



TALES OF TORTURE CONTINUE

August 11, 2009

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This morning Som Meth, a former guard of “important prisoners” at Tuol Sleng prison (S-21), continued his testimony about details of the operations of the prison which was run by the Accused Person, Kaing Guek Eav (alias Duch). He resumed his testimony in front of the judges as well as approximately 400 teachers from the vicinity of Ta Khmao who had come to observe.

In response to a question posed by the national co-prosecutor, Meth testified that he had witnessed the use of torture while serving at S-21. For example, he witnessed cold ice being poured over the body of a prisoner after the prisoner had been stripped down to his underwear. Meth was then asked to comment about a painting by Vann Nath, a prisoner and painter at S-21, which depicted a prisoner having his fingernails pulled out. Meth testified that he did not witness such acts personally, but that he did see the wounds which made it clear that the fingernails had been pulled out. The civil party lawyers continued down this line of questioning, asking Meth to confirm a previous statement that he was witness to other forms of torture such as genital electrocution. However, Meth refused to elaborate, stating only that he already told the court what he knew and what he saw.

Meth remarked that Duch occasionally would visit the interrogation room for some of the “important prisoners,” a statement which prompted Duch to confirm that he occasionally visited prisoners while they were being interrogated. In response to a question about the character of a particular interrogator at S-21, Meth responded succinctly that, “All interrogators were vicious.”

Living with Fear

Meth continued his testimony by illustrating his fear of Duch. He remarked that even though Duch did not appear to be a violent person, Meth was “always scared of him.” Furthermore, he asserted that he never enjoyed working at S-21, but concealed his true feelings for fear of being arrested. As it turns out, he was only one of four or five persons of his 50-member unit to survive.

Meth became a target of suspicion when his brother, Meng, and his wife, Poeun, were arrested and brought to S-21. Ultimately, both were killed. According to Meth, Him Huy helped keep him alive. Huy was the one who told Meth about the arrest of his brother. Meth asserted that it was extremely hard to concentrate on working after receiving the news of his brother but he abided by Huy’s advice that the only way to stay alive was to continue working as if nothing had happened.

The defense then proceeded to ask Meth why he did not try to escape given all of the circumstances. Like many other guards and interrogators who have testified, Meth stated that it was impossible for him to escape. Not only was it difficult to leave the premises undetected, but he knew that if he did escape he would be putting his family in immediate and grave danger. The defense seemed to be continuing its strategy to paint Duch as a man who faced a similar dilemma – following orders from superiors or facing grave and fatal consequences.

Duch's Response

Duch did not contest the fact that Meth was a guard at S-21. Instead, in his response he continued to show remorse for some of his actions. He asserted that he deeply regretted the fact that he indoctrinated so many people with the ideas and policies of the revolution. He also showed remorse for the fact that he was responsible for submitting reports to his superiors that identified many innocent people who ended up being arrested and killed.

Reading of Witness Statements

Consistent with the Trial Chamber's recent practice, several witness statements were read into the record in lieu of oral testimony.

Witness Mook Sithim

Mook Sithim was a medic at S-21. He treated many prisoners for wounds they received as a result of beatings and other physical abuses such as having their fingernails pulled out. Furthermore, some prisoners told him that they had been electrocuted. According to his statement, interrogators had him administer medical treatment to prisoners so that they could effectively continue the interrogation process.

He also treated 30 to 40 prisoners who were pale and weak due to the common practice of drawing blood. He stated that he saw many of the discarded blood containers. Prak Khan, a former interrogator at S-21, had testified previously that blood taken from prisoners was sent to Hospital P-17 and Monivong.

Duch dismissed the testimony of Mook Sithim, stating that he did not believe that Sithim was actually a medic at S-21. On the issue of drawing blood, Duch asserted that it was his superior, Son Sen, who mandated this practice and it had been implemented even before Duch became the head of S-21. Furthermore, he claimed that only about 100 prisoners were subjected to this practice as opposed to the estimate of 1000 prisoners claimed by Prak Khan.

Witness Tay Teng alias Dy Teng

Tay Teng was a guard at both S-21 and Cheung Ek. He was charged with digging graves at Cheung Ek. He stated that Him Huy and another guard drove prisoners to the execution site in trucks that carried roughly 20 prisoners. His account relating to Cheung Ek was consistent with Him Huy's earlier testimony.

Teng detailed the procedure that was used for executing prisoners. Upon their departure from S-21, prisoners were tied up and blindfolded. Once they reached Cheung Ek, they were kept in a house about 100 meters from the graves where two or three prisoners were called out at

the same time. They were made to kneel about 1 meter away from the pits and then clubbed with iron bar. Executioners also used a knife to slice open their stomachs or slit their throats to ensure that the prisoners were dead. Once all prisoners were executed, a team of guards filled the graves. There were about 10 corpses in each pit and about 20 or 30 pits. Teng stated that he never saw any children at the execution site. Duch acknowledged that Teng did indeed work at S-21 and his testimony was truthful.

Witness Som Sam-Ol

Som Sam-Ol claims to have worked as a messenger for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. He stated that on several occasions he was assigned to dispatch letters to Duch at his house. Even though he did not meet Duch in person, he left the letters with Duch's messenger Chhen. Sam-Ol also indicated that Duch assigned Chhen to take a pile of hand-written documents to the Ministry, which he assumes were documents of confessions of S-21 prisoners. Duch challenged Sam-Ol's entire statement, claiming that he was not a messenger from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs but merely a simple guard at S-21.

Som Sam-Ol also stated that several high-level Khmer Rouge leaders were present at Duch's wedding. Again, Duch contested this account, asserting that he had no connection with the Khmer Rouge senior leaders except for Son Sen and Nuon Chea. According to him, the wedding was not held at his house in front of Srah Srang, but at a military office in the Western Zone. He denied the claim that Ieng Sary, Khieu Samphan, Nuon Chea, Son Sen, and a film crew from China were in attendance. He went on to list the names of the wedding participants who consisted mainly of S-21 senior staff and a few high ranking officers from the Western Zone.

Witness Ouk Bunseng

Ouk Bunseng stated that he was a Khmer Rouge soldier. He was based initially in Phnom Penh before being sent to Cheung Ek and the Prey Sar re-education camp (S-24). He stated that he was once sent to S-21 for political "training" by Duch. He also asserted that he later met Duch for a second time on Kravanh Mountain after the invasion of the Vietnamese army in 1979. He claims that Duch ordered his subordinates to arrest six people (three men and three women) for allegedly imitating a bird's cry that sounded like Pol Pot.

Duch contested Bunseng's testimony. First he stated that the "training" Bunseng spoke about was conducted by Son Sen and was limited to S-21 cadres. He proceeded to accuse Bunseng of lying about the arrest and execution of the six people after the invasion of the Vietnamese forces. He noted that he no longer had authority or power to issue any orders after he fled S-21.

Witness Meas Peng Kry and Toi Teng

Peng Kry worked at S-21 and was in charge of driving prisoners to the execution site of Cheung Ek. Toi Teng was in charge of receiving prisoners upon their arrival. He was also involved in digging and filling up the pits. He admitted to executing one or two prisoners himself, but maintained that execution was not his regular job. Both of these testimonies regarding the procedure of execution at Cheung Ek was corroborative of other testimony and Duch did not contest these statements as he did some of the immediately preceding witness statements.

Witness Horn Iem alias Moeng

Horn Iem alias Moeng, now 56, was a guard at S-21. He worked at several other locations before being moved to S-21 in 1976. He explained that he worked out of fear at S-21. One day, his boss noticed that he was not paying attention due to fatigue and warned him that a lack of attention would be met with serious punishment. Not soon after, he was arrested, blindfolded, shackled and locked into a room. He was later released but was never permitted to go back into the prison compound. Instead he was assigned to guard the perimeter of the prison.

Iem asserted that he attended Duch's political training, which was an effective method of indoctrination. Specifically, trainees were taught to "identify all enemies" regardless of their relationship. According to the training, even parents should be suspected of being enemies. In fact, only purified people were to be considered parents.

Duch contested Ieng's entire statement, claiming that he was not a guard at S-21.