

## Boua Xiong Lee

*Boua Xiong Lee served as a soldier beginning in 1961. He aided the American cause until he left Laos in 1973. He came to the United States in 1992.*

I lived in Laos. In 1967, I started to be a soldier. I was on the Road Six to Seven from northern Laos to travel to Thailand to fight. I am one soldier who fought hard. My life was being a soldier. I fought and killed. Every day and night there was fighting and killing, with no days to rest. We would stay in the forests and caves, a poor existence. They dragged me to help the Americans in 1961. On January 20, 1961 the Americans had come to ask for our help in protecting the dragons up north. That's why I became a soldier: to protect the dragons up north and to help the Americans until 1973. Being a soldier in Laos was very hard especially in a war. There's nothing as hard as that. In 1973 the Americans lost the war in Vietnam. That's why I left the country of Laos when it fell. I didn't come in; I hid in the forest and the caves. The Americans had left for America and I couldn't come. That's why I had to stay in Laos. I had to hide in the forest looking for things to eat. That is a poor existence. I hid in the forests for seven years. After that I went to Thailand. I couldn't pass and the guards caught me and took me back to live in Laos until 1987. They questioned our way of war; that's why they questioned me about who were the old soldiers. They wanted to arrest me, so I couldn't stay and I left. I left in January of 1989 and went to Thailand. I lived there for three years then I came to America.

***When you became a soldier how old were you?***

I was 17 years old.

***Why did you become a soldier?***

Because in Laos the Americans came to ask us to block the North Vietnamese from using Road 6. Then they asked us to stand as soldiers to help them kill the North Vietnamese.

***When you became a soldier, did you fear that the Vietnamese would chase your family and kill them?***

That is a fear, but no matter what you start, you have to finish. When you're at war, others look out for your family at home. You do the killing and hard work, and behind they are the ones that look out.

***Can you describe an average day in the war?***

Each day it depends on whether there are or aren't any Vietnamese soldiers. If there were many soldiers and they were really close, we would fight once or twice a day. One day we would have one or two firefights and other days we fought three or four times. There were always more.

***Would you tell us about Hmong culture, about when the children get married, and about your spiritual beliefs like going to church?***

The Hmong have our own rules about how our marriages are to be. Our Hmong customs about marriage

are that we want them to have a good life and we don't want it to be bad. We don't want them to divorce. In Hmong culture, we don't have a party like Americans do when they get married. We don't do that. We have a social gathering in our homes. We must kill a pig or a cow, it doesn't matter, and have the cousins and everyone come to see that they are really married. They'll know they're married and that they'll love each other. That's how our culture is.

***Since you came to America, how is your life different from when you were in Thailand?***

My life in the United States is different from my life in Laos. When I was in Laos, our country was in a war so I learned to be a soldier. I was a soldier until the day I came to America and by then I was old. I can't really learn anymore, so that's the hard thing. In the United States it's difficult because we're different. We come to this country and we're old and we were also soldiers so we've fought and killed and our brains are messed up. We can't learn how to read or write so we don't know how to write. That's a hard thing to live in the U.S and not know how to read or write. Today it's still difficult.

***When you were in the war, was there a good or bad event that stayed with you?***

When you are in a war, you have to think that you're killing them. Your gun has to fire before theirs, and if your enemies gun fires before yours, you are dead. When you think about going to war you have to think about your country and maybe you won't die. You aren't scared a lot.

***How many people in your family were killed by the Vietnamese?***

In my family the Vietnamese killed twelve.

***Were your parents killed?***

When I was very small my dad died and there was only my mom.

***What was your dad called?***

That's something I don't know because I was too young. I just learned how to sit when my dad died. I was still small so I don't know how he died.

***Did you go to Thailand?***

Yes, I lived there for almost three years.

***Then you moved away?***

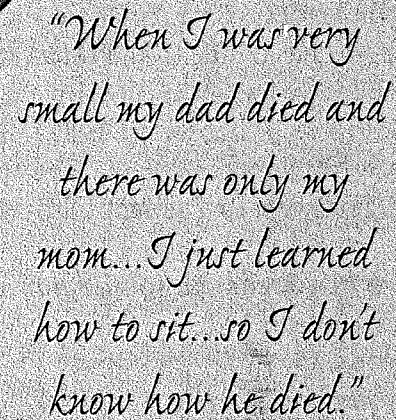
Yes, I lived there for three years, then I moved to the U.S.

***What was the hardest part in the war?***

The hardest thing is when you go fighting and you don't know if you're going to live or die.

***Do you think the Americans understand the relationship between the Hmong and the CIA?***

I think that looking at it here from the U.S., only about half know why we came to live in this country. They think maybe we saw that their country is good and that's why we came, but it's not like that. Half know and half don't.



*"When I was very small my dad died and there was only my mom... I just learned how to sit... so I don't know how he died."*