

Field trip's note in Kampong Cham, Kampong Thom and Battambang Provinces

May 23rd through 27th, 2016

By Long Dany and Seang Chenda

From May 23rd to 27th, 2016, PA team (Long Dany, Sok Vannak and Seang Chenda) visited to Kampong Cham, Kampong Thom and Battambang provinces. The PA team deployed to those provinces to search and interview Khmer Rouge cadres. Consequently, we were able to interview 5 cadres who served and worked in Region 41 of the Central Zone. Below is a brief summary of the interviews:

The first interview was with sixty-two-year-old Im Pon, [a former messenger and driver of [Ta] An who was vice secretary of Central Zone and secretary of region 41], male, currently serving as a Ansa village's chief of Sochet commune, Sandan district, Kampong Thom province.

Pon is married to Un Seth with 4 children. Born in a farming family in Trapeang Kuy village, La Baek sub-district, Chhouk district, Kampot province, Pon is the third eldest amongst 8 siblings. When he was a child, Pon went to school up until the 9th grade (in the old system). He quit school a year after the 1970 coup took place. He decided to leave school because his village was in chaos as many people were forcibly recruited to serve as soldiers; that's why his parents stopped letting him go to school. After leaving school, Pon went to help his parents in the rice field, until 1973, Pon volunteered to join the revolution and was assigned by [Ta] Nheb, a district chief, to work at Koh Sla district office. Since he was still young, Pon was assigned as a messenger to deliver letters from the district office to all communes within Koh Sla district. Pon and other messengers also delivered letters to other districts of Region 35 which include Kampot Khang Lech/ Khang Kaert district, Touk Meas district, Kampong Trach district, Sre Khnong district and Chhouk district. [Ta] Chab was Region 35's chief. [Ta] Rin and [Ta] An were deputy chief and member of the regional committee. In 1974, Pon was transferred to the textile unit in the vicinity of Dang Tung Chas. The textile unit was used to support the frontline with materials. A month later, Pon was dispatched continually off until arriving in Chamkar Daung (a coconut field) nearby Damnakk Chang Aer located in

Kep. He was in a child unit tasked to protect a group of women carrying injured soldiers from the battle along the way. Pon remained in the child unit until the 1975 liberation. After the liberation, Pon was assigned to sweep up Kampot city for a week. Then, he was sent to guard the fruit field situated in Tik Chhou. There were 30 children in the unit under the management of Chhun and Ny. In early 1976, Pon continued to be transferred to Boeng Tauk in the western Kampot, staying there for months. Later, he was sent off to an old airport near Koh Keh to farm and take care of old aircrafts. Awhile later, he was transferred to Kampot provincial town staying and working in [Ta] Chab's office. Pon was assigned a guest greeter for when Chinese, North Korean and other delegations went to visit Kampot. During that time, [Ta] An and [Ta] Rin took turns working in the regional office every 4-5 day. By mid-1977, Pon, Aun, Aun's wife and Thok's younger brother were sent to Kampong Cham province. The four of them were taken by [Yeay] Yut by car. Before they were sent to Kampong Cham province, [Ta] Chab was transferred to Siem Reap and [Ta] Bit was promoted in charge instead. Along the way to Kampong Cham, Pon along with others stayed in Phnom Penh for a night. In the next morning, all of them driven to the regional office situated in Prey Torting in Region 41 of the Central Zone. Pon was assigned to work with Aun who was a chief of the regional office by the time [Ta] Am had been sent off. Pon was assigned a regional messenger, so he was able to figure out a few people in the regional office as follows: 1) Sok, [Ta] An's messenger, was shot dead by Vietnamese soldiers/ 2) Sao deceased/ 3) Huy, worked with [Ta] An, currently living in Anglong Veng with his wife Ly/ 4) Hum was a regional soldier chief and is deceased/ 5) Try was a regional soldier, after the liberation of 1979, he moved to live in the camp in Thailand, but in 1993, it was heard that he was shot dead during a battle and 6) Ngov was a chief Krauch Kor security prison (Region 41 security center), currently living in Anlong Veng with his wife Vorn.

Whilst serving as Aun's messenger in the regional office, Pon sometimes went down with [Ta] An to perform duties. By that time, he heard that [Ta] Chab was arrested. Nonetheless, Pon was later assigned as [Ta] An's driver, driving him to meetings and duties in districts and cooperatives. The previous driver assigned to the regional chief was Lay, he was accused of immoral offense and sent off. It was then Pon heard that Lay was taken to execution after he resisted returning to see his in-love partner. At that time, there were a few regional drivers such as: 1) Pon, himself/ 2) Moeun died of stepping on a mine after 1979/ and 3) Maury deceased several years ago. [Ta] An had a monthly schedule to go down to the regional office perform his duties, and meet with the district chiefs. Whenever going to

districts and cooperatives, [Ta] An travelled in his Jeep accompanied by a few guards (Huy and Sim) equipped with guns. Not long after that, [Ta] Am who, had a connections with the accused [Ta] Chab ,was captured by the southwest cadres and taken away. Under [Ta] An's control, the region 41 was divided into 5 districts controlled by following key district chiefs:

- 1) Kan from the southwest (Takeo) was a chief of Kang Meas district
- 2) [Yeay] Yut was a chief of Kampong Siem district. After the arrest of her husband [Yeay] Yut was transferred. Then, [Ta] Sy became the district chief Later, [Ta] Chea was promoted as the district chief when [Ta] Sy moved to Tik Chha worksite. After 1979 [Ta] Chea committed suicide in the forest.
- 3) [Ta] Sim was a chief of Prey Chhor district. Sim died in late 1980s.
- 4) [Ta] Mon was a chief of Cheung Prey district, but later he died of malaria in 1979 in the vicinity of Sre Ramduol.
- 5) [Ta] Phim was a chief of Batheay district. After the arrest of So Phim, a chief of the east zone, [Ta] Phim changed his name to Phal to avoid any confusion with the arrestee. Phim later died in the vicinity of Kampong Siem in 1981. After the death of [Ta] Phim some of his soldier came forward to confess that [Ta] Phim was actually shot dead by his own men. In actuality, Phim was shot dead by his men. After the death of Phim, the rest of his soldiers went to make a confession.

Apart from that, [Ta] An also went to meetings in the central zone located in Kampong Cham provincial town. Ke Pauk who was a chief of the central zone and [Ta] An was also deputy chief of the zone. The central zone was divided into three regions in charged by following persons:

- 1) [Ta] An was the chief of Region 41.
- 2) [Ta] Oeun who was Ke Pauk's younger brother-in-law was the chief of Region 42.
- 3) [Ta] Phen was the chief of Region 43. Later, [Ta] Sim became the chief of Region 43 as his wife Sem was in charge of Region 41's hospital.

After the country was liberated in 1979, Pon went back to his village, but due to suspicions by his villagers, he decided to leave the village and integrated with his military unit

in Am Leang. He decided to serve as a soldier again and continually fought in battles. Later, Pon unexpectedly met [Ta] An again. After [Ta] An escaped to Dang Rek Mountain, Pon has been apart from him until now. In 1982, Pon married his wife. In 1987, he moved to O Trav Camp in Thailand. In 1997, he repatriated to his wife's village.

Observation: *Im Pon is the most fruitful source in term of searching for remaining information that happened in the region 41 during the DK regime. As a driver of regional chief [Ta] An, Pon is capable of remembering and knowing specific information during that period. Undeniably, Pon told us most of the information he has obtained, but he did not reveal any parts of the arrest and killing at that time. Seemingly, he felt hesitant to provide us such information.*

The second interview was conducted with 58 year old Hong Heng, [a former messenger and guard of Region 41] male, currently living in Trapeang Touk (Sre Haem) village, Chrey Vean commune, Prey Chhor district, Kampong Cham province.

Heng is married to Ngin Khen, having 9 children, five of whom are boys and the rest are girls. When he was a child, Heng went to school up until the 10th grade (in the old system). He decided to quit school after the country was brought to civil war in early 1970. In 1973, Heng voluntarily served as a KR militiaman in his village, by that time Vietcong soldiers had already arrived there. In 1974, Heng was transferred to the commune, serving as a commune's messenger. In 1975, Heng was sent back to a mobile unit to carry earth and build a dam. During his time there, Heng was able to meet **Prince Norodom Naradipo**. Heng affirmed, "**Prince Norodom Naradipo** was brought by Pheng, a Chrey Vean sub-district chief to do productive labor. The prince is elder than me. He looks like our late King Sihanouk." **Prince Norodom Naradipo** was accompanied by a few of his servants whose names were No (female), Ny (female) and probably Suon (male). The prince along with others was assigned to build a "1000" dike in Sang Ke village located in Prey Chhor district. The prince performed his duty and had a restricted life as everyone. Not long after building a dike with **Prince Norodom Naradipo**, Heng was transferred to carry earth at Ta Nhean Dam. Later, it was heard that the prince was taken away and disappeared following the arrest of Pheng. A month later, Heng and his friend Eng were transferred by Chheang to serve as

soldiers instead of medical staff. He was first taken to a district office (**Sim was a chief of the district**) and then to the regional office. At that time, many teenagers were dispatched to the regional office. Arriving in the Region 41 and standing in lines, [Ta] An went to examine newly-recruited soldiers. Later, Heng and Ren were taken to serve as regional messengers. His duty as a messenger was to deliver letters. After [Ta] An was transferred, most of the base cadres were caught and taken away. During the implementation of the arrest, he witnessed a few unknown people were captured and walked in to the regional office at dusk. Heng was scared of it and went to inform his parents secretly. Not long after serving as a regional messenger, due to a conflict between Cambodia and Vietnam, Heng was continually deployed along the border to fight under the control of Hoeun. Hoeun was from Kang Meas and in charge of regional soldiers, with Try was deputy chief. It was later heard that Hoeun along with Sen, Ke Pauk's son-in-law was later arrested. Heng continually served as a soldier until the Vietnamese soldiers arrived in Cambodia. After an arrival of Vietnamese soldiers in early 1979, Heng decided to make a confession and was brought home.

Observation: *When the PA team was nearby his home, Heng thought we were a group of traditional medics who have treated his ill wife. Then, the PA team explained to him why we arrived to his home. Heng seemed a bit more comfortable but still hesitant to tell us his life experience during the Khmer Rouge. That's why we kept continually explaining to him until he decided to let us know his entire story. Whilst an interview was being conducted, Heng could have forgotten some parts of his life, particularly the names of people with/ of whom he work/ heard. Nonetheless, Heng was able to recall those people.*

The third interview was conducted with Fifty-seven-year-old Bun At, [a former guard of Region 41], male, currently a farmer living in Sre Haem village, Chrey Vien commune, Prey Chhor district, Kampong Cham province.

At is married to Ngin Kim Hean, with 4 children. At was born to a farmer family and is the second eldest amongst 7 siblings. When he was a child, At studied until the 10th grade (in the old system) but soon after the 1970 coup, he quit school. Although not having studied any further, At was still able to read and write. After leaving school, At went to help his parents in the rice field. In 1973, his village had already become a liberated zone, but the Kampong Cham provincial town was still occupied by Lon Nol soldiers. At farmed with his parents

until the 1975 liberation. In early 1976, at the age of 16-17, At was assigned to a special unit to do farming and build a dam in the vicinity of Ta Nhean Dam, at that time a few south-west cadres arrived in his village. In 1976-77, food rationing situation at his place got worse. During Sreng and Taing's control, many "New people" including Lon Nol officials were taken to execution at Krauch Kor security office belonged to the region. In late 1977 to early 1978, At was selectively assigned as a regional militiaman of Region 41 located in Prey Chhor. At the time the southwest cadres were transferred in to be incharge, resulting in the death both Sreng and Taing, along with remaining Lon Nol officials and "New People". At affirmed, "I hear of Sreng, Taing and Thuch who were allies of the east zone taken away, but I did not witness that." After the arrest and execution of Sreng and Taing, To replace them [Ta] An was transferred in to be incharge. At witnessed the trucks in which most of the Cham people in sub-districts were arrested and sent off. During [Ta] An's control, the regional chief Am was arrested and sent off, his wife [Yea] Yut was also chief of Kampong Siem district. Along with battalion chiefs Hum, Hoeun and Sok and deputy chief Try all disappeared. Ngov was a chief of Region 41 security center (Krauch Kor) he looked Chinese and could not speak Khmer properly. At was transferred to do farming in Dam Boul in the vicinity of Prek Kdam until the Vietnamese soldiers arrived; thus, he decided to return home, getting married in the same year of 1979.

Observation: Even after stating, *"I feel alright to offer this first-hand interview of my life during the Khmer Rouge regime"*, Bun At reluctantly let us know the entire story, particularly about the arrest and execution in the Region 41 after his transfer to the regional office. Nonetheless, At provided us with some fruitful information related to the names of the key chief causing the killing.

◆ PA team also searched for one missing regional guard Sreang based on Ren's transcript interview, PA team made a decision to look for him at his homevillage located in Trapeang Ampil village, Trean commune, Kampong Siem district. Arriving to the village, we asked a few people along the way as we did not know the local geography well. Finally, we reached Trapeang Ampil village. Not many people in the village were able to recognise the name of Sreang who had left the village to join the struggle with the Khmer Rouge, a few claimed that he had died since the struggle period. Then, we decided to go to meet Trapeang, Ampil village's chief, for ensuring that deceased Sreang must have been a Trapeang Ampil

inhabitant. The village chief stated that Sreang was born in his village, but disappeared. When the Vietnamese soldiers arrived in Cambodia in 1979, he went home along with his friend (who is probably Ren whom PA has previously interviewed), but he later decided to no longer stay in the village because he was afraid of the Vietnamese soldiers chasing behind. He went on his fleeing journey and was never seen again. To clear things up, the village chief brought us to meet his cousin who lives in another side of the village. [Yeay] Mom affirmed that not long after the Khmer Rouge soldiers were scattered, Sreang and his friend came to the village, but he refused to live in the village because of his concern of rumors that the Vietnamese soldiers would cut people's stomach open if they had been arrested. She does not know where he had gone since then. But, she reaffirmed that his two siblings (younger and elder brothers), Sy and Chheang, have survived. Chheang married a wife living in Ka-Tuoy and moved to Anglong Veng. Chheang also brought his dad to live with him, who is now dead. [Yeay] Mom lastly stated that Sreang must have died because if he did survive, he would have returned to the village, or there would be some information of his whereabouts.

The fourth interview is with fifty-six-year-old Ry Nhor, [a former guard of Region 41] male, currently living in Ta Lorn village, Trapeang Preah commune, Prey Chhor district, Kampong Cham province province.

Nhor is married to Phatt Srean having 6 children. Born in a farming family, Nhor stands in 5th amongst 9 siblings. When he was a child, Nhor moved to live in several places as his father was a construction worker. However, Nhor was able to study until the 11th grade (in the old system). Although not have received any higher education, Nhor was able to read and write. When the coup in 1970 erupted, Nhor continued his studies until 1971. After the condition got worse, he left school and went to live in downtown Mean along the national road. In 1972, his village was liberated by Khmer Rouge soldiers supported by Vietcong soldiers. In January 1972 soon after his village became a liberated zone, Nhor joint the revolution because the situation in the village became worse. Serving the revolution, Nhor was assigned as a messenger of [Ta] Thun who was in charge of district administrative management. [Ta] Song took responsibilities in the front battle. In the same year of 1972, Nhor and many people were recruited and transferred to the battle of Chenla I & II. Then, he along with others was dispatched to Ba Khan Barrack located in Cheung Prey to innitiate an attack along the national road. At that time, soldiers took turns to attack. Later, Nhor was sent to serve as a district office until 1975. After the 1975 liberation, Nhor was taken by Phann, who was

deputy chief of Kang Meas district and Meas was the district chief. Nhor was assigned as a district soldier. [Ta] Taing was a regional chief. [Ta] Sreng was transferred in to take charge of the zone while [Mit] Sop was the deputy chief. Until mid-1977, the southwest cadres were transferred in to take charge, and the killing of the northwest cadres began. Meas and Phann were targeted and taken away to execution whilst Sreng and Taing in charge of the region were captured earlier. After Phann was taken off, [Yeay] Rom was promoted to replace him. 5-6 months later, Kan from the southwest zone was dispatched and placed as the deputy chief of the district. A few months later, Kan arrested [Yeay] Rom and took complete control, and Hoeun was a chief of district soldiers. Nhor coincidentally witnessed parts of the arrest as [Yea] Yeay Rom and many others were tied up by the southwest cadres and carried by truck to the west. He assumed that those arrested must have been captured from Kang Meas district.

Meanwhile, his friend Vann working in the North Zone office told him to destroy any relevant documents related to Phann to prevent any assumed involvements to happen. He did it because he became aware that any suspects would be taken to the meeting and go missing. In the meantime, [Ta] An was transferred in to take charge of Region 41 whilst Kan became a chief of Kang Meas district. Later, Krauch Kor and O Tra Kuon prisons were created. Not long after the establishment of the prisons, both of Cham and Khmer people were continually arrested and sent there. During Phann's management, daily food ration was insufficient but people were able to survive; however, when the southwest cadres arrived, everything became even worse. After the arrest and execution of Phann and [Yeay] Rom, Nhor's soldier unit was demobilized and sent to a cooperative. Then, he was selectively dispatched to a regional mobile unit. Many people were sent to the regional office and assigned to perform duty respectively. Some were offered a duty to carry earth in the worksite; some were to build 1-January Dam while Nhor was sent to be hard working at Chamkar Kabas (the cotton field) for several months. At that time, Chhan from the southwest was a chief of Chamkar Kabas. Nhor affirmed that Chhan was under [Ta] An's supervision, but later, he was arrested and transferred off by the regional chief.

During the rainy season of 1977, Nhor along with others was transferred to the regional office in Prey Tortoeng. At that time, Nhor was able to point out a few of transferees to the region as the following: Ren, Ran and San, two of whom died as only Ren could survive. Nhor was assigned as a regional guard under the control of Hum and Sokh. His

assigned task was to do nothing besides planting vegetables, building a dam and farming. Nhor was able to know a few messengers/ guards and drivers of the regional chiefs: Mauy, Meun, Lay, Hum and Pon, all of whom were from the southwest. As a regional guard Nhor did not see any of the arrested being sent to be detained at the regional office, but he learned that Watt Ta Meh was a detention prison where people were sent before being transferred to Krauch Kor prison in Region 41. Run from Kang Meas district took charge of Watt Ta Meh prison, and he was later taken to be killed by people after the liberation. Nhor reaffirmed, "Southwest cadres committing mistakes were transferred off to the southwest instead of punishment, but if any of them resist coming back, they will face the death." For instance, [Ta] An's close messenger/ driver Lay and Hum did immoral offense, so they were accused of it and sent off; however, they made a decision to return; as a result, both were taken away to execution.

Below are key persons of Region 41:

- 1) [Ta] An from the southwest zone was a chief of region 41.
- 2) [Ta] Am was a chief of region 41 office.
- 3) Not only did Phim aka Phal serve a deputy chief of region 41 but also a chief of Batheay district. After the arrest of So Phim a chief of the east zone, Phim changed his name to Phal to avoid any confusion.
- 4) Hom was a chief of regional soldiers. After committing immoral offense, he was sent back to the southwest. He was taken away to be killed resulting from his return.
- 5) Sokh was a chief of regional soldiers. When the Vietnamese soldiers attacked into Cambodia, Sokh committed suicide by shooting himself dead in the forest.

Region 41 was divided into 5 districts taken in charge by following people:

- 1) [Yeay] Yut was a chief of Kampong Siem district. She was a wife of [Ta] Am who was a chief of regional office. Even though [Ta] Am was arrested and sent off, no arrests happened to [Yeay] Yut.
- 2) Kan was a chief of Kang Meas district.

- 3) Phim alias Phal was a chief of Bateay district. After an outbreak of a war between Cambodia and Vietnam, Phim took charge of regional soldiers.
- 4) Unknown chief of Prey Chhor.
- 5) Unknown chief of Cheung Prey.

When the Vietnamese liberation arrived, Nhor went back to his home village. After his arrival in his village during the 1979 liberation, Nhor heard from his villagers that many Cham people in the village were taken to be killed by Ngan from the southwest zone who was a sub-district chief. In 1980, Nhor got married and has lived as the village chief of Ta Lan village until now.

Observation: *When PA team firstly reached and met him, Nhor felt hesitant and a bit afraid because he has never been asked for such a life-experience interview before. That's why PA team tried to make him clear by explaining our purpose until he agreeably offered us the interview. He let us know the entire story from a beginning to an end. Nonetheless, it was his first-hand interview about his life story during the Khmer Rouge regime, so he reluctantly did not provide some parts of the arrest and killing, claiming that he did not witness or know it. Seemingly, he suspected he will meet any matters in any ways if revealing such information; that's why he kept saying nothing about that. Nonetheless, he provided us lots of fruitful information, particularly a few names of key people doing the killings.*

The fifth interview was conducted with sixty-five-year-old Chea Chhoeun, [a former chief of logistics of the regional military], male, currently living in Trapeang Prolit village, Santipheap commune, Sampov Laun district, Battambang province.

Born in a farming family in Khel Chey village, O Svay sub-district, Kampong Siem district, Kampong Cham province, Chhoeun is the 1st amongst 4 siblings. Chhoeun is married to Tauch Yoeun and have 5 children. When he was a child, Chhoeun studied until grade 9 in the old system. But, in 1964, he quit school and went to help his parents in the rice field. In 1970, at the age of 19, he decided to become a monk in Watt Khel Chey. During the period after the 1970 coup, there were bombardments from Lon Nol aircrafts. Until the Khmer Rouge came

to power in 1975, Chhoeun returned to his village and was evacuated to Watt Trapeang Leak. Until May 15, 1976, Chhoeun decided to leave monkhood after a declaration that those wishing to remain as a monk were not deemed to be Khmer citizen. He decided to leave monkhood a week later. He was then assigned to a mobile unit with 200 members under Nam's control. In 1978, he and others were recruited to fight in battles. Chhoeun was sent to the regional office where he met Ren. Not long after arriving in the regional office, Chhoeun fainted, so [Ta] An told his men to bring Chhoeun to see him. [Ta] An asked how his education was, so he lied to [Ta] An that he had become a monk for a year and could not read and write anything. Chhoeun was then taken to Stung Proyaul to do transportation. Two months after, Chhoeun was assigned as a chief of logistics of the regional military after previous chiefs logistics were accused of immoral offense and transferred off. That's how Chhoeun was promoted as a chief of the logistics in Prey Torting in June 1978. During his control in logistics, his responsibility was to raise animals and plant vegetables. [Ta] An often went to examine Chhoeun's work and praised that he was better than the previous. Chhoeun heard that after the arrival of [Ta] An, Cham people were taken to be executed. [Ta] An was probably 1 meter 65 centimeter tall, and he was short and thin. He might be in his 80s now.

Observation: *Chea Chhoeun is open and approachable for the interview, and he let us know all what happened to him during the Khmer Rouge regime. But, a challenge was that his daughters felt concerned about this interview because they kept phoning him and showing concerned sense that a problem could come after the interview; thus, PA team decided to stop interviewing and receiving half of his information.*