

# មជ្ឈមណ្ឌលឯកសារកម្ពុជា

Genocide Education in Cambodia  
The Teaching of "A History of Democratic Kampuchea (1975-1979)"

## Army Institute

January 2011

### Army Officers Learn About DK History and Law of War

On January 17, 2012, DC-Cam, in collaboration with the Ministry of Defense, held a one-day training session for nearly 200 students and army officers of the Army Institute. The purpose of the training was to expand officer knowledge on



Participants in front of training hall

Democratic Kampuchea (DK) history by way of presenting different perspectives on what happened and why as well as varying accounts of the types of mass atrocities that took place. In addition, the officers were challenged to evaluate the actions of KR leaders and discuss the types of actions or policies they could

pursue to prevent war crimes and mass atrocities in their respective commands. In this regard, the participants had the opportunity to learn and reflect on other case studies and how they were to be understood within the laws of war and applicable Geneva conventions. This training approach allowed participants to not only critically examine DK ideology for the purpose of understanding this horrific period in their nation's history but also for informing their own military decision-making process (MDMP).

This training aligned with the overall objectives of the Genocide Education Project, which are to facilitate a nation-wide understanding and critical analysis of DK ideology and policies; identify the root causes of genocide; examine state terror in the lead-up to the killings; evaluate the current effects on Cambodian society as well as generate an appreciation for survivors' stories; and foster compassion, empathy, and reconciliation. The overarching goal is to encourage all sections of society, including the military, to confront their past for the purpose of informing their views of their world today. Ultimately, this training seeks to stimulate understanding and dialogue on the past, with the expectation that it will stimulate critical reflection and dialogue on the present.

To achieve this end, DC-Cam's Genocide Education Project has trained approximately three thousand teachers on DK history at primary and secondary schools (and even higher institutions). The Police Academy of Cambodia's (PAC) training in November 2011 and this training at the Army Institute in January 2012 will mark a significant broadening of the Project's outreach to Cambodia's primary institutions for ensuring security and order.

### ***Opening Ceremony***

On the morning of January 17, 2012, the opening ceremony started with the presence of Brigadier General Sdaeng Sen, Deputy Director of Army Institute, and his delegation. Upon his arrival, Mr. Sok San briefed the participants about the agenda. As a military officer, Mr. Sok San began by introducing members of the delegation and conducting the pledge of allegiance.

Then, Ms. Farina So made a speech to the delegation. She welcomed all the participants, stressing that studying history does not lead to revenge, but rather remembrance and the promotion of tolerance, leniency, and reconciliation. She stressed the importance of DC-Cam's publication of the DK textbook and the nation-wide training on this history. She described the achievements of DC-Cam, from its distribution of over a half a million DK textbooks to secondary and high school students as well the training of thousands of teachers. In addition to students in the lower and secondary schools, students in higher education would be also be included in a comprehensive education program that focuses on critical reflection and dialogue on this brutal history. She recalled the success of last year's DC-Cam university lecturer training, which involved nearly 100 lecturers from across Cambodia. Now, we have expanded our educational outreach to the Police Academy of Cambodia (PAC) and the Army Institute. On behalf of DC-Cam's director, Youk Chhang, she expressed her profound gratitude to the Institute for taking an interest in the history and, particular, genocide education. She emphasized our commitment to bringing annual trainings to the army officers and students.

**Brigadier General Sdaeng Sen**, Deputy Director of AI, started his speech by thanking DC-Cam for organizing this training for army students. On behalf of the Director, he took an opportunity to brief the participants about the background of AI. The institute's infrastructure has been built by the generous support from China.



Brigadier General Sdaeng Sen

The General continued to reiterate that AI has been the educational center for all sorts of military units such as national and military police. Approximately 200 students have annually been selected to study at the Institute. Given the increasing number of students, the General further stated that more buildings are under consideration to provide spaces to meet students'

demand.

In an attempt to get army students to pay attention during the training, Brigadier General Sdaeng Sen said in a very clear and firm voice that all students would go through an examination on what they have learnt from national and international guest speakers. This training would supplement their physical experience in having visited Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum, Cheung Ek Killing Sites, and the trial proceeding at Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia (ECCC). The General also wished all the participants to pay great attention to this training because it would benefit their knowledge and examination.

### ***Highlight the activities***

**Mr. Dy Khamboly** raised two remarkable questions about the ideology and policy of the KR. His attempt was to try to capture the participants' attention. He began by pointing out that the KR actually adhered to the Marxist-Leninist communism, but adopted a Maoist doctrine that was extreme, and driven by a leadership that was young, inexperienced and utopian. The regime was not practical and realistic. It wished to build a faster communism than the rest of the communist world and other socialist countries. To achieve this end, the regime planned to establish an equal status of all people by eradicating capitalism and feudalism. He emphasized the need to look into the reasons why the KR's policy and ideology lacked realism and ultimately led to its collapse.



Mr. Dy Khamboly

Mr. Dy explained his argument on four historical scenarios: the smashing of enemy inside in the country and purification; class struggle; independence and self-reliance; and collectivization. Mr. Dy elaborated these scenarios First, Mr. Dy said that before gaining victory over the Lon Nol regime, the KR leaders reiterated that they would kill seven traitors such as Lon Nol, In Tam, Cheng Heng, Long Boret. However, the KR did not live up to its promise. It set out an evacuation plan to arguably divide the enemy forces. Numerous military forces and civil servants of Lon Nol regime were killed. The KR thought that they were not honest. During its nearly four-year rule, the KR purged soldiers and those working for the Lon Nol regime. The KR did not spare anyone, choosing to smash feudalism and capitalism by way of an organized campaign of arrest and murder. In opposition to the regime's previous reliance and trust in the hill tribes, ethnic minorities in Vietnam and those having any sorts of connections with Vietnam, or who identified as Cham, or Chinese-Khmer were vulnerable to mass executions. Mr. Dy argued that the killing was systematic. The remarkable wave of killings targeted low-level cadres of any zone secretaries Those arrested and killed included Sao Phim, Ros Nhim, Chou Chet, Cheng An, Vorn Vet, Kang Chap, Phuong, Keu, and Khek Pen. All were accused of conspiring against Pol Pot and/or cooperating with Vietnam.

The strategic objective of the KR regime was to eradicate class inequality. The regime argued that farmers and laborers were repressed and in this respect sought to inspire them against the past regime. In reality, farmers were in debt economically and physically, and as a result, were easily persuaded.

In regard to the Self-Reliance Policy, the KR believed that Cambodia never truly achieved independence. Cambodia was colonized by imperialism, capitalism, feudalism and repression. The people had physical power but held no position. The KR wanted to redefine the people's position in Cambodia.

To this end, the KR regime set forth a policy of collectivization, under which it produced a four-year plan aimed at building a quicker socialism in all sectors. The goal was to surpass even the Chinese by categorically abolishing all private property. Mr. Dy concluded with his thoughts on how nearly 2 million died as a result of the two extreme policies and ideologies. He encouraged participants to do more research in order to look for other rationale arguments in relation to the KR regime. Mr. Dy's presentation was also followed by a series of notable questions. For example, four participants asked about the Vietnamese intervention in 1979, widespread starvation, and religious status during the KR regime.

**Mr. Christopher Dearing** focused his presentation on the comparative



Mr. Christopher Dearing

analysis of war crimes and mass atrocities. Mr. Dearing began by asking the participants on what they considered to be the most important skills that a military officer should have. A woman said politics and law of war are important; while an Army officer said all majors are equally important. His warm-up discussion led to group discussions and practical exercises. Mr. Dearing divided the audience into different

groups in which each was assigned a topic of study. He explained how commanders gave orders to their soldiers during military operations, and how these exercises were geared toward putting the officers in the situations where they can see what actions were taken, how certain decisions led to such actions, and how future commanders could pursue policies that would prevent the war crimes/mass atrocities that the officers were studying.

The idea was to encourage all army officers to think of actions that soldiers took, in excess of their orders. Each of the five groups needed to answer three questions:

- What happened in the situation?
- How would you classify what happened within the Perpetrator Action Matrix?
- Why do you think the war crimes or other issues occurred?

With the three questions in mind, Mr. Chris divided them into two different groups. Each would receive one assignment. For example, Group One focused on the scenario one:

### **Scenario One:**

Scenario One: Battalion X was composed exclusively of active policemen. The Battalion was divided into a battalion staff and three companies, with a total strength of about five hundred men. The battalion was led by Major W. Two of the companies were commanded by captains, the third by a lieutenant. Battalion X was manned overwhelmingly by reservists, by men who were called to duty, who were not yet in any military or security institution, and the least likely to be martial in spirit and temperament. The mean (average) age was 36 years old.

The soldiers in the unit had lived many years under a culture in which they were trained to see the Z people as not only different from them, but evil and corruptive. Today, they were going to take part in a campaign to eliminate these people.

Major W assembled his battalion. The men formed three sides of a square around in order to hear his address. He announced that in the locality before us we were to carry out a mass killing by shooting of Z people.

Major W asked the soldiers to think of their women and children in their homeland who had to endure aerial bombardments. In particular, we were supposed to bear in mind that many women and children lose their lives in these attacks. Thinking of these facts would make it easier for us to carry out the order during the upcoming (killing) action. Major W remarked that the action was entirely not in his spirit, but that he had received this order from higher authority.



Participants working in group

Major W's address to his men included general instructions for the conduct of the operation. They received explicit orders to shoot the most helpless—the old, the young, and the sick, women and children—but not men capable of doing work, who would be spared.

The gruesomeness of the day revolted some, but not all. One killer describes a vivid memory from that day:

These people were brought into the woods on the instruction of Sergeant S. We went with the people. After about 220 yards Sergeant S directed that the people had to lay themselves next to each other in a row on the ground. I would like to



mention now that only women and children were there. There were largely women and children around twelve years old...I had shot an old woman, who was over sixty years old. I can still remember, that the old woman said to me, will you make it short or about the same...Next to me was the policeman X...He had to shoot a small boy of perhaps twelve years. We had been expressly told that we should hold the gun's barrel eight inches from the head. X had apparently not done this, because while leaving the execution site, the other comrades laughed at me, because pieces of the child's brains had spattered onto my sidearm and had stuck there. I first asked, why are you laughing, whereupon X, pointing to the brains on my sidearm, said: That's from mine, he has stopped twitching. He said this in an obviously boastful tone..." [Another platoon] When the killing was finally ready to commence, the men of Second Platoon formed a gauntlet running between the staging ground for the killing and the killing site itself. Successive groups of fifteen to twenty people were forced to run to the killing site's pit, with the Soldiers shouting at them and beating them with rifle butts as they passed by.

During these executions I observed still something else which I will never forget. Even before the executions began, Lieutenant G himself had selected about twenty to twenty-five elderly persons. They were exclusively men with full beards. Lieutenant G made these old men crawl on the ground before the grave. Before he gave them the command to crawl, they had to undress. While the now completely naked persons were crawling, Lieutenant G screamed to those around, "Where are my NCOs, don't you yet have any clubs?" Thereupon the NCOs went to the edge of the forest, got themselves clubs, and then with these clubs rained mighty blows on the people...



Participants working in pair

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### **Scenario Two:**

A tactical operation was conducted in a small village.

The plans for the operation aimed at destroying XXX enemy battalion, thought to be located in the village, which also served as an enemy staging and logistical support base. On two previous operations in the area, friendly units had received casualties from enemy fire, mines, and boobytraps, and had not been able to close effectively with the enemy.

On XX day, the new Brigade commander visited the friendly command post and talked to the assembled staff and commanders. He urged them to press forward aggressively and eliminate the enemy battalion. The company commanders were

told by LTC L that most of the population of the village were "enemy sympathizers" and were advised that most of the civilian inhabitants would be away from village and on their way to market by 0700 hours.

During or subsequent to the briefing, LTC L ordered the commanders of the unit to burn the houses, kill the livestock, destroy foodstuffs and perhaps to close the wells. No instructions were issued as to the safeguarding of noncombatants found there.

During a subsequent briefing by CPT B to his men, LTC L orders were embellished, a revenge element was added, and the men of the unit were given to understand that only the enemy would be present in the village and that the enemy was to be destroyed. In CPT M's briefing to his platoon leaders, mention was also apparently made of the burning of dwellings. The operation began as planned.

By 0750 hours all elements were on the ground. Before entering the village, they killed several individuals fleeing the area. No resistance was encountered at this time or later in the day.



Participants inside the training hall

The infantry assault on the village began a few minutes before 0800 hours. During the platoon's movement through the southern half of the area, its members were involved in widespread killing of inhabitants (comprised almost exclusively of old men, women, and children)

and also in property destruction. Most of the inhabitants who were not killed immediately were rounded up into two groups. The first group, consisting of about 70-80 persons, was taken to a large ditch and later shot. A second group, consisting of 20-50 persons, was taken south of the area and shot there on a trail. Similar killings of smaller groups took place in other locations nearby.

Members of the platoon killed at least 60-70 men, women, and children, as they swept through the northern half of the area. They also committed several rapes. There was considerable testimony that orders to stop the killing were issued two or three times during the morning. The 2d Platoon received such an order around 0920 hours and promptly complied. The 1st Platoon continued the killings until perhaps 1030 hours, when the order was repeated. By this time the 1st Platoon had completed its sweep through the area.

The evidence indicates that only 3 or 4 were confirmed as enemy although there were undoubtedly several unarmed enemy (men, women, and children) among

them and many more active supporters and sympathizers. One man from the company was reported as wounded from the accidental discharge of his weapon.

## Afternoon

Mr. Dearing took an additional thirty minutes in the afternoon to complete his exercise which involved the officers discussing in groups and presenting briefings on how commanders and soldiers could prevent the atrocities that they studied in the case studies provided.

Group One provided the following answer: As a commander, we should take any actions that are necessary to protect civilians. We should launch attacks on military targets only. Second, the people should not be evacuated while the fighting is on-going. We should identify and target only military personnel or property.



Prof. Peter Maguire and Prof. Sok San of Army Institute

Mr. Dearing touched on his analysis of the Law of War within the military framework and how commanders can institute policies and take actions, within the military decision-making process (MDMP) that will prevent the conditions that preceded the war crimes/mass atrocities. There are three different types of the military. The

situation was to break down higher commanders' action/policies into different frames of reference: institutional culture, operational culture, and organizational dynamics. Sometimes, orders are given but they are not clearly communicated; other times orders are given that indirectly target civilians. When the commanders failed to state the rules of interaction/engagement with civilians, women, children, prisoners of war, etc, then mistakes are made on the basis of confusion or miscommunications. In effect, in the absence of clear rules of engagement, soldiers will often defer to their own judgment on what is appropriate in the situation, regardless of what is moral or more importantly, legal. Sometimes, the decisions depended greatly on institutional culture. For example, a unit's training environment may be conducive to bias, stereotypes, and misinformation that can lead to policies that are counter-productive to a culture in which civilians are protected. Most importantly, the unit's command structure may actually disregard the civilian population in such a way as to cultivate an operational culture, which sees civilians as, if not obstacles to military success, but even legitimate targets. Mr. Dearing discussed all of these aspects in the final exercise.



**Dr. Peter Maguire** introduced himself by explaining how his grandfather used to serve as a judge at the Nuremberg Tribunal. From his introduction, he moved to his assertion that war consists of acts that could be criminalized, such as destroying non-military targets, killing civilians, etc. In order to understand the nature and origins of the laws of war, Dr. Maguire began with the underpinnings of the theory of “law of war” from ancient times. First he described how the modern laws of war traced their origins to Christian culture. This could be viewed as ironic, given the message of peace, which underlay the messages of Jesus Christ. On this note, he explained how religion moved from the ideas of peace to a culture that legitimized war. To legitimize, the Christians had to establish a theory of war that was based on ‘just cause.’ The idea of *jus bellum* or just cause was, for modern times, illustrated in the 30-year War in Europe.



Army officers at Army Institute and officials from DC-Cam

The law of war stated that the winner could kill the losers. After war ended, there was a significant effort devoted toward defining a clear set of laws that would theretofore contain and organize conflict in a way that would not only prevent unnecessary war, but also define the circumstances in which it could be deemed legitimate or not. Most importantly, it laid the foundation for such principles as the one of distinguishing soldiers from civilians. Coming out of this effort to institutionalize the laws of war came a pattern that is still seen today, in which soldiers are often punished for their crimes but leaders rarely so.

Before 1986, the law of war was clearly defined. A rhetorical question would be why should soldiers follow the laws of war? The US adopted the laws of war in 1862, under General Order 100. This order from the U.S. President Lincoln to the U.S. Northern Army (during the U.S. Civil War) established the initial laws that would inform the creation of the Geneva Conventions and the war crimes tribunals that followed in Nuremberg and later. It covered many acts of war and as well as acts by

guerrillas of warfare. The law of war has many reservations and continues to be discussed even today.

**Prof. Ros Chantrabot** focused his presentation on three historical scenarios such as developments in the world, Political developments in Southeast Asia, and the social turbulence in Cambodia. Prof. Chantrabot believed that the Cambodian war was influenced by the world wars. While the war did not end, the alliance decided to divide the world into two blocs (communism and liberalism) in February 1945. Subsequently, the cold war came into existence.

Prof. Chantrabot further explained as to why it was called as a cold war? It was because the superpowers (US and Soviet) did not go to war physically, but instead waged proxy wars through satellite nations. One can look to the Korean war as one example. Many feared that a third world war might break out at that time. Even today the Korean peninsula is technically still at war. Another point in which history was particularly important was the situation surrounding the Cuban Missile Crisis. Russia deployed its missiles in Cuba, while the US deployed its missiles in Turkey and Poland. Technically, the two blocs were at war, but it was only later that both countries decided to withdraw their missiles. Irrespective of this retreat from a war by the superpowers, the satellite countries continued to wage their own respective conflicts.

During the Cold War, Cambodia had yet to gain independence. Siem, now Thailand, created the Issarak movement, but not for Cambodian freedom and independence. Siem wanted to occupy and capture Battambang, Stung Treng, Kampong Thom and Siem Reap provinces from Cambodia. After France lost these territories, Siem cooperated with Japan to claim control over the four provinces.

In Cambodia, in 1970, Cambodia plunged into a volatile situation. Field Marshal Lon Nol launched a coup against Prince Norodom Sihanouk. Initially, some supporters of the Lon Nol regime believed that the Republic Khmer came to power would solve many social ills, such as corruption. However, this was not the case, as problems continued to arise. In the end, the Cambodians, particularly the rural population, turned to support the KR movement with the hope that the KR's victory would bring King Sihanouk back to power. In their mind, only the King could solve the problems of society.

### ***Evaluation Form***

In an attempt to evaluate the effectiveness the training and identify areas for improvement, a four-question evaluation form was distributed to the 200 army officers. With respect to the first question: What are your greatest impressions or 'take-aways' from the training? Most respondents pointed out that they were very interested in the presentation by Prof. Ros Chantrabot on the historical scenarios in the lead up to the Cambodian conflict and, to some extent, the law of war by Prof. Peter Maguire. In addition, they stated that they had the chance to hear national and

international guest speakers' explanations on their unclear points. In other words, some respondents found group working useful and practical to expand their knowledge, thus helping solidify their understanding of the history.

In response to the second question: What are areas for improvement. The respondents felt that time was an area to improve. They observed that they had an insufficient time to hear guest speakers' presentation and pose questions, while many decided not to write anything that should be improved. One common



Participants inside the training hall

suggestion for the next training was to increase the time for each guest speaker. Prof. Sok San of Army Institute suggested that, if possible, the training should be held for two days.

There were some respondents complaining about the quality of the translations. For example, a respondent wrote that: "the translation should be comprehensive, clear and easy to understand." However, others

reiterated that: "international trainers spoke so fast. So, all of their presentations had to be translated in great detail." At some points, there were a number of respondents who expressed their satisfaction with the training, by stating that it was an excellent and acceptable training. Thus, no other points had to be improved.

In regard to the question of what are the most useful parts for you in terms of methodology, presentations, materials, or films, many just found it good overall. The materials inspired different ideas on how to look at history. More importantly, materials were helpful in illuminating areas or questions for their own personal research. The fourth question asked, "What topics would they wish to gain more information about?" Most respondents suggested that each presentation be allowed to have more time. Others recommended that besides the presentations on Democratic Kampuchea (DK) History, laws of war, methodology, and other topics, a substantial debate should be also touched on the issues of the trials against surviving KR leaders.

## **Conclusion**

The first training has ended with a satisfactory result with three participants giving their personal reactions to the entire training session. For example, a participant came to the front, pointing out that he was very happy to receive this kind of training. It is important for all teachers and students here to gain more understanding on the KR regime. While nodding in agreement, a second participant



Students at Army Institute

appreciated the organization of the training. She said it introduced new ideas to the school and opened her mind on issues that she had never before considered.

There were also some strengths that were noticed during the training. The group division was well practiced. The army officers and students could form the groups very quickly. They had discipline. It derived from their "adapt and

conquer" position. As stated above, time is very tough for each guest speaker. Participants, unfortunately, had a very short time for question and answers.

The training is supported by the Government of Belgium and the Swedish International Development Agency (Sida).

**Organized by** the Documentation Center of Cambodia (DC-Cam)

**Rapporteur:** Ly Sok-Kheang