

Khmer Rouge Court Witness Recalls ‘Antechamber of Death’

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December 7, 2012

Under the Khmer Rouge regime, Hun Chhunly worked as a doctor in two Battambang hospitals.

One, known as P2, adequately and attentively staffed, was a “facility for taking care and rehabilitating Angkar’s soldiers”, he later wrote in his memoirs.

The other, a civilian hospital known as P1, he wrote, “was an antechamber of death”.

For most of yesterday’s hearing at the Khmer Rouge tribunal, witness Chhunly, 74, described how his early confidence in the Khmer Rouge’s leadership quickly turned into disappointment as he became fully aware of the drastic lengths to which the ultra-Maoist regime was prepared to go in its quest for an agrarian utopia – lengths put on lurid display during his time at P1.

“I saw a young woman who came to the hospital,” Chhunly said. “She was in her late teenage years. I asked why she came here, and she said she had been asked to come and arrange medicine at the hospital because she could speak French.”

The girl was nervous, said Chhunly, but a female staffer reassured her and led her away.

“A while later, I saw a doctor come with anesthetic,” he said. “I could see Pon, the head of the hospital, go into a room.

“Later, I saw four Khmer Rouge soldiers carrying that motionless, poor little girl on a stretcher, and loaded her onto a waiting vehicle parked in front of the hospital. The car drove off. I noted immediately that the woman had been undergoing experimental surgery.”

Fifteen minutes later, Chhunly continued, the men from the car returned – injured – saying their car had rolled over.

“At the same time, when I was preparing to sew the injury of Pon, a Khmer Rouge came and asked, ‘What should we do with that enemy bitch?’ and Pon said: ‘Just execute her,’” Chhunly recounted.

“Later that afternoon, a medical staffer told me that that young woman, who was still influenced by the anesthetic, was taken to a place near the Monivong Lycee and placed

into a crematorium alive,” he added.

The girl’s story was not an isolated incident, said Chhunly, who said the civilian facility was more prison than hospital, used by cadres as an opportunity to identify “enemies of the revolution” and rob the dead’s possessions.

Most patients were emaciated and riddled with disease. Starvation was everywhere, Chhunly said, save one place – the village where Brother No2 Nuon Chea’s mother lived.