

31 Years of Impunity Began

(Meng-try is a co-author of "Victims and Perpetrators? Testimony of Young Khmer Rouge Comrades. ")

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Many Cambodians view April 17, 1975, as the day they began a terrible journey into separation from their families, forced Labor, hunger and death. However, Khmer Rouge leaders saw this day in a different light. Pol Pot said at the Central Army nomination ceremony,

"This is the day to mark most auspicious history! It is a day of great victory of the Communist Party of Kampuchea, which liberated poor workers and peasants from more than 2,000 years of oppression by America and feudalism. This historic victory was inscribed with blood, not with gold gilt."

Nuon Chea, the deputy secretary of the party, was in charge of promulgating policy and party institutions. He propagandized the party's triumph and the continuation of the revolutionary army's mandate, saying, "April 17, 1975, was the day of historical victory over American imperialism, the CIA, and KGB. American imperialists, CIA and KGB agents keep carrying out their plans to recapture power from inside and outside the country, so therefore, shortly after the liberation we evacuated all people from the cities. Then CIA, KGB and Vietnamese agents were sent to the countryside and could not implement the plans they prepare." Nuon Chea addressed his remarks to a delegation of the Communist Workers Party of Denmark.

Ieng Sary, former deputy prime minister in charge of foreign affairs, emphasized that on April 17, 1975, the day of great victory, he was not in the country. Ieng Sary said that he was on duty in China then and did not come back to Cambodia until April 25. he said he was not involved in making the decision to evacuate people. The plan to evacuate people from the cities was initiated by Pol Pot, Ieng Sary said, and was aimed at seeking and arresting enemies of the revolution.

Hor, chief of the 100-member unit of Division 703, was assigned to evacuate people from the city, but claimed that he did not know the plan's ultimate objective. On the morning of April 17, 1975, he was ordered to send people out of the city within three days. He immediately began to implement the party's order. That day, Hor, clad in black pajamas, a red scarf and a cap, with a microphone in his hand and accompanied by two well-armed soldiers, announced the party's plan to have people leave their homes. Hor recalled his announcement: "You have to pack your luggage and leave the city for a week in order to escape from the bombing by America."

On the evening of April 17, Hor's group found about 10 Lon Nol soldiers hiding near Pet Chin Hospital and killed them all. Along with the evacuation plan, Angkar, "the Organization," ordered those in the lower classes to seek and kill enemies. Tam, a former chief of Kampeng commune, Prey Kabas district, Takeo province, said he was ordered to carry out the party's plan. In mid-1975 he arrested and sent several former Lon Nol soldiers in Kampeng commune to the district chief of Prey Kabbas.

Another Khmer Rouge cadre named Em Min, alias Sen, was ordered to find and kill enemies. According to the plan, the party was to receive the evacuees from the cities and provincial towns and arrange for them to live in villages and communes. Those who were suspect would be singled out and sent to another place for clear evaluation and investigation. Those identified as officials would be smashed one by one.

Surviving Khmer Rouge leaders, especially Nuon Chea, Khieu Samphan and Ieng Sary, have enjoyed impunity for 31 years now.