

មជ្ឈមណ្ឌលឯកសារកម្ពុជា

REPORT ON CGP MAPPING TEAM VISIT TO SVAY RIENG PROVINCE 4-7 October 1995

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Wednesday 4 October

Provincial Government

We arrived at the Provincial Offices at 11.00am, and were received by the Provincial Governor of Svay Rieng, Loy Sophat, and the First Deputy Governor, Srey Mundul. The Governor very quickly acknowledged the importance of our mission, and was obviously also impressed that we had such strong support from the Royal Government and from the Second Prime Minister. He apologized that he would not have time to personally assist us that day because of a prior commitment, and asked his deputy to arrange a meeting at 2.00pm to find out our need and to plan our visit. He also assured us of his complete co-operation.

The afternoon meeting was held in the Conference Room at the Governors Office, chaired by Srey Mundul and attended by Long Pich Rattank, the Provincial Chief of Police, Chan Sokeat, the Deputy Chief of the Dept. of Culture and the Arts and his assistant Sok Cheng, the Chief of the planning Office, two officials from the Governors Cabinet Office, and the Survey Team. Srey Mundul proposed a very clear agenda for the meeting, which opened with the team outlining the purpose of the visit, and then proceeding to a selection of sites to be visited over the next two days, and to provision of security.

Chan Sokeat, Deputy Chief of the Dept. of Culture and the Arts, showed a strong interest in the project and knowledge of the sites, as he had been involved in the excavation of the burial sites in Svay Rieng in 1982-83. Srey Mundul kindly agreed that Chan Sokeat should accompany us together with his assistant on our site visits on the following two days. Ten sites were chosen to be visited, taking into account the importance of the sites, and accessibility. Unfortunately the heaviest rain falls of the rainy season in Svay Rieng occurred just prior to and during our visit, and many important sites were under water and proved to be inaccessible. One of the officials from the Cabinet Office gave a very moving description of the fate of his own family during the Pol Pot time, describing how his family and all the inhabitants of his village had been killed while he was hiding, and how he saw their bodies floating in the river the next morning. He said that that village, and many others in Svay Rieng, had never been rebuilt. His simple and moving account at the meeting helped renew our sense of purpose in this work.

Srey Mundul also proved to be extremely supportive, acceding to my request that two of my former UNTAC workers, currently working as policemen in Svay Rieng, accompany us on our visits. By co-incidence I had got to know the Chief of Police in Phnom Penh in 1992, and this association proved useful when I requested two of his high ranking officers to accompany us, and he readily agreed. Lt-Colonel Im No became our driver for the visit, and Colonel Kong Chanty, Chief of the Immigration Police, assisted as interpreter and guide. Their help proved to be extremely valuable, and because of them we had no problems with locating sites as we did in Takeo.

Thursday 5 October

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We set out early on Thursday morning to Kompong Ro District with Im No as our driver, accompanied by Chan Sokeat and Kong Chanty, and an armed police escort went ahead of us on a Toyota truck with its red lights flashing. This made us highly conspicuous, and I requested that the escort be reduced in the afternoon to three armed police inside our 4WD vehicle.

Srok Kompong Ro Sites:

Tahnor

Khum Svay Tor

200201

The first site that we visited, was In Kompong Ro District quite close to Svay Rieng town. Here there was a quite well constructed "tower" type stupa enclosed in glass, with skulls at the top level, then bones then manacles, ropes and cloth rags at the lower level. Some leg and arm bones still had nylon ropes tied around them, and Chan Sokeat explained that they had replaced the ropes after the flesh had been removed and the bones washed after their excavation in 1982. Nearby were 3 mass graves which had been excavated out of 5 that had been found, and a small mud and palm branch house on stilts which had been used as a prison and interrogation place where people were held for up to one month before execution at the site of the mass graves. The house was being kept as part of the memorial, and both were in good condition, probably due to their proximity to the provincial town.

Witnesses (Base People) said that they saw many people brought to Tahnor village to be interrogated in the detention house, but that no one could see exactly what happened there as entry to the area was strictly prohibited. They heard people say that that people living along or near the Vietnam border were driven into the village of Tahnor to be killed there, and that in late 1978 when Vietnamese troops entered Cambodia thousands of people were killed there when they refused to be evacuated to the West as ordered by the KR.

Russei Sang

Khum Prey Thom

200203

After crossing by small dug-out ferry boats and an walk of one kilometer we arrived at the memorial next to Wat Russei Sang which contains approx. 1,000 skulls intact-well protected from the animals although only a wooden structure. Part of the Wat was used as a prison, now demolished, and the prison chief, Mr. Phorn, now lives in another district in Svay Rieng Province.

One witness, Ra Vanna, (Base People), who had been a prisoner at that prison for a minor offense, attested that he saw many people being moved from that prison to other prisons as is filled. He said that the former Chief of the district and other Government Officials were held there before being killed. Witnesses attested that Phorn was not a cruel man, and that he did not directly order any executions. Mich Sarein (Commune Chief) said that Phorn had a book at his house listing the names of prisoners held at Russei Sang prison, and that Phorn might be prepared to bring it to Svay Rieng town for it to be copied.

Meak Yong (28) said that when he was about 14 years old he saw 15 prisoners buried up to their necks in the fields nearby and others tied to a bamboo tree to die. Two

other boys who were walking past and saw this, were shot by KR soldiers. He said that most of the victims were New People.

After another 2 kilometers walk we came to the burial site for the prison where we were shown two wells into which hundreds of people were tied up and thrown to drown as the Vietnamese army advanced in 1978. Nearby were the three pits which were excavated in 1982, and the bones placed in the memorial.

Srok Chantrea Sites:

Top Ksach Memorial	Khum Mesor Thnorch	200101
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After a long and bumpy drive (1.5 hours) along a rocky road in Chantrea District we came to a small stupa near the Vietnam border with a concrete urn containing bones. The stupa was broken and not cared for, and the District officials were not able to provide further information.

Friday 6 October 1995

We set out early on Friday morning with a reduced police escort, and without the valuable services of Chan Sokeat, who was replaced by Sok Cheang, who is responsible for the Museum in Svay Rieng. The first District to be visited was Svay Teap District

Wat Svay Teap Sites:

Wat Kdey Rumdoul	Khum Sang Kur	200701
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The first site visited on Friday morning was Wat Kdey Rumdoul in Svay Teap District. The Wat had been used as a prison during the PP time, and several mass graves were excavated there in 1982, and the bones were placed in a memorial stupa near the Wat. The stupa has been badly maintained, and the bones have been eaten by pigs.

One witness, a base person, saw from the top of a palm tree many people being walked in line to the field behind the prison, and he did not see them return. He heard from others that all the prisoners were shackled to an iron bar, and that many were provincial officials. They said that the female prisoner's clothes were taken off before they were killed (perhaps to search for gold & jewels).

Srok Svay Chrum Sites:

Tlork	Khum Tlork	200501
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By far the largest prison in Svay Rieng was the prison at Tlork in Svay Chrum District (previously Svay Rieng District), referred to by many as the "Toul Sleng of Svay Rieng Province". Nothing remains of the prison, which was purpose built by the KR before 1975, and was totally destroyed by the local people after the liberation, and returned to rice fields.

Q. Where were the prisoners from?

A. First they were New People from Phnom Penh, but later most were soldiers from the Sou Phem Army (Eastern Rebellion).

Q. What did you see happen before the liberation?

A. I saw many prisoners taken from the prison, and being beaten to death outside the building. I saw clearly because it was bright moonlight, and my house was nearby.

Saturday 7 October

We first went to the Dept. of Culture and the Arts, where we copied the captions for 80 photographs which are on display in their museum. These photographs mainly relate to the excavation of mass graves which took place in the province in 1982, and we had copies made of these photographs for our record.

We waited there until 10.00am for Mr. Phorn to arrive with his list of the prisoners from Russei Sang prison. When we could wait no longer, Chan Sokeat promised that they would copy this list when he arrived, and bring it to us in Phnom Penh.

Then we returned to the provincial offices and we had a final meeting with the Deputy Governor Srey Mundul, who again expressed his support for the project, and asked us to let him know if there was anything further that they could do to assist our work in the future. I requested that if it was possible they could obtain written reports from any KR officials who were known to them and who were still living in the province, and make copies for us of any documents that these officials held. We departed for Phnom Penh at about 10.12am.

Documents

1. Research on the Genocide Sites of the Pol Pot Ieng Sary Clique (1990 Report).
2. Album of Photographs Relating to Excavation of Mass Graves in 1982.
3. List of Prisoners Held in Wat Russei Sang Prison (to be sent to Phnom Penh).

Conclusion

Despite very difficult access because of the season, and unusually heavy rainfall while we were there, we were able to visit the two most important sites in Svay Rieng Province, namely Tlork Prison and Wat Bang Rai Prison, and several other important sites.

From the comments of witnesses and provincial officials, it appears that Tlork prison may have been the main regional prison for Region 23, as there was reference to prisoners being brought from the District prisons to Tlork for interrogation and execution. Wat Bang Rai prison may have changed its status to that of a military prison after the Eastern Rebellion in 1978. Witnesses confirmed that this prison mainly held soldiers from the Sou Phem army in the last few months of its existence.

The pattern which emerged, was that there seemed to be, apart from the two sites named, at least one prison and burial site in each District. Most mass graves at these burial sites have not been excavated, but a pattern did emerge that 200-300 bodies were buried in each grave that had been fully excavated. If it can be assumed that the graves were standardized in size, then it is possible to estimate the number of killings

at each site, and such an estimation seems to tally with the number of dead given in the statistics presented in the Summary Report on the Genocide made by the Svay Rieng Dept. of Culture and the Arts in 1990.

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