

**Wisconsin Veterans Museum  
Research Center**

Transcript of an  
Oral History Interview with  
Nao Tou Lor  
Laos Army, Vietnam War  
2014

## **Nao Tou Lor – English Transcript**

Interviewed by Ellen Brooks, November 14, 2014

Translated, transcribed, and abstract written by Seethong Yang, February, 2014

Ca. 1 hour 52 minutes

### **Abstract**

Nao Tou Lor is a war veteran who fought the war in Laos. He began his story from the time when he was a child, when he went with his father to a French fort. He spoke of when the Communist came to live in their village, to interrogate his father, and arrested him. Not long after, his older brothers received arms from General Vang Pao and the CIA to protect their village. Nao Tou attended school for a short while before joining the military. During his training as a soldier, he was trained to fight, to attack a fort, to crawl close to the ground, and to work as a single unit with other soldiers. After the Communist attacked the region where he lived, Nao Tou and his family became refugees. Not long after, his commanders sent him back to fight at the front. When the war ended in 1975, Nao Tou and those who were with him were still at the front, while all the officials fled. When they knew clearly that everybody had fled, they left their post, their equipment, and returned home to their villages. After the war, they returned to live their normal lives. The Communist came and took away their weapons and started to arrest those who were former soldiers. This was the reason they started to fight the Communist again from 1976 until 1978. Nao Tou and his family tried to cross over to Thailand, but on the way most of them were killed, only four survived. Nao Tou and his wife were captured near the Mekong River. They were taken back to Laos, to live in a few different camps. An old friend helped Nao Tou escaped death. Nao Tou later escaped successfully to Thailand. In Thailand, he lived in a refugee camp while waiting for authorization to come to the United States. Just before they were to leave Thailand, his wife fell ill and died. After he arrived in America, Nao Tou did many things to help the Hmong people. Nao Tou also attended trade school and later obtained employment and worked to provide for his family for nineteen years. He retired in 2013.

**[Start of Interview]**

Ellen Brooks: So we are recording now, today is Friday November 14, 2014. This is an interview with Nao Tou Lor, who served with the ADC and the SGU in the Secret War in Laos. This interview is being conducted in La Crosse. The Interviewer is Ellen Brooks and the Translator and Co-interviewer is Seethong Yang.

So we'll just start, can you tell us when and where you were born?

Translator: Let's begin by having you tell us a little about when you were born and where, Uncle Nao Tou?

Nao Tou Lor: Ah, according to what my parents told me, I was born on February 24<sup>th</sup> 1953, in a city called Muang<sup>1</sup> Ga, in Xieng Khuang.

Translator: According to (what) my parents told me and told us, I was born on February 24<sup>th</sup>, 1953 at a region or city called Muang Ga, in the province of Xieng Khuang.

Ellen Brooks: Can you tell me little about your childhood and growing up?

Translator: Can you tell (me) a little about when you were still young, what was your life like?

Nao Tou Lor: I remember a little bit. Ah, when I was still young, I remember that in the area that we lived there was a French fort. My father was someone who knew French really well, so he often went to the French fort. He took me with him. So I got to go to the French base with my father. The base was well built, with two very deep trenches around with barbwire. To cross the trenches, to get into the fort on the other side, they had a small bridge. At that time, they had a monkey in the fort. When I and my father got there, I played with the monkey while my father went with the French. When my father came back, then he'd come to get me. At that time, this is what I remember. I don't know what year it was.

Translator: Let me translate that first. I still remember some too, something from my childhood. I remember that my father knew French in the region that we lived, there was a French camp, a military base. And my father often take me to go to the French base and I remember that the French base was well set. There were some trenches, there were a few defensive things, but I remember that the trench that they dug and they did, they have a ladder that crossed the trench to (go) into the base. I remember also that in the

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<sup>1</sup> A Laotian word meaning "city";

camp, there was a monkey and so my father would leave me with the monkey, to play with the monkey while he went with the French. And when he's done talking to them, dealing with them, he'll come back he'll pick me up and we'll come home.

Nao Tou Lor: At that time I remember that there was a French man who came, he brought a cap. It was a pilot's cap. It was green. He brought it and put it on my head. So I received that cap, to come home with my father.

Translator: I also remember too that there was a French officer who gave me a cap, a pilot's cap, it was green. He put it on my head and when I left with my dad to come home I had that hat and I kept that hat.

Nao Tou Lor: This is what I remember, but I don't know how long after that that the French was defeated, I couldn't remember. I remember that soon the Laotian army came to stay at the fort. Joua Vang and his men had come to stay at the French base.

Translator: I don't remember what year or how long that was, but a few years later all I remember was that the French had gone and the Laotian troops, military troops.  
Ah, what is the name of the man you're talking about? Joua Vang?

Nao Tou Lor: Joua Vang Lee. Joua Vang Lee had always been a soldier with the French. But after the French left, and no longer living at the base, they brought Joua Vang and his men to stay at that base.

Translator: So these were Laotian soldiers now?

Nao Tou Lor: Laotian soldiers.

Translator: A gentlemen, military personnel by the name of Joua Vang Lee, he used to serve with the French, but when the French left he continued serving with the Laotian military and so Joua Vang Lee and his troops came and lived in the same base that the French lived in.

Nao Tou Lor: Joua Vang was a brother-in-law to my father also, so when Joua Vang came to stay at the fort, my father and him got along really well. My father would take me, I would go with my father to the base until '62, when Joua Vang and they were defeated.

Translator: Joua Vang Lee was also a relative of the family, a brother-in-law to my father. And so when Joua Vang Lee and his men came and lived in the base, my father continued to take me to visit the base and until 1962 when the base was taken over.

Ellen Brooks: Who took over the base?

Translator: When that base was lost, who came to stay there? Who attacked it?

Nao Tou Lor: The Vietnamese came and took over.

Translator: Oh, is that right?

Nao Tou Lor: Yes, the Vietnamese took over.

Translator: The Vietnamese military came and took over the base.

Nao Tou Lor: When the base was attacked, Joua Vang left and the Vietnamese came to stay. At that time, I noticed a lot of Vietnamese came, so my father took us into the jungle. The Vietnamese came and brought us back from the jungle. At that time Soviet aircrafts came and dropped off a lot of supplies to the Vietnamese. They had come and were all over our village. When we came (back), we didn't know that those were Vietnamese. I was a child, right? I still wondered "why drop off supplies to them?" The Vietnamese had come and live all over our village.

Translator: At that time, I remember the Vietnamese military came, there was quite a large number of them came and so my father took our family and went into hiding in the jungle, but the Vietnamese military, they came and took us out of the jungle back to the village. When we got into the village I was still a child so I didn't really know what's going on and I remember that there were Russian planes that dropped supplies off for the military, the Vietnamese military and we didn't really know what was going on but we saw that there were a lot of Vietnamese soldiers in the region.

Nao Tou Lor: Not long after we surrender to the Vietnamese, my parents told us that "These are not the same troops as before, these are Vietnamese troops". At that time, I was a child. When the Vietnamese soldiers came, they were all up at night, but they slept during the day. They took me around with them. They slept all over in our house. There were a few that took me around and ask me things. I didn't know so I spoke to them. That continued for some time, after which they arrested my father. Their reasoning was that my father was Joua Vang's brother-in-law. So they arrested my father and took him with them. When they were about to arrest my father, they would come to our house a few times a day. One group would come, spoke to my father, then they left. Then another group would come, and another group would come. They continued to do this. Because my mother and siblings had all gone to work in the field, I had to stay home with my father, and I saw the Vietnamese soldiers continued to do this until finally, the last group was the group that came and arrested my father.

Translator: Let me translate that first. When the Vietnamese came into our village, they came and stayed but I didn't really know the difference between them and Joua Vang Lee's troops and so through my mother, told me that these were no longer the same troops that was here before. These were Vietnamese troops and they came and they would stay in our village, they would stay in our home. During the day they would sleep and at night they would all (be) up and doing their own things. As a child they would take me around the village and would ask me questions about different things, I didn't know so I just told them what I know. And there came many waves of troops through our village, each group that came talked to my dad and they left. And another wave of troops came and also talked to my father too. I remember because my mother and my other relatives have gone into our fields to work the field, but my dad, I stayed home with my dad and I saw these, as these things were going on and the last group that came into our home and talked to my dad, that was the group that arrested my father.

Nao Tou Lor: At that time my father was blacksmithing, right? The Vietnamese soldiers came and spoke to him. I don't know what they said to my father. He got upset so he rebuked them. He said "You are not good people. You are bad people. Why have you come to give me trouble all this time?" As soon as he said this to them, they blew their whistle, arrested him immediately, and took him away.

Translator: That was the time when the troop came to talk to my father. My dad was still working. He was a blacksmith. He was still working in his shop. And they, I don't know what they said to my father, but somehow he got upset and he told them that they were not good, they were not doing anything good. How come they would come and harassed him continuously, and as soon as he said that they blew a whistle and the men, the personnel, men among the troops arrested him right away and tied him up and took him away.

Nao Tou Lor: When they took my father away, in our village there was one path that came on the north, and another on the south, both from the base, right? Now, they took my father on this path, so I went to call on my mother and siblings. I took the other path to call on my mother and siblings from the field. When I got to the field, my mother and siblings left from the field and went directly to the base. (We) wanted to find out why they had taken my father. They probably took my father for about a month. My mother and siblings continued to go to the base to ask for my father's release, until finally he was released. When my father was released, my brother and relatives, the Hmong people in the region where we lived all knew that if they (the Communist) arrested my father, then they will eventually

arrest each and every one. So they all fled into the jungle, to enlist, to obtain arms.

Translator: In the village, there was two paths that lead, that came into the village from the camp, the military camp. And when they arrested my dad, they took him to the other path, and so when I noticed that I ran, took the other path that they didn't take and ran to get my mother and I told my mother and she left the field from, came straight from the field to the camp where the soldiers were staying and my mother wanted to see why they have taken my dad. But it wasn't a month later, they kept my dad for about a month before they released him. And when they arrested my father my older brothers and my relatives, all the men reasoned that if they arrested my dad they would probably soon arrest everybody else too. So everybody kind of packed their bags and left and went to the jungle and went and took up arms.

Nao Tou Lor: At that time, all of my brothers went to obtain arms. I didn't know that they had all fled. They all just disappeared. I continued to go with my mother to work on the field. One day, my mother packed some rice into the basket, right? When got half way to the field, my mother went into the side of the road. (She) asked me to wait on the side of the road while she went off somewhere. My mother had brought food to my brothers, who had all gotten rifles and had come back. They were prepared to attack the Vietnamese troops. That's when (we) brought food to them. That one day, when I went with my mother, I met my eldest brother. When my brothers came back, they had American rifles. The Americans had given them rifles.

Translator: I didn't know what was going on, but I realized later that my older brothers and also my relatives, they have all taken up arms. And one day my mother packed some food and it was as if she was going to the field, to work in the field. And when she got half way to the field she asked me to wait right there on the path and she went into the jungle and I noticed that she had brought food to my brothers and my relatives who hid in the jungle, which they had already taken up arms. They have already received weapons from (the) Americans and they were all ready to attack the base.

Nao Tou Lor: At that time, the reason why they were able to obtain rifles was because the Americans had already gotten in contact with General Vang Pao. The region of Xieng Khuang was in disarray, right? They got in contact with General Vang Pao, and he had identified that "there is this region left, that region left" and so on, for the people to come and obtain rifles. So they went and got the rifles and were prepared to attack the Vietnamese. They attacked the Vietnamese and so they scattered and retreated. That was how we came to be soldiers. After the attack, I remember that it was

'60...at that time, I remember that it was probably '64 or something around there.

Translator: So at the time, it seems that the Americans have already gotten in contact with General Vang Pao, who knew that Xieng Khuong and the surrounding area had been taken over by the Vietnamese military. And so a call was put out to the people, the Hmong people to take up arms and they had taken up arms. And once they had taken up arms, they came and attacked the camp and that's when the Vietnamese military was scattered and went back and left the region. And I remember briefly, not clearly, but I think it was 1964.

Nao Tou Lor: At that time, when they came back, they established the regional defensive troops called ADC. Once they established the ADC, then they established schools in the regions further back. That's when they sent us children to attend school.

Translator: That was the time when the ADC was established and schools were built and they sent us children into the schools.

Nao Tou Lor: Not long after the schools were established, 1967, my father died. After he died, 1968, they sent me to Long Cheng. At that time, they were constructing the airfield at Long Cheng, which was the headquarter for the CIA, in that picture [pointing to a picture on the wall]. They were still constructing that airfield when I arrived. I had come to attend school.

Translator: And so '67 my father died and in '68 I was sent to Long Cheng, at the time they were still building the airport, (the) picture right there. I went to study at Long Cheng.

Nao Tou Lor: I probably had only been there for two years, in '69, when the Vietnamese attacked Long Cheng. They came to attack and destroyed two aircrafts in Long Cheng. Now, after Long Cheng was attacked, there was no more school. Our region, where we lived, was also attacked. My family had all gone into the jungle, unable to come to us. They used American aircrafts to pick up people from here and there, and bring them together. Since we had no school, they flew us back to Muang Mao. Once we arrived, and they saw that the Vietnamese were coming in large quantity, they turned the ADC troops into SGUs. They established the SGU, and they had asked Colonel Joua Vang to come back, to turn those in that region into SGUs. At the same time, I arrived there when they were putting the troops together, so they enlisted me there.

Translator: So 1969, the Vietnamese troops came back to launch an attack on Long Cheng and two planes were shot down in Long Cheng. And people were scattered and so there was no more school and my mother was in the

jungle. People were scattered throughout the region and in the different parts in the jungle. And the Americans with their planes went and picked up different people in different parts of the jungle. I was sent to Muang Mao, and that was when I guess the Americans and General Vang Pao realized that the military, the Vietnamese military was coming in droves, a huge quantity. So the ADC was transferred to become the SGU and they had someone, Colonel Joua Vang Lee to take on that effort to train people.

Nao Tou Lor: That was the time when I started as soldier in the SGU.

Translator: That was when I started to become an SGU, part of the SGU.

Ellen Brooks: So what...?

Nao Tou Lor: Until '75 when the country was lost. The General and they have all fled, but we couldn't flee because we were the soldiers and we were left in the jungle. We were still in the jungle, right? At that time, those who were officials in the cities, they have all left, except for us the soldiers who were still maintaining the borders and keeping the bases. At that time, the General and they have all left, we had no support, so we left our weapons and on our own, one by one, came back to our homes. When we got back those at home have all gone. When you arrived in your home, you left, and when I arrived in my home, I left. In this way, we left our uniforms, equipment, weapons, all were left behind. That was how we left.

Translator: Until 1975, when the Communist finally won the effort and the region and the commanders or the leaders of, our leaders they were in the city and in the bases so they left, they all left. And the troops which were still in the jungle and still defending the different regions, dropped their arms, dropped everything that they were doing and left all their equipment and everything they have and came back to their own villages. As each of us came back to our villages, we realized that our people, our families and relatives have all gone, have all left and so individually we each left our post and left the things that we were doing and just kind of dispersed and scattered.

Ellen Brooks: Can you tell me what your training was like?

Translator: Can you say a little about when you were being trained to be a soldier, what was some of the training? And how were you trained?

Nao Tou Lor: At the time when I was a soldier, the training was all about war. We learned how to disassemble, repair, and shoot a rifle. We learned how to crawl so when they fired at you, you won't get shot, how to launch an attack on a base, if we were to go on the offensive, what would we do. That was how we were trained. We were the ones who crawled very low,

close to the ground, while they fired a rifle from a little way off, so as not to get shot. If you raise your head, you'd be shot. These were the training, the rules of combat that they taught us.

Translator: Our training included disassembling a rifle or putting it back together, cleaning, it's all about war. We were trained to crawl, we were trained to launch an attack on a camp, we were trained to defend a camp. One training we had to crawl very close to the ground and if we raised our head, they were firing just very low on the ground, so if we raised our head, we would be shot. And those are some of the training that we received.

Nao Tou Lor: It is that, they'd tell us that they'd use grenades, they'd fire the rifles about as high as this table [pointing to a coffee table], if any of those who were crawling raised his head above this, he'd be dead. So at that time, you'd have to crawl very low so the shots wouldn't hit you. The point of this was that when you attack a base, and the enemy on the base was shooting at you, it was to train you so you wouldn't get shot. And you must take your rifle and grenades with you to kill the enemy, to win.

Translator: The training ground was set up so that there were machine guns set up or rifles set up at a certain level from the ground and we were instructed that this is the level that the rifle would be firing and if you crawl, you need to be crawling close the ground as much as possible. Carrying your rifle, carrying all the equipment you have, if you raise your head or if you get up, you will (be) shot. That's to imitate the real attack on a camp when the enemy are firing at you, you need to know, to be close to the ground, so you won't be shot.

Nao Tou Lor: They trained you to climb very steep cliffs, and get back down again. Also to cross a river, when there is no bridge, if you go into the water you'd sink, what would you do? This is what they taught. You must have a rope with you. An individual will swim across and tie the rope on the other side for the rest to cross. When there is no rope, what would you do? If there is no rope, you'd have to use the straps on the rifles, tie them together, to make a rope for all to cross. This is what they taught.

Translator: They trained us on how to climb a cliff and how to get off the cliff. They trained us on how to cross a river or a body of water without any other equipment. They taught us to be prepared, to have ropes so that when we get to the river we need to cross, a person would take the rope and swim across, tie the rope to the other side and the rest of the troops would hang on to the rope and cross the river that way. Or they would train us to, on the same scenario, but not have any rope, what would we do? We would use the band or the bands on our rifles to tie them together and make a makeshift rope, try to cross the river that way.

Ellen Brooks: And who was doing the training?

Translator: Who was training you?

Nao Tou Lor: The trainers were Thai, they're Thai from Thailand. But for several Thai trainers, there were some Americans who came with them. The American would instruct that "you should train in this manner" and so forth and so on, and the Thai trainers would do according to the objective of the Americans.

Translator: The trainers were Thai. There would be a few Thai instructors, were trainers, but there's always an American, kind of oversee the whole training process. He's the one that oversees and supervises and said "you should train them this way and in this manner" and so forth and so on.

Ellen Brooks: And how long did you train before you were sent out into the field?

Nao Tou Lor: When we first begin, it wasn't long. It seem like only three months, because if it was longer than that then the Vietnamese would have already come and there would be nothing that we could do. So as quickly as three months, it must all be completed.

Translator: At the most three months because it was at a point where the Vietnamese, the enemy was coming to the region so fast that we didn't have much time to train so at the most was three months, then you were out in the field.

Nao Tou Lor: After we defeated the Vietnamese at that time, they retreated. At that time, they sent us back to train for the second time at a different base, way in the back. But even the later trainings were similar to what we were trained before.

Translator: After the initial defending effort, we had won some ground and had pushed back the enemy, then that's when they took us back to do more training at a different camp. But the training was basically similar to what we did before.

Nao Tou Lor: They have multiple places to train. Once we were at that stage, there were some camps located in Laos and some in Thailand. The swapped the soldiers, some would go and trained, after which they'd come to guard the base and another group would go and train. Some times when war was quickly approaching, those who haven't gone to train in Thailand would just train in Laos.

Translator: There was a process where some was trained in Laos and others were sent to train in Thailand and they switched, kind of swap around and once the

Thai, the group that were train in Thailand was done with their training they would come and swap with the other group and the other group would go and train while this group comes in, take over defending the region. But at times, when the enemy was already coming and there's no time for all or everyone to be trained in Thailand, they would just trained in Laos.

Ellen Brooks: So when you went out, what types of assignments do you usually have? What were your responsibilities?

Translator: When you finished the training, and have gone out into the battlefield, what were your responsibilities mostly?

Nao Tou Lor: At that time, I was just a child and a soldier, right? A very low rank, they gave me the rank of Ca-Three<sup>2</sup>. I don't know if in the American system, what that would equal. So when you're at this level, you're the soldiers at the front, you were the first ones to go to war. Even on the base, you'd be the one to stand guard and patrol. You were the first to attack, so if death comes, you'd be the first to die.

Translator: At the time, we were just the little guys. We were at the front, we were the infantry, I was at a lower rank, I received the rank of Ca-Three which I'm not sure in English. It would've been a sergeant maybe. And so we were at the front, we were the ones who were defending, guarding, and if anybody were to die fighting the war, it would be us.

Nao Tou Lor: When they sent us back, after they had trained us, they sent us into the old places that we had lost. We had to go back to those areas, the old villages, to build bases, to guard them. The Vietnamese were not gone, so they fought us, from one place to another. So we had to go and build forts in the area, to live in the region and guard the roads.

Translator: So once our training was done, we were sent to the different regions that were lost to the enemy. And we had to go in, had to set up camp. We had to go and win back that region or those areas that we had lost. And we had to attack, we had to fight, and tried to gain back what was lost prior to our training.

Ellen Brooks: Can you tell me a little bit about what life was like when you weren't fighting? Like where did you sleep, what did you eat, and things like that?

Translator: Uncle Nao Tou, would you touch on your life when you were not fighting? When you had time to rest in the fort or in the villages, how did you sleep? How did you eat? And your life, when you weren't in the battlefield, what was that like?

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<sup>2</sup> A rank in the Laotian military, may be equivalent to "Private";

Nao Tou Lor: When you came back into the village and there are soldiers at the front on guard, then you don't worry as much and you can fall asleep. You can fall asleep like when we do here in this country, having no fear. You go to sleep without wearing your uniform, or carrying your rifle, because in the jungle, you sleep with your uniform, rifle, ammunition, and grenades, you sleep with all these things, right? Even when you eat, you must have your rifle, or go somewhere to do something, you'd always carry your rifle with you. But when you come back into the village and the soldiers take care of it, then you can sleep well. You can sleep at night without fear, right? When you eat, or go places, go to the market, you don't have to have your rifle. This is something that's easy on us.

Translator: When we came back from the front and back into the villages, and knowing that there are other soldiers on guard at the front, then we were a little bit relieved, we could sleep better, we didn't have to always be in our uniforms, always carrying our rifles and having all the equipment close by. We could go to the village market, we could eat without worrying about carrying our weapons, and not always feel like we need to be armed at all times. So that's a big relief.

Ellen Brooks: What about when you were at the front? How did you eat, sleep, and live then?

Translator: But what about when you were at the front, preparing to fight, at that time, how do you live and what do you do?

Nao Tou Lor: When we were at the front, we set up men, four per day, right? Two to go fetch water, and four to go on patrol before them, before they go fetch water. To make sure that there were no Vietnamese troops. Once water is fetched, two men would go and cook. And we set up the time that by four O'clock in the evening we must eat supper. After supper, we have a list like this one [pointing to a list] to indicate that you have guard duty from this time to this time, and I have guard duty from this time to this time until dawn. So if I'm on guard duty then you get to go sleep, and if you're on guard duty then I get to go sleep. But when we're at a fort like that, sleep didn't come easy. We slept in our uniforms, with our rifle, ok? Because if you take off your shoes, your uniform, and put aside your rifle, when the Vietnamese come you won't have enough time to get ready. You'd be unable to fight them. This is what we did. Meals are always at a certain time. We ate as fast as we could, so that even if the enemy comes, we would have eaten. This was what we did.

Translator: When we were at the front, we set up four people per day to take care of our daily needs. Two would go and fetch water, four would go and would go first and scout the area to make sure that the enemy were not

approaching. And once the water is fetched, two would come and cook and we would have supper right about 4:00 PM. And if someone's on guard and right after supper, we would have a list of who's on guard at what time until morning. Once somebody is on guard you could rest for a little bit, but it's not always good sleep because your shoes is on, your rifle always right by, you wouldn't think about taking off your shoes, or leaving your rifle far away because when, if the enemy attack and you still need put to on your shoes, grab your rifle, you just don't have enough time to do that. So you're always sleeping with your shoes on, your rifle right by, nearby and when you eat, you always eat as fast as possible in the case that the enemy would attack, you would be ready.

Nao Tou Lor: And if we happened to be on a base that's very dangerous, where the Vietnamese were close by, we couldn't build a fire, right? (We) couldn't cook, but the Americans had also dropped off some kind of fried rice, in bags about this size. They dropped these off for us, sometimes with beef, or just rice for us. Sometimes they also dropped off water. We kept these in our bags. Sometimes we'd just pour water over the rice, to make it soft, right? Then we'd just eat that up to four or five days at a time because you were close to the Vietnamese, you couldn't build a fire, and nobody could come and rescue you. If you build a fire then they'd shoot at you.

Translator: At certain times we would be at a camp very close to the enemy, and at those times we could not build a fire to give away our position. So (at) those times, the Americans would drop off packaged food, perhaps fried rice, bagged, and also meat that was bagged and dried maybe. Also, water and so when you were hungry, you pour water into the rice and a few minutes later the rice would soften and you would eat that for days because you could not build a fire because if you do, you'll give away your position.

Ellen Brooks: So when you were out, were you usually with the same group of men? Did you stay with the same unit?

Translator: When you went out into the battlefield, or at the front, did you mostly go with the same group that you started with? Or each time you went with a different group or different unit?

Nao Tou Lor: When we were soldiers, they put you into *kong lu-aie*<sup>3</sup> and *kong phan*<sup>4</sup>, right? So when they began, we were in so and so *kong lu-aie* and so and so *kong phan*. As far as *kong lu-aie* goes, they had first *kong lu-aie* to fifth *kong lu-aie*. And *kong phan*, they also had first *kong phan* to fourth, fifth *kong phan*. So it depended on which *kong phan* you were assigned to, which *kong lu-aie* you were assigned to, then you'd be with that group.

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<sup>3</sup> "*Kong Lu-aie*" is a Laotian word which is the equivalent of about one hundred soldiers, or maybe a "company";

<sup>4</sup> "*Kong Phan*" is a Laotian word which is the equivalent of about one thousand soldiers, or maybe a "battalion";

But within each *kong lu-aie*, there were also smaller groups with a leader, a *muat*<sup>5</sup>, each having about ten men. They assigned a leader to lead each *muat*, right? It depended on which *muat* you were assigned to and who was assigned to lead that *muat*, so we were not together. And sometimes we had to fight on a fort, and we scattered, we would run off and joined with the second or third *kong phan*, we're still on the side, it didn't matter.

Translator:

At the time, we were broken up into *kong lu-aie* and *kong phan*, *kong lu-aie* is one to five, one, two, three, four, five, and also *kong phan* is broken up into one, two, three, four or five too. And it just depends at the beginning which *kong lu-aie* or which *kong phan* you were put in and among *kong lu-aie* and *kong phan* we were divided up further into *muat*, and *muat* also groups of ten with a leader and so you just stick with your platoon or your *muat* and you follow the leader. Sometimes at a fight, we would be broken up and we would be scattered and later we joined with other *kong phan* or *kong lu-aie* and it doesn't matter, we were still on the same side, so we would join in with other *kong phan* and that would be fine too.

Ellen Brooks:

Do you have any stories from combat that you'd like to share?

Translator:

Do you have an occasion when you were at the front that you can tell about the time that you were engaged in battle and say this is how it happened?

Nao Tou Lor:

I can do that. In 1972, the region of Muang Mao was already lost in February, in January. The Vietnamese attacked our villages so we left as refugees, joined with the soldiers and went into the jungle. Together with our wives and children. When we got to Paksan, we left our wives and children there and they took us back to Nahia. When they took the soldiers back this time around, after we had lost, they wanted to combine everybody to see if we have enough troops. Once it was determined that each *kong lu-aie* and *kong phan* were as they should be, they passed out uniforms, weapons, ammunitions, and commanded us to go and retake the forts and villages that we had lost. So this was what we had to do. When we went back, we were able to retake the city of Muang Nga. We had about five, six forts there, we were able to retake all of them. When we went back in this manner, the Vietnamese did not know when we would be going. When we went, we had already gotten onto the forts, when the Vietnamese took over a fort they usually don't stay there because they didn't have aircrafts to bring them water and food, so they'd rather go and stay a little ways off in the valley, somewhere narrow, because if they stay on the fort there'd be aircrafts that might attack them, right? So when we found out that they weren't in the fort, we'd go and occupy it before they even knew it. And so this was how we gained some victories, won some

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<sup>5</sup> "Muat" is a Laotian word, which is the equivalent of about ten men, or maybe a "platoon";

battles. We had intense fighting at some forts, these were the ones that the Vietnamese stayed on so they fought. We also suffered major casualties.

Translator:

Yes, that's no problem. In 1972, in Muang Mao, the enemy had attacked and we were all scattered. It was around January or February and civilians plus troops were all scattered and we left Muang Mao, and we got down to Paksan. At Paksan, we left our family, our wives and our children there and were commanded to, we were sent back to Nahia. And in Nahia, we were regrouped there, where what was left with the troops and once everybody was identified, we were regrouped and we were divided and also supplies provided for us. And we were sent back to Muang Nga to regain some of the regions that we have lost. And when we went back, we did regain some of the regions that we have lost because the enemy didn't always know that we were coming back to regain those areas. So the Vietnamese military, once they took over a camp or a region, they don't always live in the camp because they were afraid that American planes would bomb them so they usually just stayed close by or lived close by in the different valleys far away. So when we go back to these camps, we could sometimes easily take over a camp. And go into a camp and set up our position there without any fight, but at other camps there had been fighting.

Would you speak as Ellen had asked earlier about how you were engaged in a battle and how that took place? And what did you see when you tried to retake the fort? So that we would get a picture of how it was like when you were engaged in battle.

Nao Tou Lor:

So I will explain clearly that when I was a soldier, I was very fortunate, that I was never fired at, nor was I engaged in intense fighting when trying to retake a fort. When they first sent us back, I was the one that went. After we had taken over that fort, we stayed there for some time, and right after I was transferred out, that was when the Vietnamese attacked. During the attack, four of my brothers died, ok? Much later when we went to retake a fort at Muang Ya, it was similar. They sent us to retake the fort on the highest peak at Muang Ya. We were the second *kong lu-ai*, right? So they sent us. When we got there, because the fort is so high up that the Vietnamese weren't in the fort, so we didn't have to fight. After we took the fort, the Vietnamese did come and attack us. But we had dug holes and trenches. I stayed in that fort for one year. The Vietnamese came and circled the fort. We were afraid so we set grenades, the hand grenades, we took out the igniter, right? And we used them to set up traps, from here to those houses [pointing to some houses across the street], all over the fort. We tied a rope to the grenades, so the idea was that if they trigger it then the grenades would explode. Once the grenades explode then we'd just throw lots of grenades to follow up. This was why they couldn't overpower that fort even after several tries. Just right after I left that fort, I just left that fort and came down to the airport, to come and

get some rest, as I was arriving in the airport in Muang Ya, that was the night that the Vietnamese attacked them at that fort. That was the night that the fort was lost, six Laotians and two Hmong died. This made me realize that I was very fortunate. I stayed in the fort for that many months and there was no attack, but the same night that I got out, that was the night that they was attacked.

Translator: I considered myself very fortunate too, because I would be sent to regions or camps and I would stayed there and there would be relatively a few fights that we had to do, but then once I left, the enemy would attack. And I remember one particular experience. Once I left, the enemy attacked and four of my brothers, four of my older brothers were killed in that attack, but I was already left. One time too, we had launched an attack on a camp that the enemy had occupied and it was a very, it was a very high elevated camp and so there was no water in that camp. And the enemy wasn't in that camp because there was no water, no running water that would help them. So we went in without a fight and we stayed there for almost a year, and we set up grenades all around the camp, that if anybody come, they would triggered these grenades and it would let us know that they had come. And once or twice this would happen, we would throw grenades at them. Again, I felt very fortunate because I had only left that night and the enemy attacked that night. The same night that I have been taken to the airport in Muang Ya, the enemy attacked and six Laotian soldiers and two Hmong soldiers had died that same night that I left.

Ellen Brooks: So during all of these, where was the rest of your family, your family that wasn't fighting?

Translator: When there was all these fighting, how was your family? Where were they?

Nao Tou Lor: As far as my family goes, my mother, my brother, my brothers that weren't soldiers, they took my mother, took our family to stay in a region that had no war.

Translator: You mentioned that your brother took them?

Nao Tou Lor: Yeah, I had three brothers. The two of us went to fight in the war. So my two older brothers took my mother and my family to stay in a region that was not fighting. When they came to live in that region, they receive assistance to sustain them, which (they) dropped off rice for them, so they could survive.

Translator: Yeah, my brothers, I have three older brothers and one older brother and me, we were at the front, but two of my brothers would take my mother and my, the rest of our family and kind of took them from place to place

and at those times, they received supplies, received food I guess from the leaders and the military leaders so they were doing fine.

Nao Tou Lor: One thing that took place after the cease-fire in '73, which they drafted the cease-fire in '73, stating that there was to be no more fighting, right?

Translator: Was it '73?

Nao Tou Lor: Yes. At that time, the Vietnamese violated their agreement to cease fire. The agreement was that whatever territory the Vietnamese had obtained, they were to stay put, and whatever territory we had gained, we were to stay put. No crossing over boundaries until a government has been established, when the two sides had come together, right? But when they drafted these agreements, the Vietnamese violated them. They did not abide by the agreement. They continued to cross into our regions, so we ended up fighting. For this reason, the General sent us to Ban<sup>6</sup> Na, for us to occupy Phu<sup>7</sup> Ong. They commanded us to occupy Phu Kheng, overlooking Sala Mua Kher<sup>8</sup>, on the way to the Plain of Jars<sup>9</sup>.

Translator: Um, which mountain was it?

Nao Tou Lor: Mount<sup>10</sup> Phu Kheng.

Translator: Mount Phu Kheng, correct?

Nao Tou Lor: Yeah.

Translator: Ok, was that the one you occupied or the one overlooking...?

Nao Tou Lor: That was the one that they commanded us to occupy the fort, to not let the Vietnamese occupy it.

Translator: Phu Kheng, is it?

Nao Tou Lor: Yes. When they sent us to occupy like that, they wouldn't let us fight anymore. We could only occupy it.

Translator: Oh.

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<sup>6</sup> A Laotian word meaning "village"; for example, "Ban Na" is "the village of Na";

<sup>7</sup> "Phu" is a Laotian word meaning "Mountain";

<sup>8</sup> Transliterated from the Hmong word "Xa Las Muaj Khawb";

<sup>9</sup> This is the English translation, Nao Tou's exact word were "Thoob Haim Him", which is a Laotian word, written in the Hmong Romanized Popular Alphabets (RPA).

<sup>10</sup> This is a translation of the Hmong word "Roob", used by Nao Tou, which means "Mountain".

Nao Tou Lor: So that they couldn't cross over only. But the Vietnamese, they violated the agreement, so they continued to attack us. They fired their artilleries from the plains toward us. Our artilleries in Ban Na were all burned and destroyed. We lived in the forts, because our forts were well constructed, so when they shelled us, they destroyed our man-holes, but they did not hit us.

Translator: In 1973, there was an agreement to cease fire while the government worked on putting itself back together. So the cease fire declared that whatever region we have gained or whatever regions the enemy have gained we cannot occupy those. But we were no longer permitted to try to get or gain more region, more areas through war, through fighting. We were to occupy those we have in our possession. But the enemy did not follow that cease fire agreement so they continued to cross over into regions that we have occupied, so our troops were sent to Ban Na, Ban Na in Phu Ong. And we were asked to occupy a place called Phu Kheng. And we were not ordered to fight or to establish any fight or to attack. We were just ordered to occupy Phu Kheng, so if the enemy come and tried to take over that region we would (be) ready for them, but we were not commanded to fight. I remembered the enemy would fire their artillery from their bases into our area and they have destroyed our artillery and equipment in the regions that we stayed in. And our camp was heavily bombarded with shells.

Nao Tou Lor: At that time, when we called for air support, even when the aircrafts came they just said the government wouldn't allow them to be armed. They couldn't help us, right? They wouldn't let us fire our artillery to the Vietnamese, that if we do we would be violating the agreement, right? We were commanded to hide so that we wouldn't get hit. So after the Vietnamese bombarded us heavily, and we didn't budge, they abandoned their efforts, in the region of Phu Kheng. Now they came around to the region of Khang Khai, which is in the southeast part of Laos. In this situation, they noticed that the Vietnamese were coming over in that region, so the General ordered these very large aircrafts, they were stripe and green, to pick us up from Ban Na and bring us to defend that region...

Translator: When we called for air support to help us, because we were bombarded with so many shells, they would send air support, but they could not arm with any kind of missiles or any kind of capability to fire or to fight. They instructed us to hide so that we wouldn't be destroyed through the bombarded artillery. So the enemy finally abandoned bombing the region that we lived in at Ban Na in Phu Kheng, and they had gone to a different area called Khang Khai. And in that area, Khang Khai, General Vang Pao had taken our troops, used airplanes to come pick up our troops and sent us to Khang Khai also.

Nao Tou Lor: When they sent us to Khang Khai, in the rules of the military, they first sent in the First *Kong Phan*, then the Second *Kong Phan*, right? And sometimes the First *Kong Lu-aie*, Second *Kong Lu-aie*, that's what they did. The first two aircrafts that tried to land at Khang Khai came under Vietnamese fire that they couldn't even land. That was why they sent those of us who went later to Padong.

Translator: So in Khang Khai, in military engagement rule or based on what I know, *Kong Phan*, the First *Kong Phan* and the Second *Kong Phan* were sent first. First *Kong Lu-aie* and Second *Kong Lu-aie* were also usually sent first, but when they tried to land in Khang Khai, the enemy had already, were ready to attack them and had establish a base there that they could not even land their troops there. And so the *Kong Phan* and *Kong Lu-aie* that was sent to Khang Khai were attacked and they were scattered and we couldn't, they could not establish, they could not come and get a base set up over there.  
You said that they also sent you but to a different location, correct?

Nao Tou Lor: They sent two aircrafts but upon landing they were attacked, scattering all the troops, so the later aircrafts were not able to land at all.

Translator: Ok, what about your group? Where did they send you?

Nao Tou Lor: They sent us to a location a little further back, in Padong.

Translator: Padong right?

Nao Tou Lor: Padong, very close, Khang Khai is only on the other side. Separated by a river, Khang Khai is on the other side.

Translator: Because we couldn't land at Khang Khai, because the enemy would attack the planes that would try to land there. We as a group of *kong lu-aie*, *kong phan* were dropped (off) at Padong which is near by Khang Khai, just separated by a river.

Nao Tou Lor: At the time that they brought us to the region, they want us to block all of that region, to Phula Phaphai<sup>11</sup>, all the way to Mount Zaoqao<sup>12</sup>.

Translator: When you say "block", was it the Vietnamese that blocked you or...?

Nao Tou Lor: We do the blocking so that the Vietnamese wouldn't come.

Translator: Oh ok.

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<sup>11</sup> Transliterated from the Hmong word "Phus Laj Pham Phais";

<sup>12</sup> The Hmong word for this is "Roob Zaub Qaub";

Nao Tou Lor: So we came to stay like that in the region. Once we came, the Vietnamese no longer advanced, because they knew that we had come and established forts to protect all of that region.

Translator: You had to block from where to where?

Nao Tou Lor: From Padong to Phula Phaphai.

Translator: Phula Phaphai?

Nao Tou Lor: Yes, Phula Phaphai to the area of Mount Zaoqao. North of Padong.

Translator: Ok. When we came to Padong, we were commanded to establish a line of defense there from Padong to Phula Phaphai, to an area called Mount Zaoqao and to establish that line of defense that the enemy could not advance any further.

Nao Tou Lor: When the Vietnamese saw that we had established the line of defense like that, they took route 7, which led to Salaphukhon<sup>13</sup>. They wanted to go to Luang Prabang, and also to Vang Viang. Therefore, the General sent us from that area back to defend at Salaphukhon, at the crossroad leading to Luang Prabang and Vang Viang. We were the last ones who stayed in that region until '75 when the General and everyone left the country. The soldiers in that area were the last ones at the end.

Translator: So when the enemy noticed that we have established a line of defense in the area of Padong to Mount Zaoqao, they decided to take a different route to try to get to Luang Prabang through, is it route 7? I'm not sure, but route 7 to Salaphukhon, also from Salaphukhon to Luang Prabang. And so General Vang Pao took our troops and our *Kong Phan* to try to stop the enemy on their advance on Route 7. And we were the group that stayed there to defend that route so the enemy couldn't get to Luang Prabang until 1975 when the war, the war effort was finally lost.

Ellen Brooks: So, did you have any interactions with the Americans? And if so what was that like?

Translator: Have you had interactions with or worked with American soldiers? If you have, what took place when you interacted with the Americans?

Nao Tou Lor: I did not see American soldiers because the Americans that came to Laos were not soldiers. Because in Laos, there was something called "neutral", which was that other nations were not allowed to send troops. But even when other nations weren't allowed to send in troops, Vietnam continued to send troops. That was why there were American CIAs, who dressed as

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<sup>13</sup> Transliterated from the Hmong word "Xas Las Phus Khoos", which was taken from a Laotian word;

civilians, that came to train the soldiers, trained us, the Hmong and Laotian soldiers. So we didn't get to see them as soldiers, how they fight a war, we did not see. We saw the pilots. When they came, they came in airplanes, so we saw them. We also saw an American who carried a phone, right? Sometimes when they came to the fort, they were dressed in uniforms and carried a handgun, right? But they came, spoke many words and then the airplane took them away.

Translator: My interactions with American soldiers were limited in that seems like the Americans were neutral so they didn't really send any troops to, in the war effort to fight in Laos per se. Mostly, it was with the CIA, where officers who came wearing civilian clothes to train and to supervise. They didn't engage side by side with us in any combat. I'd also seen pilots, American pilots who came and also some Americans who came with them, officers who came with the pilot, who had a phone with them or who might be in uniform of some sort, but they would come, they would just talk about certain things then they would leave.

Ellen Brooks: So in 1975, when the, it was clear that the war had been lost or the effort was going to cease, what happened to you? What was next for you?

Translator: So in 1975, when it was obvious the country was lost, at that time what were you thinking? What happened then?

Nao Tou Lor: At that time we hid all of our rifles because at that time in our country the Vietnamese were coming. The General had given rifles to all civilians in the villages, as a way to protect the country, right? So the soldiers all had guns, and the civilians also had guns. So when it was known that the Vietnamese were coming to take over, (we) hid all of our weapons. Some threw them away, others hid them. There was no telling of what they would do when they came, whether they'd do well or evil, because the officials were all gone, the General was also gone. At that point, we decided that we would try to be good citizens and live among them. So when we decided to be good citizens among them, they sent troops. They started by sending Hmong troops first, who came and told us "Don't be afraid, we will not harm you. General Vang Pao had left and the Americans had gone home, so we won't harm you". So at this point, we weren't afraid. We came back to being civilians, farmed our land and fields. Go ahead and translate that.

Translator: Ok. At that time when we realized that the war was ending or that the war was being lost, we hid our arms, our rifles, our weapons, we hid them. At that time, before '75, General Vang Pao and Americans sent lots of weapons to even civilians in the villages so that they have means to defend themselves. And when the war effort was feeling, was feeling that it was lost, a lot of people throw away a lot of their rifles, throw away their

weapons, hide them someway. We decided to become civilians and citizens again to farm and to live our lives as normal as possible. The enemy sent, sent other Hmong people to come and talk to us and telling us not to be afraid that the Americans and General Vang Pao had already left. And that we shouldn't be afraid, we should just become citizens again.

Nao Tou Lor:

At that point, we weren't afraid anymore, but when they came, they brought new laws. When they came, they established new infrastructure, new officials, new mayors, new elders like in a city council, right? They established those anew. When they established those, they took individuals who were very poor, those who were of no use on our side because they were illiterate, uneducated, and couldn't work, right? So they came and established those as officials. They gave them a salary, and ask them to identify who was a soldier, those who lived in this village, who was a soldier, right? Who served in what position? Who was the mayor? What was a teacher? These new officials were the ones who told them. So when they were finished doing this, establishing new officials, they came and spend time with them, befriended them, and only them. And they told them that this individual was a soldier with the General back in the days, this one was a mayor, this one was *nai kong*<sup>14</sup>, this person has a rifle, these all have rifles. At that time, they wrote it all down. There was one day when they came with the list, right? They came and asked "Hey, you have a rifle, right? You were a soldier, right?" If you denied, they had a list in their hands because the other guy had already told them. When you say that you do have a rifle, then they'd tell you give them your rifle, if not they'd take you to jail. So they started to create problems like this.

Translator:

Um. So at first with them telling us not to be afraid, we were not. We tried to live our lives as normal as possible, but they came with new rules and new order in the villages that we lived in also. They set up new village leaders; they set new mayor, new city council, for example. They approached those people that during our time in peace couldn't even serve in city council and couldn't serve as village head, because these were poor people and these were uneducated people. But they established these new orders, these new level of commands in the villages and once they put them in the position of power and once they gave them a salary, they would come and get these people to help them to identify who was who during the war. And then these people who received power and received a salary from the enemy would tell them, would them the enemy so and so served in this position during the war and so and so had a rifle and still have a rifle. They would tally up all the names in the village, all the men, all the people who had served during the war. And once they have done that, compiled that list and they would approach you and ask you, "So you

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<sup>14</sup> Transliterated from the Hmong word "*Nais Koo*"; Base on a follow-up conversation with Nao Tou, "*Nais koo*" is a Laotian title for a civilian leader, it's a position higher than a village leader, but lower than a mayor;

still have a rifle?” So you can’t really deny because if you deny someone else have told them you have a rifle, but if you tell them you do, they would confiscate the rifle and said “Give it to us or we’ll arrest you and put you in prison”.

Nao Tou Lor:

Ah, at that time, we were living in Muang Au. Muang Au is just south of Phu Bia. When they came, they said “We know that you have many rifles”, right? “Bring all of your rifles, they belong to the Americans and the General. Don’t use them anymore. Whoever was a soldier, now we know. We’ll let him be a soldier like before, but we’ll bring brand new rifles. But you must bring all of your rifles”. So we were happy, so we gave them all of our rifles. Wherever we hid our rifles, we went to bring them out, because if we didn’t we’ll be punished. The reasoning is that if you’d still want to be a good citizen, then that’s what you do. They’d bring new rifles. That’s what their law said, right? That was why everybody brought their rifles to our house. My brother was a *nai kong*, in the CIA in the old days, so we collected many rifles into our home. We got a huge pile of rifles. But after they came and took away the rifles, they did not bring new rifles for us, ok?

Translator:

Let me translate that first. At the time we were living in an area called Muang Au, south of Phu Bia and the enemy told us to give up our arms and our rifles, and told us to give them up and so they will give us new rifles. They told us that those of you who were soldiers could continue to be soldiers and officers still in the military and you can remain so. And so my brother was a *nai kong* and we, those who hid their weapons in the jungle or at different places, they had gone to get their weapons and tried to surrender their weapons to the enemy, thinking that we would receive new weapons because we were told that “Those weapons that you have belonged to the Americans and General Vang Pao. Don’t use them anymore and we’ll give you new weapons”, so people were willing to give them their weapons. I remembered that once we collected all the rifles and the weapons into my brother’s home, we had a whole pile of weapons, we had so many of them that the enemy had taken them away. But once they took away our weapons and our rifles they didn’t give us any of their weapons that they had promised.

Nao Tou Lor:

After they took away the rifles, they did not bring new rifles. Now they knew that we no longer had any rifles, so they made new laws. Now they knew that if they arrest us, former soldiers and officials, we had no guns to fight back, right? So when they came, they asked “Were you a mayor? Were you a *nai kong*? Were you a *nai<sup>15</sup> kong phan* back in the days?” And if you deny, they already knew because the mayor had told them, right? So now they created trouble for the Hmong, and the Hmong can no

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<sup>15</sup> “*nai*” is a Laotian designation in Laotian which means *leader*, therefore “*nai kong phan*” is “*leader of a kong phan*” or “*commander of a battalion*”;

longer live. So if they arrest my brother, because he was a mayor, or because he was a *nai kong phan*, then the option I have was to go into hiding in the jungle and retrieve my old rifle. This was the reason why the Hmong had risen to fight in the second wave of war in Laos, which they called “the revolt against the *Hucksaad*<sup>16</sup>”. So when they came back, they did not bring the rifles. They came with the mindset to arrest people, this was the reason why the Hmong was upset. However many rifles we still had, we retrieved them all. We brought all the rifles we still had back into our homes. We became soldiers once again. We fought them once again, and they were driven back. We fought them beginning in '76 until '79.

Translator:

So once they took away all of our weapons and arms, they did not bring their weapons for us to use. They came back interrogating people and said you were colonel, you were general, you were so and so *kong phan*, *nai kong phan*, *nai kong lu-aie*, so forth and so on. And you could not really deny much because they have a list of who was who from what they know already. And so that caused a lot of problems with a lot of us because if they arrest my brother, I would be upset, I would go and get whatever weapons I still have in the jungle and tried to defend myself and my family. So this is why the second wave of fighting started from 1976 to 1979 and those of us who were not arrested went back into the jungle and get whatever weapons we had still remaining and bring them back to the village to defend ourselves.

Nao Tou Lor:

At that time, we went and retrieved our weapons. So I went and retrieved mine, and you went and retrieved yours, because we knew that they weren't being just toward us, right? Everybody, each went and retrieved their own rifle, however many was left we went and retrieved them all. So we fought them from '76 until '79. In '76, '77 and '78, they had no idea where our strength came from. For this reason, they feared us, and they weren't able to come near us. So we had those few years to work our fields and plant. We sent soldiers to occupy the old forts, surrounding all their forts, they weren't able to come out at all, the Vietnamese. We were able to plant and harvest freely. After that there were some Hmong who betrayed us and went to the Vietnamese, to expose us. At first they befriended us and then they went and disclosed to them that we had nothing, that whatever weapons we had were those left behind by General Vang Pao and the CIA, that we had no artillery, no grenades, no aircrafts, that we only had rifles. When this got out, the Vietnamese used aircrafts, soldiers, a *kong phan* of Vietnamese soldiers to support the Laotians, right? They used tanks, 105 artillery, 130, together with aircrafts to fight in '78. That was why we scattered and went into hiding in the jungle. Once they know that this village that they couldn't penetrate is located here, then they used artillery and fired at us from the distance. They used

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<sup>16</sup> This was Nao Tou's own word; it refers to the Laotians who claimed loyalty and love toward Laos, who love their nation.

aircrafts and fired missiles from the distance into the village. So when we could no longer live in the villages, we went into hiding in the jungle.

Translator: So at the time each of us who still had any weapons or rifles left, we gathered all the weapons that we have and defended ourselves. Because the enemy did not know where our strength is they left us and they no longer harass us, no longer came and tried to arrest certain leaders during the war. So we set guards and we set up perimeters around our villages to guard and to protect ourselves. And from '76, '77, and to part of '78, we were living in peace, we could establish our farming and lived normally in the villages. But there have been other people who were also Hmong who lived among us who went to the enemy and gave them some facts about our situation. They would go and said that "They have nothing, they only have old weapons and old rifles that was left by the CIA and left by General Vang Pao." And so when the enemy gained these facts and know these facts, they used tanks, they used air strikes, they used artillery, they used other means of war to bomb our villages and to fight us and we have no way to combat that. And so that's when we scattered in 1978 and went into the jungle.

Nao Tou Lor: In '78, after they scattered us into the jungle, they brought aircrafts, artillery, rifles, and set them up in our villages. We couldn't do anything, that's why we crossed over to Thailand. And they knew that we were crossing over to Thailand, they knew that "These people are going to Thailand", so they sent troops to wait on the route and slaughtered us. Our family, on the way to Thailand, had twelve members, they killed eight, only four of us survived. Even I got arrested at the Mekong River.

Translator: So when we were scattered into the jungle, the enemy bring their equipment, bring their troops and occupied our villages and took over our livelihood and so we had no way of living normally in Laos anymore. And so that's when we decided to cross over to Thailand. And even with that they would sent troops to be on our routes to Thailand and would attack and would bomb and would kill people along the way. Our family had twelve, there were twelve of us and eight had died and only four of us survived, even myself was arrested right alongside the Mekong River.

Nao Tou Lor: After that, they arrested me and my wife. I only had one child, so with my son there were three of us. Because when we got to the River, it was huge, and there were troops everywhere, Vietnamese soldiers, right? No matter where you tried to go, there were troops. No matter where you tried to go, there was water. So we went around for three days and they arrested us.

Translator: Me and my wife and my oldest son were arrested right before we crossed the Mekong River because the river was huge and we couldn't cross.

There was a lot of enemy troops circling that area and so for three days we just kind of circling around that region and we got arrested.

Ellen Brooks: How old was your son?

Nao Tou Lor: At that time he was three years old.

Translator: At that time he was three.

Nao Tou Lor: When they arrested us, they sent us as refugees to a camp in Laos. After they sent us to live in the camp, they sent troops to watch over us. They didn't let us go anywhere. They built a very good fence. A little further down from the camp was a market, but the rest of the area was filled with soldiers. They only allowed us to go and buy grocery from the market and then we had to come back into the camp. We couldn't go out of the camp anywhere. We stayed there for over a month then they sent us to Vang Viang.

Translator: So when captured at the Mekong River, we were taken back to a refugee camp on the side of Laos. And it was a fenced in refugee camp with military troops guarding that camp. There's a little market right in the camp where you can go and get some food and some supply, but that's all you could do; go get your food and your supply and you had to come back to stay at that fenced-in camp. So for about one month, my family stayed there and after one month we were sent to Vang Viang.

Nao Tou Lor: If we were to tell these stories thoroughly it would take a long time, so I'm just telling it briefly. After they sent us to Vang Viang, they noticed that we were further away, so they didn't put us in a fenced-in camp, in barbed wire, right?

Translator: Further from the Thai border, correct?

Nao Tou Lor: Yes, further from the Thai border. They dispersed us, to build huts in random places, spread out tarps, but they sent troops to stay with us, to watch us. At that time, they took us to work in the field, the community field, which belonged to the government. They forced everybody to work, to pluck weeds from the field.

Translator: So in Vang Viang, because we're further away from the Thai border, they did not fence us in. They allowed us to live in different areas of the village but there were still enemy troops kind of in the village, living among us, keeping an eye on us. And we were commanded, we were asked to work on the field, the community field, where the government owns, and to farm that land as a huge community effort.

Nao Tou Lor: The reason they brought us to live there was only temporary, when they had put out the revolt in Phu Bia, when those villages were ready, they would certainly take us back there. They brought us there and forced us to work the community field, to clear and to pluck their rice field. There were more than three hundred of us. Rain or shine, we must go. While we worked on the field, there were three soldiers, carrying three rifles, walking on the dividers on the field watching us. There was no talking between one another. I couldn't speak to you. You couldn't speak to me. We must work the field reverently with our heads down. If I said anything to you, they'd come to inquire "What are you talking about? Are you talking about going to Thailand? Tell me", right? So you wouldn't dare say anything, and just keep working the field until they blew the whistle to signal "go home". Then we came home.

Translator: So the reason they retained us in that village in Vang Viang, there were over three hundred of us, was to prepare us so that once in Phu Bia, they could carve out a region in Phu Bia where they had won the region and declared it peaceful enough, they would want to take us and go back and live Phu Bia area. When we were working that community land, or community field, there were over three hundred of us, and they have three soldiers with rifles that watched our effort. As we worked in the field, they would have three soldiers with rifles watched over us, we could not talk to one another. If we started to talk one with another they would approach us, they would come to us and say "Are you talking about going to Thailand?" They would be more inquisitive and we would just not be able to talk at all.

Nao Tou Lor: During that time, when they conquered Phu Bia, they sent General Boon Chun who fought in Phu Bia, to pick us up in Vang Viang. One day, unbeknownst to us, General Boon Chun brought a troop of soldiers to our huts and ordered us "Are you the ones who had been scattered, who revolted against the government and tried to cross over to Thailand, and was captured? Pack your bags, go see the mayor and obtain travel documents, and at noon we will return to take all of you to Phu Bia", right? "And if by noon, when we return, whoever still didn't have travel document will be punished, will be imprisoned." At that time, they ordered us to pack, so after eating breakfast we packed our bags, and everybody went to get travel documents. If by noon, whoever still didn't have travel document will be punished, right? So at that time, I cooked breakfast in haste and after eating, my wife packed while I went to see the mayor of Vang Viang, and got the travel document there.

Translator: So, there was a general named General Boon Chun, who was in Phu Bia, who was leading the effort in Phu Bia with his troop. He came to our village in Vang Viang and commanded us to prepare, to get our things ready, to get ready that by twelve pm they would take us to Phu Bia, to

live in that region. And his initial question was, “Are you the ones who had fought in the war and were trying to leave Laos to go to Thailand?” And he wanted to know that, and he commanded us to go and get permissions, authorizations from the mayor of Vang Viang, to go from Vang Viang to Phu Bia. The command was that if each of us did not get permission or authorization from Vang Viang to Phu Bia by twelve O’clock we would be imprisoned. So I go ahead and made breakfast and after breakfast I had gone to the mayor in Vang Viang and get my permission and authorization to go from Vang Viang to Phu Bia.

Nao Tou Lor:

After I got the travel document from the mayor, I was on my way back home, and luck was on my side. *Nai Kong Xiong Pao* was the head of the refugees, in bringing the refugees to live Muang Kasee, and we were the soldiers that were stationed in Salaphukon, in Muang Kasee. So we had known each other from that time, right? When the Vietnamese first came into Laos, they came through Salaphukon, and they couldn’t get out so *Nai Kong Xiong Pao* with others brought the refugees to live in Ban Don. And *Nai Kong Xiong Pao* was made mayor, to govern the refugees there. After I had gotten the travel document, I met *Nai Kong Xiong Pao* and he said to me, “Son, where are you going?”

“Oh, I went to see the Mayor”.

“Why did you go see him?”

“I went to get travel document”.

“Travel document? Where are you going?”

So, he quickly asked me a few questions like that. They were coming back, General Boon Chun and his troop were coming to take us to Phu Bia.

“Were you among those who were arrested near the river?”

“Yes”.

Then he said, “Son, that’s unacceptable. I won’t let you go. Let’s go to the Laotian teacher’s house, so I can talk to you first.”

The Poo-Terr<sup>17</sup> teacher used to teach in Long Cheng. He was our teacher. He taught the third class. He took me there and we spoke.

“You must not go to Phu Bia. You must not, if you go there, when the fighting is over, you will be the first to die, because you attempted to flee, you had helped the government, you have fled. If you made it to Thailand, then that would have been it, but if you didn’t make it and they captured you, and now they’re sending you there, you’d be the first to die. So go and undo your travel document.” This was what he said.

Translator:

So when I got the authorization from the Mayor of Vang Viang and I had just gotten on the road come back home, I met *Nai Kong Xiong Pao*. *Nai Kong Xiong Pao* had known me because he had fought in the war also. He was one of the people who right at the beginning, right at the time when the war was coming to an end, he had a group of refugees that he had led,

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<sup>17</sup> Transliterated from the Hmong word “Pub Thawj”, which is an ethnic minority group in Laos;

that he left his post as a military leader and he had led this group of refugees to live in Ban Don and so he had been established as a Mayor of Ban Don, as a civilian, the Mayor of Ban Don. And he knew me so when he met me on the road, he asked me where I was going and where I was headed and I said, "I just met with the Mayor and got my authorization to go to Phu Bia."

And he said, "Are you the ones, are you some of the troops, are you some of the group that was arrested on your way to Thailand, right?"

And I told him, "Yes, I was".

And he said, "You should not go, you must not go to Phu Bia. Because if you go to Phu Bia you would be one of the first ones to die, because you have been established as those who fought against the enemy and you would be the first to die if you go to Phu Bia."

And so he asked me to accompany him to a teacher's house, one of the teachers who had taught back in the time, the day when I was going to school. So we went to this Lao teacher's house and he talked more, a little bit about why he thinks I should not go. And that I should go and undo the permission, or the authorization to leave Vang Viang to Phu Bia.

Nao Tou Lor:

He told me to go and undo that travel document. He said, "If you're able to undo the travel document, then I will take you to Ban Don so you won't die."

So I brought the travel document back to the mayor. When I got there, the mayor was sitting in the same place when he gave me that travel document. And the mayor said, "What else do you want?"

So I went, at that time my wife was pregnant for the second time, right? I thought about what I was going to say, and I said to the mayor that my wife was pregnant and so she might not be able to travel to Phu Bia. The road was bad, right? So I went and said to the mayor, "Oh, my wife is pregnant, so I cannot go at this time. I'm bringing this travel document back to you. Would you undo it? And wait until she gives birth."

When I said this, the Mayor took the document, right?

"If your wife is pregnant, I won't let you go to Phu Bia."

So I gave the document to the mayor and he tore it up. And he said "Just go and wait. If General Boon Chun is displeased with you, have him come talk to me. I will take care of you. I will be responsible for you. After your wife gives birth, once the rain stops, and the a new year comes, I am going to build this road all the way to Phu Bia, then I will bring you directly to General Boon Chun's hands. So just go and wait at home." This was what he said, "Go back and stay in the camp."

So I came back. After I had undone the travel document, *Nai Kong Xiong Pao* said "Were you able to undo the travel document?"

I said "Yes I did."

And he said "Since you did, go ahead and pack your bags, and (I'll) go get travel document from the Mayor to go to Ban Don right now."

So we exchanged quickly like this and (he) was able to bring me to Ban Don.

Translator:

So I was instructed by my friend *Nai Kong Xiong Pao* to go and undo the authorization to leave Vang Viang to Phu Bia. And so, I did that, I went to the Mayor again in Vang Viang, he was still sitting at the same spot that he did the permission slip for me. And so I asked him, I didn't know what to say because I didn't have an excuse readily, but at the time, my wife was pregnant for the second time and I just came up with the excuse that "My wife is pregnant, I cannot leave right now, she cannot get on the car and make this journey, this rough journey to Phu Bia."

And he said, "Oh if your wife is pregnant right now I will not let you go either, I will wait until your wife gives birth to your baby."

He took the paper and tore it up and he said, "If General Boon Chun is not happy with you or is not pleased with what you're doing, I will take of it, I will tell him that once your wife has given birth to your child and I have established this road from Vang Viang to Phu Bia, I will personally drive you from Vang Viang to Phu Bia and take you to him."

And so the Mayor helped me in this sense and was able to undo my permission and my authorization to go to Phu Bia. And once I finished with the Mayor I came back to my friend Xiong Pao and he asked me if I had done that, and I said I did and so he instructed me right away to go and pack my bags. He's going to go and talk to the Mayor on (my) behalf and prepare another set of paperwork to get me from Vang Viang to Ban Don.

Nao Tou Lor:

At that time, I came and pack my bags. *Nai Kong Xiong Pao* went and got the travel document to sponsor me. When I came...*Nai Kong Xiong Pao* said to the Mayor, "Please find a vehicle to transport this family to Ban Don as soon as possible."

And the Mayor said, "Oh, there is no vehicle at this time. So you can take them and start walking, once I have a vehicle from Luang Prabang I will send one to pick them up."

So *Nai Kong Xiong Pao* led us, and we walked. Once we got past Vang Viang, there were two military trucks from Vang Viang, but they were empty. They didn't carry anything. When they got to us, they said, "Are you the people that the Mayor said we should take to Ban Don?"

We said, "Yes" and so they took us to Ban Don.

That's how I came to live in Ban Don and from there I left Ban Don and crossed over to Thailand and that's how got to where I am today.

Translator:

So *Nai Kong Xiong Pao* got the authorization for me to leave Vang Viang to come to Ban Don, he had requested with the Mayor to find a mean of transportation, maybe a car maybe, a truck to take me and my family from Vang Viang to Ban Don. But he said, "No, we have no vehicle right now to take this family to Ban Don, but go ahead and walk, start walking from

here to Ban Don and as soon as I have a truck I will send them after you to take you to Ban Don.”

And so we started walking from Vang Viang to Ban Don and little while later came two military trucks, emptied military trucks and they approached us and said, “Are the group that the Mayor asked to walk from here to Ban Don?”

And we said, “We are”. And so they said, “Come on the trucks, come on the truck and we’ll take you to Ban Don.” And we got on the truck, we got to Ban Don, we lived there for a little while and from Ban Don I crossed over to Thailand.

Ellen Brooks: So how long were you in Thailand then?

Nao Tou Lor: One year.

Translator: You only lived there for one year?

Nao Tou Lor: Only one year.

Translator: And came straight to this country?

Nao Tou Lor: Yeah.

Translator: Stayed there for one year and then came to the U.S.

Ellen Brooks: In Thailand, did you live in a camp? Or how did you live there?

Translator: How did you live there? Were you living in a camp?

Nao Tou Lor: I lived in a camp. Vi Nai was a refugee camp, it was a very difficult thing. You were immigrants, had no land and no country, had no way to make a living. You were just waiting for the government, the UN, to send food, right? Whatever food they rationed to you, that was what you eat, you couldn’t go outside. The outside belong the Thai people, it was their land, and they have the right to beat you up, to tie you up, right? This was how it was, it was difficult, that was why I decided that I must not stay in Thailand. If there was a way, I must get out of Thailand. It was good timing, when we got there, they were doing interviews for war veterans to go to foreign countries, to take all the war veterans first because it was dangerous for them. Because the Vietnamese knew that all the war veterans had fled to Thailand. That was why they were bringing all the war veterans first.

Translator: What year was that?

Nao Tou Lor: It was ’80. I came to Thailand in ’79. June of ’79 I came to Thailand.

Translator: So in '80 you registered to come to this country?

Nao Tou Lor: October of '80, I came to this country.

Translator: Ok. So in the refugee camps, there was no means to make a living, we have to rely, all of our food, on whatever the UN provided. We can't leave the camp because it was not our land. And we had to rely completely on UN to provide us with food. So I reasoned that I must leave Thailand and at the time interviews were being conducted for former veterans to leave Thailand, to go to a foreign country. I came to Thailand in June of '79 and by October of '80 I was ready to leave.

Ellen Brooks: So how did you end up in the United States?

Translator: So I how did you end up in the United States?

Nao Tou Lor: When I came, I came by plane. Because at that time, it was unfortunate, Thailand was a country that had many illnesses, correct? I lived there for only, I came in June of '79, in March of '80 my wife died. My wife got sick but we couldn't treat her so she died.

Translator: When did she die?

Nao Tou Lor: In March.

Translator : In March of '80?

Nao Tou Lor: March of '80. We had just finished the interview, the registration, then my wife died. If my wife had not died, I would have come earlier, but because she died, they delayed it. That was why I was delayed until October. I decided to come to America, this country, to bring my two children because in Thailand we were living in a camp, similar to living in the battle field. You couldn't even move, it was very difficult.

Translator: We came to the U.S. by plane, but Thailand is a country that has a lot of illnesses too. And my wife got really sick in Thailand. All of our paperwork were ready to come to the U.S. But in March of 1980, just right before we were to leave my wife passed away. She died and so our departure was pushed back, that's why it was pushed back to October of 1980. And I decided to take my two children to come to the U.S. because in the refugee camp you can't really do much. It wasn't a life to grow and to live anyway. So I decided to leave Thailand.

Nao Tou Lor: Ah, at the time when we came, I'm saying only the truth, as veterans, we didn't have to pay the airfare. The three of us cost over \$1,000. They

didn't have us pay because we came as war veterans. They brought the veterans first, and after the veterans they brought the refugees. When the refugees came, they all had to pay. That was because the American government helped us, they saw the value of our service, between us and them, we had helped each other fight the war in Laos. Even if they weren't there, they sent weapons and utilized our people as their soldiers, defended against the North Vietnamese, to help the Americans in South Vietnam. This was the reason why they were able to bring all of our veterans over. If we stayed in Thailand, it would have been very dangerous for us, right? When we came, we didn't have money. We were immigrants, refugees, had no money from anywhere, if the government didn't help how was it possible for us to come, if not we would have died over there. So the government provided the aircraft for us to come, this is something to be grateful for, and thank the government for it.

Translator: I speak the truth because at the time when my family came we did not have to pay the airfare. The cost was a little bit over \$1,000 but we didn't have, we weren't made to pay that fare. The American government paid for all of that because we had helped in the war effort, even the American government did not send troops to help us, they provided supplies for us to help them fight a common enemy. Us, veterans, living in Thailand was also very dangerous, and we were refugees and so we had no money and I was grateful that the U.S. government had helped us to bring us to the U.S., very grateful.

Ellen Brooks: How did you end up in Wisconsin?

Translator: How did you end up in Wisconsin?

Nao Tou Lor: Ah, when I came, I landed in Saint Paul, in Minneapolis. Then in '84, I moved to La Crosse.

Translator: Oh, ok. I actually came to Saint Paul, Minneapolis, Minnesota first, but 1984 I moved to La Crosse, Wisconsin.

Ellen Brooks: So why did you end up in Saint Paul first then?

Translator: Why did you end up there? Did you have relatives that came there first?

Nao Tou Lor: Ah, because the church and the program that sponsored us was over there.

Translator: Oh, because the church that sponsored us were in Saint Paul.

Ellen Brooks: Ok, and what brought you to La Crosse?

Translator: What was it that made you moved to La Crosse, Wisconsin?

Nao Tou Lor: Ah, the reason we came to La Crosse was because in 1982 they established the Hmong Association in La Crosse. In 1984, they appointed my cousin<sup>18</sup>, who had come previously, to be a board member. But because he my cousin wasn't literate and didn't know the language, he didn't want to accept the appointment. That's why he came to bring me down to be a board member in the Association.

Translator: So in '82, there was a Hmong Association established in La Crosse and in '84, one of my relatives, one of my older brothers, relative, cousin probably, was asked to come and serve on the board for the Hmong Association. But he doesn't know English or he doesn't read or write and so he wanted me to come and serve on the board instead. That's why in '84 I came to La Crosse.

Ellen Brooks: So what was it like trying to adjust to life here in the United States and to be a civilian?

Translator: When you came the United States and you had to change, because over there you were a soldier, you fought in a war, but you became a civilian when you came here, you changed your life like that, how different was it?

Nao Tou Lor: Ah, if we were to talk about it, it was a difficult thing. But let's talk about something a little simpler. Trying to change to be a new person in this country was very difficult. First, you don't know the language. You don't even own a car, right? When you don't speak the language, you don't have any income from anywhere, ok? When (we) arrived, (we) applied for some assistance from Welfare. I went to work part-time. They sent me to work, cleaning a library, mowing a lawn, whatever it was (I) just had to do it. They helped with some Medical Assistance for the family and some Food Stamp, just enough. Second of all, you get an opportunity to go to school for a little bit. So a few things made it very difficult to adjust, but grateful that we were free from sleeping with our rifles, or the sound of gunfire. So it was peaceful in that way, to take a different path, that's how we got to where we are today.

Translator: It's very difficult, first of all I had no English, no vehicle to get by, had no income, couldn't work much, whatever work the government found for me I had to do; such as janitorial, yard work. I did so I could get Medical Assistance, I could get Food Share for my family. It was difficult, but the bright side is that we are free from the fighting. We no longer have to sleep with our weapons right by (our) side. We no longer hear gunfire, artillery, and fighting.

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<sup>18</sup> Nao Tou's actual word was "tij laug" which is "older brother", but relationships in the Hmong family this "older brother" can be a biological brother or a cousin. In this case, he was referring to a cousin, therefore, we use the term "cousin" instead;

Nao Tou Lor: When this is the case, you begin to think what should you do to acclimate into this country, America? First, you have to work with their law. Second, you have to see these Americans as your parents. We must see this country as our own, and work with them to build a life one step at a time, and begin in this manner.

Translator: It's difficult but we, in this new life, we try to fit in. We try to follow the law. We try to make this, our country. We try to look at the American government as our parents, as our leaders and we take it one step at a time.

Ellen Brooks: What types of organizations have you joined?

Translator: What types of organizations that you, yourself, have joined?

Nao Tou Lor: Ah, when I came, I did all kinds of things, as much as I could do. When I came here, they appointed me to be a board member in the Association. So I served as a board member from '84, '85, '86, all the way to '93. I served with the Association like this to help my people, while working at my own job to support my family, organized my people so they obey the law, love one another, and able to adapt to this country, until '93. Ah, so they appointed me to be the Vice President of the Association. Then in '94, they appointed me as the President in the Association here in La Crosse. Two terms until '98, then in '98 all of the Lor clan, the leader of the Lor clan died. So they turned to elect a new leader for the entire Lor clan for all of America. They elected me to be that leader in '80.

Translator: It was '98 right?

Nao Tou Lor: From '98 to the present, when it was like this, I finished my term as the President, the Lao Veterans Association, I had been a member of the Lao Veterans Association. So when I finished the term, they appointed to be the Vice President of the Lao Veterans Association. I served as the Vice President there for four years. Then in '95, oh 2005, they appointed me to be the President of that Association until 2013.

Translator: I did all that I can, I served on the board of the Hmong Association from '84 to '93, to help our people acclimate into the American life, to be obedient to the law, to be able to fit in. Umm, I...  
Let's see, you served as the Vice President until '94, then in '94 you became the President, right?

Nao Tou Lor: In '93, I became the Vice President for one year, then in '94 they appointed me to be the President.

Translator: So '93, I was elected to be the Vice President for the Hmong Association in La Crosse and in '94, I was elected to be the President. I did two terms of that from '94 to '98 and in '98, the, all the Lor clan, our leader for the Lor clan had passed away, they elected me to be the new leader for the Lor clan. For the Lao Veterans Association, I also joined with them and I was the Vice President from '98, I served for four years and in 2005 until 2013, I served as the President for the Lao Veterans Association.

Ellen Brooks: Wow, so sounds like you're pretty proud to be a veteran.

Nao Tou Lor: Yeah.

Ellen Brooks: Yeah.

Translator: She said that the fact that you're a veteran brings a certain sense of satisfaction to your heart.

Nao Tou Lor: Yeah.

Ellen Brooks: Is there anything else that you think we, ah, we missed that you'd like to talk about? Any other stories or reflections about your service or about your life here?

Translator: Is there something that you think we didn't get to, in regard to your service as a veteran, you had helped your country that we haven't talked about, haven't spoken about thoroughly, that you'd like to talk about?

Nao Tou Lor: Ah, there are but those things would take a long time so this will be it. (I) would like to tell you that when I came to America, I wanted to be a good citizen to this country. Tried to find employment, and I was able to finish trade school and found employment with Trane Company and worked for nineteen years.

Translator: Trane?

Nao Tou Lor: Yeah, and I retired in 2013. When we were in Laos, we were soldiers, so they used aircraft to transport you and drop you off in the wilderness. When the aircraft was there, it felt like your life line is strong, right? But at night, after the aircraft left, you were in the wilderness all by yourself, you felt like your life line is very thin. You held tight to your rifle. That was the one thing that I desired the most. So when I came, in '90, I decided to learn how to fly. I finished aviation school in '90, '91 I finished aviation school and got my private pilot license. Then in 2004, I decided to buy an airplane, a Cessna 150. This is one of the things that I acquired in this country.

Translator: Very good. There are other things too, but if we talk, it might take a lot longer so that would probably be it. But when I came to the U.S, I tried to be a good citizen. I learned, when I came here I went to school I learned some technical skills and I worked for a Trane Company for about nineteen years and I retired from that post in 2013. In Laos, when I was a soldier, airplanes would drop us off in the jungle and when the airplanes were still there, we felt like our live is still good and we felt that we weren't in any danger, but when the planes left and we were left in the jungle by ourselves at night, we felt as if our life line is so thin, life could perish any time. And so in 1990, I decided to pursue pilot training and after training, I received my private license to fly an airplane, small private airplane. And recently, I have bought a small private airplane... You said that the airplane is called Cessna?

Nao Tou Lor: Yes, Cessna. Cessna 150.

Translator: Cessna 150. I have bought a small Cessna 150 airplane. Where?

Nao Tou Lor: Up there [pointing to a photo on the wall]. My wife and I, we took that photo.

Translator: Oh, up there ? Oh, ok.

Ellen Brooks: Oh, ok, in the corner there.

Translator: That picture right there. I bought that and made that my umm, the center of my joy now.

Nao Tou Lor: At present, even at this old age, there are still things that you desire, but don't quite know what to do. So right now, the thing that I desire the most is for my story be placed somewhere, so that the children, or Americans can come, see, read and know that this individual used to help us in the past. Even if I am gone, hopefully they'd still love my people, my children.

Translator: There are a lot of things that I desired too in my life, but one of the things I desired most right now is for my story to be stored somewhere or kept somewhere so that the people in this country would understand and would know that this person had been to this place and had done so and so. And even after the time when I'm gone, hopefully the people of this country would continue to be able to love my people and my children.

Ellen Brooks: That's great! Well, we're happy to have your story and we're going to keep it and will take very good care of it, so. Do you have anything else you think?

Translator: We are pleased to keep your story, and will share your story with other people also. I, myself, don't have anything else to ask you anymore. As I listened to your words, they have brought joy to my heart.

Nao Tou Lor: Ah, one more thing when we came to meet down in Madison, at the last time...that Xiong and Blong, I told (them) a little bit. Right now, I sculpted a Long Cheng, which was the CIA's headquarter, it's stone. They said I should let you know, so when you come, (we) would like for you to take it and put in the museum. And carved aircrafts, I used wood, one was a T-28, a few helicopters, these were the aircrafts back then, the CIA brought them to be used in Laos. I'd like to let you know so when you have time you can come and take an aircraft to put it there.

Translator: To borrow for a while?

Nao Tou Lor: Take it forever, to be kept there.

Translator: To be kept as an artifact?

Nao Tou Lor: Yes, to be kept as an artifact.

Translator: Do you have something that you can show us right now?

Nao Tou Lor: Sure. After we finish here, I can show you which is the one I'd like for you to take and put it in the museum. So for this, I'd like for you to write clearly that this stone was sculpted by Nao Tou. He sculpted the CIA headquarter in Laos. General Vang Pao was the commander of that post.

Translator: Um, very good. When we met in Madison, I spoke to Blong and Xiong who also came there and I told them about some of my work, my handy work. I had done some wood carving and carved a few planes, a T-28, a helicopter, the CIA had sent to help us during the war. I had carved them out of wood, I would like to donate these items to the museum so when the exhibit comes, see if you would like to take these and display them with the exhibit and as part of the exhibit. I had also made, not sure, from maybe rock or granite or certain sense a whole set of the city of Long Cheng, or the base of Long Cheng. That will be something I'm willing to donate to the museum, to use indefinitely, as part of the exhibit. After we talk here, I will show you. We will take a tour of those items.

Ellen Brooks: Ok.

Nao Tou Lor: One more thing, when I led the Veterans Association, I took more than forty Hmong to a training session to be instructors, to teach the Hmong how to hunt small games, to prevent accidents, to not trespass into private

properties. These things, because I had brought others to the training that's why I received that certificate from the DNR. When the General (Vang Pao) was dying, the General saw that I was a very young soldier, serving the country back then. After coming to this country, I still continued to help the Hmong people, for all this time. (He) said he didn't have anything to give me, to pay me a monthly salary, meaning that I was an individual that had the heart and mind, and the dedication to help the Hmong people. So he promoted me to be a *Kom-ma-daang*<sup>19</sup>, which is a Major. So now, in the military, I'm a Major.

Translator: So, since I've come to the U.S. and had been part of the Hmong Association, I had helped about forty individuals learn safety hunting through the DNR and that's why I got the certificate from the DNR for my effort to help the Hmong people learn the safety of hunting in Wisconsin. Also General Vang Pao noticed my service since when I was very young in Laos, and that even after the war I came to the U.S. I still continued to help the Hmong people. And out of my heart to help my own people, General Vang Pao promoted me to be a Major, *Kom-ma-daang*, or Major, with the Hmong-Lao Veterans Association. So now, I'm a Major to that association.

Ellen Brooks: Oh wow. So you knew General Vang Pao?

Nao Tou Lor: Yeah, I know him very well. When General Vang Pao came to Wisconsin, he usually came to my house, to dine in this house. He said to others "When I go to President Nao Tou's house, I can eat to a full stomach."

Translator: Yes, I know General Vang Pao. Whenever he stopped by in Wisconsin, he usually stops by my house. And he would tell others, outside that, "everytime I stop by Nao Tou, *Kom-ma-daang* Nao Tou's house, that's when I know I could eat with a full stomach" or "to a full stomach".

Nao Tou Lor: Because he trusted the person, that he's a person who truly loves you, truly helps you. He won't poison you. Even when you eat a lot, you won't die.

Translator: Yes, that's true. Because he knew that certain people that he (General Vang Pao) can trust that he could eat according to his desire and would not be afraid that they might want to harm you in anyway.

Ellen Brooks: I think if we can turn off the recorder now, and if you want to show us something then we can do that ok?

Nao Tou Lor: Sure.

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<sup>19</sup> A rank in the Laotian military; per Nao Tou's clarification, this is equivalent to "Major" in the U.S. military.

Ellen Brooks:            Alright, thank you.

**[End of Interview]**