

Chandler Testimony Wraps at Khmer Rouge Court

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Prominent Cambodia historian David Chandler wrapped up his testimony yesterday at the Khmer Rouge tribunal, bringing to a close five and a half days in which the professor brought his decades of research on the subject of Democratic Kampuchea to bear on the proceedings of Case 002.

It was a sometimes testy, sometimes enlightening appearance.

“Although it may not have seemed like it, I have enjoyed it,” Chandler said at the end of his testimony. “Or seemed like it at times,” he clarified.

But his last morning was far tamer. Chandler, prompted by questions from the defence for Khieu Samphan, dug deeper into the late 1960s fallout between the former Khmer Rouge head of state and then-King Norodom Sihanouk.

“Sihanouk had actually accused Khieu Samphan to his face of fomenting the Samlaut rebellion,” he said, referring to the violently suppressed peasant uprising in 1967 that was credited with giving the Khmer Rouge momentum.

Soon after this encounter, Khieu Samphan fled into the jungle, and later became a member of the Communist Party of Kampuchea’s central committee.

“That accusation compelled Khieu Samphan unwillingly ... into the jungle.”

The former Khmer Rouge state presidium president’s flight may have been taken “unwillingly” but it wasn’t necessarily unwitting, Chandler elaborated. Upon fleeing into the countryside, “Oh! just by coincidence, he meets Ta Mok,” Chandler pointed out.

“He didn’t flee into a part of the forest that he had no connections with.”

Chandler said a French official he spoke with recounted meeting with Khieu Samphan just before he left.

“He told the person I interviewed, ‘I have to get out of town, I’m sorry, this is au revoir,’

he was speaking French,” Chandler said, adding that Sihanouk also resented that people admired Khieu Samphan.

“Sihanouk did not like this popularity one bit,” Chandler said.

After the morning session ended, a new witness who lived through much of the history that Chandler wrote about in his books gave testimony.

Rochoem Tun aligned himself with the movement that became known as the Khmer Rouge in 1963. A member of the ethnic Jarai group, Tun said his brothers told him that as minorities, they should take the opportunity join the revolution.

He became a member of the youth league in 1968. Around that time, he was in the jungles of Rattanakiri, where the movement had holed up. He said he served as a messenger between Brother No 1 Pol Pot and Ieng Sary, who became the Khmer Rouge Deputy Prime Minister of Foreign Affairs.

Pol Pot, he said, taught him in “study sessions”.