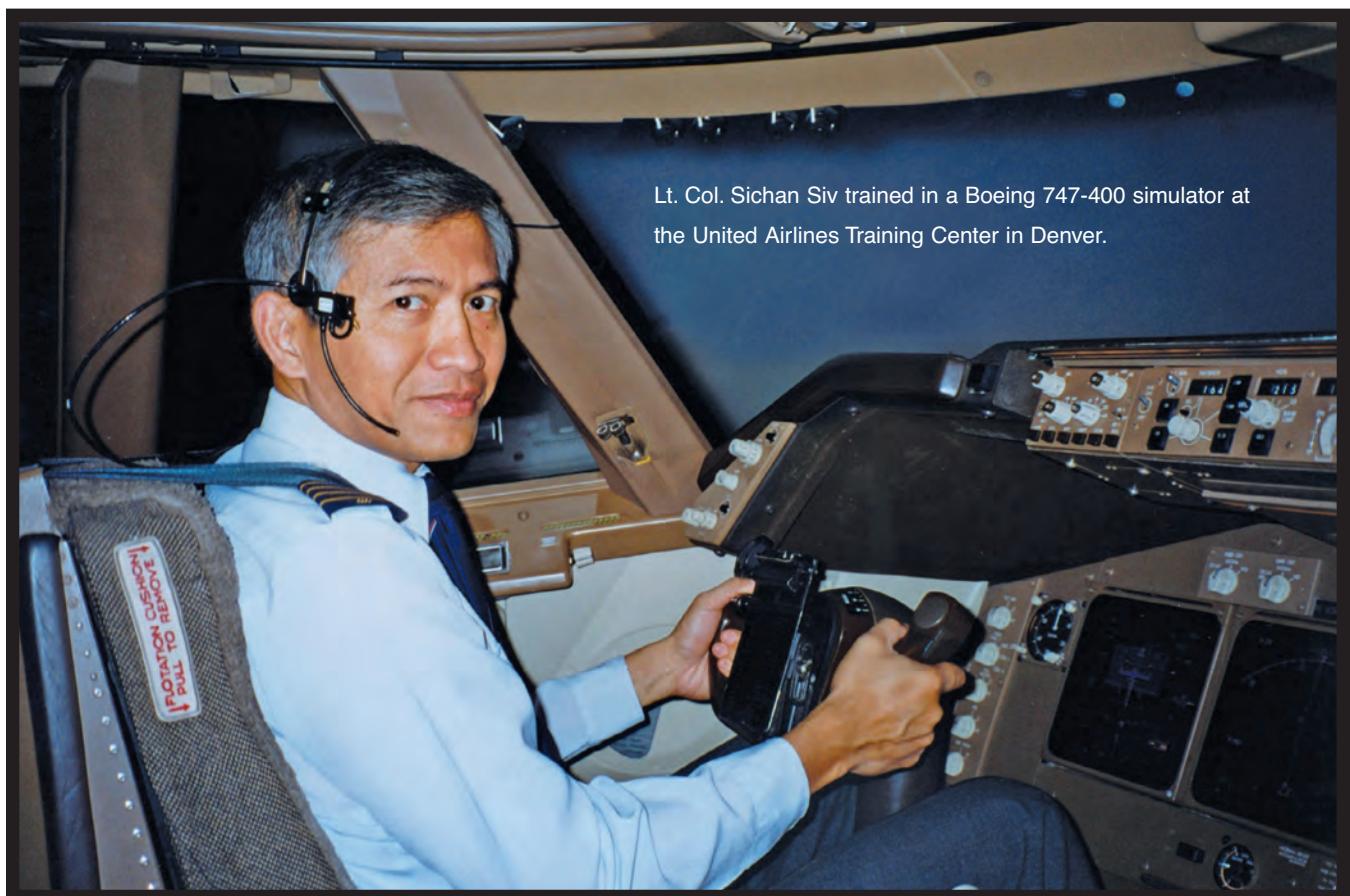


# From the Killing Fields to the White House

## Sichan Siv never lost hope for the American Dream



Lt. Col. Sichan Siv trained in a Boeing 747-400 simulator at the United Airlines Training Center in Denver.

By Donna Harris

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As a young boy in Cambodia in the 1960s, Lt. Col. Sichan Siv listened to the planes taking off and landing at the airport near his home, their engines revving his imagination and fueling his dreams. His mother told him, "Never give up hope."

"I always wanted to fly one of those," he said.

Someday Siv would fly planes, but his life took a lot of turns before he landed in the pilot's seat.

After graduation in Cambodia, he taught in a high school and

was a flight attendant for Royal Air Cambodge. Siv was educated and he was a friend to the U.S., working for the humanitarian service organization CARE, Cooperative of American Relief Everywhere. For implementing food distribution to half a million refugees, he became a target of the Khmer Rouge, the communist guerrilla group led by Pol Pot, who took power in Cambodia in 1975.

He missed a U.S. evacuation helicopter by 30 minutes, because he was arranging food and medical supplies for 3,000 stranded refugee families in an isolated province. He and 15 members of his family left their homes a few days later with only what they could carry, joining a throng of 3 million other Cambodians doing the same thing.

### A refugee survives the Killing Fields

Siv saw decomposing bodies along the roadside, dead from exhaustion and executions. In a *New York Times* article headlined “The Karma of the Killing Fields,” Siv said Cambodia had become “a land soaked with blood and tears, a hell on earth.”

So his presence wouldn’t endanger his family, Siv



Sichan Siv taught English to refugees in the labor camps of Cambodia before escaping to America.

traveled across Cambodia on a bicycle for three weeks until he was stopped and placed into a Khmer Rouge work unit, where he endured 18 hours of hard labor and

### ABOUT SICHAN SIV

2006-Present	International Consultant, San Antonio
2001-2006	U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations, Economic and Social Council, New York
1997-2001	Managing Director, Hayes & Co., Washington
1995-1997	Financial Adviser, Prudential Securities, Washington
1993-1995	Managing Director, Commonwealth Associates, New York
1992-1993	Deputy Assistant Secretary, U.S. Department of State, Washington
1989-1992	Deputy Assistant to the President, the White House, Washington
1987-1989	Manager, Institute of International Education, New York
1983-1987	Adviser, Cambodian Delegation to the United Nations, New York
1977-1983	Statistician, Lower Eastside Service Center, Staff Officer at Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service, Management Associate at Marine Midland Bank and Finance Officer at the Episcopal Church, New York.
1976-1977	Apple picker, fry cook and taxi driver
1975-1976	Prisoner in forced labor camps under Khmer Rouge
1972-1975	University of Phnom Penh studying education, law and English
1969-1973	CARE's Program Associate in Phnom Penh, Cambodia

one meal a day.

He eventually escaped, making his way through the jungle, avoiding mines and patrols and doing without food or drink for three days, until he was severely injured in a booby trap. He was jailed for illegal entry into Thailand and placed in a camp, where he taught English to other refugees.

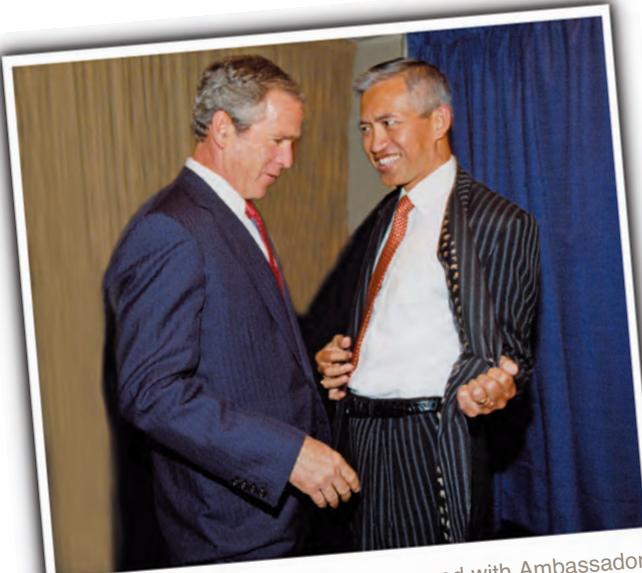
Siv made it to America on June 4, 1976, with \$2 in his pocket and his mother's words: "Never give up hope."

### A hopeful immigrant chooses to adapt and be adopted

In Connecticut he picked apples, washed dishes and flipped hamburgers. In New York he drove a taxi. He said he chose to adapt to his surroundings to become adopted by his promised land. "I kept on working, working. I did everything that came my way," he said.

He attended Columbia University's master of international affairs program on a scholarship, which led to a position as an adviser to the Cambodian Delegation to the United Nations.

His decade-long interest in the U.S. political process caused him to volunteer for George H.W. Bush's presidential campaign to better understand elections, and on



President George W. Bush is impressed with Ambassador Sichan Siv's elephant-print jacket lining. Siv served as an ambassador to the United Nations from 2001 to 2006.



Sichan Siv was deputy assistant to President George H.W. Bush from 1989 to 1992, serving as principal liaison to public interest groups. He was also leader of the White House Communications Task Force on national security issues.

Feb. 13, 1989 — exactly 13 years after he began his escape through the jungles of northwest Cambodia — Siv became the first American of Asian ancestry to be appointed a deputy assistant to a U.S. president.

While working at the White House, a chance meeting with a computer repair technician piqued his interest in the U.S. Civil Air Patrol. Siv's computer was on the fritz, and while the technician worked on it, she learned of his interest in flying. She suggested he give CAP a try.

He joined in 1990 and trained to be a pilot while a member of the National Capital Wing in Washington, D.C.

### Siv's American dream comes true

From 1993 to 2001, Siv continued his distinguished career as a consultant and director for several major financial corporations.

In 2001, President George W. Bush appointed Siv as a delegate to the 57th U.N. Commission

on Human Rights, then later that year he was unanimously confirmed by the Senate as the 28th U.S. ambassador to the United Nations Economic and Social Council.

While he was ambassador to the U.N., he let his

CAP membership lapse, but now that he is in the private sector he has joined the Civil Air Patrol's Texas Wing and is a lieutenant colonel with the Bexar County Senior Squadron near his home in San Antonio.

He encourages others to join CAP for the opportunity to be part of search and rescue operations. "I am proud to be wearing a uniform," he said.

Following a political career in which he has impressed world leaders and five U.S. presidents, Siv has continued his tradition of adaptability in the private sector as an international consultant, advising corporations on foreign investment strategies. He also oversees refugee resettlement and educational exchanges.

His wife, Martha, often travels with him as he brings his motivational message of hope and endurance to audiences around the world.

His book, "Golden Bones," is set for publication by HarperCollins in spring 2008. In it, Siv recounts his journey from humble beginnings in Cambodia to the White House and the U.N.

The life of the man who is fluent in English, Khmer, French, Spanish, Thai, Japanese, German and Arabic is also condensed on the pages of his Web site, [www.sichansiv.com](http://www.sichansiv.com), which begins with Siv's rendition of a Bee Gees song.

"I started a joke, which started the whole world cry-



ing, but I didn't see, the joke was on me. I started to cry, which started the whole world laughing. If I'd only seen that the joke was on me," Siv sings.

"It's a contradiction," he explained. "My life is not the traditional path. You don't start in the Killing Fields and end up in the White House."

Siv will be forever scarred by his journey, though the external wounds healed years ago. After arriving in America, he

learned his mother, brother and an older sister and their families were clubbed to death by the Khmer Rouge. He is the only survivor from the original group of 16 who left Phnom Penh together.

Yet he holds on to hope, just like his mother told him. And that is what he wants to be remembered for.

Siv is someone who became adaptable to his circumstances and survived to make the most of his life and his mother's memory.

His friend, Joe Connors of Arlington, Va., took the portraits of Siv for his Web site. "He survived and not only did he survive, he made something of his life that is obviously a testament to his mother, to make this a better world," he said.

Connors said whenever a tough roadblock comes his way, he recalls Siv's life. "Take a look at this guy's Web site when you feel frustrated and you'll feel a lot better," he said. "He is quite an inspiration." ▲

*“My life is not the traditional path. You don’t start in the Killing Fields and end up in the White House.”*

— Former U.N. Ambassador Sichan Siv