to wait for a chance to cross the river. We waited until around 1:00 A.M. to cross the Mekong River because Viet Cong soldiers know that

Hmong people would have to cross the river to get to Thailand. It was not easy for people to cross the river. I can remember the Viet Cong soldiers killing resisters one by one in the head. I was in rage but my family and I could not do anything except watch the Viet Cong kill the resisters such as ourselves. After watching the resisters being killed, the dead bodies were tossed into the water. Viet Cong soldiers were laughing in joyfulness as they tossed the bodies into the water. Hiding and watching Viet Cong soldiers happily enjoying their 'victory' made me want to pull the trigger and kill every single Viet Cong soldier until there is none left alive. The only thing that pulled me back was the thought of my family and their safety. If I were to take action, it would only endanger my family.

My family and I had observed the Viet Cong for several days to see when it would be safe to swim across the Mekong River. We carefully observed the time the Viet Cong soldiers come to patrol area and the time they leave the station. We did not want to lose our lives when we came so far. My family and I came up with a plan; hope that the plan would work out. The plan was that when the Viet Cong soldiers leave their station, we would divide into two groups. The first group will swim across while the other group stays behind to protect the first group from the Viet Cong. Then when the first group reaches the middle of the river, the second group will follow. We planned it this way because of safety and in case the Viet Cong came back. Since I had a weapon I had to stay behind to guard the first group. It was scary and my eyes wondered everywhere looking for the Viet Cong. I was very fortunate that there was not any killing during our swim across the Mekong River.

It was difficult to cross the Mekong River early in the morning because the water was cold. We could not possibly cross the Mekong River at night because Viet Cong soldiers patrolled the area tightly to prevent any Chao Fa from getting to Thailand's boarder. When

crossing the Mekong River, I threw my M-16 and AK rifle weapons in the water, so when Viet Cong soldiers come back during the day, they would not find evidence that there were Chao Fa people trying to cross the Mekong River.

My family did not have any water tubes to cross the Mekong River; instead we used bamboo trees to get across the river. Before nightfall, all the men gathered bamboo trees and then tied three to five bamboo trees together for support while we swim across the river. Ropes we used to tie the bamboo trees together were made from our shirts and from tree vines.

When crossing the Mekong River, we put the bamboo trees we had tied together under our armpits to help us float easier in water while we swim with our legs. It was very difficult to swim because we were holding on to the bamboo trees and also carrying children on our backs. I feel very sad for those children who did not make it through. I still remember some of the villagers dropped their child (ren) in the water because the child either was dead or was not going to survive the journey.

After about seven hours, we reached the Thai boarder. My body was so stiff that I could not move. I was in the water so long that I did not have any energy to walk once we have reached land. We were fortunate that the Thai soldiers took my family to a refugee camp immediately after we landed in Thailand. The refugee camp that we were sent to was called Nong Khai (Noom Qais) [This is a place you will not find on a map; it is a place Hmong people will recognize and know where it is located]. There we were given food, shelter, and clothing. We were in Nong Khai (Noom Qais) for three months; then we were sent to Sam Neua (San Neua Phouamg). We did not stay there long. My family moved to Ban Vinai [(It is the largest refugee camp for the Hmong population that crossed over from Laos. Hmong families were

placed in Ban Vinai prior to coming to United States of America)]. I married my wife when I was in Ban Vinai.

Describe what the war was like?

The Vietnam War was a war I could never forget. I fought for no reason and I survived. I was very fortunate that I survived and now, able to tell my side of the story; a story that many people would never understand.

I remembered going through the jungle not knowing when I will be shot at and always fear that I might get caught by Viet Cong soldiers. I did not want to be a victim of the Viet Cong soldiers. I have seen Viet Cong soldiers' tortured Hmong men, blind-folded and shot behind the head and raped Hmong women. It was cruel and inhuman.

Do you think if the Hmong had not helped the Americans fight the war, there wouldn't have been any impact on the Hmong behalf?

I believed that if the Hmong had never helped the Americans, there might not be as much bloodshed in the beginning. I wish this war have had never started or even if it starts, the war should never have involved the Hmong people. If the Hmong were never involved in the war there might not have been as much death and bloodshed for the Hmong people. We might have been able to live a more peaceful, non-racist life. Unfortunately, fate had put Hmong people up for a crisis task.

Name several events that you are never going to forget during/after the war?

During the Vietnam War, I will never forget:

1. The crying and screaming of resisters (Hmong) fleeing their life to safety
2. The gun fire and bomb blasting everywhere
3. Airplanes flying all over
4. Seeing dead bodies lying everywhere

5. Crossing the Mekong River

After the Vietnam War, I will never forget:

1. Seeing dead bodies lying everywhere
2. The escape routine to freedom crossing the Mekong River
3. The path that I took to Thailand
4. The smell of dead bodies
5. The soldiers that I killed

What was the most fearful moment of your life during the Vietnam War?

During the Vietnam War, my most fearful moment was while sleeping. It was impossible to tell if death would come to you or not while you are sleeping at night. The thought of being captured and killed by [sic] the Viet Cong soldiers while I am sleeping constantly ran through my mind. I did not want to die young.

How did you manage to survive the war? What survival skills were needed to survive in the jungle?

I survived the Vietnam War by escaping to Thailand. The journey to Thailand was not an easy task to accomplish. There were many hardships that I had been through. I survived the war by living in the jungle, eating whatever I could find such as grass, rats, bamboo shoots, etc. I was lucky that I did not get sick. To survive the jungle I kept myself warm at night by gathering long grass to use as a blanket so that I would not catch a cold.

As of today, do you still wish to go back to live in Thailand or Laos, if you have the choice? Why?

If I have the chance to go back to Laos, I would gladly go because that is where I was born and rise. [sic] I missed the mountain range and 'no rule or regulation' life style I grew up

with. Living in Laos, rules and regulations did not apply to those living in the mountain. Also, I missed the fresh smell of the forest and rising animals.

What do you remember the most?

As of today, I still remember the soldiers that I killed. It will always be in my mind and it would never disappear. Once in a while, I would have nightmares about the soldiers that I killed. There were times when I was alone; I could still hear the noise of Chao Fa screaming, gun fires, and an airplane dropping bombs. Tear drops still come running down my face without me consciously thinking about the past, in which I am sometimes scared myself.

What was your perception of the Vietnam War then? What is your perception now?

I have not thought of the Vietnam War for a long time now because I have so many things to worried about such as taking care of my family and getting my bills paid on time. When I was about 16 years old, I firmly believed that the war was not necessary and that people should not have to die for it; many innocent people had lost their lives, family members lose loved ones, etcetera. Moreover, I was not prepared to go to war. I was young and I had never killed anyone in my life, however, my life had changed due to the Vietnam War.

My perception of the war has not changed after 17 years in the United States. However, somewhere deep in my heart I understand that if it were not for the Vietnam War, my family would not be in the United States right now and my children would not have this wonderful opportunity to go to school and better educate themselves. I want my children to be educated. I have never had the chance to learn how to read and write. Most importantly, I want my children to have a bright future; not just becoming a farmer but to have the opportunity to become successful in life.

When the Vietnam War ended, where were you located?

I have been living in America for 17 years now. I have five children who were born in America. We have eleven people in my family. I first settled in Wausau, Wisconsin and I stayed here ever since then. I was fortunate that all of my siblings made it safely to America. I was the last one out of my family to come over to America.

How long did you spend in refugee camps before coming to the United States?

I lived in Ban Vinai for 9 years with my wife and parents. In 1989, I have four children and we were sent to Pa Na Ne Chong [This is a place you will not find on a map; it is a place Hmong people will recognize, and know where it is located], another refugee camp in Thailand. Living in the refugee camp was not easy compared to life in the mountain. The rules in the refugee camp were strict; no refugee could go outside the camp. I hate [sic] living in the refugee camp because there was really nothing to do besides eat and sleep. My family stayed in Pa Na Ne Chong for 3 months and registered to come to the United States. Luckily we were able to leave Pa Na Ne Chong and come to the United States.

What was the hardest part about coming to the U.S.?

Not knowing English was the hardest part about coming to America. It was very difficult not being able to ask for food or medication while we were on the airplane. [sic] First time flying made me sick. Moreover, it was hard not knowing where to go when changing flights. Despite of the difficulties that we went through, we managed to get to the United States.

Chong's Personal Experiences in the Vietnam War

As of today, I am 71 years old. I could still remember the Vietnam War like it was only yesterday. I remembered every detail during the war. Even though I am old, I could never forget my experiences during the Vietnam War. I lived in Wausau, Wisconsin all my life after I

left Thailand. All of my sons had made it safely to America, and I am glad that no one got killed.

How old were you? What were you told about the war?

When I joined General Vang Pao to fight in the Vietnam War in 1973, I was 35 years old. I lived in a small village called Pooh Hay. My wife and I lived with my second son at the time. I was forced to join the army under the circumstance we were in. I had no choice but to fight. We were given instructions and weapons. I was not sure where I would end up, but I was sure I would be defending some area. I was only told that we fight the war in order to protect our women and children.

My first weapon was an M-16. We practiced shooting outside of the village, near the rice field. All of the men in our village including my son had to join the army. I remembered young boy (teenagers) holding weapons in their hands, trying to defend their lives. I could not begin to imagine how hard it would be for a teenager to kill somebody. I was not afraid at the time, holding my M-16 rifle and thinking of killing my enemies. We target practice three days straight in the morning to the evening. The third day of target practice, some soldiers were given military uniforms; however, there were not enough uniforms to go around. I was lucky that I got a uniform.

What was the most fearful moment of your life during the Vietnam War?

Living here in America, I can still remember the journey to the Mekong River as well as staying in the refugee camps in Thailand. I suffered a tremendous amount of fear not knowing if I am going to survive. The most fearful moment for me was being captured by the Viet Cong soldiers because I [sic] seen many Viet Cong soldiers torture many innocent people. For example, they were being whipped and women being raped. I could never forget the loud noise

of gunfire and bombing. I have seen so many dead bodies on my way to the Mekong River. Children were dropped into the Mekong River one by one. Such experience I could never forget.

What were your duties as a soldier?

I was sent out of my village and relocated at another village where all of the villagers were gathering to fight against the Viet Cong. I did not like the idea of separating myself from my family. This was a critical time and I had no choice but to leave my family. When I left my village, I did not carry anything except my M-16 and a small military backpack. At the camp, I saw many villagers just like me who were farmers taking up arms against their will. I spent one night at the camp. The next day, I was put into a group. There were about sixty soldiers in a group. I was put in a group of soldiers that I never met before. Although I never met my group members, I felt like we had seen each other. This makes me feel more comfortable.

My group was sent out the next day and we arrived at the camp to guard the Ho Chi Minh Trail. We were sent immediately to help other soldiers who were guarding the Ho Chi Minh Trail. We had to walk through jungles and hills. At the same time, we had to be very cautious of the Viet Cong. My group was fortunate that we did not encounter any Viet Cong soldiers while traveling to the Ho Chi Minh Trail, although, I heard many gun fires coming from everywhere non-stop.

At the Ho Chi Minh Trail, everyone scattered and hide from the Viet Cong. In addition, our mission was to destroy any weapon supplies that were passing by. I was about 20 feet away from the trail, positioning myself behide an old tree. It was hard for me to see what was coming from both sides, so I climbed up the tree. By doing this, it was a lot easier for me to see the Viet Cong soldicrs and any carriages passing by. The other soldiers and I were five feet apart from each other.

I took my first shot with the M-16 and killed a Viet Cong soldier when a weapon carriage was passing by. There were many Viet Cong soldiers that I could not count all of them. The carriage was passing by about 20 feet away in front of me and I did not hesitate to fire. I took my time aiming at my enemy. I shot the soldier by the passenger side of an old truck. I was the first person to fire and then my group started firing. I climbed down from the tree and positioned myself behind the tree to protect myself from any incoming bullets. As shots were firing from all directions, I can hear soldiers from both sides screaming and shouting. We were outnumbered so we had to pull back. After everything had quieted down I realized that all my group members were either dead or had ran away. I [sic] retrieved not knowing which direction to go. I ran and ran until I could not hear the gun fires anymore. I was lost and did not know where to go.

I was wandering the jungle alone without any supply. My M-16 was almost out of bullets. I was fortunate I came across a dead soldier. The dead soldier was equipped with a water bottle, bullets, and a handgun. I took all of his equipments. After taking the dead soldier's equipments, I decided that I should head to Thailand for safety.

Describe what the war was like?

The Vietnam War was a war that the Hmong would never forget because it is an unexpected war, a war that was not necessary for the Hmong population to get involved with. Thousands had served in the war and many had died. Most of all, I felt terribly sorry for those who lost their lives fighting in the Vietnam War because they did not know what is truly going on and there were no proper burials for those who have died. I fought in the Vietnam War without knowing what exactly I was fighting for. I was not told the whole story.

The Vietnam War is a war that involved many countries because of wealth and power. I believed this is the reason why many countries were involved. The Hmong had no country of their own or a land of their own and yet the Hmong volunteered to fight for the sake of survival. This is a matter of live [sic] and death.

There was not a day of peace and quiet. The sounds of bombing and gun firings could be heard everyday and night over the hill. Every night I hoped that the sounds of bombing and firing would stop, but they never did. Not once since the war has started that I get a good night sleep. I constantly worried if I go to sleep, will I get up the next morning safely. There were so many crazy ideas of what could possibly happen to me running in my head, which made it difficult to fall asleep at night.

Your journey to Thailand, what was the journey like?

My journey to Thailand was not easy. I faced many hardships. In order for me to get to Thailand, I had to cross the Mekong River. I did not have any plans on how I am going to cross the river. Before reaching the Mekong River, there were a lot of terrifying memories.

I only traveled in the daylight through the jungle. There were times I came across small villages, but I did not dare to stop to rest or get more supplies. I was worried that the Viet Cong soldiers might be in the village; therefore, I continued working my way to the Mekong River. From the spot that I was positioned in the Ho Chi Minh Trail, I traveled 10 days until I reached the Mekong River. During those 10 days, I have killed many Viet Cong soldiers. I could not get a count [sic] how many enemies I had killed. In addition, I saw many dead bodies lying everywhere. However, I did not bother to take a look. I just kept going in hope of reaching my destination.

At night, I slept in [sic] cave to prevent [sic] from being captured [sic] by the Viet Cong soldiers. It was hard to sleep by leaning against rocks. To ensure my safety from anyone who may enter the cave, my M-16 was always on my side. I did not have a good sleeping pattern because I feared that the Viet Cong would sneak up on me and capture me; therefore, my ears were always on the lookout. Also, I did not have any blankets or sheets to cover me up. Through the night, it was cold in the cave and sometimes I made a little fire to warm me up before I go to sleep. When morning comes I started my routine all over again until I reached the Mekong River.

I reached the Mekong River in the afternoon by the tenth day. I was alone. The Viet Cong soldiers were patrolling the Mekong River like crazy; therefore, I did not make any move. I gathered bamboo trees so I could float on water. I prepared myself that night before attempting to cross the Mekong River. I had waited all day and night for my chance to cross the Mekong River. The Viet Cong soldiers did not leave their station until midnight. After the Viet Cong soldiers left their station, I waited two more hours to make sure the Viet Cong soldiers really left their station. I started to make my way to Thailand around 2:30 A.M. and I made it safely to Thailand.

Before crossing the Mekong River I threw my weapons and equipments in the water. I gathered bamboo trees, about 5 feet long, and started working my way to freedom. The bamboo trees were tugged [sic] under my armpits so that I could float and I used my legs to help me move. When I reached the middle of the river, it was around 4:00 A.M. I got so tired from using my legs to paddle, so I took a rest for 10 minutes. It was a beautiful night and it was a full moon. I gazed at the moon and stars, hoping that I will survive. I drifted slowly down the river. I happened to run into a group of Chao Fa working their way to Thailand. I decided to stay with

the group. The small children were being carried on their parents' backs. Unfortunately, some of the children did not make it. The children that died on their parents' backs slowly tipped over and dropped into the water. Women were crying, but nothing could be done. According to memories, six children died while we crossed the Mekong River over to Thailand.

During the war, where did you hide for safety?

During the Vietnam War, there was no one place that was safe to hide. The only safe place that I know was to cross the Mekong River to Thailand. Unfortunately, not everyone survived the war. Those who survived the war were blessed. However, the damage left by the tragedy of the war will always remain in my heart.

While I made my way to the Mekong River, I traveled in jungles and stayed in caves for safety. It was hard to stay in village due to Viet Cong soldiers patrolling the village strictly; it was also hard for the villagers to go outside of the village.

Name several events that you are never going to forget during/after the war?

During the Vietnam War, I [sic] will never going to forget [sic] are listed below:

1. Dead bodies lying everywhere
2. Crossing the Mekong River
3. The gun firing and bombing
4. Seeing people (Hmong) cried [sic]
5. Seeing my comrade die in front of me

After the Vietnam War, I [sic] will never going to forget [sic] are listed below:

1. All of the Hmong who fought in the Vietnam War
2. Not having enough food to eat
3. The path I took to the Mekong River

4. The cave I slept in
5. All of the Viet Cong that I killed

Do you think if the Hmong had not helped the Americans fight the war, there wouldn't have been any impact on the Hmong behalf?

I believed that if the Hmong people did not get involved in the Vietnam War with the Americans, our people would have been allies with Laos. Either way we would have been involved. If we (Hmong) were [sic] alliance with Laos, I believed that we would not have to suffer as many difficulties; we would not have to flee to Thailand for survival and our people would not have to suffer and die at the hands of the Viet Cong because Laos was an alliance of Vietnam. This would benefit the Hmong because the Hmong have knowledge of the wilderness and therefore, the Americans would have [sic] a disadvantage of the war due to the geography of the land.

How did you manage to survive the war? What survival skills were needed to survive in the jungle?

Most of my travel, I stayed in the mountain. There was not much food in the mountain. There were no animals to hunt; therefore, I ate bamboo shoots and berries to survive. The hardest part of surviving was finding water in the jungle. There were times that I came across small streams to fill my water bottle. Sometimes, I would go on for one to two days without any water.

As of today, do you still wish to go back to live in Thailand or Laos, if you had the choice? Why?

If I had the chance to go back to Laos to live, I would like to. Laos is my country; therefore, I would never forget the place that I was born. Living in America there are more rules and expectations than living in Laos. Also, in Laos there are not much rules or regulations;

therefore people can do anything they want. I am glad that my family came to America so that my children and the generations after could have a better future.

What do you remember the most?

I can never forget killing the Viet Cong soldiers in the fight for my life and the lives of my loved ones, fleeing for survival, and crossing the Mekong River. I had killed many young innocent soldiers just because they were considered the enemy. I felt terrible for what I had done. If I did not kill them, they would have killed me. I had to do what is necessary for my survival. During the war, it was not a time of justice, it was a time of crisis, fighting. Everyone was fighting in order to protect their lives; therefore, I had to kill to survive. Crossing the Mekong River was also a matter of life and death. Many people did not make it and drowned. I was one of the lucky ones that made it to Thailand. I can still feel the cold water running through my skin every time I wash my hands. I am neither happy nor sad. It is a sin that I will carry with me until I die, because what I have done to survive can never be undone.

What was your perception of the Vietnam War then? What is your perception now?

During the Vietnam War, I strongly believed that the war should have never started. The Hmong people should never have got involved in such a war. I believed that if the Americans did not asked [sic] the Hmong for help, then the population of the Hmong would not have decreased. Also, if the Hmong did not help the Americans, the Hmong would have lived a happier life. Even today, I still believe that the Hmong people should never have been involved.

When the Vietnam War ended, where were you located?

The war ended for me the moment I reached the Thai border in 1974. I fought my way out of Laos in one year. I had suffered long enough. When I reached the Thai border, the Thai soldiers took me to the refugee camp. I did not know which camp I was in. I stayed in the camp

for nine years. It was a long time; I was able to come to the United States. When I got to the United States, I settled in Wausau, Wisconsin. I have been living in Wausau ever since my arrival in the United States because all of my sons live in Wausau.

How long did you spend in refugee camps before coming to the United States?

When we arrived at the Thailand border, I could not feel my body. I was so tired and numbed that I could not move an inch. The rest of the Chao Fa and I rested for twenty minutes on the shore. The Thai soldiers spotted us and took us to a refugee camp. I did not know the name of the camp. I was given food and clothes. I stayed there for one month and I was transported to another camp. At each camp, I saw many other Chao Fa like me. There were hundreds of them, but I could not recognize anyone.

At the camp, there were rules and regulations. We were not allowed to step outside of the camp. If anyone tries to escape or step outside of the camp, the Thai soldiers would kill him or her immediately. Everyone was warned of the rules. No one dared to step outside of the camp. Shelter, food, and clothing were provided to everyone living in the camp.

At the second camp that I was transferred to, I saw my family. They had made the long journey that I did. I never thought I would see my family ever again. There, we reunited. My family stayed in the second camp for six months; then we were given the opportunity to come to the United States.

One day, a big blue bus came to the camp to pick up refugees to go to America. There was a person with the list of names who could go to America. My family name was on the list. I gathered my family and headed toward the bus. There were hundreds of refugees like us on the bus. We were given food and blankets. The bus took everyone to the airport and there we got on

a plane. As I can remember, my family was on three different airplanes. The first two airplanes were very big. The last one was very small. We arrived in Wausau, Wisconsin in 1986.

What was the hardest part about coming to the U.S.?

The hardest part of coming to the United States was not knowing where I will end up and not knowing any English. All I know was that my sons are living in Wausau, Wisconsin; therefore, I must make my way to them somehow. It was a long ride and I never thought that coming to America would be such a long way. My last airplane was small; therefore, I knew that this is the plane that I will meet my sons and I was right. Since I did not know any English, a woman who was a staff on the airplane directed me. I gave her many thanks in Hmong language, even though she may not understand what I was saying.

Chapter V: SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS

This final chapter contains a review of the participants' personal experiences of the Vietnam War. The chapter summarizes the purposes, similarity and differences of experience, and the personal stories of the Vietnam War. The conclusions are based on limitations, and recommendations for future research.

Summary

The population of the study was two Hmong soldiers from Wausau, WI. The participants are now 44 years old and 71 years old. At the time they were sent to war, one of the participants was only 16 years old, a teenager, and the other one was in his 30s. The study focused on Hmong soldiers' personal experiences in the Secret War, also known as the Vietnam War. They told their stories of how they survived the war and of coming to America. In the interview process, they added more detail to what was being asked of them.

The participants' experiences and memories of the Vietnam War will still remain. The experience during the Vietnam War had taught many people hardship and courage to stay alive. Although, the participants' lives will never be the same, they are satisfied because they have hopes that their children will have many more opportunities to live better lives. For the freedom that these participants have, they had to pay a price they can never forget. However, adapting to a new life, new society is still difficult for them.

Both of the participants had faced many hardships and were separated from their families without knowing when they would see each other again. They traveled in the jungles and stayed there for months without food, shelter, and clothing. The Viet Cong soldiers were looking for the Hmong people due to the Hmong's involvement with the Americans. The Viet Cong only killed those Hmong who side with the Americans. With the Hmong siding with the Americans,

it made it more difficult for the Viet Cong to conquer South Vietnam; therefore, the Viet Cong tried to eliminate anyone who stood in their way of achieving their goal. Many of the Hmong died because of the war. The Viet Cong soldiers killed many innocent people and destroyed their villages, which forced many of the Hmong people to relocate, and many became resisters.

The two participants fought their way to Thailand by crossing the Mekong River, using bamboo trees to help them float. It took many hours to reach the Thai border. There were Viet Cong lining the river attempting to shoot those trying to escape to Thailand. When they reached the Thai border, many of the resisters were sent to refugee camps. At the refugee camps, many of the Hmong were given food, shelter, and clothing. Sometimes, some of the Hmong were shipped to other camps because of overpopulation.

At the refugee camps, many of the Hmong were given the opportunity to come to the United States because they had aided the Americans in the fight against North Vietnam. There were thousands of Hmong refugees that eventually came to America. In America, the Hmong scattered all around the United States. The first Hmong people to come to the United States settled in California in 1975. It is unfortunate that not all of the refugees got a chance to come to America. As of today, there are resisters (Chao Fa) still living in the mountains and jungles, hiding from the Viet Cong. The war ended in 1975 for the Americans, but it is not over for the Chao Fa. Even today, the war continues.

Similarities

The similarities of the participants were that they had fought during the Vietnam War, fought their way to the Mekong River and swam across, stayed in a refugee camp, facing hardships living in the jungle, seeing dead bodies, and the killings of the Viet Cong soldiers.

Both of the participants were from Laos and fought against the Viet Cong during the Vietnam War. They had seen many Chao Fa being killed as well as innocent children and women. The bodies laid everywhere. The smell of the bodies created a bad odor, which reminded them of a funeral. They fought their way to the Mekong River, and it was not easy. There was not enough food and water for everyone. To survive in the jungle, they ate whatever was edible. The war created a huge mess in the jungle; therefore, all of the animals were dead, which made it difficult to hunt. It was fortunate that the participants were able to find bamboo shoots and berries to eat.

When they arrived at the Mekong River there were Viet Cong soldiers patrolling the area. Both of the participants used bamboo trees to float on water. The journey on the Mekong River was not easy and only traveled late at night. In addition, seeing dead bodies floating was expected. It took long hours to reach the Thailand border. When they arrived at the border, Thai soldiers took Chao Fa to refugee camps. The participants spent many long months at the refugee camps and were given shelter, food, and clothing.

The biggest opportunity for the participants was the privilege of coming to America. Living in America has given them the opportunity to seek freedom and to see their grandchildren and children grow up and eventually go to school.

Differences

The participant who was a teenager at the time of the Vietnam War had faced many difficulties. He traveled with a group of people who were trying to fight their way to Thailand, trying to survive without food and water. He did manage to survive by eating bamboo shoots that were grown on bamboo trees.

Traveling with a group, there were advantages and disadvantages. The advantages were that when sleeping at night some people could guard while the others sleep; more eyes for the lookout for incoming missiles and Viet Cong soldiers and staying in a group was safer than being alone. The disadvantages were that not everyone was able to move at the same pace and many had children, which might slow down the group. In addition, many parents used drugs, especially opium on children and babies to keep them quiet because parents did not want to be caught or killed by Viet Cong soldiers. However, in many cases children who were drugged often died from it.

The participant who was an adult at the time of the Vietnam War faced many difficult tasks as well. For example, he always worried about not having enough bullets to protect him. For safety, he slept in a cave night after night. Although he did not travel in a group, this allowed him to travel much easier on his own without having to worry about other people getting sick or being injured. Another advantage is that he did not have to worry about other people besides himself.

During the Vietnam War, he was positioned at the Ho Chi Minh Trail to stop any carriages carrying weapon supplies. When his unit was attacked by the Viet Cong soldiers and were pulled back, he decided to go to Thailand.

On his journey to Thailand, he stayed in a cave at night to protect himself from the Viet Cong soldiers. He only traveled during daylight. He was alone. His family was separated from him. He managed to cross the Mekong River and survived the long journey. There he unexpectedly met his family in the refugee camp.

Conclusions

Both of the participants shared their stories of survival during the Vietnam War. Their personal experiences had different perspectives of what the war was like and each journey to freedom was different. They faced many hardships because of allying with the United States, but yet the Vietnam War was a war that, from both interviewees, should not have involved the Hmong people. Many other Hmong veterans are never going to forget this war, a war of survival for the Hmong people. Many Hmong have come to the United States and started their lives fresh and are learning to adjust to the American culture. The new generation of the Hmong people may or may not know how their parents came to America with pride and dignity, along with nightmares of what they have been through to get where they are.

Limitations

There are three limitations to this study. First, because the elders might suffer from traumatic, painful memories of the war, valuable information might not have been disclosed. Second, due to the war, elders have their own perceptions and frustrations about the war; therefore, the interview process may be shortened. Finally, due to the elders' age and the fact that these events happened over 30 years ago, there could be some memory loss about the war.

Counseling Implications

As a counselor, one should always be open-minded towards other cultures and where they are coming from. One important point to keep in mind is that when dealing with Hmong elders, their minds may be thinking of the Vietnam War. Also, it is important to teach other students and staff about the Hmong and how they have helped the Americans during the Vietnam War. Many brave soldiers fought to protect their families and their alliances with America; therefore, everyone should acknowledge that the Hmong did help the Americans. In addition,

counselors should understand that the Hmong did not just arbitrarily want to come to America, but they had to sacrifice many of their personal belongings, their communities, and their ways of life as well as many innocent lives. However, many U.S. citizens do not understand why the Hmong came to America in the first place, which has resulted in many stereotypes about the Hmong. Counselors need to teach students about diversity and how we all can welcome different groups to the U.S.

As a counselor, one should understand where the Hmong came from and their history as a result of having been brought into the Vietnam War. In addition, counselors can help new generations of Hmong students to understand where their ancestors came from and educate Hmong students about their identity. However, many Hmong American students may adapt to American culture and not know where their ancestors came from.

Lastly, counselors can provide individual or group counseling to Hmong students who need help dealing with family issues related to the Vietnam War. Schools should have experienced counselors dealing with parent(s) who have experienced war and loss, and provide services for the students to release their stresses or depression.

Recommendations for Future Research

A recommendation for future research study would be to do a longitudinal study on Hmong soldiers' psychological and physical health from the Vietnam War. A good resource for this is Say Mao Vang's thesis on Hmong-University of Wisconsin-Stout (A 1995 Survey of Hmong veterans of Vietnam War to determine the extent of war related physical and psychological problems). It is also recommended that research be done on the impact of the Hmong involvement in the Vietnam War and its' impact on the children of Hmong veterans.

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Appendix A

Interview Questions in English

1. How old were you? What were you told about the war?
2. What were your duties as a soldier?
3. During the war, where did you hide for safety?
4. Your journey to Thailand, what was the journey like?
5. Describe what the war was like?
6. Do you think if the Hmong had not helped the Americans fight the war, there wouldn't have been any impact on the Hmong behalf?
7. Name several events that you are never going to forget during/after the war?
8. What was the most fearful moment of your life during the Vietnam War?
9. How did you manage to survive the war? What survival skills were needed to survive in the jungle?
10. As of today, do you still wish to go back to live in Thailand or Laos, if you had the choice? Why?
11. What do you remember the most?
12. What was your perception of the Vietnam War then? What is your perception now?
13. When the Vietnam War ended, where were you located?
14. How long did you spend in refugee camps before coming to the United States?
15. What was the hardest part about coming to the U.S.?

Interview Questions in Hmong

1. Koj muaj pis tsawg xyoo pus muaj leej twg qhia tsjog koj ua rhog?
2. Thawm koj ua rhog koj ntsai dab tsi tsaj?
3. Koj ua ib tus tub rhog koj txoj hau lwg yog dab tsi?
4. Txoj kev sib tuaj rhog yuav zoo li cas rau koj?
5. Koj txoj kev mus rau taib teb ua yuav zoo li cas?
6. Lub sij hawm tua rog koj yuav ua li ca thiaj yuav zoo?
7. Thawm koj tua rog tas lawm thiab thawm koj los so lawm koj sav li cas lawm?
8. Koj puas xav hai tia hmoob tsis pab mes kas ua tsog. Qhov tog no tsis xav hais tias yog hmoob?
9. Thawm koj tua rhog ntawm es koj thiaj us dhau thawm koj nyob pem hav zoov koj thiaj yuav cas us dhau?
10. Txog hmub koj puas xav mus nyob nplog teb thiab thaib teb vim li cas?
11. Thawm koj tua rhog qhov twg yog qhov koj nco tsaj plaws?
12. Thawm koj tua rhog koj xa li cas tam sis no koj ho xav li cas?
13. Thawm koj tua rhog tas koj ho xav li cas?
14. Thawm nej tuaj nyob hauv lub yeej tawg rhog tau hov ntev koj mam tuaj teb caws mes kas?
15. Thawm koj tuaj teb caws mes kas qhov nyuab tsaj yog dab tsi?

Appendix B

Consent Form

I understand that my participation in answering these interview questions is complied consent for the researcher to use the information in completing his thesis at the University of Wisconsin-Stout.

Kuv nkaag siab tias kuv cov lus teb rau cov lus nug no tus researcher yuav coj mus siv sau nws phau ntawv nyob rau hauv lub ntsev kawm ntawv University of Wisconsin-Stout.