

មជ្ឈមណ្ឌលឯកសារកម្ពុជា

Banteay Meanchey Province : June 21/ 1999 - June 25, 1999

On the afternoon of June 21, 1999, the Documentation Center of Cambodia sent a mapping team composed of Mr. Sin Khin, responsible for contact with local authorities and also interviews with witnesses, Mr. Ouch Sam Oeun, the Global Positioning System Unit (GPS) operator to record geographical positions of killing pits, memorials and prisons, Mr. Vanthan Peou Dara, responsible for filling information in site forms and helped interview witnesses, Mr. Yin Nean, responsible for drawing map of pits and prisons, and Mrs. Iem Sokym was a report writer.

We flew from Phnom Penh to Battambang and we traveled in a car from Battambang to Banteay Meanchey Province.

At 3.30 PM our team got off the plane in Battambang Province and continued our journey in a car along 70 km road towards Banteay Meanchey Province. We arrived in Banteay Meanchey Provincial town at 5:30 PM .

Next day, June 22, 1999 at 8:30 AM, our team went to Banteay Meanchey Provincial office to ask the provincial authority for information about the geographical locations of districts to which we were going. Unfortunately, we did not have chance to meet the provincial governor because the governor had already gone to Banteay Chhmear temple to meet with Thai delegation since June 21, 1999. We, however, met with Mr. Diep Chhuon, deputy chief of provincial cabinet. He let us know that after the election 1998, Banteay Ampil District has not been under Banteay Meanchey Province, but Oddor Meanchey Province. If we want to go there, we have to go to meet with Oddor Meanchey Provincial governor in advance. The Geographical feature is very complicated. It is about 70km from Banteay Meanchey Provincial town. To get there, we had to take a full day trip. The district town is located in Samraong; so, we could go via National Road #6.

He then told us the way towards Thma Puok District. Thma Puok District is about 43km far; so we had to spend 4 hours in order to get there because the road is very difficult. The security has been good since the government took measures to disarm weapons. After asking the deputy chief of cabinet, our team decided to set off our journey along Road 69A toward Thma Puok district across Serei Saophorn District and Svay Chek District. The road is extremely difficult and there are groups of armed forces deployed along the road up to the district town.

At 12:30 PM the same day, our team arrived in Thma Puok District and we administratively contacted with Mr. Hean Narun alias Chhat, deputy chief of Thma Puok District. He said that he had known about our team as he had been told by the deputy chief of cabinet on walkitalky (icom) in the morning. The deputy chief of cabinet told Mr. Hean Narun to make our work possible and go smoothly. Mr. Hean Narun briefed us about geographical and security situation of the district. He said that Thma Puok District consists of 6 sub-districts. The 6 sub-districts are Thma Puok sub-district consisting of 7 villages, Phum Thmei sub-district consisting of 8 villages, Banteay Chhmear sub-district consisting of 11 villages, Rokar Romiet sub-district consisting of 20 villages, Kumrou sub-district consisting of 6 villages and Kathen sub-district consisting of 8 villages. The district consists of 60 villages and 79,876 people. Among them there are 26,749 females and there are altogether 10,615 families. Almost 99

percent of people earn their livings by doing farming. People's living standard in this district is worse than any other districts in Banteay Meanchey province because the people only rely on farming, and fish are rare.

Geographical feature of District

The district is located about 43 km Northeast of Banteay Meanchey Provincial town. It is bounded to the West by Thailand, the East by Phnom Srok District, the South by Svay Chek District and the North by Banteay Ampil District.

Talking about security situation, before 1989 the district was under the control of the Liberation Resistance Movement. So, all structures were set by the Movement. The Liberation Resistance Movement was Funcinpec Party. After the general election in 1993, the district was acknowledged by Son San party, and then by Funcinpec party. The Cambodian People Party could not access the district then. The administration in the district was chiefly controlled by military. Even though there was district authority, before doing anything, we had to ask permission from the military in advance.

In 1997, Mr. Hean Narun was assigned to be in charge of the district. Because the security situation was not stable, he decided to spend a year studying in the National Administrative School in Phnom Penh (1998-1999). He added that the situation before was not as good as now. It was very far different. The political situation now is good as the civil war came to an end; all armed forces have been disarmed and demobilized. The remaining armed forces are trying to learn law and be aware of the power of local authority. The military does not involve in our work anymore. The situation is good because our country has peace, and the military does not concern about the administrative work, but thinks about new methods of development and knows clearly about their responsibilities.

He told us about his life in the Pol Pot regime. He was born in Thma Puok Village, Thma Puok District, Battambang Province. He studied in Serei Saophorn District. His father was a military commander. After the coup against King Sihanouk, he went to study in Phnom Penh. When the Khmer Rouge captured Phnom Penh, his family was evacuated from Phnom Penh to Bakan District, Pursat Province. His 6 siblings and his mother died from starvation in 1976. His father was taken by 17 April Angkar to be reeducated because they knew that he was a soldier. He was then known as dead. Then in late 1976, the Pol Pot cliques informed that all people who had lived in Northwest were allowed to live where they used to live. This information made him decide to set off his journey in a boat from Champuh Ka-Ek pagoda, Bakan District towards Svay Daunkeo District and spent over night there. Next morning the Khmer Rouge cliques transported people in ox carts to Damnak Pongro Village, Russei Kraing sub-district Mong Russei District. Mong Russei District was then in Region 2. When arriving there, Mr. Hean Narun was shown a hill on which he was told to pave forest in order to build a shelter. He was then 16 years old. He did not know anything about such manual work, but in the Lon Nol regime he was taught how to camp; so, he took plastic sheets to use as a tent to build a shelter. He was then forced to join a regional mobile work brigade and forced to do hard work. He had a miserable life as there was insufficient food with a can of rice for 20 to 50 people. Because of being too hungry, he decided to take off his clothes to exchange for rice bran to fry and eat. He felt very uncomfortable

whenever he defecated and he sometimes used his fingers to help push his shit out. His shit looked like pig's shit because he ate rice bran like pig "human's track, but pig's waste ".

In the end, he said that he did not know clearly about any evidence because when he came here, the evidence was in ruin and he notified that what he said is true. He did not slander the Khmer Rouge.

After meeting with Mr. Hean Narun at 2:30, our team met with Mr. Ek Sangvat, 47 years old, chief of office of Thma Puok District. He was born in Andaung Thlong Village, Thma Puok sub-district, Thma Puok District, Battambang Province. He now lives in Andaung Thlong Village, Thma Puok sub-district, Thma Puok District, Banteay Meanchey Province.

He told us that in the Pol Pot regime, this district was in Region 5, Northwest Zone. District headquarters was in Kathen Village, Thma Puok sub-district, Thma Puok District. The security office was in the Cambodian People Party's headquarters today. The district chief then was Chhat. Chhat was accused of enemy and killed later. He also knows some about the killing committed at security office in Thma Puok district.

In the Khmer Rouge regime, he lived in this village, which is his native place. He was then an ordinary farmer. He was accused of having tendency as a student, but in fact he is just an ordinary literate. He was spied on and tested if he knew anything. His parents were in middle class and Buddhist bishop in the region. His father was accused of being a "Buddhist soldier ". In fact he was just an ordinary clergyman. His parents and his siblings died in early 1979. All together 7 people of his family died in the Pol Pot regime. In 1975 he was 20 years old. He then stopped studying to help his parents with work.

He said that in the first step, the Khmer Rouge arrested policemen, soldiers or people who had tendency with the Lon Nol regime, such as students, feudalists and capitalists to detain in the security office. All people kept in the security office were later killed. None of whom has enough luck to survive.

Second step: The Khmer Rouge took base people to be detained in the security office. These people had small mistakes such as traveling from one village to another or they had fish, crabs or snails. They were accused of enemy and arrested them to detain in security office and killed afterward. Some people did not plow as what they were ordered. For example, they were ordered to walk on the right, when plowing, but they walked on the left, they were accused of being enemy and killed immediately in front of all people who plowed there so that the rest would not follow this example.

Third step: The Khmer Rouge played trick on people by telling people that people had to be evacuated out of the village to plant cotton, and hemp elsewhere. There, people would have enough food. They told people to prepare clothes and food stuff to eat on the way. People were very

happy, and they happily packed and took their children along with them. After 5 to 6 weeks, we all knew that in fact the Khmer Rouge played trick to take people between 5 and 10 families from each cell to be killed in military barrack of Thma Puok and at water well near the security office.

The military barrack in which people were killed is now headquarters of Division 7 of Thma Puok District and the well is near High School of Thma Puok District.

Besides killing people, the Khmer Rouge deprived people of all kinds of freedom. The people, men and women, who were only joking to each other, were accused of committing moral offenses and were taken to be killed in front of the public.

For killing, the Khmer Rouge took all the accused who were detained in the security office to be killed and thrown into a 10meter deep and 8m x 8m mass grave. The mass grave is now in Por Phleak Village, Kumrou sub-district, Thma Puok District.

Between 1975-1977, this district was under the control of Northwest people. Then, there was enough food. Although people ate porridge, but they had sufficient food to eat. People produced plenty of crops, but Ankar educated them that they had to be patient because some of the crops had to be taken to feed people who lived along rivers as they almost died of starvation. In early 1977, Southwest people came to the district and accused the Northwest people of being betrayers. The Southwest people arrested Chhat, chief of district, to be killed. The new district chief was comrade Ream. Southwest people played tricks that they called all levels of cadres of Northwest Zone to have a meeting and ordinary people were evacuated to another place. In fact, they took those people to be killed.

In 1977, the Southwest people destroyed all Northwest cadres and started to control the zone. Then they started killing base people and they were less strict tow and the 17 April people. They were too strict with eating. People were not allowed even to walk from one house to another. If they saw any one walk, they accused them of being enemy, arrested and killed them immediately. Mr. Sangvat added that he then caught beriberi. He did not have any rice, but only little potato or manioc tubes. Then he smashed chaff and fried it to eat. One day when he got up very early in the morning to go to plow, he saw pig stuff of the Southwest people, he almost took them to eat because of being too hungry, but he dared not to. If he did that, surely he would have been killed. He was patient enough and walked away with tears.

10 people had a ration of 3 or 4 spoons of uncooked rice; so many people died of starvation. The chief of a model cooperative, in which Mr. Sangvat lived, was Comrade Kork [Contemptible Kork]. He was very cruel. No one dared to look at his face. If anyone dared to look at his face and he saw, he tied and killed them immediately.

In early January 1979, members of Ek Sangvat's family including his parents and siblings were taken to be killed and some died of starvation. In 1978, there was a victim escaping from the security office. He was taken to be killed by chopping on the back neck. He then pretended to die,

but when the Khmer Rouge was away from the place, he got up and escaped. He is still alive now. The victim is Sim Sieu. He now lives in Pongro Village, Mkakk sub-district, Serei Saophoan district. If we want to find the witness, we should ask his younger sibling, Sim Koy, living in Thma Puok sub-district.

Mr. Ek Sangvat told us that some evidences, such as bones excavated from mass graves, wells and military barrack, were stored in a 2m x 2m thatch hut at Pothiveal Pagoda in 1982. There were about 700 bones, 400 of which excavated at the military barrack and another 300 excavated at the mass grave. The evidences were destroyed in 1985 when the Khmer Rouge armed forces captured Thma Puok District and they burnt down people's houses, bones stored in Pothiveal Pagoda and shot a large number of people dead. He was also chased and fired with B40 rockets. Luckily the rockets did not hit his skin, but his clothes which covered his body were on fire.

In Thma Puok district, there were a lot of people killed, but we do not know where they killed people. We know only 2 or 3 places.

Mr. Sangvat added that he himself also joined the excavation team in 1982, because he was a member of Thma Puok sub-district committee, in charge of social affairs and culture. When excavating, he even saw the blind folding masks and human arms tied with ropes. There were 3 killing pits. The first was called Sep [Officer] Pheng well situated in Pophneak Village, Kumrou sub-district, Thma Puok district, Banteay Meanchey Province. It is 10 meters deep and 8m x 8m size. It is about 1.5 Km far from the office of Thma Puok District. The second was in the military barrack, which is 700 meters North of the district office. The place is now headquarters of Division 7 of Thma Puok District. There were 4 main pits. Each of which was 8 meters in length, 3 meters in width and 2 meters dept. We excavated only one pit. The third was in Dek Keh village, Banteay Chhmar sub-district, Thma Puok District. In this place, there were 2 pits called Trapeang Suong. First we did not know there were killing pits in here, but when people dug to search for gold, they found pits in which the Khmer Rouge buried the corpses they killed. Mr. Ek Sangvat does not know the 2 pits but Mr. Ky Kav, captain, commander of engineering army F7, knows. He shepherded us to the place. In the place we could see small pieces of bone and pieces of noticeable materials.

Mr. Ek Sangvat concluded that there were a lot of pits in the district the 2 pits as examples, but he does not know. He does not know much about this because in the Pol Pot regime, the killings were secretly committed.

In the end, he added that he survives because he tried to work hard even though he caught beriberi. Whenever they gathered people, he tried to escape from one place to another. He hid himself in mobile work brigades. He could do this because in late 1978 the rule was not so strict as before. His parents and his siblings who lived in concentration places died. Mr. Sangvat said that Pol Pot cliques were very cruel. He will never forget what the Khmer Rouge did to him.

After interviewing Mr. Ek Sangvat, our team met with Happ Svang, 69 years old, born in Wat Chass Village, Thma Puok sub-district, Thma Puok District, Battambang Province. In the Pol Pot regime he lived in the same place which is Ekapheap Village, Kumrou sub-district Thma

Puok District, Banteay Meanchey Province. He now works in the Social Affairs and Culture Office in Thma Puok district. In the Pol Pot regime, he was a teacher of social affairs in Thma Puok district. He healed people in this district. He cured beriberi, diarrhea, fever, etc. He used traditional medicine made of tree roots. He made the traditional medicine by himself. Later, there was a Chinese named Vien and his wife Lun. He was skillful in operating. In the Lon Nol regime, the Chinese taught Uncle Happ Svang how to produce traditional medicine and put into ampoule. 4 other youths also worked with them to produce the medicine. When the Southwest people came to take control over the district, Vien and his wife were killed. Then Happ Svay was responsible for curing beriberi, diarrhea, fever or period cease etc. in the hospital. He then was ordered to work in a plantation. A Southwest woman came to be in charge of the hospital of Thma Puok District. Most patients who came to the hospital died, very few patients survived because only medicine which were made of tree roots were used in the hospital. They played trick that they evacuated people to plant cottons or hemp in different cooperatives. In fact they took families of people to be detained in a large closed-up hall. They called the hall theater. The hall could store 5,000 people. All cows, water buffaloes, and carts of people were sent out to keep in different cooperatives. At night, they drove trucks back and forth. It seemed these trucks carried people elsewhere, but they just drove the empty trucks. The people who were kept in the hall were taken to be killed in military barrack which is now headquarters of Division 7 of Thma Puok district, and the other killing place was Sep Pheng well as Sangvat mentioned. Coconut branches were laid at the bottom of the well and after killing people, they laid coconut branches. They did like this until the well was full. There were 7 layers of coconut branches. He knew this because he joined the excavation team with Mr. Ek Sangvat in 1982. He added that Pol Pot cliques planed to kill all people by 1979, after harvesting season. Before killing, the Khmer Rouge gave Khmer noodle party. Fortunately, Vietnamese armed forces came in time to liberate our country.

He added that, he almost died in the Khmer Rouge regime. Chief of the district ordered him to heal the physiologically ill daughter of the district chief. He then was very scared as he had not experienced in curing such illness, but he pretended to know and used the tree root medicine to treat the daughter. The daughter was eventually better and got rid of the illness. So, he could escape from death. The same chief of district later called him to heal another daughter who caught fever. He was then even more frightened. He thought to himself that he would surely die. Fortunately when he traditionally healed the daughter, she got better and got rid of the disease. So, he could escape from death again.

He clarified that the killing pits were in every sub-district such as in Banteay Chhmar sub-district, there were 10 pits. Each of which is 4m x 4m size. In Thma Puok District, one sub-district formed a cooperative. So, the killing sites were in every cooperative during 1977-78.

In short, according to Mr. Ek Sangvat and Happ Svang, in 1984, statistics on people killed in every sub-district showed that 8,000 people died, but there were only 700 human bones excavated. Documents and evidences were burnt down when the Khmer Rouge captured Thma Puok District in 1985. On September 30, 1985 Para armed forces captured the district as well and the remaining evidential documents were destroyed. A witness who used to be detained in the security office lives in a far away place to which we could not get access. The witness moved from Serei Saophoan to elsewhere. No one knows where he lives now if we want to see the witness we must ask his younger sibling in advance.

In the end, Mr. Happ Svang and Mr. Ek Sangvat said that if national or international court against the Khmer Rouge is set up, they will voluntarily be witnesses for the court to find justice for Cambodian people. They will not hesitate to do so because they also have relatives killed by the Khmer Rouge and they suffered a lot during the period of 8 months and 3 years. Uncle Happ Svang has 2 families of relatives. 10 of them died during the Khmer Rouge regime. Mr. EK Sangvat's parents and his other 7 siblings also died. So, they both are very angry with the Khmer Rouge forever and will never forget the events.

At 4:30PM in the same day, after the interview with witnesses our team set off its journey to examine genocidal pits. There were 3 excavation places, which were already mentioned. In the 3 killing sites, there were 7 pits. The guides were Mr. EK Sangvat and Mr. Ky Keav, captain and commander of engineering army F7 bases in Ekpheap village, Kumrou sub-district, Thma Puok district, Banteay Meanchey Province.

Now the pits were almost unable to identify as they were covered with soil, but our team took photos of the pits so that they can be used as the evidences and historical records for younger generation.

After examining the pits, we decided to pay a visit to Banteay Chhmar temple which is about 16 km far from Thma Puok District town because we want to see the aspect of the temple with our own eyes and to see why Thai princess paid her visit to the temple.

The same day, our team arrived at Banteay Chhmar temple at 5:00PM. According to villagers who live there, on June 22, 1999, there were a Thai princess, Sorin Than, 46 years old, and students in military uniforms paid visit to examine geographical feature of the temple and go around the temple campus. They spent 100,000 baths on renovating the path to Banteay Chhmar temple and building a hut for dressing and rest room during her visit.

Mr. Ky Keav and military-policemen who were bodyguards of governor of Banteay Meanchey Province talked to each other during the meal in office of Cambodian People's Party that when the Thai princess with anger-like-facial expression got off the plane and went around to see the temple, she did not say thank or talked even a word to Princess Bophatevy and to the governor who tried to accompany her. Our team who also sat and ate near the military policemen in Cambodia People's Party of Thma Puok District thought that the activity of Thai princess showed that there was something behind the visit. We witnessed the aspect of Banteay Chhmar temple. We felt very sorrowful and shocked. The temple was almost completely in ruin. Giant stones piling up on one another. There was no entrance to the inside of the temple as it was covered with piles of stones.

Banteay Chhma temple is 1 square kilometer, but the temple body is in ruin. We could see only giant stone piles. According to Mr. Ky Keav and Ek Sangvat, the temple were under the control of liberation armed forces, Sereikar [Free Khmer], before. Cambodian People's Party did not have

chance to take responsibility for the temple, but after the general election 1998, Cambodian People's Party and Funcinpec Party have cooperatively defended this area. So, the destruction of the temple is not part of CPP Party's responsibility because when the temple was under the control of liberation armed forces, some higher commanders ordered their soldiers to excavate for antiquities such as statues from under the temple. This caused the temple to collapse and sometimes the temple stones fell on their children to death.

In 1990, the temple was in fairly good condition, but after excavation for antiquities and statues to sell to the Thai, the temple was almost completely in ruin. The Thai buy a large piece of the temple stone for 3,000 or 4,000 bahts in Thailand.

According to Ek Sangvat, the Thai try to do this because they intend to destroy our culture by using their money to buy off consciousness of some Khmer people as they did in Lungvek period. He added that do not put the blame on anyone. Khmer do not desperately think about the nation and do not love their own nation; think only about their own benefits and keep committing this. They eat and never get full and they are too tired to work for the nation and society. He told us about Cambodian-Thai border where the Thai captured our land step by step. If we want to see our border in Boeng Trakuon, he could guide us there as it is only over 20 km from the district town. He said we will burst out into tears if we see the border, because we will feel sorry to see Cambodian land invaded and captured by Thailand by moving boundary post into Cambodia land. He said that he felt very sorry and pitiful but he does not know what to do as high officials do not care about this. He looked sad and painful when he saw Cambodian land became Thai land. In Boeng Trakuon which is located along the border, the Thai have secretly captured Cambodian land step by step. He almost burst into tears when he saw this. He has no ability to help save our land. This point Em Sokhym, asked him that does the provincial authority not care about this matter? He said, " they can not see the problem ". He ended his words because he was probably afraid of upper leaders. We are Cambodian. When we look at the history in the past we can see that our neighboring countries have always invaded our land up to even now.

After visiting Banteay Chhmar temple, our team returned to Thma Puok District at 6:00 PM the same day in order to get ourselves ready to go back to Banteay Meanchey Provincial town next day.

In conclusion, we have little results from the research, and interviewing witnesses in Banteay Meanchey Province because we went to only Thma Puok District. We did not go to Banteay Ampil District because this district is now under Oddor Meanchey Province. If we want to go there, we should contact the provincial authority in advance. The way to the district is extremely difficult as there are a lot of big holes in the road and the bridges were destroyed by flood. So, we cannot travel by car. We have to take raft and then take ox cart. It is 70km far. We have to spend a full day to reach there. Dry season is better for us to travel than rainy season.

The witnesses who used to be in the security office lives very far. His address is not clearly known. The time was not permitted. So, our team could not interview the witness. Even though, we have little results, we could compile this document to be published as the historical record for younger generation to be aware of the regime of 3 years, 8 months and 20 days.

Note :

- Pit 1 is about 700m from the District Office and 10m from Road 69A
- Pit 2 is about 1,500m from the District Office and 50m from Road 69A. It is located behind the people's houses.
- Pit 3 is about 7,500m from District Town and 250m from Road 69A. The site called Trapeang Suong.

