

# Mail Online

## **Khmer Rouge killers 'burned Briton alive': How John Dewhirst may have met a brutal end at hands of Pol Pot's regime**

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A Briton held in a Cambodian torture camp may have been burned alive, a war crimes trial heard today.

John Dewhirst, 26, was on a sailing trip in 1978 with an American, an Australian, a New Zealander and a Canadian when their yacht was intercepted by the Khmer Rouge.

The Canadian, Stuart Glass, was shot dead. Mr Dewhirst and the other men were interrogated at the notorious S-21 prison in Cambodian capital Phnom Penh then killed. Exactly how they met their end has never been known.

But Cheam Soeu, 52, then a guard at the camp, told how he saw colleagues lead one of the men out on the street one night, sit him down, then put a car tyre over him. Speaking at the trial of notorious prison commander Kaing Guek Eav, he said they then set the tyre and the body on fire, adding: 'I saw the charred torso and black burned legs.'

Mr Dewhirst had been in the Gulf of Thailand with his friends when they drifted near the Cambodian coast. It had always been assumed the teacher from Newcastle, who was accused of being a spy, was then tortured and shot, as countless other prisoners of Pol Pot's ruthless communist regime had been.

Earlier this year, the commander of the S-21 prison, Kaing Guek Eav - also known as Duch - told the tribunal that it was Pol Pot, who died in 1998, who personally ordered that the four Westerners be executed and then burned.

'I received an order from my superiors that the four Westerners had to be smashed and burned to ashes,' he said. 'It was an absolute order from my superiors. Pol Pot, not Uncle Nuon' - the regime's second in command - 'personally ordered to burn the bodies.'

But Kaing Guek Eav, known as Duch, yesterday denied the story, claiming he ordered the four to be killed before being burned.

'It's hard for me to believe that the prisoner was burned alive,' he said.

'I believe nobody would dare to violate my order. They had to be killed and then burned to ash.'

Duch is the first senior regime member to stand trial at the UN-assisted tribunal in Phnom Penh.

Prisoners in the notorious prison would be tortured with beatings and electric shocks, interrogated and then shot, their bodies dumped in what became known as the killing fields. Many of those executed were burned.

Kaing Guek Eav, also known as Duch, at his trial on the outskirts of Phnom Penh Before his capture and execution, Mr Dewhirst was on a dream voyage with his friends cruising the Gulf of Thailand.

Then they were captured at gunpoint by a Khmer Rouge gunboat when they strayed too close to the Cambodian coast and were accused of being spies.

Mr Dewhirst was forced to make a signed confession that he was a CIA agent, having been recruited by his father at the age of 12.

His father, he was forced to erroneously claim, was a CIA agent whose cover was that of a secondary school headmaster.

In signing the confession, he had also signed his own death warrant.

The only Briton to die in the killing fields, Mr Dewhirst was executed just a few weeks before Pol Pot's regime was overthrown by invading forces from Vietnam. Kaing Guek Eav has told the U.N.-backed genocide tribunal that he wanted to apologise for his actions under the Khmer Rouge, whose radical policies while in power from 1975 to 1979 left an estimated 1.7 million Cambodians dead.

The hearing began in February.