

# CAVWV Calls on America to Remember the Forgotten Warriors of the Secret Air War

*The Sandys, Hobos, Ravens, and their brothers fought America's longest covert air war and came home to a country that never knew their names.*

ST. PAUL, MN, UNITED STATES, May 14, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- This Memorial Day, the [Coalition of Allied Afghan & Vietnam War Veterans](#) (CAVWV) calls on the American public to remember a community of warriors whose service has been largely unknown and unacknowledged for more than fifty years: the airmen of the 56th Special Operations Wing and the covert air forces who fought America's Secret War in Laos from 1961 to 1973.

They flew under call signs that their country did not know: the Sandys and Hobos of the 1st and 602nd Special Operations Squadrons, the Knives of the 21st SOS, the Nimrods of the 609th, the Fireflies and Zorros of the 602nd and 22nd, the Lucky Tigers, the Candlesticks, the Green Hornets and Pony Express crews, and the gunship warriors of the Spooky, Shadow, Stinger, and Spectre. And at the most dangerous end of the mission spectrum: the Ravens, volunteer fighter pilots who shed their uniforms, assumed false identities, and flew unarmed propeller aircraft over the most heavily defended ground in Southeast Asia as covert Forward Air Controllers directing strikes that held the line for America's Lao allies. Before the Ravens came the Butterflies, enlisted Combat Control Team members who pioneered covert FAC operations in Laos before the program had a name. And alongside them all, the American advisors and CIA officers whose operational partnership made the Secret War possible.

These men flew in Laos, a neutral country, where the United States was legally prohibited from entering under the 1962 Geneva Accords. Their missions were classified. Their awards were sanitized, the country's name removed from their citations before presentation. When they were killed, their families were sometimes told they died in accidents. For decades, they were not listed in the official directory of Vietnam Veterans Memorial names, though their names appear on the Wall itself.

The scale of what they did is staggering. American pilots flew 580,000 bombing sorties over Laos, the equivalent of a full planeload of bombs every eight minutes, twenty-four hours a day, for nearly a decade, divided between the 7/13th air war against the Ho Chi Minh Trail in the Annamite Mountains, and close air support for Special Guerrilla Units fighting the NVA invaders of the Kingdom of Laos and MACVSOG teams operating in Laos from Vietnam. The very first USAF aircraft lost in the entire Southeast Asia conflict went down not over Vietnam but over

Laos, on March 23, 1961, two years before most Americans believe the war began. Of the 161 men identified as having flown as Ravens, 22 were killed in action. Seven Raven FACs captured by the Pathet Lao were never released; not a single American prisoner held by the Pathet Lao was ever returned.

Their Lao allies, the Special Guerrilla Units comprising lowland Lao, Lao tribesmen, and Hmong fighters directed by the CIA under commanders including General Vang Pao in the north and General Soutchay Vongsavanh commanding SGU forces in the south, fought and died alongside them in numbers that dwarfed American casualties, their service still largely unrecognized in American law and public memory.

America did not forget these warriors. America never knew them. CAVWV, is committed to changing that, beginning this Memorial Day.

"These men accepted anonymity as the price of their mission. The mission is long over. The anonymity should end with it.", CAVWV President Thomas Leo Briggs, Coalition of Allied Afghan & Vietnam War Veterans

CAVWV invites veterans' organizations, military historians, journalists, and the American public to join in remembering the [Forgotten Warriors](#) of America's Secret Air War this Memorial Day. A full research summary, unit history, and valor award accounting is available at [cavvv.org](http://cavvv.org).

The organization also calls on the Gary Sinise Foundation, the National Memorial Day Concert producers, and veteran-focused media to consider giving voice to this untold chapter of American military history.

## About CAVWV

The Coalition of Allied Afghan & Vietnam War Veterans (CAVWV) is a veteran advocacy organization dedicated to recognition of the service and sacrifice of American veterans and the Southeast Asian allies who fought alongside them during the Vietnam War era, including the citizens of the Republic of Vietnam, the Kingdom of Laos, the Kingdom of Cambodia, and the Khmer Republic who served as surrogates for American policy. CAVWV advocates on behalf of the full range of allied communities, Vietnamese (Kinh), Montagnards, Lao Loum, Lao Theung, Lao Sung, Nung, Khmer, and others, whose contributions have been systematically overlooked in federal and state recognition programs. [cavvv.org](http://cavvv.org)

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