

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

Meeting 6 Summary – December 10, 2025

Date: December 10, 2025

Time: 2:00 p.m.–4:00 p.m.

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

1. Call to Order

Chair Pha called the meeting to order at 2:02 p.m. Roll call was conducted, and quorum was confirmed.

2. Opening Remarks – Chair Pha

Chair Pha welcomed members and explained that the meeting would include a federal briefing from the National Cemetery Administration (NCA), information from Ramsey County CVSIO, and a detailed section-by-section review of the Eligibility Protocol Draft. The goal is to refine and improve the protocol so MDVA can begin preparing the Commissioner's statutory verification process.

3. National Cemetery Administration Briefing

Glenn Powers (Deputy Under Secretary for Field Programs and Cemetery Operations) and Daniel Catron (National Cemetery Scheduling Office) provided an extensive overview of NCA responsibilities, the evolution of federal eligibility for SGU and irregular forces veterans, and federal evidentiary standards.

3.1 Overview of NCA's Role

Mr. Powers opened by describing NCA's operational responsibilities, including national cemetery operations, scheduling interments, issuing headstones and markers, and overseeing the state cemetery grant program. He highlighted NCA's long and positive partnership with Minnesota State Veterans Cemeteries, noting that Minnesota consistently maintains high-quality facilities.

3.2 Evolution of Federal Eligibility for Laotian and Hmong Veterans

Mr. Catron provided a detailed overview of how federal law has changed over time.

2018 – Consolidated Appropriations Act (PL 115-141)

- Created eligibility based on naturalization under the Hmong Veterans' Naturalization Act of 2000.
- Did not require proof of military service.
- Many who served were not naturalized within the required timeframe.

2021 – FY22 National Defense Authorization Act (PL 117-81)

- Expanded eligibility to individuals the VA Secretary determines served honorably with SGU or irregular forces between Feb. 28, 1961 and May 7, 1975.
- The VA understands that there were Laotians that were not Hmong. They are indeed part of this eligibility criteria.

2023 – Implementation Regulation (38 CFR § 38.619)

The regulation identified four acceptable documentation types:

1. Government-issued original documents
2. Affidavit from a superior officer
3. Two affidavits from peers
4. Other appropriate evidence documenting service, dates, and locations

NCA displayed real-world examples including certificates, community-issued letters, affidavits, and photographs. They emphasized that DD-214 “SGU Form 14” is not authentic and cannot be accepted.

2024 – FY25 Servicemember Quality of Life Improvement and National Defense Authorization Act (PL 118-159)

- Prohibited NCA from restricting state cemeteries from interring SGU/IF veterans.
- Minnesota already updated its statutes to align with this.

3.3 Trends in Applications and Determinations

- 39 time-of-need burial requests: 9 approved
- 421 pre-need eligibility applications: 85 approved
- Earlier denials were tied to naturalization issues; service-based evidence is improving.

3.4 Discussion with Task Force Members

DD-214 Concerns

- Rep. Cha asked about the origin of SGU-style DD-214 documents.
- Catron confirmed these were community-created and not issued by DoD.

Turnaround Time

- Clear cases may be resolved within minutes.
- Complex cases require USCIS verification or follow-up.

Cultural Burial Preferences

- SGU members described Hmong beliefs and burial preferences leading many families to seek only funeral honors rather than interment.

3.5 Key Takeaways from NCA

- Applicants should submit all possible documentation.
- Pre-need determinations are highly recommended.
- Federal evidentiary categories align with Minnesota’s draft protocol.
- MDVA may rely on VA approvals, while denied applicants have state pathways.

4. CVSO Testimony – Christina Rost

Ms. Rost discussed her extensive work supporting SGU veterans.

4.1 Documentation Challenges

- Applicants often lack formal records.
- Many affidavits require translation.
- Adult children frequently serve as intermediaries.
- Photos and oral histories often supplement written evidence.

4.2 High Demand for Funeral Honors

- Many SGU veterans seek recognition rather than burial.
- Funeral honors remain the most requested service.

4.3 Experiences with Appeals

- Appeals succeed when applicants provide additional affidavits or evidence.
- VA denial letters typically include reasons.

5. Review of Eligibility Protocol Draft

5.1 **Pre-Filing Requirement**

Consensus: Pre-filing with VA Form 40-10007 must be mandatory. MDVA will accept a VA approval as final. A VA denial leads to the Special Consideration process.

5.2 **CVSO Assistance**

CVSOs must be available to help but applicants are not required to use them.

5.3 **Submission to MDVA**

Upon receiving a VA determination, applicants will submit a cover letter and VA documentation. If approved by VA, MDVA issues certificate; if denied, Applicant enters Special Consideration.

5.4 **Special Consideration Pathway**

Applicants must submit the VA denial letter and at least two pieces of acceptable documentation. MDVA will develop an intake and tracking process and issue determinations within statutory timelines.

5.5 **Acceptable Documentation Categories**

Members discussed four categories: original documents, superior officer affidavits, peer affidavits, and other appropriate evidence. They emphasized expanding “superior officer” to “chain of command,” requiring affidavits to state location, dates, unit, and commander, and refining “other appropriate evidence” to include photos, certificates, and contextual details.

(1) Original Service Documents: Rare; absence should not disadvantage applicants.

(2) Affidavit of Superior Officer: Consider expanding definition to include non-commissioned officers, company commanders, and others in the chain of command.

(3) Two Peer Affidavits: Often the most valuable evidence given SGU historical circumstances.

(4) Other Appropriate Evidence: Should include service region, dates, unit/battalion, chain-of-command references, photographs, and community certificates. These correspond to federal examples presented by NCA.

6. Next Steps

MDVA will incorporate revisions and return with an updated draft at Meeting 7. Focus areas will include strengthening definitions, clarifying evidentiary expectations, and finalizing MDVA workflow for reviews and appeals.

7. Public Comment

No public comment submitted.

8. Adjournment

Meeting adjourned at 4:03 p.m.

Action Items

Action Item	Responsible Party	Due Date / Follow-Up
Integrate Task Force recommendations into revised Eligibility Protocol Draft	MDVA Staff	Before Meeting 7
Add affidavit clarifications (service location, dates, chain of command)	MDVA Staff	Before Meeting 7
Explore chain-of-command affidavit model	Task Force / MDVA	Ongoing
Clarify whether VA denial letters always include reason for denial	MDVA Staff	Next meeting