

DOCUMENTATION CENTER OF CAMBODIA

GENOCIDE EDUCATION IN CAMBODIA

**Quality Control on the Teaching of "A History of Democratic Kampuchea
(1975-1979)"**

Seminar for Army Officers and Students

June 6, 2013

I. Introduction

DC-Cam has been doing genocide education programs since October 2009. Since 2012, this program has been expanded to training programs for the Cambodian army in the history of Democratic Kampuchea (DK) regime. This session marked the third training session at the Army Institute. The teaching of DK history has been an important step in enabling army students to engage in discussion of the events. This program brings in national and international experts with varied expertise to speak about various aspects of the DK regime. Students learn about the roles of security forces in DK ideology, the historical context and impact of the Khmer Rouge (KR) regime and practice critically analyzing the history and impact of the KR regime.



Group Photo in front of the Seminar Hall

This year's program was attended by nearly 250 male and female students at the Army Institute in Kampong Speu province. The training is an entire day of lectures and activities, including group activities and question and answer sessions. It is a significant time commitment by the students and officers. One student described the training as important because it helps him to gain more understanding and insight into crimes committed by the brutal regime and that the training is valuable because the history of DK is limited in school.

This report first will describe the event with a short summary of each lecture and program. Following the summary, it will describe some of the highlights of the program as well as some recommendations for next year's training. The recommendations will include recommendations for content to consider including as well as recommendations to make the presentations more dynamic for the students.

II. Overview of the Event



*Brigadier General Men Sath,
Deputy Director of Army Institute*

The army training opened with an official introduction by Professor Sok San of the Army Institute and a welcoming speech by the DC-Cam Office Manager, Ms. Savina Sirik. These introductions described a brief history of DC-Cam's genocide education programs and the importance of the programs to educating the future officers of the army. Mr. Ly Sok-Kheang explained the objective of the training to the students: to share experiences and knowledge of history with the students and to allow the students to interact with the information by asking questions.

These remarks were followed by a keynote address by General Men Sath, in which he told about his personal experiences as a survivor of the KR regime. He described being worked like an animal and the loss of numerous family members. Despite the tragedy of the KR regime, General Men Sath was able to lighten his grim story with dark humor describing that while he lost some siblings, his parents were still young, so they were able to produce more children after their losses. He also described, more seriously, that today it is important to study and understand DK history in order to prevent such horrific events from happening again.

Next, the students watched two short films, "Basit Prison" and "Cambodian Children." Mr. Ly Sok-Kheang introduced the films, which were donated to DC-Cam by the Vietnamese. "Basit Prison" is a Vietnamese film depicting graphic footage of Tuol Sleng as it was found by Vietnamese soldiers when they arrived in Phnom Penh in 1979 with a soundtrack of period instrumental music. "Cambodian Children" featured footage of Cambodian children shortly after the end of the Khmer Rouge regime, compared to footage of Western children from the 1950s and 1960s. These short films were followed by an explanation of the films. Students interviewed after the training described the film as "shocking" and one said that though he had read history books about the KR regime, he had never imagined how brutal the regime was until he saw the footage.



Ms. Sirik Savina of DC-Cam

Mr. Dy Khamboly, a researcher at DC-Cam, next presented a lecture about assessing prior knowledge of the history of DK and a presentation on "A History of Democratic Kampuchea." He began the lecture with a question, "Why did the KR kill Cambodian people?" and described that there is no clear answer, but that the ideology, leadership and policies are the root causes of the atrocities committed by the KR.

Following this, there was a brisk question and answer session with Mr. Dy. This session was one of the students' favorite parts of the training because it allowed them to be more active. Some of the questions by the students included, "Why didn't the U.N. proceed with any military intervention between 1975 and 1979 and why did they continue supporting the KR leaders until the 1980s?" and "How could January 7 be considered a 'victory' when none of the KR leadership had been arrested?" These thoughtful questions demonstrated that the students were well-prepared for the training and were interested in learning more about the history of Democratic Kampuchea.

The afternoon session was in two parts, a lecture and an activity. The lecture was held by Professor Ros Chantraboth, who is also an advisor to the Cambodian government, and the activity was directed and coordinated by Mr. Christopher Dearing, legal advisor to DC-Cam, with translation by Ms. Savina Sirik.



Army students work in group

Professor Ros' informative talk discussed Khmer history and the peace process in Cambodia. He described how rare it is to discuss how the peace process has taken place in Cambodia. He finished his lecture with a few questions from students for which he provided very detailed answers.

Mr. Christopher Dearing regained the students' attention when he opened his lecture and activity with a question to the students, "What will your responsibilities as officers and leaders be to your soldiers?" and then selecting a student to answer. Mr. Dearing described that officers provide direction, motivation, training and resources for soldiers and gave examples of how these elements are important to command. He then divided students into groups for them to work on an activity. Each group received one of five scenarios, two involved combat situations, two involved detention, and one involved civilians. In groups the students were required to create a short report or presentation for their commanding officer that answered what happened in the scenario and why various war crimes and other problems occurred. Some of the students then presented their reports in front of all the attendees. This activity modeled some of the responsibilities that the students will face as officers in the army.

III. Recommendations

This training paid great attention to the aftermath of the KR regime and to reconciliation. This was excellent because Cambodia is currently in the process of reconciliation and disseminating information about reconciliation should help the process. A way to make the discussion of reconciliation more interactive for the students could be to show a video of Duch's apology in the ECCC, then discuss what makes apology a valuable tool of reconciliation. Including student input as to what makes a valuable apology would engage the students in the lecture, then the students and lecturer can discuss what other factors help reconciliation and the healing process. The lecturer might consider describing an example of another country that has dealt with reconciliation and how that country did it, for example South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission regarding apartheid.

Including personal stories about experiences with the Khmer Rouge was also excellent, as it personalized the history for the attendees. The short films also helped to personalize the history. The students interviewed noted that the short films helped them to truly visualize the situation during the KR regime and to more clearly imagine how difficult the children's lives were following the fall of the KR. A suggestion for improving the film is to seek a way to have the second film translated into Khmer or into English and then into Khmer, using subtitles. It may help to provide a better context to the images. It also would be beneficial to explain the objective of the film as a piece of propaganda highlighting the suffering of Cambodian children in comparison to certain Western children used to encourage Western countries to support the People's Republic of Kampuchea, if this explanation was not provided.



Army students inside the seminar hall

A topic to consider including is to explore group pressure and how group pressure influences behavior. Including this information would help students to understand how normal people can be led to commit terrible crimes, for example, situations where if you don't kill people, you will be killed. Describing how normal people can become mass killers

and how the KR influenced cadres would be valuable information about the psychology of how repressive regimes develop. It may be useful to draw a parallel to Nazi propaganda and how normal German men joined the SS or Einsatzgruppen during Nazi Germany. It might also be useful to point out some current mass atrocities that are happening, for example the events in Syria. Comparing the KR regime's atrocities to other genocidal and brutal regimes will help give the students a greater global understanding of the circumstances in which genocide can occur, so as to make them more able to prevent it.

The students interviewed generally enjoyed Mr. Dy Khamboly's history lecture and found it and the Question and Answer session very valuable. Starting the lecture by posing questions to the students got their attention and engaged them in the lecture. The students also noted that the presentation was good because it was concise, clear enough to follow easily, and clearly explained the events. It might be helpful to include some visual aids to the lecture, such as a PowerPoint presentation that outlines the topics that he will cover during the lecture. An outline of the topics that will be lectured about can help students to follow along and pay closer attention because they are aware of what will happen next. It also can help to remind the students of what has already been covered in the lecture.

The students described Professor Ros Chantraboth's lecture as very informative. However, the students became restless after slightly less than one hour of the lecture. This was noticeable because when the students were engaged and attentive, the chairs were silent and when their attention wandered, they started moving around and the chairs started squeaking. Adding a visual aid, like a PowerPoint, might help the students to remain attentive for longer because they will understand the flow of the presentation and the major points that will be covered. It also might be helpful to shorten the lecture and allow more time for the question and answer session because the students had the most interest in the question and answer sessions.

One student interviewed said that she liked Mr. Christopher Dearing's lecture the most because it allowed the students to be more active and interact among themselves by sharing their ideas and thoughts on the scenarios. The methodology of learning by practicing rather than solely by watching and listening is an effective way to engage students and to get them to participate in the learning process. Getting

student input and having them present their ideas after analyzing a realistic wartime scenario helped them to practice the skills that they will need as officers. It would be



Two female students do their presentation

beneficial for this session to include a longer review of the lessons to take away at the end of this activity. It might be helpful to consider having a second interactive activity during the morning session.

IV. Conclusion

In conclusion, this report has briefly described the Army Training program, noted some of its strengths and offered some recommendations to make it an even more valuable event for the Army Institute students. The Army Training is an important tool to help teach the future leaders of Cambodia about the Khmer Rouge genocide. Learning about and discussing the genocide helps the students to be more aware of the history of their country and hopefully will help to prevent these kinds of atrocities from occurring in the future. The training is an excellent opportunity for students to listen to and have a dialogue with experts in the history of the Khmer Rouge genocide.

Organized by the Documentation Center of Cambodia (DC-Cam) in collaboration with the Army Institute.

Facilitators: Ly Sok-Kheang of DC-Cam and Sok San of Army Institute

Rapporteurs: Femke de Koning and Kate M. Langford, DC-Cam Legal Associates