

Southeast Asian allies of Vietnam war honored at Fort Snelling

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Participants and veterans unveil the first National Memorial to honor Hmong, Khmer and Laotian and other special operations veterans who served with U.S. troops in South East Asia at Airborne Circle Fort Snelling National Cemetery on Saturday, April 18, 2015 (Pioneer Press: John Autey)

In what was described as the first occasion of its kind in the country, a memorial to the Southeast Asian forces who fought as allies of the U.S. during the Vietnam War era was dedicated at Fort Snelling on Saturday.

The plaque, in the cemetery's Airborne Circle, memorializes the Hmong, Laotian and Khmer special forces units that served in Cambodia and Laos.

"I believe that this is probably the first time that they have been recognized specifically in a place like this," Trudell Guerue, president of the Chapter XV 173rd Airborne Brigade Association, said during the dedication ceremony.

For Khoa Ingxiengmay of Brooklyn Park, who served during the Vietnam War, formal recognition felt like it had been a long time coming.

"We felt like things today would not happen. We didn't get much support," Ingxiengmay said. "We experienced the same thing. We consider ourselves Americans, brothers-in-arms. This is the beginning of our journey."

Felicia Ouk of St. Paul said her father and her husband served during the Vietnam War. So did her grandparents, now deceased.

"When I talk about it, I get emotional because I miss them, so today is really special," Ouk said. "This dedication is for the next generation to see what we sacrificed."

Brad Nichols, president of the Midwest All-Airborne Alliance, said the journey to secure formal recognition had been "long, and at time frustrating, but rewarding in the long run."