

Minnesota Veterans of the Special Guerrilla Units and Irregular Forces in Laos Task Force

Meeting 2 Summary – October 20, 2025

Date	October 20, 2025
Time	2:00 p.m.–4:08 p.m.
Location	Veterans Service Building (Hybrid – Teams)

1. Opening Remarks – Chair Pha

Chair Pha outlined objectives: review statutory benefits, confirm meeting procedures, and identify future agenda topics.

2. Roll Call was taken by Vice Chair Johnson. Quorum is met.

3. Overview of Benefits and Privileges for Veterans of the Secret War in Laos

a) Memorial Affairs – David Swantek (MDVA Memorial Affairs)

Programs Reviewed: Minn. Stat. §§ 197.23 (Purchase of Grave Markers), 197.231 (Honor Guards), and 197.236 (State Veterans Cemeteries).

Grave Marker Program: Provides grave markers for eligible veterans interred in private Minnesota cemeteries. The program is administered through County Veterans Service Officers (CVSOs), who must submit requests within the same calendar year as the veteran's burial.

- Eligibility: Veterans defined under Minn. Stat. § 197.447 or 197.448 who are buried in Minnesota.
- MDVA has been unable to issue bronze markers for the past three years due to cost increases, limited manufacturing sources, and constrained budget appropriations.

Honor Guards: Under Minn. Stat. § 197.231, the Commissioner of Veterans Affairs shall pay, within available funds and upon request by a local unit of a congressionally chartered veterans' organization or its auxiliary, up to \$50 to the local unit for each time that local unit provides an honor guard detail at the funeral of a deceased veteran.

State Veterans Cemeteries: Governed by Minn. Stat. § 197.236, these cemeteries provide burial for veterans, spouses, and dependents as defined under 38 U.S.C. § 2402(a). Interment for veterans is free of charge. Spouses and eligible dependents may also be buried there, subject to a fee.

- In March 2018, Congress amended 38 U.S.C. § 2402(a)(10) (via Public Law 115-141) to allow interment in VA national cemeteries for:

- Individuals who died on or after March 23, 2018,
- Were naturalized under the Hmong Veterans' Naturalization Act of 2000, or
- Were determined by the VA Secretary to have served honorably with a special guerrilla unit or irregular forces operating from a base in Laos, and who were U.S. citizens or lawful permanent residents at the time of death.

Spouses and surviving spouses are excluded.

Eligible individuals under this provision may receive:

- Casket or cremation burial in a VA national cemetery (if space is available), or
- A government-furnished headstone or marker for private cemetery burials.

VA programs unaffected by this law include:

- Burial in VA-grant funded State or Tribal Veterans Cemeteries,
- Medallions, memorial headstones, burial flags, Presidential Memorial Certificates, and military funeral honors provided by DoD.

In December 2024, the FY25 National Defense Authorization Act amended 38 U.S.C. § 2402 to allow individuals described in paragraph (10)—those naturalized under the Hmong Veterans' Naturalization Act of 2000 or determined by the VA Secretary to have served honorably with a special guerrilla or irregular unit in Laos who are U.S. citizens or lawful permanent residents—to be interred in VA-grant-funded State or Tribal Veterans Cemeteries without jeopardizing current or past federal grant funding. When requested, the VA will determine and confirm such eligibility for use by those cemeteries. The amendment does not cover federal burial allowances, memorial items, military funeral honors, or spouses and surviving spouses.

Follow-Up: MDVA will prepare a comparative chart summarizing eligibility requirements that are and are not available through the Federal government for Task Force review.

MDVA to provide link to Federal Register.

b) Veterans Preference – Dennis Devereaux (MDVA Education & Employment)

- Purpose: recognize military service and support transition to civilian employment (limited preference).
- Eligibility: Minn. Stat. § 197.447 veterans, including qualifying SGU veterans; disabled veterans; certain spouses. (note: SGU veterans are not currently eligible for federal service-connected disability benefits).
- Scope: § 197.455 (local governments); § 197.4551 (allows but does not require private employer preference).
- State agency hiring governed by §§ 43A.11 and 43A.111 (separate from local government preference).

c) Department of Public Safety – Jacquelyn Eiffler (DVS)

- Veteran designation on DL/ID authorized by Minn. Stat. § 171.07 subd. 15; currently there are no approved eligibility documents DVS can accept for an SGU Veteran.
- Documentation submitted once and kept on file; designation does not affect federal VA benefits but aids recognition/discounts.
- Laos War Veterans license plate requires proof of service and documentation from authorized organizations.

Follow-up: Provide statutory language and criteria used for license plate issuance at next meeting.

d) Vital Records, Certified Copies – Dan Tengwall (MDVA Government Affairs)

- Minn. Stat. § 197.63 authorizes recorders to issue vital records (e.g., marriage, death certificates) for veteran benefits purposes.
- Issued documents include notation limiting use to veteran benefits, preventing misuse for non-benefit purposes.

4. Discussion of Meeting Procedures

- Public input at end of meetings; up to 5 minutes per speaker; written comments encouraged in advance.
- Meeting summaries, access to slides, and recordings are sufficient; full transcripts and official meeting minutes not required.
- Materials and slides posted on MDVA website within three business days; distribute materials earlier when possible.

5. Discussion of Future Meeting Topics

- Reserve final two meetings for drafting and approving recommendations to the Legislature.
- Request to legislators involved to give rationale used to create bill and how they define SGU veteran, including criteria used.
- Discussion about groups who are excluded from bill.
- Provide testimony or proof of groups omitted from bill.
- Discuss criteria that VA uses for eligibility criteria.
- Invite Dr. Lee Pao Xiong (discuss history)
- Invite someone from National Cemeteries Administration (federal burial eligibility).

6. Adjourned at 4:08 p.m.

Key Action Items

	Action Item	Responsible	Due Date / Follow-Up
1	Prepare federal/state eligibility comparison chart for SGU veterans	MDVA	By next meeting (Oct 27)
2	Provide Laos Veteran plate statutory language and eligibility criteria	DVS/MDVA	By next meeting
3	Provide written background on criteria used for bill	Authors of bill	
4	Invite Dr. Lee Pao Xiong	Chair Pha / MDVA Staff	Before Meeting 3
5	Post meeting summary and slides to MDVA website	MDVA Communications	By Oct 23
6	Confirm attendance of absent members for future sessions	Chair Pha / Vice Chair Johnson	Before Meeting 3
7	Information on 38 USC 2402	MDVA	Before Meeting 3