**HMONG KEEB KWM**

**Tou Vang- Interviewee**

**Houa Yang- Catawba County Library, Interviewer**

**Tou Vang- TV**

**Houa Yang- HY**

**This is an oral history recorded on June 25, 2018 at the Newton Library in Newton, North Carolina as part of Hmong Keeb Kwm, a grant project awarded by the National Endowment for the Humanities in partnership between the Catawba County Library, the Historical Society of Catawba County, and North Carolina Digital Heritage Center for the purposes of collecting and preserving the history of the Hmong in Catawba County and the surrounding area.**

**Total length of interview: 15 minutes and 42 seconds**

**Available format(s): Audio recorded on Audacity® available as a .WAV file, and video available as a .MOV file**

**Transcription and translation by: Houa Yang- Catawba County Library**

HY: Kuv lub npe yog Huab. Koj twv hais koj lub npe lawm tias yog… *(My name is Houa. You already said but, your name is…)*

TV: Tub Vaj. *(Tou Vang)*

HY: Npe laus yog dabtsi os? *(What is your “old” name?)*

TV: Npe laus yog Nyiaj Tub Vaj. *(My “old” name is Nhia Tou Vang.)*

HY: Zoo siab ntsib koj os. Koj nyob lub zos twg, los sis koj yug qhov twg? *(Nice to meet you. Where do you live or where were you born?)*

TV: Kuv yug rau lub zos hu ua Phu Luang nyob province of Xieng Khouang, Laos. *(I was born in a town called Phu Luang in the province of Xieng Khouang, Laos.)*

HY: Es nim no koj nyob rau qhov twg? *(And where do you live now?)*

TV: Nyob rau ram Mount Gilead, North Carolina. *(I live in Mount Gilead, North Carolina.)*

HY: Thov qhia mi ntsis txog koj tus kheej. *(Please tell a little about yourself.)*

TY: Teb zaum yuav yog long history mi ntsis tabsis xav tias koj yuav zam txim. Kuv yog ib tug mi nyuam ua kuv niam kuv txim nyob pem toj roob tim teb chaws Nplog txom txom nyem. Kuv tsis expect tias kuv yuav los ua ib tug neeg ua txawj tsav nyoob hoom. Thaum kuv kawm ntawv nyob teb chaws Nplog kuv kawm tiav plaub xyoos nyob Dong Dok. Compared rau teb chaws no mas yog grade kaum tabsis mas tebchaws no thiab teb chaws Nplog yog different system of education. Peb kawm rau xyoo tiav primary school ces peb mus kawm plaub xyoo nyob Dong Dok no mas lawv hu ua college lawm. Txawv teb chaws no. Compared to teb chaws no mas peb yog nyob grade kaum xwb. Tabsis peb kawm plaub xyoos tag mas peb los qhia ntawv tau, grade ib mus rau grade rau lawm thiab os. Nws different qhov no. Ces tom qab, xyoo 1965, ces kuv mus kawm ntawv nyob Dong Dok ces txog ‘69 kuv graduate tov. Ces kuv tsis mus ua nai khu. Kuv thiaj li txiav txim siab hais tias lub caij ntawv yog lub caij ua tsov ua rog lawm ces yuav los mus pab lub teb lub chaws. Ces kuv thiaj li mus kawm tsav nyoob hoom T-28. Kuv los mus kawm nyoob hoom xyoo 1971 to ‘73. Kuv mus kawm nyob Bangkok [and] Hua Hin. Ib qho no yog peb lub hli, peb lub hli. Thaum final ces kuv mus kawm nyob Udon, los ya T-28 nyob Udon. Ces 1973, kuv tsis nco lub hli peb graduate tab sis mas ntshe yuav yog nyob lub May ntawv, peb graduate ces peb los nyob Long Cheng. Thaum ntawv tsov rog tus lawm Sin Sanya [Thai word for “treaty”] tsis pub mus tua rog lawm ces peb tsis tau mus tua rog lawm ces peb mus nyob Long Cheng. Ces xyoo ‘75 peb tawg tuaj nyob teb chaws Miskas no.

*(This might be a long history but I hope you’ll forgive me. When I was a child, my parents were from the mountains in Laos and were poor. I never expected that I would learn how to fly planes. When I was in Laos, I finished four years of school in Dong Dok. Compared to this country, it would just be tenth grade but Laos and this country have different systems of education. We studied for six years in primary school and then we studied for four years in Dong Dok. That was considered college which is different from this country. In this country, it would just be tenth grade but when we were done with our four years, we were qualified to teach grades one through six. So it’s different like that. After 1965, I studied in Dong Dok and in ‘69 I graduated but I didn’t go teach. I decided that since it was war time, I would go help my country so I enrolled to learn how to fly the T-28 plane. I trained from 1971- 73 in Bangkok and Hua Hin [Thailand]. Each place was for three months. Finally, I trained in Udon to fly the T-28. In 1973, I don’t remember the exact date, probably that May, I graduated and moved to Long Cheng. At that time, the war had slowed down and peace treaties didn’t allow fighting so we didn’t have to fight and we just stayed in Long Cheng. In ‘75 we became refugees and immigrated to America.)*

Ces tuaj txog teb chaws Miskas no ces kuv tuaj poob rau Mobile, Alabama. Ces kuv nyob ndav txog xyoo ‘83 ces kuv thiaj mam mus nyob rau La Crosse [Wisconsin]. Nyob Alabama mas kuv tsuas tuaj ua hauj lwm xwb. Ces kuv cov kwv tij tuaj nraws tau kuv tag ces kuv xav hais tias tuaj txog roj teb no ces tsis tau kawm ntawv lis, ntawv Aaskiv tim ub kuv kawm tau li cas ces tau li ntawv xwb. Ces kuv thiaj los rau La Crosse los kawm mi ntsis. Kuv kawm tau degree electronic servicing. Kuv kawm tag ces peb thiaj li nyaib los nyob North Carolina txog niaj hnub no. Ces kuv los ua hauj lwm electrician thiab mechanic.

*(When we arrived in America, we were in Mobile, Alabama. I lived there until ‘83 then moved to La Crosse [Wisconsin]. When I lived in Alabama I just worked. When my relatives finally arrived [in America] I thought that in this country I didn’t have any education and I only knew the little amount of English I had learned [in Thailand] so I decided to move to La Crosse and go to school. I got a degree in electronic servicing. When I was done with school then we moved to North Carolina. We’ve lived here to this day and I work as an electrician and mechanic.)*

HY: Xyoo twg yog xyoo uas nej tuaj rau North Carolina? *(What year did you move to North Carolina?)*

TV: Peb tuaj xyoo ‘87. Kuv tuaj teb chaws no yog xyoo 1976, May 1976. Kuv lub neej ces tag li no. Yog nej xav tau kuv cov duab los koj mus xyuas hauv internet, koj tso hais tias: Tub Vaj T-28 pilot ces yeej muaj nyob hauv tag lis. Nej muab hauv los tau. Tiag tiag yog kuv paub tias yuav tuaj no mas kuv nqa kuv phua ntawv ua muaj tag nrho kuv cov diploma nyob Nplog teb, kuv cov certificate ya nyoob hoom nyob Udon, thiab tej appreciation ua the United States recognize peb. Tej ntawv kuv yeej muaj tib si tabsis kuv tsis paub li ntawv kuv tsis nqa tuaj xwb.

*(We came in ‘87. I came to this country in 1976, May 1976. That’s about it for my life. If you want some photos you can search on the internet. Just type in: Tou Vang T-28 pilot and it’s there. You can get some pictures from there. If I knew I was going to be interviewed, I would have brought my book that has all my diplomas from Laos, certificates for flying in Udon, and certificates of appreciation from the United States recognizing our service. I have all of that but I just didn’t bring it.)*

HY: Yog tias koj xav teem caij rov qab tuaj es peb muab koj cov duab thiab certificate ntawv scan los yeej tau thiab ma. *(If you want to set up an appointment to come back, we could scan your photos and certificates.)*

TV: Yog koj muab koj email rau kuv es kuv mam xa email rau koj tau ib yam. Ntawv thiaj yog easy. *(If you give your email to me I can email them to you. That will make it easier.)*

HY: Okay, ua ntawv los tau thiab ma. *(Okay, I can do that.)*

TV: Kuv xav tias qhov no tej zaum yuav interesting rau koj thiab ua ib qho rau… Kuv pom tias peb Hmoob tiam no nawv, the 21st century, kuv xav tias peb cov ya T28 thawj thawj pab Hmoob uas ya nyoob hoom mas yog cov uas famous nrua tag nro tibsi nawv. Txawm cov tuaj nyob teb chaws Miskas no lawv yuav fly F15 los F17 los yeej tsis npaum peb cov tiv. Vim li cas kuv thiaj hais lis ntawv, rau qhov cov tuaj teb chaws no mas lawv mus rau huav U.S. Airforce lawm hos peb tiv mas lawv hais tias thiaj yog Hmoob pilot tiag tiag os ces qhov nov yog ib qho hais tias different lawm ov. Ces peb cov mas yeej yog…

*(I think this will be interesting to you and be a… I see that the Hmong now, in the 21st century... I think those of us who flew the T28 were the original Hmong to fly and that made us famous unlike those now. Those who live in America even if they fly F15 or F17 [planes] it’s not the same like those who flew over there [in Laos]. I say this because they go through the U.S. Airforce but back in the days, we were considered real Hmong pilots, so there’s a difference. We were... )*

HY: Koj hais txog cov tub ntxhais hluas nim nov uas yog Hmoob es lawv mus join army [military] lod? *(You mean the men and women now, who are Hmong and join the military?)*

TV: Yeah, txawm lawv tau los lawv lub npe tsis muaj li peb cov lawm. Qhov tseem ceem yog li no xwb. *(Yeah, even if they fly, the significance isn’t the same. I think that’s an important distinction.)*

HY: Koj twb teb kuv cov lus uas yuav nug mi ntsis lawm thiab... *(You’ve already covered some of my questions…)*

TV: Koj paub lus Hmoob zoo mas yom. Koj translate tau zoo mas yom? *(You know Hmong well right? You can translate this.)*

HY: Yog mas. Qhov ua kuv tsis paub mas yog tej co chaw tim Nplog teb uas koj piav txog. After wb kaw nov tag ces kuv mam li nug koj es koj mam li sau rau kuv es kuv thiaj li paub muab translate.

*(Yes. What I’m unfamiliar with are the names of the places on Laos that you mentioned. After we record this, I’ll ask you more about those details and you can help me so I know how to translate them.)*

TV: Okay ua li mas. *(Okay, we can do that.)*

HY: Koj qhia mi ntsis txog lub sij hawm uas ua tsov rog. Koj twb piav tau tias koj yog ib tug pilot. Thiab thaum teb chaws tawg es nej khiav, koj piav mi ntsis txog qhov experience ntawv.

*(Can you talk a little bit about what it was like during the war? I know you already talked about being a pilot. Also, when the war ended and you became a refugee, can you tell about that experience?)*

TV: Vim, ua li puas ta kuv hais koj, peb kawm tiav los txog ces teb chaws Nplog tus lawm ces lawv tsis pub peb mus pov bomb rau Nyab Laj lawm rau qhov qhov no yog against lawv tus treaty nob hauv teb chaws Nplog ces peb tsis tau mus tua rog peb tsuas yog log training ya, prepare hais tias tej tsam ho muaj. Peb kuj mus tua zaum puav nyob Sala Phut Khorn thaum yuav tawg Long Cheng no thiab. Koj hais txog dabtsi ntxiv thiab?

*(Like I mentioned before, after pilot training, war in Laos was ending and treaties wouldn’t let us bomb the Vietnamese anymore so I didn’t have to fight but we trained to prepare in case. We did fly a few times in Sala Phut Khorn when Long Cheng was about to be bombed. What was your other question?)*

HY: Thaum teb chaws tawg. *(At the end of the war.)*

TV: Thaum teb chaws tawg ntawv mas peb cov ya nyoob hoom mas peb… Yaj Xyooj yog peb tus huam nab nawb. Thaum peb yuav tawg Long Cheng ntawv mas sawvdaws khiav mus, cov mus ko taw los mus, li cas los mus, tabsis mas yov yoog hais rau peb cov nakbin [Thai word for pilot] hais tias tshuav peb lub nyoob hoom tshuab. Ces lub wan thi [Thai word for “date”] kaum plaub thaum 11:00, May 14 thaum 11:00, 1975 yog xyoo hais tias peb lub nyoob hoom ntawv yuav coj peb cov nakbin mus rau Udon. Thaum txog 11:00 ntawv ces muaj peb lub nyoob hoom tsuab, cov lawv hu ua H34 helicopter, ces peb thiab peb cov poj niam mi nyuam tuaj hauv peb lub nyoob hoom ntawb mus rau Udon. Peb tsis tau khiav mus ko taw hauv tej hav dej hav zoov li cov Hmoob. Peb tuaj mus nyoob hoom xwb, peb tsis muaj dab tsi.

*(At the end of the war, those of us who were pilots… Yang Xiong was our leader. When Long Cheng was about to be bombed [genocide of the Hmong] everyone ran on foot or escaped however they could but those of us who were pilots were told that there would be three helicopters for us. On the 14th at 11:00, May 14 at 11:00... 1975 was the year, the helicopters would take us to Udon. When it was 11:00, three helicopters came, they called them H34 helicopters. Us and our wives and children got into those three helicopters and went to Udon. We didn’t have to run through the river and jungle like the other Hmong. We just came in helicopters and that was it.)*

HY: Lub sij hawm ntawv koj twb yuav poj niam lawm lod? Koj twb muaj mi nyuam lawm lod? *(Were you married at the time? Did you have children?)*

TV: Kuv yuav lawm. Kuv twb muaj ob tug mi nyuam lawm. Tabsis kuv poj niam yog poj niam Thai thiab. *(Yes, I was already married. I already had two daughters. But my wife is actually Thai.)*

HY: Es koj yuav nws thaum twg? *(When did you get married?)*

TV: Kuv yuav 1973. Oh, tsis yog. Yog ‘72. ‘73 ces kuv poj niam wb twb muaj ib tug mi nyuam ntxhais lawm. *(I married her 1973. Actually, no. It was ‘72. In ‘73 we already had our daughter.)*

HY: Ces nim no koj muaj peb tsawg tus mi nyuam lawm os? *(How many children do you have now?)*

TV: Kuv muaj plaub tug. Plaub tug ntxhais. Lawv twb loj tag, lawv twb mus ua neej tag, yuav txiv tag lawm. Ob tug nyob Wisconsin, ib tug nyob Virginia, ib tug nyob nrog kuv nram Mount Gilead. *(I have four. Four daughters. Two live in Wisconsin, one lives in Virginia and one lives with me in Mount Gilead.)*

HY: Muaj xeeb ntxwv lawm thiab lod? *(Do you have grandchildren too?)*

TV: Muaj 19 leeg lawm os. [laughter] *(I have 19!)*

HY: Zoo mas. *(That’s great.)*

HY: Thov piav qhia tias koj pab txhawb koj lub zej zog li cas, xws li koj puas nyob rau ib lub koom haum li Hmong Southeast. Koj qhia mi ntsis txog koj qhov involvement rau peb. *(What are some ways that you support your community, for example, are you involved in any organizations such as Hmong Southeast? Can you tell us a little about your involvements?)*

TV: Kuv tuaj txog tebchaws no ces kuv tsis involve nrog peb Hmoob lawm vim hais tias kuv tsuas yog tuaj mus support lawv nyob li lawv noj peb caug es tuaj mus xyuas lawv xwb. Hos tej uas mus pab lawv khiav hauj lwm tej ntawv ces kuv tsis tuaj lawm vim hais tias zoo li peb Hmoob no nws hais lus nyuaj nyuaj thiab hais lus tsis sib tau taub...sawv daw peej play game ntau heev. I have a headache about that so I don’t want to get involved so much. Sawv daw tsis pom kuv thiab tsis paub kuv tab sis mas nyob teb chaws Nplog kuv kuj [unintelligible 11:40] thiab. Neeg kuj paub kuv. Peb cov Hmoob, cov laus ces li 60% yeej paub kuv tag thiab mas.

*(When I got to this country, I wasn’t that involved with the Hmong community anymore. I just support them by attending the New Year festival and things like that. As for volunteering to help run things, I don’t do that anymore because it seems for us Hmong, it’s difficult to get along and understand one another. There’s a lot of political play. I have a headache about that so I don’t want to get involved so much. People don’t really see me or know me but in Laos I was active. People knew me. The older Hmong, about 60% of them would know who I was.)*

HY: Tam sim no koj ua hauj lwm dab tsi os? *(What do you do for a living now?)*

TV: Tam sim no kuv retire lawm. *(I’m retired now.)*

HY: Koj twb retire tau pes tsawg xyoo lawm? *(How many years has it been since you’ve retired?)*

TV: Retire tau 9 xyoos no lawm. Tabsis mas kuv no nyiaj disability tau 6 xyoo kuv mam li retire. Tabsis kuv ua hauj lwm nyob tom \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ company, yog electrician thiab mechanic.

*(I’ve been retired for 9 years now but I was on disability for 6 years before I retired. I worked for \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ company and was an electrician and mechanic.)*

HY: Dab tsi yog qhov ua koj txaus siab rau thiab qhuas tshaj plaws nyob rau hauv koj lub neej? *(What are you happiest about or most proud of in your life?)*

TV: Yog qhov uas kuv tau ya nyoob hoom ib zaug. Hais tias ua neeg nyob ntiaj teb no ces tsuas zoo li peb no lawm xwb. Rau qhov tias, ua li kuv hais koj, peb yug nyob puag pem roob. Niam thiab txiv txom txom nyem, ev taws thiab mus ko taw liab xwb. Yus yeej tsis npau suav tias yus yuav pom tej no tabsis txoj moo muaj peb kuj los tau nrog lawv kawm nyoob hoom ib yam li luag neeg txawj ntse thiab. Qhov no yog qhov txaus siab tshaj plaws.

*(It’s that I got to fly. I think, on this earth, it’s the greatest thing. Because, like I said, I was born in the mountains. My parents were so poor, we just carried firewood and went around barefoot. I never imagined that I would get to experience any of this but I was so lucky that I got to learn how to fly like those who are educated. This is what I am most happy about.)*

HY: Yav tom ntej no, koj xav kom neeg paub dab tsi txog Hmoob, Hmong lub neej, thiab Hmong kab lig kev cai? *(What would you like future generations to know about the Hmong culture?)*

TV: Qhov no, kuv xav kom peb Hmoob focus rau peb cov kab mob kev tuag thiab peb Hmoob txoj kev ntseeg dab qhua. Kom peb Hmoob nco ntsoov hais tias txawm peb tuaj nyob teb chaws no lawm los kom peb nco peb poj koob yawm txwv. Tej coj noj coj ua peb yuav tsum hais tias lawv ua los li cas peb yuav tsum tau follow. Tsis yog kom tag tag los kom tau li 60% kom peb lub npe Hmoob tseem nyob exist forever kom txhob muaj peb lub npe Hmoob ploj mus hais tias Hmoob no mus coj luag lwm tus kev cai lawm.

HY: Puas muaj lwm yam ua kuv tsis tau noog koj tab sis koj xav piav thiab qhia txog? *(Is there anything we didn’t talk about that you would like to add?)*

TV: Zoo li tsis muaj lawm. Kuv tsuas muaj li no xwb. *(I don’t think so. That’s it.)*

HY: Kuv muaj questions ntau ntau rau koj thiab tabsis koj twb muab teb tag thaum xub tawj lawm, ces ua tsaug. Koj teb zoo kawm. *(I had a lot of questions but you already answered it at the beginning so thank you! Great answers.)*

**[Stopped recording at 14:17]**

**[Restarted recording. This portion was the interviewer asking details regarding the narrative for clarification.]**

TV: 6 months [training program for flying]

HY: Lub T-26 los T-28? *(Was it T26 or T28?)*

TV: T28. T26, 3 months.

HY: Tsis yog lub T-6 yog lub T-26 los? *(Not T-6 but it was T-26?)*

TV: T-6 xwb os. Cov ko yog ib lub nyoob hoom me me txaus ob leeg xwb. Ces English yog ib xyoos. Ces grad school yog 3 months. *(It’s just T-6. That’s a small plane that only fits two. Learning English was one year and grad school was 3 months.)*

HY: Flying los yog education? *(Flying or education?)*

TV: Education. 3 months yog grad school nyob Bangkok. *(Education. 3 months was grad school in Bangkok.)*

HY: Ces koj hais tias koj train ya nyoob hoom ntev npaum li cas lawv thiaj pub koj ya? *(How long did you say that you trained before you flew?)*

TV: Rau hli xwb ov. 6 months. Li ko ces complete training T-28. *(6 months. That was the complete training for the T-28.)*

HY: Koj lub rank yog dabtsi? *(What was your rank?)*

TV: Yog lieutenant. *(It was lieutenant.)*

HY: Second lieutenant?

TV: Lieutenant.

HY: Lieutenant. Ok. Koj tus nai yog tus twg? *(Who was your commander?)*

TV: Yog Major Yaj Xyooj. *(It was Major Yang Xiong.)*

**[End recording 15:42]**