

The Establishment of S-21

Ta Khmouv

Ta Khmouv was the prison where Nat was the Chairperson, and deemed to be important in the establishment of S-21 because at the early stage the prisoners who were interrogated at the Center were detained there. Duch explained that it used to be a psychiatric hospital, which was turned into a prison and a plantation a few days after the liberation on April 17, 1975. Duch claimed he only knew a few things about Ta Khmouv, because he was a deputy to Nath at that time and he only visited the prison once with Nath. According to Duch, the prison ceased to be operational on 15, August 1976, namely, 3 months after Nath was officially transferred to another position. The building subsequently was handed over to the Ministry of Social Affairs. Duch claimed not being involved in the operational management of the prison, a duty that was designated to Hor.

Duch Chairmanship at S21

Duch stated that he was appointed as chairman of S-21 after Nath was replaced. He asserted that when currently analyzing his past, he concluded that he was chosen because he was better at interrogation and at teaching interrogation methods to others. Furthermore, he was more trustworthy, honest and faithful to the party.

Duch has consistently maintained that he did not want to be appointed to S-21, that he hated security work. He noted the two occasions he tried to avoid the position, once before coming to Phnom Penh, when he asked his superiors to be positioned at industry department and when Nath was transferred, in which he tried to propose someone else to be the Chairman. However, he said he never directly told anyone that he disliked the security work, for doing so would be detrimental to his and his family's safety.

Organizational Structure

This week the questioning addressed the other units aside from the interrogation, namely the military unit, typing unit, phone communication management unit, a photography unit, medics, food security and production unit, as well as a sub-unit to reproduce maps.

Duch explained that the military unit was under the supervision of Hor (Phal ¹was his deputy), whose duty was to arrest, detain and smash prisoners. Although Duch claimed not knowing too much about the details of this unit- such as how many personnel were there- he explained that it consisted of guards and special unit. The duties of the guards were to guard detainees, provide food and medicine (in order to keep prisoners alive for interrogation), send prisoners to the interrogators and prevent the escape of prisoners. Normal guards were assigned inside S-21, whereas the special force guarded the special prisons outside the S-21 compound. Other tasks of the special force included to receive victims and register them, before delivering them to the guards. Furthermore, the special guards were responsible for defending the unit from internal interventions (e.g. when an enemy grabbed a weapon) and from outside interventions (however, there

¹ Duch painted Phal as “Phal was one of the ... absolute cadre. Someone who was absolute to commit the crime. Amongst the cadre of Division 703, Phal was the [most] absolute to commit the crime”

were none). There were also 3-4 members of the special unit stationed at Choeung Ek, with the duty to dig pits and bury corpses.

Duch explained that after the upper echelon decided to replace Nath with Duch; Hor then was promoted to be Deputy Chairman and Phal served as his Deputy. Peng was promoted to being in charge of the military unit. Phal, while had to report to Duch, was the person in charge at Prey Sar. He affirmed that Hor was in charge of the daily operations of the center and also reported to him.

Composition of Staff

This week Duch elaborated further on the youth recruited for S-21. He claimed that their recruitment was his initiative, approved by the Superior. He asserted however, that teenagers were “too young for serious duties”, and thus he only chose a few of them to be messengers, while the rest were put under the Military Unit’s supervision. The children and teenagers were appointed because of their good biographies.

He further explained that while the staff of S-21 originally also comprised of personnel from Division 703 and from the “city people”, the majority of them fell victim to the purges. Thus at the later stage, the remaining staff of S21 were mainly those recruited from M13, and the youth from Kampong Chhnang.

Locations

Duch reaffirmed that the relocation to Phohea Yat High School as well as the determination of Choeng Ek as the execution and burial ground were his initiatives, the latter he decided without consulting the superior.

Reporting Structure

According to Duch, his subordinates reported to him, and subsequently he reported to the standing committee. He displayed various confessions which he annotated and sent to Son Sen and later Nuon Chea, addressing them “respectful brother”. Other annotations in the documents showed that Sons Sen passed these documents on to Pol Pot or circulated them within the standing committee, as he found appropriate. However, activities within the S-21 organization were not reported to the superiors in writing, but verbally, because Duch claimed to meet his superiors “quite often”.

Prey Sar

Duch explained that Prey Sar was for the correction of ill-disciplined combatants as well as for the production and plantation of food. Duch stated that Prey Sar was under his complete supervision, through the reporting of his subordinate Phal.

Methods of Interrogation

Duch stated that interrogation and torture methods at S21 were similar with S-21. They were also consistent with other security offices. The difference could be seen in the use of confessions. He further stated that he learned the torture methods mainly from his experience as a prisoner in the Lon Nol regime, as well as from books he read.

However, Duch emphasized that he had never interrogated prisoners himself except for one prisoner called Kouy Tun.

The Implementation of CPK Policy at S-21

Policies

On Monday, upon inquiry by Judge Ya Sokhan, Duch claimed that the 10 rules currently at display at the Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum were created by the Vietnamese. He acknowledged however that the policy at S21 represented the “strict” party line.

On the last day of the week the issue that was discussed at length was party ideology and how it was implemented at S21. Judge Lavergne presented the CPK statute and the DK Constitution and asked for clarification on the meaning of various sections of the documents. During this discussion, Duch asserted that during his youth he believed in the concept of socialism and Leninism, but after the Fall of Phnom Penh, as he watched people being driven away and killed, he was disillusioned. He considered that Pol Pot’s approach to communism was not even “Maoist”, but “Pol Pot-ist”, with even crueler approaches than the Chinese regime at the time.

With regards to the Party ideology, according to Duch, it dictated members to keep strong stance towards those perceived to be enemies to keep the party “clean and pure”. The definition of enemies, however, changed across time, as elaborated in the “smashing and purges” section of this appendix. In line with the aforementioned party ideology, Duch acknowledged that the main principle in S21 was that once a person was arrested and brought to S21 (s)he would not be released- even in the case of false arrest.

Position of S21 in CPK structure

The characteristic of S21 was compared to other Security Offices in the country at the time in the questioning on Tuesday. Judge Lavergne inquired upon the inference in the Closing Order that S21 was at the top of Security Offices hierarchy. Duch however replied that all Security Offices were equal, and any difference² between it and the others only occurred due to its geographical proximity to the Standing Committee.

Smashing and Purges

With regards to the order to smash, Duch noted that based on a document dated on 30 March 1976 attributed to CPK Central Committee, only four groups of people had the authority to do so, namely the Zone Standing Committee (for targets at base level), the Central Office Committee (for areas surrounding the Center Office), the Standing Committee (for Independent Sectors), and the General Staff (for the Center Military), whom he claimed as the people “most responsible according to the Cambodian Law. In his testimony on Tuesday and Wednesday, the Accused clarified there were two different period of purges: firstly was the period after April 17, 1975, where the purges were concentrated on the former Lon Nol officials, police and soldiers. The second was

² The differences inquired by the Judge, amongst others, were S 21 capability to receive prisoners from other zones and the arrested Central Committee members would be detained and interrogated there instead of other centers.

after a Standing Committee's Decision dated 30 March, 1976 from the standing committee, the main task became internal purge.

Upon questions of Judge Cartwright and Judge Lavergne on Tuesday, Duch agreed that once a family member was killed, the rest of the family would also gradually be smashed. The same applied to the hierarchical structure. If a superior was arrested, his subordinates would also be arrested.

With regards to the purges at S-21, Duch explained that when Hor saw any wrongdoings, he had to report to Duch. If he did no report, he himself would be in trouble. Duch then reported to his superior who in turn would decide whether to smash the respective person. Duch claimed that Hor and Huy would propose who to arrest and then ask Duch for his decision. Duch acknowledged that he did not have to ask approval from his superior to make these decisions, but only needed to report them. Only in some special cases, should he seek permission. Duch argued that he had to follow the orders, thus he had to report on his own subordinates he suspected of doing something wrong³. Duch was aware that if he reported someone, this would lead to a decision to arrest that person.

Education

Duch himself was also required to attend political training once a year. Participants were assigned three types of documents during these trainings for them to learn and understand, i.e., political documents, ideological documents, and organizational documents. This he did before his appointment as the deputy chairman of S-21. Duch explained that he went to Phnom Penh on June 21, 1975 to attend a political training. During the training, participants were required to provide their biographies and write about their "revolutionary opinions". While claiming that he never lied to his superior, Duch admitted that in his biography, he did not reveal his family connection with Lon Nol.

Duch further explained that during the annual trainings, the members would be provided with training materials, to be used for the training of his subordinate. Thus after his training, Duch would conduct short trainings with cadres to pass down the political ideas.

Duch pointed out the education of young people as one of the same characteristics of M-13 and S21. Young people were educated in a way that aimed at cruelty, using the communist terminology. This education (or transformation as judge Lavergne put it) in essence turned young people into cruel persons.

³ This may suggest that Duch had a certain discretion about whom to report. It should be noted when Duch elaborated on this point, he stated "[but saying the victims had done something wrong] seemed like pointing fingers at the victims who died. We the educators and the reporters were part of the crime. We did not educate them [enough] to be determined at their job and were quick to report them". However afterwards he retreated back to his stance that he had to report them, because if he and Hor had not then they would have been "beheaded" by the upper echelons.