

VETERANS OF SPECIAL GUERRILLA UNITS AND IRREGULAR FORCES IN LAOS

Advisory Task Force

Minnesota Session Law – 2025, Regular Session - [Chapter 30, SF Number 1959, Article 2, Sec. 6](#)

October 27, 2025, 10:00AM-12:00PM

MEETING AGENDA

1. Call Meeting to Order: Chair Pha
2. Roll Call: Vice Chair Johnson
3. Opening Remarks: Chair Pha
4. Legislative Intent Overview
 - Rep. Cha and Sen. Pha
5. Secret War Historical Overview & Initial Eligibility and Protocol Discussion
 - Historical Overview Presentations
 - Professor Lee Pao Xiong, Concordia University
 - Scott Walker or guest
 - Initial Eligibility and Protocol Discussion
 - Task Force Members & MDVA Staff
6. Public Comment
7. Adjourn: Chair Pha

TASK FORCE MEMBERS

MDVA Deputy Commissioner Ben Johnson – *The Minnesota Department of Veteran Affairs Commissioner, or a designee*

Mr. Trent Dilks (DAV of MN) - *A representative of the Minnesota Commanders Task Force designated by the Commanders Task Force*

Mr. Bill Strusinski - *A United States armed forces veteran who served on active duty in Vietnam during the Vietnam War*

Mr. Tou T. Yang - *A Hmong American Minnesota resident who served in the United States armed forces*

Mr. Gia T. Lee - *A veteran of a special guerilla unit or irregular forces in Laos*

Mr. Tong Vang - *A veteran of a special guerilla unit or irregular forces in Laos*

Mr. Scott Walker - *A member with expertise in the history of allied irregular and surrogate forces*

Mr. William F. Roleau - *A member with direct experience in United States intelligence or special operations in Southeast Asia*

Mr. Stephen (Tim) Kirk - *A member with direct experience in Military Assistance Command Vietnam Special Forces operations*

Rep. Ethan Cha - *A member appointed by the MN House Democratic-Farmer-Labor leader*

Rep. Bidal Duran - *A member each appointed by the Speaker of the MN House of Representatives*

Sen. Jeff Howe - *A member appointed by the MN Senate Minority Leader*

Sen. Susan Pha - *A member appointed by the MN Senate Majority Leader*

2025 Session Law Excerpts Regarding “Veteran of the Secret War in Laos”

Reference: Chapter 30 – SF Number 1959, Article 2 (Military Affairs and Veterans Affairs Policy)

Section 9. [197.448] **VETERAN OF THE SECRET WAR IN LAOS.**

Subdivision 1. **Definition.** As used in this section, the term "Veteran of the Secret War in Laos" means a person who resides in Minnesota and who:

(1) was naturalized as provided in section 2(1) of the federal Hmong Veterans' Naturalization Act of 2000, Public Law 106-207; or

(2) is a person who the commissioner of veterans affairs determines served honorably with a special guerrilla unit or with irregular forces that operated from a base in Laos in support of the armed forces of the United States at any time during the period beginning February 28, 1961, and ending May 14, 1975, and is a citizen of the United States or an alien lawfully admitted for permanent residence in the United States.

Subd. 2. **Eligibility for benefits and privileges.** (a) A veteran of the Secret War in Laos, as defined in subdivision 1, clause (1), is entitled to the benefits and privileges listed in paragraph (d) the day following the effective date of this act.

(b) A veteran of the Secret War in Laos, as defined in subdivision 1, clause (2), is entitled to the benefits and privileges listed in paragraph (d) after the commissioner of veterans affairs verifies the person's veteran status. The commissioner must not begin accepting applications for verification under this paragraph until the legislature enacts criteria and a protocol to determine:

(1) which Minnesotans served in special guerilla units or with irregular forces in Laos; and

(2) which of the Minnesotans who served in special guerilla units or with irregular forces in Laos are deserving of Minnesota veterans benefits.

(c) If the commissioner verifies a person's status as a veteran of the Secret War in Laos, the commissioner must provide the person with a certificate of eligibility for the benefits and privileges listed in paragraph (d) on a form developed by the commissioner for this purpose. The commissioner must develop the form required under this paragraph no later than September 15, 2025.

(d) The following statutory benefits and privileges available to a veteran, as defined in section 197.447, are also available to a veteran of the Secret War in Laos: section 171.07, subdivision 15 (veteran designation on drivers' licenses and state identification cards); section 197.23 (purchase of grave markers); section 197.231 (honor guards); section 197.236 (state veterans cemeteries); section 197.455 (veterans preference); section 197.4551 (permissive preference for veterans in private employment); section 197.63 (vital records, certified copies); section 197.65 (renewal of professional licenses, motor vehicle registration, and drivers' licenses); and section 197.987 (honor and remember flag).

Sec. 13. **ADVISORY TASK FORCE ESTABLISHED; VETERANS OF SPECIAL GUERRILLA UNITS AND IRREGULAR FORCES IN LAOS.**

Subdivision 1. **Establishment; membership.** (a) The commissioner of veterans affairs must establish a Veterans of Special Guerilla Units and Irregular Forces in Laos Advisory Task Force.

(b) The advisory task force must consist of the commissioner, or a designee, and the following additional 12 members appointed by the commissioner, except as otherwise provided:

(1) a representative of the Minnesota Commanders Task Force designated by the Commanders Task Force;

(2) one member with direct experience in Military Assistance Command Vietnam Special Forces operations during the dates established in Minnesota Statutes, section 197.448, subdivision 1, clause (2);

(3) a United States armed forces veteran who served on active duty in Vietnam during the Vietnam War;

(4) a Hmong American Minnesota resident who served in the United States armed forces;

(5) two veterans of a special guerilla unit or irregular forces in Laos;

(6) one member with expertise in the history of allied irregular and surrogate forces during the dates established in Minnesota Statutes, section 197.448, subdivision 1, clause (2);

(7) one member with direct experience in United States intelligence or special operations in Southeast Asia during the dates established in Minnesota Statutes, section 197.448, subdivision 1, clause (2); and

(8) four legislators, with one member each appointed by the speaker of the house of representatives, the house Democratic-Farmer-Labor leader, the senate majority leader, and the senate minority leader.

Subd. 2. Duties; report. (a) The task force must:

(1) establish criteria for determining which Minnesotans served in the special guerrilla units or with irregular forces in Laos; and

(2) establish criteria and a protocol to determine which Minnesotans who served in the special guerilla units or with irregular forces in Laos are deserving of the benefits of a veteran under Minnesota law and which veterans benefits should be extended to these Minnesotans.

(b) The task force must prepare a report to the legislature that includes the findings, criteria, protocol, and recommendations required under paragraph (a). The commissioner must deliver the report to the chairs and ranking minority members of the legislative committees with jurisdiction over veterans affairs policy and finance by February 15, 2026.

Subd. 3. Administration; terms of membership. The commissioner shall convene the first meeting of the advisory task force by September 15, 2025, and provide staff support to the advisory task force. Minnesota Statutes, section 15.059, subdivision 6, governs the terms and removal of members of the advisory task force. Members of the task force serve without compensation or per diem.

Subd. 4. Expiration. The task force expires February 15, 2026.