

**MAPPING PROJECT 1999:**

**KAMPONG THOM PROVINCE**

**Sandan District**

On August 10, 1999, a Documentation Center team composed of Phat Kosal, Sin Khin, Ouch Sam Oeun, and Peou Dara went to Kampong Thom Province in order to conduct research on crimes committed by the Khmer Rouge during its reign between 1975 and 1979. The target of the team was Sandan District. We planned to interview witnesses who survived the Khmer Rouge regime, to determine the precise location of genocide sites using the Global Position System (GPS), and to collect documents, if possible.

The team traveled by car to Kampong Thom Province. The trip took four hours at a speed of eighty kilometers per hour. From Road 6A to the province, we saw many big bridges, and on every bridgehead there was a picture of a Kangaroo, a symbol of Australia. On both sides of the road, there were houses and fields with rice growing.

At 11 am, the team arrived in Kampong Thom Province. We then looked for accommodations and had lunch. At 2 pm, we contacted the local authorities at Kampong Thom Provincial headquarters. We were unable to meet the provincial governor, as he was busy with other duties. Mr. Sin Khin then met with Mr. Chhun Chou Hut, chief of provincial cabinet. Mr. Chhun brought Sin Khin to meet with Hem Savong, First Deputy Governor of the province. Mr. Hem Savong issued a letter to the team for official use.

After meeting with the first deputy governor, we contacted provincial Office of Cults to ask for documents concerning crimes of the Khmer Rouge regime. We also wanted directions to get to Sandan District. Mr. Leam Sarun, Deputy Chief of Cults for the province, informed us that to reach Sandan district, the best approach would be to travel by motor boat along the Sangke river. We could take a motor-taxi, but that would be very difficult because the road was in poor condition, and we would have to traverse a large forest, where we might encounter security problems since we were strangers and would be easy for outlaws to recognize. If we traveled by motor boat, on the other hand, it would require an overnight trip to reach Sandan District. We could not afford an entire day to get to Sandan District. So, the only practical way was to obtain a faster vessel, and go to Sandan District by speedboat.

Once apprised of this situation, we contacted the fishery office at the Kampong Thom Province agriculture department to inquire about the availability of a speedboat. Unfortunately, we were not successful in borrowing the speedboat, because they were all in use for a crackdown on illegal fishing in the Sap River. The officer said he was sorry about that. We were out of ideas for finding transport to Sandan District, and decided to leave the problem unsolved for the time being, and come back to it later.

During our meeting with Mr. Leam Sarun, he described some of the cruelties committed by the Khmer Rouge in Sandan District during their reign. He said that in the Pol Pot regime, it was quiet and fairly secure in this district. There was not much killing for most of the regime.

Late in 1978 and into early 1979, killings committed by the Khmer Rouge noticeably increased. Mr. Sarun suggested that if we wanted to know more, we should ask Mr. Chim Vuthy, who lived in Sandan District under the Khmer Rouge regime.

Given our failure to find suitable transport to Sandan District, we decided to seek witnesses who had lived in Sandan District during the Pol Pot regime and who could describe what happened in the area. So, following Mr. Sarun's suggestion, we interviewed Mr. Chim Vuthy.

### **Witness**

Mr. Chim Vuthy, 51 years old, was born in Sandan District. He is now deputy chief of the environment office for Kampong Thom Province.

He told us that he lived in Sandan District from 1975 to 1978. He therefore has good information about what happened in the district in those days. He said that in Sandan District during the Khmer Rouge regime, there was a security office used to detain all kinds of people. Some of the detainees were Sandan District residents who were accused of having betrayed the revolution, while other detainees were cadres who had committed various errors in the villages, sub-districts, and district. This security office was well known to everyone in the district, especially to Mr. Chim Vuthy. It was called "Prey Kanleng security office." It is about five to six kilometers from Sandan District town, near the boundaries of Chheu Teal Sub-district and Sandan Sub-district. Mr. Chim Vuthy told us that he knew the Prey Kanleng security office clearly, as he used to do dry-season farming near there. The security office is now in Prey Kanleng village, Chheu Teal Sub-district, Sandan District, Kampong Thom Province.

According to Mr. Chim Vuthy, more than one hundred people were detained at the Prey Kanleng security office. The Khmer Rouge took people from the security office to be killed nearby. They killed people and buried them in pits near the security office. After the Khmer Rouge regime collapsed, the district authorities excavated pits near Prey Kanleng security office in order to recover the remains, taking the bones to be placed in a pagoda for veneration. Mr. Chim Vuthy estimated that there were about one hundred skulls. He knows this because he was Chief of Sandan District for about one year (July 1983-September 1984).

Mr. Chim Vuthy asserted that the Khmer Rouge massacred Lon Nol soldiers everywhere in the fields, and buried them in the forests of Sandan district. However, he does not know about this quite as clearly as he knows about the security office.

Living standards in this district were not too bad. Mr. Chim Vuthy gave the example that "each logging worker got three cans of rice." In Ngorn Sub-district, however, people had difficult lives because the land was not particularly fruitful. He added that grandfather Chheng Phon, former Minister of Information and Culture during the State of Cambodia regime, and also chief of 1998 National Election Committee, had lived in Sandan district with him during the Khmer Rouge regime.

Comrade Chhorn had been the Khmer Rouge security chief before Southwest cadres came to the district. According to Chim Vuthy, Comrade Chhorn had been an ordinary teacher before he joined the revolution. During 1975 and 1976, he served as security chief, with a deputy named Yorn. Mr. Chim Vuthy said late 1977 and early 1978, the district chief was replaced. Southwest cadres came and took control of the district, arresting the previous cadres. Those who carried out the arrests were security officials. Comrade Rin became the new security chief, and Comrade Kan was the new Chief of Sandan District.

Mr. Chim Vuthy believes that there were not any Khmer Rouge prisons in the area other than Prey Kanleng Security office. We also asked him if he knew of any woman who had been raped by the Khmer Rouge before being taken to be killed between 1975 and 1978 in Sandan District. Mr. Chim Vuthy said he knew of a woman named Natt, living in Kampong Trabek village, Sandan Sub-district, Sandan District, Kampong Thom Province. This woman had been accused of committing "moral offenses," and she was then arrested and detained in "the prison" of Prey Kanleng. Ms. Natt escaped from the Khmer Rouge when the Vietnamese troops came to liberate the country. He said if we wanted to meet Natt, we could ask at Sandan District Headquarters, because everyone knows her.

We took photographs of the witnesses, and taped the interviews.

## **Conclusion**

The Sandan District mass grave mapping trip was not particularly productive. We were unable to get to the district in order to deploy the GPS for site data collection. We had problems stemming from (a) not having enough time; and logistical difficulties, including (b) the lack of appropriate transportation, as well as (c) long distances. The district is about eighty-five kilometers from the provincial town by road and two hundred kilometers by water. However, our team did have one success, in that we met and interviewed a close friend of Kang Khék Ieu, aka Duch, who is now being detained by the government on charges of genocide. That interview was written up separately, and is presented as another section of the 1999 Mapping Reports.

## **Baray District**

On August 10, 1999, the Documentation Center of Cambodia dispatched a three-member team: Mr. Phat Kosal, team leader, Mr. Sin Khin, responsible for local contacts and interviews, and Mr. Ouch Sam Oeun, responsible for Global Positioning System operations. The team was accompanied by a French film crew from Arte Productions in Paris, consisting of four members: the Film Director, Mr. Adrian Maben, who also acted as a cameraman, a second cameraman, a soundman, and an assistant. We aimed to visit the genocide site at Wat Baray Choan Dek, located in Trass Village, Balaing Sub-district, Baray District, Kampong Thom province.

We set off from Phnom Penh at 7 am traveling via National Road #6 to our destination -- Balaing Sub-district. On arrival at Skhun market, we made our way to the west. We arrived at Balaing Sub-district office at 10 am, where we met the chief of the sub-district, Khieng Kry and his secretary, Norng Sokh.

We had already visited the site at Trass village, Balaing Sub-district in 1997. On this trip we hoped to locate additional witnesses to gain more detailed accounts of events in the Khmer

Rouge era. We hoped to interview the sub-district chief as well as his secretary, and to determine the condition of the genocide sites. More importantly, we also wanted to get information from eyewitnesses who had been once imprisoned, but managed to escape execution. We had reason to believe that we could locate victims who had experienced detention in the prison at Wat Baray Choan Dek.

According to the sub-district chief, Khieng Kry and his deputy Norng Sokh, the victims who survived the slaughter at Wat Baray Choan Dek are:

Mr. Men Le, 69, male;  
Mr. Ao Yoeng, 65 male;  
Mr. Chapp Bun, 72, male; and  
Mr. He Hai, 67, male.

The first three victims are ordinary people -- farmers -- living in Daung Village, Balaing Sub-district, Baray District, Kampong Thom Province. All four victims had originally been detained in a security facility known as Tradet prison, located in Tradet village, Choang Daeng Sub-district, Baray District, Kampong Thom Province. Then they were sent to another prison, that is, the Baray Choan Dek security office and prison located on the premises of Wat Baray Choan Dek. These two security prisons -- Tradet and Baray Choan Dek -- were the main execution sites in this district during the Khmer Rouge regime.

After being informed of the identities of these four victims, we went to visit the villages where they live, accompanied by the sub-district chief and his deputy, aiming to conduct interviews with them.

On August 10, 1999, at 10:15 am, we met the following villagers: 1) Grandfather Le; 2) Grandfather Ao Yoeng; 3) Chap Bun; and 4) Heng Hai. They were all imprisoned during the Pol Pot time.

During our interviews with these individuals, they told us of their histories, birthplaces, positions, and especially recounted their lives in prison. Incredibly, they were in prison for a period of three years. They said the Khmer Rouge perpetrators who were security guards had beaten them and broken their ribs, resulting in the serious health consequences for them up until the present day. Some of them still bear scars on their feet and ankles from shackles.

Some prisoners were starved for fifteen days. At that point, they were allowed to take a bath and eat a ration of thin gruel. During their detention, the victims were not allowed to relieve themselves outside the door, but were forced to urinate and defecate in the place where they were being detained.

After retelling their sad stories about the cruelty and torture committed by the Khmer Rouge perpetrators, especially during their three years of detention (1976 to 1979), they also told us how they managed to survive. They informed us of the events they had witnessed, and gave us information about both the perpetrators and the types of victims.

We felt that the four victims could act as witnesses for our research team, and also serve as subjects for the French movie team. We advised them to answer based strictly on the facts, without fear of consequences. Then we asked them to accompany us to the sites and made an

appointment for the next morning at 8 am. At 11:30 am, we had lunch together at Kampong Thmar market.

At 2:30 pm, we searched for the residence of Mr. Leam Sarun -- a friend of Kang Khek Ieu, alias Duch, who had been the Chief of S-21, the infamous Khmer Rouge Tuol Sleng Prison. We met Mr. Sarun at 5 pm at his residence, upon his return from a Buddhist seminar in Sambo District. Also present at the interview was Mr. Kim Sour, a former student of Duch. We interviewed these informants in a friendly atmosphere. They recounted many aspects of Duch's history. The interview ended at 6:00 pm. The text of this interview is presented as a separate section of the 1999 mapping report.

On August 11, 1999, at 7 am, we led the French film crew to photograph the Khmer Rouge genocide sites at Wat Baray Choan Dek, Baray District, Kampong Thom Province. At 8:30 am, the DC-Cam team and the film crew arrived at the Balaing Sub-district office. The film crew proceeded to take some photographs, while the mapping team interviewed a secretary of the sub-district. Then we went on to interview the four witnesses with whom we had made contact the previous day. An interview with these four people follows.

Mr. Men Le, 70, male, was born in Daung Village, Balaing Sub-district, Baray District, Kampong Thom Province. During the Sihanouk and Lon Nol regimes, he also lived in this location. In 1969, he acted as First Deputy of Balaing Sub-district, Baray District, Kampong Thom Province. During the Pol Pot regime, he was an ordinary villager living in Daung Village. During that period of time, he was put in prison on the charge that he had connections (his service as a sub-district deputy chief) to the Sihanouk and Lon Nol regimes, and that he had lived with Lon Nol soldiers instead of with people loyal to Pol Pot. A person named Nhem -- who was Chief of Daung village, Balaing Sub-district, Baray District -- had reported him to the Khmer Rouge. The Khmer Rouge assigned him to make ox-carts. At some point, while he was making the carts, a militiaman came and asked him to cut forest. He was then forced to leave his wife and children. Along with many others, he was taken to the Balaing Sub-district office. After some hours, he was sent with nineteen other people to a dark jungle at Prey Sam Ky, Chaeng Daeng village, Chaeng Daeng Sub-district, Baray District, Kampong Thom Province, where they spent the night. The next morning, they all were gathered for a meeting.

The Khmer Rouge told the assembled people, "You [Grandfathers and Uncles] all can not go back, because this place will be used to establish a new village." They were assigned to clear the forest, with work quotas based on the number of family members. The wives and children were brought along to help with the work. Later that day, the Khmer Rouge gathered up Mr. Men Le and ten other people, telling them they were being reassigned once again, this time to work on handicrafts. They were then taken to Wat Punareay, but upon reaching the Wat, the Khmer Rouge allowed eight of the people to return to the site of the new village. They kept only two persons: Mr. Men Le and Ao Yoeng, who, like Mr. Men, had been involved with the Lon Nol army. They were then sent to Tradet village, the site of the district security office and prison. Upon arrival at the prison, their feet were shackled. While in the prison, they were allowed to bathe only once every fifteen days. They were permitted to take nourishment -- a meager diet of water and gruel with salt -- only while shackled. Men Le said that he remained shackled for 38 days. Finally, on April 17, he was sent to attend political training course. In 1975, once the Khmer Rouge gained control of Phnom Penh, all the prisoners were locked up once again.

The prisoners were soldiers, officials and civil servants. Mr. Men Le and four other prisoners were assigned to pound rice and prepare it for seventy people, day and night. Many prisoners were brought in and sent out every day. One day, Mr. Men saw a person named Rum Laey called away on the pretext that his wife was waiting for him; a moment later he heard a scream for help. Mr. Men said he had no idea where prisoners were being sent when they were taken away. He explained that all prisoners were permitted to urinate and defecate only in their place of confinement. Women were kept in separate cells. At some point, a letter of release was issued, and he thought he was being freed. But he was not allowed to return home. Instead, he was sent to another security office, a prison and execution site known as Baray Choan Dek. There he was assigned to make four oxcarts per month.

### **Acts of the Khmer Rouge security guards at the Wat Baray Security Office**

Mr. Men Le said five truckloads of victims were brought to Wat Baray Choan Dek once or twice each month. When this place became too crowded, some prisoners would be sent away to another place. Mr. Men Le was kept in prison from 1974 to 1979. He says that he knew four other victims who were imprisoned with him. They all wish to be witnesses in case a court needs them.

He estimated that the number of victims killed at Wat Baray Choan Dek was between 1,000 and 2,000, with the victims dispatched at execution sites located east of the temple. In 1979, Mr. Men was made a village chief, and he organized the people carry out exhumations of the mass graves in 1980. The bones and skulls were stored in a stupa on the grounds of the Wat.

### **Testimony of the other witnesses**

Mr. Cap Bun, aged 72, lives in Daung Village, Balaing Sub-district, Baray District, Kampong Thom Province. Prior to the Khmer Rouge regime, he lived in the same village as Mr. Men Le. During the Pol Pot time, he became a prisoner. He described to us the reason for his arrest.

In early 1974, he was called to attend a meeting where he was badly mistreated, and accused of being a chief of Baray District. He protested, "Why was I not asked in advance for a reason? What kind of mistakes have I made?" Security guards beat him all evening, until midnight. He was beaten so severely that his ribs were broken, and he began coughing up blood. At 1 am, guards took him to the Tradet Prison where he was placed in shackles with Mr. Men Le, our previous witness. There he was were forced to work. Later, he was sent to O Tra Khop, where he was made a servant of security guards until 1975. At that point, he was released and sent to training courses with the Regional Committee in the vicinity of Baray Choan Dek. During this time, he managed to produce ten motorboats, and also repaired other kinds of machinery. Because of this productivity, he was kept alive until liberation on January 7, 1979. Other prisoners tried to escape, but he returned home to live with his wife and children after four years of imprisonment between 1974 and 1979. When asked if he would act as a witness, he willingly replied, "I am eager to be a witness, because I have suffered and been worn out up to the present."

Mr. Ao Yoeng, age 65, male, has been living in Daung village, Balaing Sub-district, Baray District, Kampong Thom Province. He, too, was a Khmer Rouge prisoner. At first, he was detained in Tradet prison. Later he was transferred to the security office at Wat Baray Choan Dek. While shackled in the eating hall for monks, he was sponsored by Mr. Men Le to work

as an ox-cart maker. He performed this job until 1979. He said the reason for his arrest was that he had been accused of involvement in political affairs, as he was a Buddhist movement facilitator. This kind of Buddhist preacher was considered an obstacle to the Khmer Rouge.

Mr. Ao Yeong said that in the hall at the Wat many prisoners were shackled. The prisoners were laid out in many lines, with their heads alternating in opposite directions. When prisoners who had committed minor offenses needed to relieve themselves, they were allowed to use a spittoon. When thirsty, these prisoners were allowed to ask for water. Every fifteen days, the prisoners were walked to take a bath. He said that all prisoners were required to defecate and urinate with their feet remaining shackled. They were disturbed and bitten by bedbugs and mosquitoes at night. They slept without mattresses or pillows. Five to ten people died each day from starvation, because they were fed only thin gruel, sometimes with salt. Thus the testimony of this witness is similar to the others. Mr. Ao says that he heard a security guard named Comrade Mao talking with his other members of his group, while washing their legs: "I have smashed a child against a tree stump." As the interview was drawing to a close, Mr. Ao guided us along with the French film crew to the prison where he was held, and later showed us the execution sites. He indicated the hall where he had been kept as a prisoner, and reenacted for us what it was like to be a Khmer Rouge prisoner. Finally, Mr. Ao Yeong voluntarily agreed to be a witness, should he ever be called before a court to testify.

The DC-Cam team and the French film crew, accompanied by three witnesses, then moved from the monks' eating hall to the execution sites at the rear of Wat Baray Choan Dek. There we began by taking some photographs and examining the bones of victims stored in a fairly large, ancient stupa. All the while, the French production crew filmed the witnesses and our interviewers.

The last interviewee was Mr. He Hai, who has long lived in Trass village, Balaing Sub-district, Baray District, Kampong Thom Province. He is a very important witness because he had clear knowledge of the number of victims killed by the Khmer Rouge guards at Wat Baray Choan Dek in late 1978 and early 1979.

On December 15, 1974, He Hai was detained at the Tadet security prison, Chaeng Daeng Sub-district, Baray District, Kampong Thom Province. On May 16, 1975, he was sent to Wat Baray Choan Dek prison in Balaing Village, Balaing Sub-district, Baray District, Kampong Thom Province.

He asserted that the day on which the most extreme wave of executions took place in Wat Baray Choan Dek was June 30, 1977. The victims targeted for execution that day were those accused of being involved in political affairs, regardless of sex or age. They were taken from every cooperative in the district. The total number of victims altogether was 25,414.

On May 16, 1978 the Khmer Rouge dismantled the security prison at Wat Baray Choan Dek, and sent those remaining to do farming in Tra Nak village, Chaeng Daeng Sub-district -- an agricultural site in Baray District. The Prison Chief was Grandfather Sin who lived in Tradet Village. The chiefs of the prison in Baray District were Ta Sen (in 1977), Soeun from the Eastern Zone, and Ta Mao, the one who issued the orders for killing.

He Hai said there was a guard who tried to escape, and who came to his house with documents including lists of victims who had been killed. The security guard spent two

nights at his house. The guard told him that he aimed to bring those documents to his higher level superiors. The guard said: “Hai, you don’t need to worry; this is the time for me to panic.” During the two nights at his house, the trusting guard slept with his documents unfolded. Taking that opportunity, He Hai glanced at the documents and saw statistics on the number of people killed at Wat Baray Choan Dek. The lists bore 25,414 names of victims, including men, women and children. Mr. Hai said he didn’t exaggerate or estimate that figure, but that he had seen it with his own eyes. Unfortunately, the Khmer Rouge guard took the documents along with him when he left Hai’s home.

We interviewed He Hai at the execution sites, where he showed us thirty to forty large killing pits, each of which is three meters long, three meters wide and two and a half meters deep. There were also hundreds of tiny pits, in each of which three or four people had been killed. All told, this execution site is approximately sixty meters wide and eighty meters long. The pits are in lines. They were excavated with the assistance of authorities in 1980, according to He Hai, under the Government of the State of Cambodia. [Editor’s note: actually, the government in 1980 was known as the People’s Republic of Kampuchea.] The exhumation was carried out with the assistance of the authorities and the local people, using an excavator.

All the bones stored in the stupa were taken from the killing pits, only five meters away. Witnesses estimated that more than twenty times as many bones as are in the stupa were actually excavated. Cattle and pigs had eaten some of the bones over the two decades between the exhumation and our investigation. The witness had seen victims being taken off for killing, to be struck with hammers and axes. That is why skulls showed evidence of cracks. The witness stated that the victims had been brought from various places, and that four of the victims were members of the royal family. They were King Norodom Oddomvong, his wife, and their two mature daughters. [Editor’s note: We have no record of any member of the royal family named Norodom Oddomvong, although at least five members of the Norodom royal line are known to have lost their lives during the Khmer Rouge regime.] The Khmer Rouge guards had hinted this fact to the witness.

## **The Perpetrators**

The people targeted for execution were those having any kind of political connection, including officials, civil servants, policemen, soldiers, teachers, and students. When asked about the identities of the perpetrators, Hai said that the highest-ranking perpetrators were:

Ta Sen, Security Chief,  
Ta Meun, Deputy, and  
Ta Mao, the one who issued the orders to kill.

Beside these three leaders, He Hai estimated that there were about thirty other cadre at the prison, of whom he could remember only fourteen names. They are:

1. Mr. Chut
2. Mr. Yum
3. Mr. Yom
4. Mr. Khoeun Tauch (small build)
5. Mr. Khoeun Thum (big)
6. Mr. Pheap
7. Mr. Vong



8. Mr. My
9. Mr. Duot
10. Mr. Ret
11. Mr. Sieng
12. Mr. Chhan
13. Mr. Pey
14. Mr. Chhoeun

These fourteen people were Khmer Rouge security guards at Baray Choan Dek. Some of them, Mr. He reckons, are still alive. There are ten to fifteen other guards whose names he could not remember. In total, there were at least thirty and possibly as many as forty security guards at Baray Choan Dek. Some of these guards were killers, some were spies, and some were interrogators.

After lunch, the French film crew interviewed and photographed Mr. Phat Kosal. The interview questions focused mainly on Kosal's ideas about the mass grave mapping research from 1995 to the present. The interview took thirty minutes and ended at 3 pm. At that point, we took our leave from the film crew and made our way back toward Phnom Penh. We arrived in Phnom Penh at 6 pm.

## **Conclusion**

The second Documentation Center mission to Trass village, Balaing Sub-district, Baray District on August 10-11, 1999, was very successful. Our team interviewed four witnesses who provided detailed information. We employed two tape recorders to document our interviews with the witnesses, and photographed the prisons and execution sites, the killing pits, the bones of victims, and the four witnesses. We met with all the witnesses we had planned to interview, and the witnesses were patient in describing the activities of Khmer Rouge security guards between 1975 and 1979. This success was due to good planning by the team. We also guided the French film crew led by Director Adrian Maben, assisting them to create a motion picture film record of the Cambodian genocide as well as the documentation activities of the DC-Cam.