

STATEMENT

by

MR. TOU YI VANG

Before the
SUBCOMMITTEE ON ASIAN AND PACIFIC AFFAIRS
of the
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS

December 12, 1979

"CHEMICAL WARFARE IN INDOCHINA"

My name is Tou Yi Vang. I am a member of the Hmong tribe, am 35 years old and spent all my life in northern Laos until last year.

From 1961 to 1971 and from 1973 to 1975 I served as an enlisted man in the army led by General Vang Pao which the United States supported. My highest rank was Sergeant. My unit fought frequently against North Vietnamese and Pathet Lao soldiers.

In May 1975 General Vang Pao and other leaders of his army left Laos. I returned to my village where I grew rice and corn and raised pigs. The Pathet Lao came and took away the men who had been officers in our army; we never heard from these men again. We turned over most of our weapons.

Every week the Pathet Lao held meetings for men in my village who had been in Vang Pao's army. They asked us questions about Vang Pao and the Americans. More of our men were taken away and did not return. In mid-1976 our men began to refuse to attend these meetings. The Pathet Lao soldiers were upset and burned many houses. So the next time they came some of our men ambushed them using weapons we had hidden.

Pathet Lao soldiers came many times to our village to search for men and weapons. By the end of 1976 they had burned most of our houses but we hid in the jungle and caves and continued to farm. Villages in the area which the Pathet Lao could not enter were attacked with artillery.

In early 1977 several thousand Hmong from another area came to my village. These people had been attacked by gas in their villages and also when they hid in caves. We joined together to resist the Pathet Lao.

There were several heavy ground attacks against us in August and September but they could not capture our area. So they attacked us with rockets from small airplanes. They would see smoke from our cooking fires and then attack. The planes came every several days.

Each plane carried four rockets and fired them two at one time. These rockets exploded on the ground and made yellow, white and red smoke. The rockets also had small, very sharp darts. The white smoke was safe, but the yellow and especially the red smoke was dangerous. The yellow and red smoke left a sticky powder on leaves and buildings. People who breathed the smoke became sick but were able to protect themselves with handkerchiefs and native medicine like ginger. The smoke did not kill trees but our animals died -- horses, cows, pigs and chickens.

When I breathed the gas, one time, I became very sick. Within an hour or two, I had diarrhea, headaches, my stomach jumped up and down, it was very difficult to breathe, it felt like heavy pressure on my whole body, my vision was blurred and my eyes felt like popping out. I swallowed ginger and opium and felt better in several days.

In this attack eight people died from breathing too much gas. They had heavy bleeding from the nose, they could not stop their bodies from shaking and died in several hours.

Because of these attacks, we moved to another place, but in January 1978 the planes used gas against us there. We heard of many gas attacks in other villages which killed many hundreds of people.

Our people ran out of ammunition, we were attacked by artillery and gas and could no longer fight. We decided to go to Thailand, and two thousand of us left in early March. Walking through the jungle, it took us one month to get to the Mekong River. We had very little to eat and many people, especially children, did not survive.

When we were near the Mekong we stayed in the jungle several kilometers away and formed smaller groups. I led 28 people across the river in the middle of the night on April 17, 1978. Those who could not swim tied themselves to pieces of bamboo fence to stay up in the water. Of the two thousand who left my village only two hundred were able to cross the Mekong. We later heard from one man in the group who came to the Ban Vi Nay Camp that the Pathet Lao captured the others, shot many and took the survivors to Vietianne and another place.

I was in the Nong Khai and Ban Vi Nay refugee camps until October of this year when my wife and I came to this country.

I am happy to be in the United States where I can lead a free, safe and secure life again. I have fought for my people's freedom for many years but without success. It makes me very sad to think of the many Hmong people who still suffer from starvation and disease in Laos and the many thousands who are in camps in Thailand who like myself once fought with the United States.