

## VANG PAO'S CELEBRATION OF LIFE – EULOGY FEBRUARY 4, 2011

Thank you to the Vang family, relatives, the SGU and Lao Hmong Coalition for allowing me to express condolences from my Air America colleagues. It is an honor to be here with you and to talk about a great man, General Vang Pao. I would like to acknowledge the SKY personnel, Ravens, and Air Commandoes- all who were a part of the Laos experience.

As a young man, it was my privilege to know General Vang Pao and participate in his fight for the right of the Hmong people to live in peace as well as becoming our allies in the Vietnam war.

I can still see this energetic, charismatic man running to my helicopter to catch a ride to Lima Site 32, Bana, Phou Bia, Muang Cha, Sala Phou Khoun, and other villages that were threatened by enemy attack. He would sit next to me and ask about my life? Thus began our conversations. His compassion in a time of great turmoil left me aware of this man's love for family and his people which governed his life and was a force that made him a great leader. Taking Vang Pao to the Plaine des Jarres and other hot spots was an amazing experience just watching his presence change the tide of war. He would jump out of my helicopter and I would observe his actions of leadership as he gathered his troops and led them into battle.

My Air America comrades and I have fought, bled, and died with you. I have personally comforted, tended to your wounded and returned your honored dead to their families and villages. This is the sorrowful part of war. One of our pilots, Captain Jack Knotts brought General Vang Pao and Jerry Daniels out of Long Cheng. In the aftermath, VP still led his people. He brought them to the United States.

It was my privilege to address two thousand Hmong at your New Year's celebration in Seattle, Washington at the Seattle Center a few years ago. Seeing your young people full of life performing the traditional ball toss ritual took me back to Long Cheng where I first experienced it. I had a speech prepared but reading about your fathers' and grandfathers' escape from Laos which were mounted on large boards at the Center by SGU veterans changed my direction entirely. In the end all I could say is, "I am sorry for leaving you when you needed my comrades and myself the most. It was heartbreaking for all of us when our government ordered us out.

It is enlightening to look around this room and experience how you have adapted to a new country and have flourished with the guidance of your beloved leader, General Vang Pao. I have met doctors, lawyers, educators, and leaders who have obtained this status by the educational and life freedoms that our country has offered you. I can truly see how the Hmong people have excelled and will continue to play an important part as America forges forward. How lucky we are as Americans to have the Hmong people among us. What a legacy General Vang Pao has left all of us.

It will be a privilege for me, my Air America colleagues and others to meet with you during this great Celebration of Life for General Vang Pao.

**BOB NOBLE      PRESIDENT, AIR AMERICA**