

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

Meeting 5 Summary – November 24, 2025

Date: November 24, 2025

Time: 10:00 a.m.–12:11 p.m.

Location: Hybrid Meeting (In-Person & Microsoft Teams)

1. Call to Order

Chair Pha called the meeting to order at 10:00 a.m. Roll call was conducted, and quorum was confirmed. The Chair noted that today's meeting would be discussion-heavy and focused primarily on refining potential eligibility criteria for veterans of the Secret War in Laos.

2. Opening Remarks – Chair Pha

Chair Pha provided an overview of last week's progress, including the presentation by MDVA staff on the initial Eligibility Protocol Draft and early framework for documentation verification. She reiterated that no voting would occur today; the purpose of this session was to share ideas, refine and categorize potential documentation types, and begin further shaping a workable draft protocol for MDVA to review.

MDVA staff also reported ongoing efforts to secure National Cemetery Administration (NCA) staff and the Ramsey County Veteran Service Officer (VSO) for the December 10 meeting.

3. Discussion: Eligibility Verification Criteria and Documentation Framework

3.1 Overview of Initial Documentation List – Strusinski

Mr. Strusinski presented a draft list of potential documentation types that may help verify service in SGU or irregular forces during the Secret War in Laos. He emphasized that the list was illustrative, not exhaustive, and is intended to serve as the Task Force's starting point. Examples included:

- U.S. military records
- Hmong, Lao, Royal Laotian, or Pathet Lao records (if any exist)
- ID cards, photos, personal letters
- Refugee camp documentation
- Possible CIA or liaison records
- Affidavits of various types
- Organizational records held by SGU veteran groups

4. Cultural, Historical, and Practical Barriers to Documentation

4.1 Oral Tradition and Loss of Records – Tou T. Yang

Mr. Yang provided extensive historical context, explaining that:

- The Hmong written language was not widely used until the mid-1900s, resulting in very few written personal or military records.
- SGU soldiers were paid in cash through covert financial channels; no receipts or payroll logs exist.
- When forced to flee Laos in 1975, most families left with nothing. Documents were burned, buried, or abandoned for safety.
- CIA records remain classified or unobtainable, even through FOIA requests.
- Many refugees entered the U.S. through different immigration programs, and many of those programs did not document or inquire about SGU military service; therefore, SGU participation may not appear in immigration records.

These factors mean that most Hmong applicants cannot provide formal records.

4.2 Documentation Non-Existence – Tong Vang

Mr. Vang reiterated that:

- SGU units were not part of the Royal Lao Army, so no formal military rosters exist.
- Any existing lists of SGU members were intentionally destroyed during the war for safety reasons.
- Immigration records vary widely based on refugee program pathways, and many do not reflect SGU service.

Ultimately, only SGU veterans themselves knew who served, making affidavits a primary verification tool.

4.3 U.S. and CIA Operational Secrecy

Mr. Rouleau noted parallels to U.S. special operations units, where individuals were required to sign multidecade Non-Disclosure Agreements. He explained that most American personnel took operational details “to the grave,” and that SGU veterans returning to Thailand also faced strict rules and secrecy documentation. This reinforces the reality that formal records were not preserved and may never be recoverable.

Members emphasized the importance of protecting personal safety and urged the Task Force to incorporate strong data-privacy safeguards to ensure applicants are not exposed to risk.

5. Affidavits: Benefits, Limitations, and Use-Case Structure

5.1 Importance of Affidavits

Members broadly agreed that affidavits—whether from commanders, battalion-level officers, or peers—will be a core component of the verification process. Several emphasized that:

- Women, spouses, and older children often served as primary historical memory-keepers.
- Many SGU officers are now deceased. Requiring affidavits from direct superiors would be overly restrictive and would unintentionally disqualify legitimate veterans.
- Many Task Force members acknowledged that affidavit requirements need flexibility

5.2 Concerns Regarding Reliability

MDVA expressed concerns regarding:

- Hearsay, especially from family members.
- Inconsistent or contradictory accounts.
- Potential pressure on witnesses in close-knit communities.

Rep. Cha proposed a balanced approach:

- Family affidavits should be allowed as supplemental evidence, but not primary.
- Multiple supporting affidavits should be encouraged.

5.3 Chain-of-Command Affidavit Model

A chain-of-identity or chain-of-honor model was discussed, including:

- Command certification (if feasible)
- Peer or battle buddy affidavits
- A multi-tier system assigning different evidentiary weights

Walker explained that federal precedent under the Hmong Veterans' Naturalization Act included similar concepts.

6. Categorizing Evidence into “Buckets”

Chair Pha led the Task Force in grouping documentation into structured categories to aid MDVA in future verification:

Category 1 – Formal / Original Service-Related Documentation

Examples:

- SGU organization rosters
- ID cards
- Immigration or refugee documents referencing military status
- Any available foreign military records
- U.S. training records for select officers
- Verified Naturalization Act records

Category 2 – Affidavits

- Former superior officers
- Battle buddies or peers
- Eyewitness community members
- Supplemental family affidavits (can't be primary)

Category 3 – Other Appropriate Proof

- Media accounts, books, interviews, documentaries, archival materials, oral histories

Category 4 – Photographic / Supplemental Evidence

- Photos in uniform or with identifiable SGU officers
- Photos corroborated by witnesses

Category 5 – Supporting Documentation

- Flexible category for additional materials

MDVA will consult the Commissioner on feasibility and evidentiary weight.

7. Procedural and Administrative Considerations

7.1 Applicant Interviews

Members discussed whether interviews should be included. Concerns included:

- Language barriers
- Logistical burden on elderly applicants
- Risk of inequity

It was suggested that interviews could occur only after an initial denial and only as an optional step. Further discussion to be had on this.

The Task Force discussed whether MDVA has any obligation to assist applicants in locating documentation.

7.2 Advisory Council Concept

Mr. Dilks proposed an SGU Advisory Council to serve as a pre-review body. MDVA expressed interest but noted resource constraints.

7.3 Fraud and Document Validity

Members discussed fake DD-214 forms circulating in the community. Some elders possess fake or recreated DD-214s that they did not create and do not understand are fake.

Consensus:

- Documentation must be legitimate.
- Applicants should not be prosecuted for unknowingly submitting invalid documents.
- The protocol must account for community vulnerabilities - The protocol must be designed

in a way that recognizes the historical, cultural, and practical challenges SGU veterans face, so applicants are not disadvantaged by circumstances beyond their control.

8. Federal Precedent and Walker Materials

MDVA referenced the Naturalization Act verification process and its reliance on affidavits and contextual documentation. Mr. Walker submitted a research and audio package for distribution.

9. December 10 Meeting Preview

The next meeting will:

- Include the anticipated NCA briefing And Ramsey Co CVSO (Christina Rost) to address the federal application and appeal processes experienced to date.
- Begin assigning documentation examples to evidence buckets
- Discuss weighting (primary vs. supplemental)
- Review federal models and identify gaps

Members were encouraged to prepare refined lists.

10. Public Comment

No public comments were submitted.

11. Adjournment

Meeting adjourned at 12:11 p.m.

Action Items

Action Item	Responsible Party	Due Date / Follow-Up
Confirm NCA staff and Ramsey County VSO availability for the December 10 briefing	MDVA Staff	Before December 10
Distribute Walker's research packet and audio materials to all Task Force members	MDVA Staff	Before next meeting
Review Hmong Veterans' Naturalization Act verification model	All Members	Before December 10
Consult internally on MDVA's capacity to verify documentation	MDVA / Commissioner	
Assess feasibility of optional interviews post-denial	Task Force	Ongoing

Determine primary vs. supplemental evidence types	Task Force Members	At December 10 meeting
Prepare refined eligibility examples for draft protocol	All Members	At December 10 meeting

Note Taker:
Shambrie Lesniak

Next Meeting:
December 10, 2025 (10:00 a.m.–12:00 p.m.)
Location: Virtual Meeting (Microsoft Teams)