

**Documentation Center of Cambodia
PROMOTING ACCOUNTABILITY PROJECT (PA)**

KHMER ROUGE 'TRAPEANG THMA' DAM CONSTRUCTION

Interview series: Interview No. 1

Interview with Chhum Seng, Male, 57 years old
of Ta-vorng village, Punley commune, Phnom Srok district, Banteay Meanchey province
Position in Khmer Rouge Regime: Chief of Big Unit of Trapeang Thma Dam Construction

Current Job: Farmer

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Total Pages: 55 (in Khmer), 33 (in English)

01:46:10

- Dara : First of all, I'd like to introduce our team to you. I am Dara of Documentation Center of Cambodia (DC-Cam). They are Pronh, Socheata and Bunthorn. We all are working at DC-Cam. We are here to interview you about Trapeang Thma dam construction site during the Pol Pot regime. DC-Cam is a non-governmental organization, which is not associated with political issues. DC-Cam is conducting research and compiling KR-related documents for next generation to study and understand the regime. This will be a means to prevent the reoccurrence of the genocidal regime. So, after this introduction, I'd like to start interviewing you. Will you allow me to interview you now?
- Seng : Yes! alright.
- Dara : You have no objection?
- Seng : I have no objection.
- Dara : So, today is June 18, 2011. It is 10:40 A.M when I interview you. First of all, I want to know your full name. What is your name?
- Seng : I am Chhum Seng.
- Dara : Chhum.
- Seng : Yes! 57 years old.
- Dara : Where is your birth place?
- Seng : My birth place is Phnom Liep village, Phnom (mountain) Liep commune, Preah Net Preah district, Battambang province.
- Dara : At that time, Preah Net Preah district was in Battambang province?
- Seng : Yes, in Battambang province.
- Dara : Now it is in which province?
- Seng : Banteay Meanchey [province].
- Dara : Where are you living?
- Seng : I live in Tavorng village, Punley commune, Phnom Srok district, Banteay Meanchey province.

Dara : Your name is Chhum Seng. Have you changed it previously?

Seng : I have only one name. Later, I have been informally called as "Ta Seng Sra Kilo" because I drink white wine. But the official name is Chhum Seng.

Dara : Even during the Pol Pot regime, your name is Seng?

Seng : Yes! Seng.

Dara : Uncle! What is your wife's name?

Seng : My wife is Voeur Thou.

Dara : How old is she?

Seng : 56 years old.

Dara : Where is her birthplace?

Seng : Yes! Her birthplace is Tavorng village, Punley commune, Phnom Srok district, Banteay Meanchey province.

Dara : How many children have you got?

Seng : I've got three children.

Dara : Three children?

Seng : Yes.

Dara : Have your children grown up?

Seng : They grow up. One is studying at Battambang provincial pedagogical school.

Dara : And, how about other two?

Seng : Other two stay at home. One got married.

Dara : The other one studies?

Seng : No. The other one has abandoned school and works in a rice field.

Dara : What are your parents' names?

Seng : My father is Nou Kin.

Dara : Nou Kin?

Seng : Yes! He passed away during the KR regime.

Dara : Passed away during Pol Pot regime?

Seng : Yes. The Pol Pot regime.

Dara : What was the cause of his death?

Seng : Starvation.

Dara : Really?

Seng : Yes! He was starved. No water. Thin porridge was provided. Then, he suffered from swelling illness and died.

Dara : When he died, were you there with him?

Seng : No. At that time, I was targeted to be killed too because I had a background with the Lon Nol regime.

Dara : So, did you serve as a Lon Nol soldier?

Seng : Yes! Having served as a Lon Nol soldier, I was searched for. I was about to be killed. I escaped the village for the mobile unit at Kambo-Sreh [mountains]. Then I was transferred from Kambo-Sreh.

Dara : Let stop at this point. So, your father died of starvation, swelling illness?

Seng : Yes.

Dara : Were you there when he died?

Seng : No, I was with a mobile unit.

Dara : How about your mother?

Seng : She died of old age years ago, probably in 2000.

Dara : What was her name?

Seng : Her name is Ho Suong.

Dara : A moment ago, you said you were a Lon Nol soldier?

Seng : Yes.

Dara : What was your rank?

Seng : No, just a soldier.

Dara : A soldier?

Seng : Yes. A soldier.

Dara : Did the KR search for your family members and parents as you were known as a Lon Nol soldier?

Seng : They knew [about me]. It should be noted that at that time, the Southwest [cadres] did not come yet. There was a certain degree of tolerance. This made us escape. My parents were not in trouble.

Dara : What was your educational background?

Seng : I studied at grade 9th [old system].

Dara : Grade 9.

Seng : Yes.

Dara : Where did you study?

Seng : I studied at Phnom Leap school in Phnom Leap village, Phnom Liep commune.

Dara : Was it a pagoda school or public school?

Seng : No. It's a public school.

Dara : During your studies, what were your teachers' names?

Seng : Teachers of Grade 12 [old school system which is grade 1 today] were Im San, San, Yun, Kol, Vanna. But these are teachers that I know. In regard to teacher Yun, if he wore grey cloth, which was a short and scrolled up sleeves, he was vicious and lashed students.

Dara : Vicious?

Seng : Yes. He was vicious because I was a wayward student. My parents wanted me to go to school, but I did not want to.

Dara : That's a public school.

Seng : Yes. I was young at that time.

Dara : In regard to all the teachers, where were they during KR regime?

Seng : When all the teachers arrived, there was no restriction on them. Usually they were sent to Battambang province. Many were sent there too.

Dara : They were sent for teaching during the regime?

Seng : Yes. Went to teach there.

Dara : When the KR entered your village, where were they evacuated?

Seng : They were sent back to their own native villages.

Dara : Really?

Seng : Yes. Any teachers who got married could bring their wives to their own birth place, but [we] did not know where was their birth place. [I] have no idea.

Dara : But they no longer stayed in this village?

Seng : Yes. [They] could not stay.

Dara : In regard to your village, yours was Phnom Liep village when the KR arrived or what?

Seng : Yes in Phnom Liep village, when the KR arrived. They evacuated me to Kambo village.

Dara : Evacuated to Kambo village?

Seng : Yes down to Kambo village of Phnom Liep commune too. When the search was conducted, I fled to a mobile unit.

Dara : Mobile unit?

Seng : Yes.

Dara : How about your village, who was sent in here [the evacuees] during the Pol Pot regime?

Seng : Those were from Kambo village. They were cadres who were liberated before 17 April. After the evacuation, those who were in liberated zones were transferred from Beng Batt and from other areas.

Dara : To come here?

Seng : Yes. All were cadres.

Dara : So, villagers of Phnom Liep could not stay but were transferred to Kambo village?

Seng : Yes.

Dara : But still in Leap commune?

Seng : Yes. After the evacuation, they spent one year there. They were then sent to Lot, Batrang and Santhas along Rumduol River.

Dara : Rumduol River?

Seng : Yes.

Dara : So, uncle! When you fled to Phnom Leap village, it was because you knew that the KR searched for Lon Nol soldiers?

Seng : Yes.

Dara : So, you succeeded in escaping?

Seng : Yes.

Dara : Entered a mobile unit?

Seng : Yes. Among 24 members [of my unit], I am the sole survivor. Only 2 or 3 have survived.

Dara : Who are the survivors?

Seng : One is me and Det, who died of illness. In all, the survivors are me, Loeum, and Kheng.

Dara : Loeum?

Seng : Yes. Loeum has served in the police, but is now retired. Another survivor is a chief, who is currently a principal of Phnom Leap Primary School. The chief served as a soldier with me. He survived as he also fled to a mobile unit.

Dara : What is his name at the school?

Seng : His informal name is Kheng. And, his formal name is Liv Eang.

Dara : Liv Eang?

Seng : Yes. Liv Eang is the principal of Phnom Leap Primary School. Only three left.

Dara : Three left?

Seng : Yes. Another one is Pech Loeum, who served in the police and is now retired.

Dara : Living in this village?

Seng : Yes in Phnom Liep village.

Dara : So, the first time you entered the mobile unit, which group did you belong to, where and when was it?

Seng : Let see. The liberation was in 1975. When they arrived, the evacuation started in 1975. Then I fled to the mobile unit with Ta Khauv and Ta Vorn as the unit chief. Ta Vorn distinguished between villagers of Kambo and Phnom Liep.

Dara : Chief of the mobile unit, you were in?

Seng : Yes. Chief of mobile unit.

Dara : Were there men and women in the mobile unit, chief of mobile unit [man or woman]?

Seng : Yes, but there were separate supervisions of men and women.

Dara : In regard to your mobile unit, where and when was it was established?

Seng : First, it was established at Prey Moan.

Dara : At Prey Moan?

Seng : Yes. It was established at Prey Moan. And then group organizations were set up and sent to Kambo and then to Sreh. It was 16 kilometers between Kambo and Sreh. When the dam was completed, the unit moved from Sreh to Preah Net Preah. The group at Preah Net Preah was divided into the workforce working at the cotton plantation. The other two built Trapeang Thma dam.

Dara : So, your unit continuously worked?

Seng : Yes.

Dara : Ta Khauv and Ta Vorn led it?

Seng : Yes.

Dara : Where did Ta Khauv and Ta Vorn receive [their] orders?

Seng : They received [them] from Ta Vall.

Dara : Ta Vall?

Seng : Yes.

Dara : What was the rank of Ta Vall?

Seng : At that time, he controlled Region 5.

Dara : Only Region 5?

Seng : Yes. He was a chief of Region 5.

Dara : Ta Vall was a chief of a regional mobile unit or a chief of the region?

Seng : It seems [the answer is] "no" because at that time Ta Hing was a region chief?

Dara : Ta Hing was a region chief?

Seng : Yes.

Dara : Were there any more?

Seng : At that time, I did not know them all. I knew only Ta Hing, chief of Region 5 and Ta Mang, chief of Preah Net Preah district, and Ta Vall, chief of the regional mobile unit.

Dara : In Region 5?

Seng : Yes.

Dara : And, in regard to the zone, who were the chief, deputy, and members of the zone?

Seng : In regard to the zone, I knew only Nhim Ros and Moul Sambath alias Nhim.

Dara : Your mobile unit built the dam from Kambo-Sreh?

Seng : Yes.

Dara : How many kilometers [long was it], as you mentioned earlier?

Seng : According to Ta Vall, it was 16 kilometers [long].

Dara : From where to where?

Seng : Built from Sreh to Kambo. It was called Ta Bek dam.

Dara : How long did it take for the 16 kilometers?

Seng : It was so long. Regarding a pond near O-Runteah Banh, human forces were used. It was 3-meters deep. It took all forces between more than one month and nearly a year. When it was nearly completed, one or two units were left to get it wrapped up. The rest were sent out.

Dara : Ta Vall oversaw the dam construction?

Seng : Yes he did.

Dara : Since you entered the mobile unit that started building at Kambo-Sreh, what was your rank?

Seng : Yes. I served as a chief of a big unit.

Dara : How many members per a big unit?

Seng : Controlled 100 forces.

Dara : 100 forces per a big unit?

Seng : Yes.

Dara : In which year did you serve as a chief of a big unit?

Seng : In 1976-1977.

Dara : Chief of a big unit, and who were your deputies?

Seng : My deputies were Sou and Hauv. By now, they have passed away.

Dara : When you served as a chief of a big unit, what were the ranks of Ta Khauv and Ta Vorn?

Seng : Chief of Battalion.

Dara : Chief of Battalion?

Seng : Yes.

Dara : So, a military structure was organized?

Seng : Yes. Chief of Battalion, chief of small unit and chief of big unit.

Dara : Really?

Seng : Yes.

Dara : Why the structure of dam construction was organized as a military hierarchy?

Seng : It was easy for supervision with squads and groups.

Dara : Really?

Seng : Yes. Easy to supervise because it was organized by chief of group.

Dara : Yes. Chief of group.

Seng : Chief of group controlled 10 people and chief of squad controlled 3 people.

Dara : Three people?

Seng : Yes. For example, you and I. You are a chief and control 2 people. So, there are three people. Three people multiple by three equaled 9, which would be controlled by another chief.

Dara : That meant a chief of group?

Seng : Yes. Chief of group.

Dara : 10 people?

Seng : Chief of group controlled 10 people.

Dara : Including the chief?

Seng : Yes, 10 including oneself.

Dara : After the chief of group?

Seng : It was called chief of small unit supervising 30 people.

Dara : 30 people?

Seng : Yes.

Dara : Including each chief?

Seng : Yes.

Dara : From small unit to big unit?

Seng : Big unit controlled 90 people. The 90 people included cook and fisherman. So there were 100 in total.

Dara : So, big unit was promoted from big unit?

Seng : No.

Dara : No. I wanted to talk about its structure?

Seng : From big unit to battalion.

Dara : Battalion?

Seng : Yes.

Dara : How many divisions per battalion?

Seng : It had three big units.

Dara : So, battalion?

Seng : It had regiment.

Dara : How many battalions per regiment?

Seng : Three battalions per regiment.

Dara : At that time, there was no division?

Seng : No. There was only Battalion 1, 2, and 3. So, each battalion consisted of 300 people. So, Ta Vall controlled people in all battalions.

Dara : And you were in a big unit and under the control of the battalion?

Seng : Yes under the battalion.

Dara : What was the number of the battalion?

Seng : I was in Battalion 1.

Dara : Who was the chief of the battalion?

Seng : The chief was Ta Khauv and his deputy Ta Vorn.

Dara : So, he was the chief of the battalion?

Seng : Yes.

Dara : How was plan making or reporting [organized]?

Seng : The chief of a company reported to the chief of battalion.

Dara : What was the process of reporting?

Seng : [they often] chose only illiterate persons.

Dara : So what was it?

Seng : Because if we are literate, we were usually not assigned and ran counter to the Angkar. We chose only illiterate persons. Oral reporting was specially preferred. There was no recruitment of those who were literate, only illiterate persons and poor were recruited.

Dara : Why only illiterate persons were chosen, because of their loyalty or what?

Seng : It was easy in that if they were assigned to kill their siblings and fathers, they dared to do so. For the literate person, when they raised their hands to kill their fathers, they would think of their parents, to whom they owed gratitude. Before they killed siblings or relatives, they would think of their neighbors and relatives. That's why they were not used. They preferred those who could bark and bite. After barking, they bit. They would care nothing about relatives. They thought only enemies of Angkar. That was convenient.

Dara : So, your reports to the chief of Battalion were made orally?

Seng : Yes, mostly orally.

Dara : No documents?

Seng : Could have some.

Dara : Had some?

Seng : Yes, sometimes. I could write and read some. But there was one person whom I got—an evacuee from Phnom Penh—to write what I said.

Dara : What was his name?

Seng : I called him Mab [fat man], but did not know his real name. He had a healthy body and was fat. Thus, I called him Mab. I reported about the day's absence and presence and the meter squares of the earth. After he wrote it, I sent it out.

Dara : In your unit, were there any incoming evacuees?

Seng : Most of them were evacuees from Phnom Penh. There were only three base people who were the chiefs.

Dara : Uncle! Do you remember names, either real or alias names, of evacuees from Phnom Penh; can you recall some?

Seng : It has been so long. I remember only Sim Kim Thai and Men Siphon. Both were close to me on a daily basis. They cooked and fished for food. The rest were Mab. In all there were 100 people. I cannot remember.

Dara : As for chiefs of group and squad, how were reports made?

Seng : Reported to me.

Dara : And passed on?

Seng : Yes. We could remember. Group reported to small unit and then to big unit. Three of us went and reported because we could write about the number of forces in small group 1 and group 3. And the total number could be passed on to the battalion.

Dara : So, at the first stage when the dam was built from Sreh to Kambo [mountains], how about food, accommodation and supervision?

Seng : At that time, we ate porridge because at the stage, they could eat fully 2-3 meals as they wished if they could carry earth between 4 meters to 5 meters. With four meters, they could get kilograms of smoke fish. If they worked day and night and achieved only

less than 3 kilometers, it was ranked middle [level ration] that could not get those food. Only 2 cans of rice were provided.

Dara : Rice?

Seng : Yes. Two cans of rice per day.

Dara : Regime?

Seng : Yes. Two cans of rice for 2 cubic meters, and 4 cubic meters for four cans of rice per day.

Dara : Less than that?

Seng : Less than that, only one can was provided. Those who just worked on the foot of the dam because of they had short-sighted eyes, they could get one can.

Dara : Who decided the food regime?

Seng : Those who took charge of rice. I never went there. But I knew that because we had cook. In one battalion, we had this number of people. We could get it.

Cheata : So, in your group, there were all kinds of those who could carry earth 5 cubic meters, 3 cubic meters and less than that?

Seng : Yes.

Cheata : All kinds of people?

Seng : Yes. Three.

Dara : Received different food regimes?

Seng : Different.

Dara : Three kinds of people?

Seng : Yes.

Dara : So, those who could carry earth between 3 to 5 cubic meters ate in a separate group?

Seng : Yes. They had their own unit.

Dara : Oh! They had their own unit?

Seng : Yes. For example, my unit had 100 workers, of those who worked so hard.

Dara : Assigned in one group?

Seng : Yes. These persons could achieve this. Among the 100 people, only 50-60 people, selected from different units, could be placed in one group. So, food was provided to the hard working group. The rest was given in accordance with the regime.

Dara : Those who received the food regime were under your control?

Seng : No. Those who were working hard were controlled by other chief of unit. I no longer controlled.

Dara : At which level did you control?

Seng : I controlled second level working forces, who could achieve 2-3 cubic meters or below, 1 cubic meter, 2 cubic meters, and 3 cubic meters. That was under my control.

Dara : Let continue. After the completion [of the dam] between Sreh and Kambo, where did you go?

Seng : I worked on cotton plantations in Chup [district].

Dara : In Chup?

Seng : Cotton plantation in Chup district.

Dara : In which year?

Seng : In 1977.

Dara : How long did you work at the cotton plantation in Chup?

Seng : Worked there until the plantation was completed including looking after it. It took about 3-4 months.

Dara : So, that means until the cotton was harvested or what?

Seng : No. It was not harvested yet. When it grew, it was completed. I was transferred to work at Trapeang Thma dam. Some workers were kept there to spray pesticide to protect cotton from worms.

Dara : All the workers who built the dam from Sreh to Kambo were sent there?

Seng : At the plantation, there were some who were transferred to Sala Kraham and Sala Krao near Svay. They were sent to work in the rice fields.

Dara : So, some went to Sala Krao and others to the cotton plantation?

Seng : Yes. Planted cotton.

Dara : Your group planted cotton.

Seng : Yes. Planted cotton.

Dara : The unit was still under Ta Khauv and Ta Vorn?

Seng : Yes. He still controlled.

Dara : So, after the cotton had grown, the workers were sent back to Trapeang Thma dam?

Seng : Yes. [They] built Trapeang Thma dam.

Dara : We reached the stage at Trapeang Thma [after cotton plantation]?

Seng : Yes.

Pronh : Sorry! In relation to the cotton plantation, were there any Chinese?

Seng : At that time, there were Chinese experts.

Pronh : Chinese experts?

Seng : Yes

Cheata : They were there to plant it?

Seng : No. They did not plant it, but oversaw [the planting].

Pronh : Who brought them there?

Seng : I did not know who brought them there. But sometimes they went there, sometimes not. Sometimes, they came once a month, or every 2-3 months. They had their own cars and never stayed overnight. They came for about one or two hours. They returned to stay at Svay, where there were receptions.

Pronh : The experts came and told us how to grow it?

Seng : Maybe true because we could go closer to them [Khmer Rouge officials]. We worked far away from them. They came and told the growers but did not tell us how to grow it and use pesticide. Then they returned and stayed at Svay.

Pronh : Did they come often?

Seng : Sometimes. During the cotton plantating, we could see them coming. When the cotton bore fruit, they came again. After spraying pesticides and [the cotton] ripping, they came again. After a few visits, we worked on our own.

Dara : Let me go back a bit. In regard to the dam between Sreh to Kambo, where were the food supplies coming from?

Seng : Food was brought in trucks, but I did not know where from. We stored it in a warehouse and we had a saw mill. If our battalion was far, we could use ox carts to store at our work places. But I did not know who brought it.

Dara : Those who built the dam kept working there on a daily basis?

Seng : Yes. Kept working on the dam.

Dara : Regarding the dam construction, only your group consisted of those who were evacuees from different places?

Seng : They were usually called as 17 April people or new people. But they were from Phnom Penh. But I did not know which part of Phnom Penh they were from. When I asked, some said they were from Angsnuol, Kandal, Prey Veng, Svay Rieng and Takeo provinces. If we did not ask, we said all were from Phnom Penh.

Dara : They all could work as hard as you?

Seng : Strong.

Dara : Strong?

Seng : Yes.

Dara : Strong for the first place or what?

Seng : No. It was like this. Some were clever, but behaved illiterate. They could survive. They tried to carry earth, they could survive. The earth carriers did not require literate persons who studied at secondary and high schools. When asked, they were students. They had backgrounds when biographies were made.

Dara : Did you know about that?

Seng : I did not know but I heard from others. I said if we could not do like that [during this regime]. I escaped because I avoided being conscripted into the military.

Dara : Told them honestly?

Seng : Yes. Told them honestly.

Dara : Told your group members?

Seng : Yes. Told my group members but there were 2-3 persons who came and searched secretly.

Dara : That's another stage?

Seng : Yes. For example, I came and helped carry earth. But they did not carry earth. They could only put earth in [baskets] and asked where are you from?

Dara : They asked?

Seng : Yes. They asked like that. Where are you from and what did you do previously? If [someone] happened to tell them about the fact that [their] father was a soldier, they could disappear sooner or later.

Dara : Were there any disappearance in your group in that category?

Seng : Three disappeared.

Dara : Three disappeared?

Seng : Yes.

Dara : During period of building dam between Sreh and Kambo, three people were disappeared?

Seng : Yes. They disappeared at Trapeang Thma dam.

Dara : Disappeared at Trapeang Thma dam. How about at Sreh? Were there any disappearances?

Seng : No. They worked as usual. Only three disappeared at Trapeang Thma.

Dara : So, describe your arrival at Trapeang Thma. When you arrived there, you worked with the same group?

Seng : Yes. My group.

Dara : You said it was in 1977?

Seng : Yes. 77.

Dara : In 1977, on arrival at Trapeang Thma, did you have any plans to work on Trapeang Thma?

Seng : At that time, when I was transferred from Chup, I had no idea at all. But a chief of the battalion said all members of the big unit needed to pack because tomorrow we would move. I asked where we would go. He said I did not ask Angkar yet. Let me ask Angkar first. And Angkar did not tell Ta Vorn and Ta Khauv. He said let's pack. Tomorrow morning we cannot stay any longer. Tomorrow we will move. And I asked where we would move, he said he did not know. Let me ask Angkar. And I did not know.

Dara : Really?

Seng : Yes. They did not tell us where were going. When we took tractors, we could hear where we were going.

Dara : Really?

Seng : Yes.

Dara : Leaving from Kambo or from the cotton plantation in Chup to Trapeang Thma, how did you travel?

Seng : At that time, we took tractors.

Dara : Your unit took tractors?

Seng : Yes.

Dara : I went to Preah Net Preah. I met Khoeung, whom I interviewed.

Seng : His wife worked with me.

Dara : That's right, aunty Bandet.

Seng : She was a chief of the women's unit and I was a chief of the youth unit. She was with Net and Loeung, who lived nearby. But she was a chief of the women unit and I was a chief of the youth unit.

Dara : Let me ask if there was any contact between the chiefs?

Seng : Especially, the chiefs. First of all, we convened a daily meeting with our members about the conscious standpoint and morality. But we said there was a prohibition on visiting women's places. In reality, the chiefs visited each other as we were senior.

Dara : At that time, Det was pretty with her black clothes?

Seng : Female comrade.

Dara : Female comrade was pretty and known throughout Preah Net Preah.

Wife : He fell in love with her.

Seng : What a love!

Dara : Chief of units contacted each other?

Cheata : What was her husband's rank?

Seng : No. His birthplace was at Kambot river and then the Vietnamese came.

Dara : Regarding Trapeang Thma, did you know about the plan?

Seng : Yes.

Dara : [You] did not know about [them] sending you to Trapeang Thma. You did not know until you got there?

Seng : Yes.

Dara : You said you took tractors to that place?

Seng : Yes.

Dara : On your arrival, could you confirm the year and place?

Seng : In 1977.

Dara : Earlier, mid or late that year?

Seng : I forget it but remember only 77. I cannot remember early or late.

Dara : What about the season of the year?

Seng : The season. It took us so long before the work on rice fields started. But I do not remember.

Cheata : Was it a rainy season?

Seng : We had worked for about one month before rainy season started.

Dara : It could be July or August when rainy season began.

Seng : We took tractors to work there for about a month. Then rain started.

Dara : So, when you arrived at Trapeang Thma, there was no rain?

Seng : No.

Dara : Still no rain?

Seng : Yes, no rain.

Dara : After working for about one or two months, rain began?

Seng : Yes.

Dara : When you first arrived, there was no rain?

Seng : No.

Dara : It's enough because [we] did not remember. At least, [we knew] that there was no rain. It had to be summer. When you first arrived, there was no shape [to the] dam.

Seng : No. It was covered by forest. Local people called it "Dop," but we called it a flood-covered forest, which stretched so long. Surrounding the areas, there were rice fields and people.

Dara : I used to visit Trapeang Thma. When we travelled there, we could see a dragon-shaped dam?

Seng : That's a bridge.

Dara : Was it an old bridge?

Seng : Yes, an old bridge.

Dara : Was that the front of the dam or what?

Seng : It was dark red stone.

Dara : Yes. Dark red stone.

Seng : It was an old one.

Dara : I knew it was an old one, but I just wanted to say that Trapeang Thma dam was the starting point or what?

Seng : At that time, they started to build first bridge to the west and then first bridge to a village.

Cheata : This means that the starting point was the first bridge?

Seng : Yes! The first bridge to Punley and then to Trapeang Thma village, which is around 600-700 meters away from the first bridge.

Dara : Where was the first bridge bound to?

Seng : To the east.

Dara : East?

Seng : Yes.

Dara : When you arrived at Trapeang Thma, you started building up from the first bridge?

Seng : Yes. From the first bridge to the west.

Dara : Your group built it?

Seng : Yes.

Dara : Were there any groups?

Seng : Yes. There were three battalions.

Dara : Three battalions?

Seng : Yes.

Dara : When you arrived at the first bridge, who took the initiative to build the dam or were there any plans to do it?

Seng : Upon arrival, Ta Vall was the chief of three battalions, who attended a meeting. But we did not know what was on the agenda. When he returned to the battalion, chiefs of big cell were convened. Then, there was a different assignment for each battalion. For example, Battalion 1 was responsible for, for example, 300 meters, and then the Battalion 2 and 3.

Dara : In row?

Seng : Yes, in row. So the battalion was divided into companies. Comrade Seng assigned me to be in charge of these meters of land for Company 1. There was nothing beside hoes.

Dara : Hoes and baskets?

Seng : Yes. But when we cut down trees, we used hooked hoes.

Dara : Could not use hoes?

Seng : Used hoes.

Dara : No hooked hoes?

Seng : There were only 3-4-5 hooked hoes. How could we use them as we had 100 or 80 work forces.

Dara : The starting point was to cut down trees?

Seng : Cut down trees.

Dara : Cut down trees?

Seng : Yes! Cut down trees and cleared it. Then we started, right away.

Dara : When each started moving earth, how many meters per person?

Seng : First, we spread our workforces in lines, but it did not work. Then, we assigned two meters per person. We measured two meters by using step measurements. For example, our workforce did not reach 100, but they still counted for 100, although we had only 80 or 90 people.

Dara : [They] counted this way for food rations or what?

Seng : No. It was a working assignment.

Cheata : When [you] arrived, there was no division of food regime?

Dara : So, they divided into two meters?

Seng : Yes.

Dara : At first, the forest needed to be cleared. And [you] did not build it?

Seng : Not yet.

Dara : How many months for the clearance?

Seng : It was not so long. Deploying the workforce twice, we could reach the first bridge and second bridge. And, we assigned each with two steps, which equaled to two meters. Those who could complete two meters could have rice. Those who failed to complete it needed to finish it in a day.

Dara : In a day?

Seng : Yes.

Dara : So, cutting down forest was followed by moving earth?

Seng : Yes.

Dara : How long would it take for the cutting down of trees?

Seng : It was not long, but it was about half a month.

Dara : Really?

Seng : Yes. Stage one started from first bridge to second bridge and next was from second bridge to third bridge.

Dara : When you first arrived, Trapeang Thma had no reservoir and dam?

Seng : No. It had a long-time hill which was a road.

Dara : When Trapeang Thma construction got off the ground, where did [you] receive the plans and initiatives to build the dam?

Seng : It could be Ta Khauv. Ta Vorn, chief of Battalion, received orders from Ta Vall. When Ta Vall spoke in a meeting, [Ta Vall] saying [Angkar] does not know who was Angkar. Do not the name. He did not tell us the name of K [A] or Kh [B], but showed [us] that Ta Nhim or Moul Sambath, chief of zone, assigned him to do. He said Angkar assigned us to do but we did not know the name of the Angkar.

Dara : When your battalion chief went to meet with Ta Vall, did he mention about the map or the appropriate plan to build the dam?

Seng : I'd say Ta Vall was a person who was close to me. His real house was in Chup near a pond. He lived there. He spoke about Angkar, but did not know the name. He was the one who drew the map. At that time, he drank wine. It was a black and muscle wine. With 4-5 pens and big papers he drew. If he found it incorrect, he tore it apart and threw away.

Dara : Really?

Seng : Yes. Tore it apart and threw it away.

Dara : Did you witness it?

Seng : Yes. I witnessed it because I got along with him.

Dara : It means that there was a proper plan to build the dam, but you just did not know where the plan was made. You just saw Ta Vall's drawing?

Seng : Ta Vall was a drawer.

Dara : Did he know how to put numbers in it?

Seng : No. I'd say Ta Vall was not an illiterate person. He would be a knowledgeable person. He never wrote on paper. He made a note like this. If he wrote to me [he said] "Comrade Seng with greatest love." He wrote few words like that.

Dara : He wrote few lines?

Seng : Yes. We saw his writing and idea, but only one mistake was the killing of people. But he had a great deal of knowledge.

Dara : Considering the killing, was every decision made by Ta Vall or whom?

Seng : No. Some were made by him, while others by others. The chief of the big unit could decide to kill those who were disliked.

Dara : No need to seek others' advice?

Seng : Rarely.

Cheata : Did Angkar tell you that you had the right to do this?

Seng : No. In short, they wanted to tell us during a meeting with all chiefs of big units that those who opposed to the Angkar would be killed.

Cheata : So, those who attended the meeting were told this?

Seng : Only chiefs of unit attended the meeting, at which it was said that those who opposed to the Angkar would be killed.

Dara : So, the killing took place within units. You, as a chief of unit, had the right to kill people too. Some of your members would disappear?

Seng : Yes.

Dara : With some members disappearing, did Ta Vall, a chief of battalion, ask about why there were the disappearances of members?

Seng : No. Didn't ask at all. But, for example, if anyone was disliked by a chief of unit who had no leniency, [he] would be sent for death. After the killing, we simply informed the chief of battalion in the morning that Brother! I smashed that person. He bargained by resisting orders and not working. That person said moving earth was not the business of his/her mother. There was not enough food. In fact, that person did not say anything. By just saying [things] like this, they were free [to kill].

Dara : They did not punish for the killing committed by the chief of unit?

Seng : No.

Dara : When you came and worked at Trapeang Thma dam, you did witness Ta Vall, who made the drawing?

Seng : Yes. Ta Vall made the drawing.

Dara : Drawing. So, you could conclude that the construction of Trapeang Thma could come from what Ta Vall had drawn?

Seng : What I could see was that the map was the same.

Dara : The same?

Seng : Yes. But when he drew a bridge, which looked big, the construction seemed to look small.

Dara : So, it meant that Trapeang Thma could come from Ta Vall, who was the designer?

Seng : Yes. He was a designer.

Dara : In the first place, Trapeang Thma's plan was in the form of dam with length and width in meters, depth and foot in meters, when the plan was proposed?

Seng : When the plan was made, I was a chief of unit. There would be 25-meter width, 3-meter height, although there were ponds. The height had to be at the same height, which was three meters.

Dara: In general, if it is in plain area or pond like this, how deep should it be to equate with the top of the dam?

Seng: Well, there were 4 or 5 probably.

Dara: Really?

Seng: Yes!

Dara: What about the average? Based on its average, what is the tallest height if it was in a plain area?

Seng: In plain area like this flat bridge, its height is about 6.

Dara: About 6?

Seng: Yes!

Dara: And the flat bridge is about 6?

Seng: About 6, but it is short, about 200 meters, short one.

Dara: And what about the average for this plain area?

Seng: The average short is about 3.5 or 4 at most.

Dara: Is it close to the right estimation?

Dara: Yes, it is. If the "3" is not close to the right estimation, but if from 4-5 is [most] the case.

Dara: Was it long?

Dara: Yes! It was.

Dara: Then is the top of the dam 25 meters?

Seng: Yes!

Dara: What about the width?

Seng: The width is about 40 meters.

Dara: Was it the first plan you were asked to carry out?

Seng: Of course. [I] received it from the chief of battalion.

Dara: So people were assigned to build the dam. They had people to chop soil, carry soil or bulldoze soil, whether or not their responsibilities were different?

Seng: At that time we were responsible for one carrying stick, two sacks, and one spade and they assigned the meters for us. And the chief of unit was the one who bulldozed the soil, and the ones who were blind and disabled or had a sore leg; all of these persons bulldozed with a wooden stick or spade.

Dara: So those who carried soil had sole responsibility for only this task?

Seng: Sure!

Dara: Then there were other people who took care of bulldozing?

Seng: Yes!

Dara: What about regarding the bridge, Did Ta Vall makes the sketch?

Seng: [I] saw him make the sketch, he did the whole thing. [He] sketched between each [and] put each bridge in [may be] three kilometers. [Then], [I wonder] and asked why they kept [certain distance between bridges]. They said they put bridges in the missing parts.

Dara: And regarding the bridge, you said earlier, who helped build the bridge?

Seng: At that time, it was him [Ta Vall] who looked for [an expert]. [He] told the chief of unit to find an engineer who could build the bridge. [He said] there were many [experts] from Phnom Penh who knew this.

Dara: Did he say that?

Seng: Yes! He said so. "What about you, mit Seng? Do you find any [expert]?" I told him "Brother, I have never asked. My unit may not have any. They are all illiterate. Even among soldiers, we cannot find any. There were not any educated. We do not have any, brother." "You should find one." I did not know where to look. [I] dared verbally confront him sometimes. Later, he had a meeting and found one named Ta Ten. He was tall and had a fair complexion. His body was round. His height was about 1.60 meters, about 1.67 to 1.68. He knew [how to make the bridge]. He was asked "did you ever make a bridge?" He said, "I used to do it during Sangkum Reastr Niyum. [I] made a bridge or tube." He said he was knowledgeable about it. And he told [us] about materials and equipment we needed such as cement, iron, and wire to make the bridge. He asked for a piece of paper and a pen. Ta Vall gave him the paper and pen. [He talked about] the width and the length. But I forgot about it. Later he told us that [we need] this amount of 6 millimeter iron and the bigger size and when how much wire, sand and cement needed. He [Ta Vall] called [me], "brother, how did you mix all these materials. In one cube of sand, how much cement did you use? He [Ta Vall] called it sack. This meant three sacks of cement were needed for a half cube of sand. "So let's calculate the rest of the process. How much sang, iron, cement are needed." After his explanation, Ta Vall began drafting man power to dig and remove the old dam and old road. They dug this big. The depth of the foundation was almost my height. The foundation was about 2 meters deep down the rock. Trucks helped with this.

Dara: Where did [they] get the rocks?

Seng: They were taken from Ponlei and Ta Kream Mountains.

Dara: Were there any machinery to transport the rocks?

Seng: Trucks. Trucks were used to transport and Khly's forces—he is now chief of commune in Barei district. He was called Khly, but later was called Khan Chamroeun, chief of commune in Barei district. His forces were sent to transport the rocks. Chief of the unit, like me, was a native of Daun Chrey.

Dara: So he was looking for an engineer to build the bridge?

Seng: Yes!

Dara: And the engineer named Ta Ten was not taken from your unit or your battalion?

Seng: I did not know this. There were about 300 people and I did not know them all. When I came into the battalion, I did not know where all these people were taken from.

Dara: So when the first bridge was build, your line or front line was responsible for the first bridge?

Seng: At first [we all] took care of all the things. [We] needed to chop the trees and after this was done, my forces moved to the first bridge and were stationed there.

Dara: So for how long?

Seng: It took long time. But at that time there were two [experts], Ta Ten just assigned the measured piece of land for us to work, and another man named Ta Mong.

Dara: So Ta Ten just measured the land for you to work or did he also measure the top of the dam?

Seng: No, he just took care of the bridge. Ta Mong was his deputy. Ta Ten was responsible for the first, second, and third bridges and needed to work on the water station at Chab Kok Tiem, so he just measured the land [for us] like a principal contractor. After he was done, Ta Mong took care of the rest.

Dara: Mong?

Seng: His name was technician Mong.

Dara: So he was the one who directed the whole thing?

Seng: He took care of everything directly.

Dara: Directly?

Seng: Yes!

Dara: Where did Ta Mong come from?

Seng: Ta Mong, our native village was in this zone. [We] are people from the Northwestern [zone]. But I did not know where he came from [exactly]. He was rather old, but not from the Southwestern [zone]. Southwestern people had not arrived yet.

Dara: So to which unit did Ta Mong belong to?

Seng: Well, at that time, I was digging and I saw Ta Mong. Ta Ten came to measure the land and said [something about the work] and then Ta Ten drove his black Chinese bicycle. Ta Ten told [Ta Mong] about the work. I followed [what they said]. [I started with] laying the foundation, assembling iron bars, carrying water to pour into the mixture. And at that time about 100 people fetched the water from Paoy Chay Trapeang Thmar.

Dara: Just to fetch the water?

Seng: Yes! 100 people. But [we did not have] 100 buckets. [We] asked for 50 buckets from the cooperative. For example, after a person "A" came to fetch water, then a person "B" took a turn.

Dara: So you said earlier you finished building the top of the dam?

Seng: Not yet. Those who built it took care of this. And those who built the bridge just focused on that.

Dara: So you said you carried water for the cement mixture?

Seng: Yes I did. But they removed my unit. They took 100 people from my unit to build the bridge.

Dara: To work on the bridge instead?

Seng: Yes! To work on the bridge. Another 200 people carried soil. Because there were three units in one battalion. One unit was withdrawn from my unit to work on the bridge. The other two units worked on carrying soil.

Dara: So when Ta Vall came, they started to build the dam? Were there several battalions or other people also involved?

Seng: There were three battalions under Ta Vall such as Battalion 1, Battalion 2, and Battalion 3. But when more man power was needed, the mobile brigade cooperative from Thmar Puok district was asked to help. At that time Svay Chek district was not created yet. Only one Thmar Puok district like Battambang province. Banteay Meanchey was not created either. The man power was taken from Thmar Puok and

Preah Neth Preah district. These were called mobile cooperatives to help the regional mobile brigades.

Dara: Okay. How many people were needed?

Seng: A lot of them. They were stationed from the first bridge to second bridge, about 3 kilometers. Two front line from the third bridge.

Dara: Based on your estimation, how many people totally helped with Trapeang Thmar reservoir?

Seng: About thousands and thousands.

Dara: About thousands and thousands.

Seng: Yes! About thousands and thousands. Very crowded and they were everywhere, so that we could not see the soil.

Dara: Really? Even on top of the dam?

Seng: Yes! All were people. They built two ways. One way for entrance and one for exit, like two doors.

Dara: I see.

Seng: If it was not flooded. We built the road ourselves. But if it was flooded, [we] used it as an entrance and the area which was not flooded as an exit. Lots and lots of people [who worked there], but there were many who died as well.

Dara: What about rationing of food during that time?

Seng: [I felt] full.

Dara: Did only regional mobile brigade have enough to eat?

Seng: Yes, only regional mobile brigade had enough to eat.

Dara: Weren't you short of food?

Seng: No. Because we were given 4 cans of rice each, so we could not finish it.

Dara: Wow! What about the mobile brigade cooperative?

Seng: They were short of food because there was no support from the regional mobile brigade. It was the cooperative who handled the food.

Dara: So it was up to cooperative they belonged to? If the cooperatives provided more, they could have a lot accordingly?

Seng: That's right! It was up to cooperatives. If the cooperatives could not provide more, they ate watery rice soup.

Dara: So they did not eat with you and other regional mobile brigades?

Seng: No, not at all.

Dara: So who led the mobile brigade cooperative?

Seng: There was a chief of each cooperative. For instance, for Thmar Puok, there was a chief of brigade, but all of them were under the control of Ta Vall.

Dara: Under Ta Vall.

Seng: Sure!

Dara: Ta Vall looked after the overall thing. But what about if a cooperative came to work in your area, it was not Ta Val who could look after everything, right? So who closely supervised the workers?

Seng: I did not know those who were responsible for Thmar Puok district or Preah Neth Preah district.

Dara: So as a force from the regional mobile brigade, you were also asked to help with the dam, but not to supervise all of them?

Seng: No.

Dara: Although you worked with them altogether?

Seng: Right! Regional mobile brigades were assigned until bridge 2, so from there it was occupied by mobile brigade cooperatives.

Dara: Really?

Seng: That's right! Regional mobile brigades were assigned to work on certain areas and so were the cooperatives.

Dara: So they supervised their subordinates separately?

Seng: Yes, separately.

Dara: They did not work with each other?

Seng: No.

Dara: They could not work with each other?

Seng: That's right.

Dara: So the many deaths may come from mobile brigade cooperatives

Seng: No, not many from cooperatives. One day I never forget what I saw. We built the dam from that corner, bridge 1. We need to work days and nights. But those in my unit were not sick or disabled. However, in another brigade, there were 12 blind people among other able-bodies. Ta Vall's plan [to test them] was to put fire [by using fire wood], and then put it off and later takes the charcoal and told them to hold hands tight. [The 12 were told to connect hands.] The group was led by Phan, chief of unit, and he had one handkerchief, like a [Cambodian] scarf. He asked the 12 to grab the scarf and then walked toward the fire [ember].

Dara: Really?

Seng: That's right! 11 of them escaped the ember, except the last one who stepped on the ember. He then exclaimed "Uh! so hot, bang! so sore" So he was the one who survived.

Dara: What about the rest?

Seng: The 11 persons is [killed] at the dam.

Dara: Why did they do that? What was the reason?

Seng: I hardly estimated. They said the people had pretended to be ill, but in fact they were not blind. If they were blind, they would step on the ember.

Dara: Oh! Was that the reason?

Seng: Yes! They meant that. Those persons were just lazy.

Dara: Even though they were half blind (Kvak Moan)?

Seng: Sure! That also resulted in killing.

Dara: [You] know that too?

Seng: Yes, they tested.

Dara: To have them step on the fire?

Seng: Only the last person who stepped on it, the 11 ones escaped.

Dara: Oh! you mean the 11 ones at the front escaped the ember?

Seng: They did.

Dara: And the last person stepped on it?

Seng: Yes he did.

Dara: So the one who stepped on it could survive?

Seng: Yes he did.

Dara: The 11 persons were killed?

Seng: They were killed at the dam.

Socheata: Was the last person really blind?

Seng: Well [I] did not know.

Dara: So did you witness this?

Seng: Yes, [I] did.

Dara: Was Ta Vall there?

Seng: No, Ta Vall was the one who supervised everything; he usually wore a palm leave hat and walked around at night. Nobody knew him.

Dara: I see.

Seng: But we just remembered that if we heard hurried spades, he was there. Be prepared; Ta Val had arrived.

Dara: Oh! You listened to the sound of the spades?

Seng: We listened to others if we were in the middle. We listened. For example, if he came from that direction, we should listen twice. If we heard hurried spades, everybody was in chaos. Oh Ta Val came. At our side, our spades followed the sound. If he passed us, we were relieved and the sound of spades faded away. And then our chief of brigade would ask, "How is [your] job?" "Brother, I still have only 20 centimeters left." At that time they calculated in cubes. For instance, if we were asked to take care of 3 cubes, we had to get 1.5 meter cubed done before we could have food. If we got only 1 meter cube [completed], we could not eat. So we had to finish the whole thing in a day. If we could not do it, we had to complete it anyway.

Dara: Did you need to get all the daily assigned work done?

Seng: Sure.

Dara: So did you know the situation of those who came to build Trapeang Thma reservoir. Could you see the different situations in cooperative and regional brigades?

Seng: No! I was far from them. They worked from bridge 2 to the west, kilometers far from my work site.

Dara: So from which bridge did the cooperative work?

Seng: There were 2 or 3 times and needed to do many work in many areas. But I remember that there was one worker from Thmar Puok named Khan. Khan came from Svay Sar Touch, Pkoam commune.

Dara: Was he still alive?

Seng: Yes, he was.

Dara: Svay Sar. What about commune?

Seng: In Pkoam commune, Svay Chek district. Now it is called Svay Chek district. Before it was Thma Puok.

Dara: So Khan was the one who led the mobile brigade from the cooperative?

Seng: That's right! [He] brought the force, but I did not know whether he was the chief. But he told the workers to do things. But I did not know his position. I just knew that he was a cadre.

Dara: Okay. How can we contact him? Did you know him before?

Seng: No! There is a long story which is difficult to describe.

Dara: Could you just summarize a bit?

Seng: Alright! I fell in love with a woman in his cooperative. When I asked, I [learned] that he was their chief.

Dara: I see. That's the story.

Seng: Yes! I love [her] so when I asked for the chief, they said it was Khan.

Dara: Did you get married? Is she your current wife?

Seng: No! [We] were separated.

Dara: So cooperative forces and regional forces did the work separately?

Seng: Yes, we worked separately.

Dara: So you were in a regional brigade and food was enough?

Seng: Yes! No problem.

Dara: So only farmers (cooperative forces) were short of food?

Seng: That's right. Farmers (cooperative forces) usually were short of food because they were second and third ranked man power. There were three kinds of man power: 1, 2, and 3.

Dara: Really?

Seng: Yes! As I said, from [bridge] 3 up was full man power; we could eat a lot. Then the second man power; they could eat two cans of rice a day, and then the third one ate less than us.

Dara: This was applied to regional forces?

Seng: Yes!

Dara: What about cooperative forces? Were they divided into different kinds of man power?

Seng: I did not know. Because cooperative forces had their own style of supervision. I did not know how food was separated in their brigade.

Dara: Did you see them work?

Seng: Yes [I] did.

Dara: So how did they look?

Seng: Well, it was difficult. They were skinny.

Dara: So they were cooperative forces?

Seng: Yes.

Dara: What about regional forces? Did they look the same?

Seng: No, not that much.

Dara: Not skinny ones.

Seng: Not many of them looked skinny.

Dara: Really?

Seng: Yes! there were some, and some were skinny [because of] the three meter cube. If we lived in cooperative.

Dara: So when you worked there, Ta Vall watched all workers work?

Seng: Not regularly! Because he was usually stationed at the work shop. Kapat was an old work shop and used for storing rice. He stayed there.

Dara: How far was it?

Seng: It was not far. We just walked a bit from Trapeang Thmar dam. When we arrived near the tube, he was in the south along the stupa. Did you see the stupa?

Dara: Now?

Seng: Yes! It was in front of the pagoda, in front of Trapeang Thmar pagoda. It was about 300-400 meters to the west of the pagoda.

Dara: So the main force was from the regional mobile brigade who came to build the dam at the beginning?

Seng: That's right! It was a regional mobile brigade.

Dara: And the mobile brigade cooperative came later?

Seng: Yes.

Dara: But both forces were under the control of Ta Vall.

Seng: Correct.

Dara: You also mentined Ta Hing, who was a region secretary?

Seng: Ta Hin was called chief of the region.

Dara: Chief of the region?

Seng: Yes.

Dara: Did he come to watch workers directly?

Seng: He came here once. Chinese [experts] also came.

Dara: Okay.

Seng: His name was comrade Chhim Yong Kuy. He was well greeted.

Dara: Chhin Yong Kuy?

Seng: Maybe Chhin Yang Kuy. [He] drove a car when he came to Trapeang Thmar. They saw our brigades. Ta Vall asked the workers to weave a palm leaf hat with red pieces of cloth for the Chinese delegate because [he] wanted it.

Dara: Really?

Seng: Yes, the Chinese wanted the palm leaf hat. We normally did not use the tiny cloth. But we laughed when the Chinese delegate [wore it] awkwardly. But we were told not to laugh. We secretly said this person was crazy because he put on the hat wrongly. Ta Vall did not say anything because he did not speak Chinese language.

Dara: Did Ta Vall speak Chinese?

Seng: No, he did not. He just smiled and greeted them.

Dara: So did the Chinese also spoke Khmer?

Seng: [He] knew some greeting words.

Dara: Did he come with Ta Hing?

Seng: Yes, he came with Ta Hing once.

Dara: Besides Ta Hing, were there any other delegate coming to your work site?

Seng: No, never. [I] did not see Mous Sambath and the chief of the zone come to the site.

Dara: You did not see them at all?

Seng: No. They may have come, but I was probably busy.

Dara: I meant while you were there, you never saw them?

Seng: Not at all.

Dara: Or did you ever hear your chief of battalion talk about high ranking officials or delegates coming to the site?

Seng: No, never. There was an interesting moment. When we worked at the bridge 1 and 2 which needed 8-unit forces, at first 100 workers were sent to Kaun Kleng, the situation was not stable.

Dara: What happened?

Seng: When So Nhim and So Phim [were hunted] about 200-300 people were sent to [Kaun Kleng], but later were called back to [Trapeang Thmar]

Dara: Really?

Seng: Exactly, I also got involved in this task.

Dara: What did you do? Please restate?

Seng: When we were almost done with Trapeang Thmar reservoir, from bridge 1 to Peam Ro village, Ta Vall asked us to send 100 workers to Kaun Kleng Mountain.

Dara: Did Ta Vall send the forces [there]?

Seng: Yes, he did. But he did not do it himself, he just told chief of battalion about the task, selecting only men not women. But there was not much to do there.

Dara: At Kaun Kleng Mountain?

Seng: Yes, they were sent to build a dam, big pond. They also brought some fish back.

Dara: Really?

Seng: Yes. About 3-4 months later, Ta [Vall] ordered the forces back.

Dara: So did you go with the 100 workers to Kaun Kleng Mountain?

Seng: No, I did not go with them. But Ta Vall told me to do the thing.

Dara: To do what?

Seng: To arrange the task.

Dara: To send the force from Trapeang Thmar to [Kaun] Kleng Mountain?

Seng: Yes. He told the chief of Battalion to send them to the Mountain.

Dara: I see.

Seng: But when he wanted to call them back, he asked me to do it.

Dara: To bring them from Kaun Kleng here?

Seng: Yes.

Dara: Did you know why this happened?

Seng: Because of the unstable situation. Later [I] heard that Ta Nhim and Ta Phim arrested Ta Cheal and a few others and then killed them. Subsequently, the chief of battalion arrested Ta Vit and Ta Sreh. Ta Sreh tried to escape; however, he could not.

Dara: Did this happen?

Seng: A Veth, A Sreh, A Tuon, A Vei, all of them tried to escape. They were all chiefs of battalion.

Dara: Where did they work?

Seng: At Trapeang Thmar reservoir.

Dara: They all worked there?

Seng: Yes, they did. But they were in battalion 2.

Dara: Battalion 2?

Seng: Yes, I was in battalion 1.

Brunh: Excuse me, who came to arrest Ta Nhim?

Seng: They did not come to arrest them here, but there was a letter from Angkar to invite him to meet [Angkar], and he disappeared forever.

Dara: I see. So by unstable situation you were referring to purges [in those zones] that led to reshuffle some work force from Trapeang Thmar to Kleng Mountain?

Seng: Yes, that's right.

Dara: To bring them back from Kaun Kleng?

Seng: Yes.

Dara: So to use the forces against the purge. Was that their plan according to your opinion?

Seng: I did not know. I do not want to give an estimation on this because I am afraid I am wrong.

Dara: That's fine.

Seng: I just heard that it was. But I did not think it is officially true. But some talked about the plan.

Dara: So when was that when Ros Nhim, Cheal came to your work site?

Seng: It was about [19] 88.

Neighbor: 78?

Dara: 80 or 70?

Seng: No, it was 78.

Dara: 78?

Seng: Yes.

Dara: Was it in the beginning or middle of 78?

Seng: It was end of 78. I remember that I got married in 79. One year after the arrest, I moved to a cotton farm in Kang Va.

Dara: You moved to Kang Va?

Seng: Yes.

Dara: So you were at Trapeang Thmar until the construction was done?

Seng: I left Trapeang Thmar late. I did not stop until we were running out of cement and iron.

Dara: Until the three bridges were done?

Seng: Yes.

Dara: So after the bridges were completed, was the top of the dam complete as well?

Seng: Yes, but not properly neat. They left 200-300 workers to get all done neatly.

Dara: To finish the work?

Seng: The 200-300 workers had to fill the missing parts and smooth out everything left.

Dara: So both regional forces and cooperatives worked there?

Seng: No, cooperatives were sent out.

Dara: Really?

Seng: Yes, they were sent back to their respective cooperatives.

Dara: Was that end of 78?

Seng: Yes. End of 78, they were sent back, probably this started in Thmar Puok first and then Preah Neth Preah.

Dara: Was that so?

Seng: Yes, those in Thmar Puok were sent out early.

Dara: So those who worked at Trapeang Thmar were the forces from Preah Neth Preah?

Seng: Yes.

Dara: They were from Preah Neth Preah cooperative?

Seng: Yes, but they were not stationed at the first bridge.

Dara: Really?

Seng: From second bridge or it was called Dai Sou. It faced west.

Dara: So you got everything done before you were sent to other place?

Seng: The bridges were not done yet, but we lacked [materials].

Dara: Lacked what?

Seng: Cement, iron, and the situation was not stable. Ta Vall also disappeared.

Dara: So when Ta Vall disappeared, how was the situation at the dam?

Seng: It was in chaos. Nobody listened to each other. So people from Southwestern zone came to supervise [the workers].

Dara: So you were still here when people from Southwestern zone came?

Seng: Yes. I was still there. But I did not stay long, only about 4-5 months. I was sent to the farm in Banteay Meanchey because we lacked materials.

Dara: So when people from the Southwest zone came, it was end of 78?

Seng: Yes, probably during that time.

Dara: So where were your chiefs of unit such as Khauv and Vorn?

Seng: They were sent there with me but they no longer had any position anymore.

Dara: No more position?

Seng: No, they did not.

Dara: Weren't they arrested?

Seng: They were arrested later. When Ta Vall disappeared, Ta Poal came to take his position.

Dara: Ta Poal?

Seng: Yes, Ta Poal replaced Ta Vall after the arrest.

Dara: Ta Poal?

Seng: Yes. He came from Southwestern zone.

Socheata: In 78?

Seng: Yes.

Dara: So Ta Poal was the one who controlled at Trapeang Thmar as a whole?

Seng: Yes, he was.

Dara: Besides him, were there any others?

Seng: No, there were only chiefs of battalion. The structure remained the same; they only changed the people.

Dara: Same as before?

Seng: Yes.

Dara: Did you know any others?

Seng: My chiefs of battalion were Ta Cheng, Ta Nin. Both of them led a battalion.

Dara: Ta Nin?

Seng: Yes.

Dara: In battalion 1?

Seng: That's right.

Dara: Was it yours?

Seng: Yes.

Dara: So did you know any others in different battalions?

Seng: I did not know them all. They had set the structure already before they arrived.

Dara: All had been set?

Seng: Yes. They just implemented it.

Dara: And what about your chief of battalion?

Seng: He was Ta Nin, but he disappeared when I was sent to Kang Va.

Dara: No, I did not mean that. I want to know when you were at Trapeang Thmar, Cheng and Nin were your supervisors and Khauv and Vorn were also, did they still work there?

Seng: At first, nothing changed.

Dara: But they no longer had any position?

Seng: No.

Dara: So they did the work like other workers?

Seng: No. They did not do the work. They just ate as usual.

Dara: Excuse me?

Seng: They still took care of other workers when they built the dam, chopped the trees as such.

Dara: Ta Vorn also went with the workers.

Seng: Yes! They sometimes did but sometimes did not. It was up to them.

Dara: I see.

Seng: 4-5 months later Ta Vall disappeared. We were sent to Kang Va.

Dara: Kang Va?

Seng: Yes, then the two disappeared.

Dara: So Ta Khauv and Ta Vorn were sent to Kang Va with you?

Seng: Yes, they went there with me. Later, they were removed.

Dara: Were only you sent there or the whole unit?

Seng: All of us.

Dara: All the people in your unit?

Seng: Yes. All of us to work at a cotton farm in Kang Va.

Dara: I see.

Seng: So the remainder worked at Trapeang Thmar because we lacked materials.

Dara: So when you moved to work at the other place, was the dam finished or not?

Seng: Let say, it finished.

Dara: What percentage, can you guess?

Seng: About 95 percent.

Dara: Really?

Seng: Yes. All was almost done, except the bridges. We just finished 30-40 percent.

Dara: All the three bridges?

Seng: Yes! All the three bridges were 30-40 percent done.

Dara: Okay.

Seng: Yes.

Dara: Whether or not the water rushed [through the dam]?

Seng: Yes.

Dara: So there was nothing to protect the bridges?

Seng: No. Nothing to protect them, so the water flowed freely.

Dara: The shape of the bridge did not appear yet?

Seng: No.

Dara: So when the water flooded, it rushed.

Seng: Yes, it [water] rushed. But we tried our best to handle the water flow.

Dara: So when you were there, the dam was almost finished?

Seng: Yes.

Dara: But the three bridges were not completed?

Seng: Not yet. But the water front was completed.

Dara: Waterfront?

Seng: Yes. It laid a foundation at the top.

Dara: Foundation?

Seng: Yes.

Dara: So the water front was finished?

Seng: Yes.

Dara: Could you open and close it?

Seng: Yes.

Dara: I see.

Seng: Alright.

Dara: Regarding cooperatives, did you know the chief of cooperatives or chief of province?

Seng: I forget. I just know Ta Maong from Preah Neth Preah, and Ta Hatt from Phnom Srok. But I forgot the one from Thmar Puok.

Dara: Could you say the name from Phnom Srok again?

Seng: Here is Phnom Srok.

Dara: What was his name?

Seng: Ta Hatt.

Dara: Ta Hatt?

Seng: Yes, he was chief of district.

Dara: Was he?

Seng: Yes.

Dara: So did Ta Moang stay in Preah Neth Preah throughout?

Seng: Yes, [we knew]. When the cooperative in my district was still under control

Dara: Okay.

Seng: But there were many others like deputy heads. I believe that they stayed there until people from Southwestern zone came to arrest them.

Dara: Then the plan started?

Seng: Yes! They were removed.

Dara: Have you ever heard of Yeay Chem?

Seng: Yes. She oversaw people in Preah Neth Preah district but usually she was stationed in Phnom Leap.

Dara: So she was usually stationed at the mountain.

Seng: It was in Phnom Leap commune.

Dara: So she usually went there?

Seng: She did.

Dara: Did she also come to Trapeang Thmar?

Seng: No I never saw her.

Dara: Do you know her?

Seng: If I see her again, I will be able to recognize her. Because when the Vietnamese came to Kralanch in 1979, I fled from Svay [Sisophon]? to Phnom Leap.

Dara: Did you unite with Yeay Chem?

Seng: No.

Socheata: She is here (Socheata shows the photo of Yeay Chem to Seng).

Seng: Yeah [he laughs]. But she was young at that time, not as old as in this photo.

Dara: Really?

Seng: Yes. But she just delivered a child when she fled to Phnom Leap.

Socheata: So she got married during the Khmer Rouge?

Seng: Speaking of her husband, I have never seen him. I just knew that she had a baby when she fled leaving her moto, her unit, and guns.

Dara: So when you moved to Kang Va?

Seng: Yes.

Dara: You grew cotton, didn't you?

Seng: Yes I did.

Dara: So where were the rest of your team?

Seng: Ta Leng and Ta Sim were the chiefs. I heard the announcement that those who were married will be sent to cooperatives. So I proposed to a woman and then we got married with other 25 couples.

Dara: Okay.

Seng: Yes, it was when I was at Kang Va.

Dara: I see.

Seng: When I arrived in Kang Va, I was asked to supervise middle aged people and then we were asked to go to Ma-kak Daun Ly, Ma-kak Svay Chek. When we arrived the chief of the cooperative who got along well with Ta Pheak knew that the Vietnamese were coming. They gave me an ox cart. I asked my wife where to go. She said it was up to me. I feel worried. I said I did not want to go into the jungle. But that was alright. So at first they gave me the ox cart with a pair of oxen, a sack of rice, a sack of green beans, and a jar of palm sugar. We prepared all this stuff. I wrote a letter myself addressing my name "Seng" to bring my wife from Ma-kak Daun Leu to Svay. Yeay Chem was transported by a military truck and escorted by a chief of unit in a black uniform. When we ran into each other, I was asked where I was going. I told them I am going to Phnom Leap. They asked "for what?" I replied, "I am going to get my relatives." "Do you have a travel pass?" I said "yes." When I gave the pass to them, they did not know how to read, so they asked me to get on the truck. So that's why I met Yeay Chem.

Dara: Alright.

Seng: I just lied to them to wait for me that I came to bring my relatives, but if you did not show up, no need to wait. So I just helped carrying sacks of weapons, an old moto, and a bicycle. As for Yeay Chem, she just carried her baby. She also headed to Phnom Leap and as for me, I finally arrived in Kaun Kleng.

Dara: So when the Vietnamese came you fled to the village?

Seng: Yes! When the Vietnamese came, I fled to Phnom Leap and to my native village. My parents lived in the village. I reunited with my parents. Those people from the Southwest zone were also dispersed.

Dara: So they all ran away?

Seng: Yes. They did.

Dara: So when you arrived in your village, did you ask the people in the village about their living conditions during that time?

Seng: Well, I shed tears when I knew all the things. I asked why my father died. They said because he was swollen and he could not do anything. As for Lon Nol soldiers, most of them were killed. And those who stole yam, rice, they were arrested and killed.

Dara: Did you know all of this from your family in the village?

Seng: Yes, I did. My mother and siblings told me that we lost one brother and...

Dara: What did he do?

Seng: He was still young, so he died of hunger.

Dara: Did he die of starvation?

Seng: Yes.

Socheata: How many family members did you lose during that time?

Seng: One father and one brother, totally 2. And my mother was swollen, but she managed to survive.

Dara: Why did she get swollen?

Seng: Well, when we were young, we were told that this is happened because we did not have enough food to eat, and a lack of glucose and we did not have rice. As for watery rice soup, they put only 5 or 10 cans of rice for a cauldron and then everyone got only a bowl of congee. Nobody dared to confront. If anyone did, Angkar pineapple eyes will find you.

Brunch: You were talking about digging soil at Trapeang Thmar; you were in a hunder-person hundred unit, and many of your team members became ill. But what about the daily plan of work, did they give [food] to the 100 people despite many of them being sick?

Seng: Yes that's right.

Prunh: So what did you do when you were sick?

Seng: We had to go. We divided the work. It depended on the chief of unit and chief of battalion. I asked, "What if some of my team members get ill, and we have only some left." They said, "So let's take 2 meters each and figure it out the rest." I was illiterate; we were ignorant.

Prunh: So you worked harder? Because you did not have enough people to help.

Seng: We had to do a lot. But the most important thing was the food ration.

Dara: Really?

Seng: Because the chief of battalion collected the rice instead? For example, when they were asked how many people went to work, the chief of battalion would say 100, even 10 were ill.

Dara: So he said 100; he also got the ration for 100?

Seng: Yes.

Dara: So they assigned the work for 100 people as well?

Seng: That's right.

Dara: Even though you had only 80 or 90 left?

Seng: Sure. They did not come to check.

Dara: Not often?

Socheat: So did you ever tell them that you still had only 80 left while 20 were sick?

Seng: No. At first, the work was assigned for 100. We also got ration for 100 workers, so we had some left because we saved it day by day. I told the chef to cook as much rice as they could. However, when I realized that we need to complete the work as such, I asked those [new] people from Phnom Penh because they were educated. But I was not. So based on the saying of Angkar "minority must listen to the majority." I remember a fleshy man. He said that he was In Tam's nephew.

Dara: Okay.

Seng: Yes, he was. He asked me to leave the dam. However, when he ran, he was shot. I did not know his name, but he told me that he wanted to find his uncle in Thailand.

Dara: So his uncle was In Tam?

Seng: In Tam. Two of them left, but one was shot. But another one was in Kok Lun, his cooperative. But the cooperative was included in a regional cooperative. He found me later.

Dara: Where did he find you?

Seng: When I built dam at Kamboar Sreh. He disappeared for awhile and when he found me, he told me the story.

Dara: What is his name?

Seng: I just called him A- *mab* (fatty man), but I do not know his real name.

Dara: Oh the one who was shot?

Seng: Yes, that one.

Socheata: So you do not remember his name?

Seng: No. I do not know his real name. But he looked big, so I just called him A-*mab* forever.

Dara: Do you know if he is still alive?

Seng: [We] were separated and asked to go to our own cooperative. We hoped to meet again. We had three days off during [Khmer] New Year, and we returned to our cooperative.

Dara: I see.

Seng: When we came back to our cooperative, they gave us only watery rice soup. We were not full. Although [when] we worked hard at Trapeang Thmar, we were full. But here at the cooperative, we worked hard; however, we were not full.

Prunh: You said you carried water to build the bridge, but what about drinking water or water for washing, where did you get it?

Seng: Water for drinking and washing were given. But it was not enough. We had to find it ourselves.

Dara: Did you dig in order to get water?

Seng: Yes. We made a well. Although we dug 1 meter into the ground, we hardly got any water. We sometimes got one or two buckets of water, or worse, we got only two to three *ptil* (containing one litre). We needed to struggle.

Prunh: What about water for washing?

Seng: Well it was hard.

Prunh: So you did not have water for washing?

Seng: We could find some in the cattle pond. But that did not last long, probably 2-3 months during dry season. For the rest we depended on rain.

Prunh: How many people died of disease while they were working at Trapeang Thmar?

Seng: Not so many.

Prunh: Not many?

Seng: Many of the workers were killed.

Dara: Were they sent to be killed?

Seng: Yes, they were killed. There was one person I knew. I usually called him Ta Nhob, but I did not know his real name. He was sent away. I knew this because I was with him every day. When I did not see him I asked "Where is Ta Nhob?" He was ill before he was sent away. One cook said that he was dead. We usually teased him. So please forgive me. He wore sunglasses and had only one arm. When he took off his sunglasses, he could not see things clearly. He begged, "Please, brother Seng, spare me." Three persons took him to be buried under the third bridge where there was a big pool. I saw him and his photo the last time. His parents preserved his ashes [after the regime]. I heard that he had a few pieces of gold jewelry.

Dara: How did he hide [it]?

Seng: He could hide it from Angkar. Everybody needed to turn in their belongings to Angkar. If Angkar found out, he/she would be killed. However, some did not turn them in. We did not barter for food because we were full. When I went to check for his jewelry, I did not see it.

Dara: We seem to have a lot of information from you. So I'd like to end this interview here. If I have any additional question, can I just call you?

Seng: No problem.

Dara: Really?

Seng: Sure.

Dara: So we'd like to thank you so much for your interview.

Seng: My pleasure.

"End"