

REVOLUTIONARY COUSINS: Lao-Cambodian revolutionary links

Abstract: In his final days while under house arrest in Anlong Veng, Pol Pot brought attention to the little known Cambodian Communist called Ta Ya, by accusing him of being the ringleader of the traitorous forces that led to the demise of Democratic Kampuchea. For the last few years I have been unearthing the links between revolutionaries in southern Laos, northern Cambodia and northeastern Thailand. My focus has been the relationship between the Pathet Lao and the Khmer Rouge. However, the scope of this study has spilled over to Isan as the two revolutionary movements struggled for influence over the ethnic Lao and Khmer Communists of northeastern Thailand; specifically the Isan Tai branch of the Communist Party of Thailand. My research covers the southern command of the Pathet Lao, Isan-Lao revolutionary relations, provincial historical studies, tributary relations, patron-client networks, relations amongst anti-Vietnamese forces in the Lao-Cambodian frontier region, cross-border migrations and trade, and the mysterious origins of the Communist networks in Stung Treng, Ratanakiri, Mondulakiri, Otdar Meanchey, Banteay Meanchey and Preah Vihear.

This article is drawn from my doctoral research which is on the development of Lao-Cambodian revolutionary relations in the 20th century. It utilizes Lao, Khmer, Vietnamese, Thai, French and English language archival sources and as well as oral histories recorded in the provinces of southern Laos and northern Cambodia. I have visited Anlong Veng three times to interview Khmer Rouge (KR) veterans who originated from northeastern Cambodia. Many of them are Khmer Leu (upland Cambodians, mostly speakers of Austroasiatic languages) or ethnic Lao, while a few are ethnic Khmer who were relocated to the northeast of Cambodia to serve as border security forces after the capture of Phnom Penh in 1975. My interest is to show that the KR didn't treat the ethnic Lao particularly harshly during their reign, i.e. there wasn't an aggressive racial stance against the Lao of northeastern Cambodia. Certainly there were abuses and the killing of ethnic Lao, but it is interesting to see how many gained positions of influence during Democratic Kampuchea (DK) and following the Vietnamese occupation. In addition, it has been surprising to learn that a number of wives of purged officials from the northeastern and northern provinces did survive, as did their children and some of their husbands' assisting staff.

For example, the chief of Voeunsai, an ethnic Khmer called Ta Kat, was purged after his brother Ta But (*alias* Kheang Seum Han) the chief of Sector 104 (Stung Treng) was arrested by S-21 forces for contacts with the Lao as tensions between Vietnam and Cambodia rose to boiling level in 1978. In contrast, his ethnic Lao wife is alive and well in western Cambodia. It seems Ta But and Ta Kat were not arrested in the early rounds of purges due to their early association with the 'elder brothers' and possibly also their Sino-Khmer ethnicity. Ta But had indeed been in contact with the Pathet Lao (PL) chief of Khong district in southern Laos, Bounyong Vongsavath. Bounyong remembers friendly contacts with the KR up until 1976 when he was sent to Vietnam for political training. From reading the works of David Chandler and Ben Kiernan it seemed that Angkar Leu (the Upper Organization of the Communist Party of Kampuchea) was ruthless in purging all relatives and associates of party enemies, but not necessarily so. Another interesting example is the case of Ta Laing,

the KR chief of Mondulkiri (known as Sector 105 by the KR), who was associated through marriage and work with the 'super traitor', Ta Ya. If you recall, Ta Ya was the figure mentioned by Pol Pot in his final interview with Nate Thayer for conspiring with the Vietnamese against Angkar.

For the greater part of the 20th century the Indochinese revolutionary movements claimed strong fraternal links. However, the preeminence of the Pol Pot faction in the Cambodian revolutionary movement of the late 1960s led to the violent rupture of the Indochinese trinity in the late 1970s. Since the 1980s there have been various studies of the uneasy relationship between Vietnam and Cambodia, and the intimate 'master-apprentice' relationship between Laos and Vietnam. However, there has been no detailed study of the relationship between the Lao and the Cambodian revolutionary movements. An important reason for this was that the two groups for the greater part of the revolutionary struggle were trained and developed separately by the Vietnamese Communists. That is, the Lao were primarily administered by Vietnamese cadres in northern Vietnam, while the Cambodians were supervised by Vietnamese cadres in southern Vietnam. However, there were two areas of overlap, the Lao-Cambodian frontier region which was administered by Vietnamese cadres in central Vietnam, and Thailand where Indochinese revolutionaries briefly sought sanctuary from French security forces with sympathetic elements of the Seri Thai and overseas branches of the ICP.

Ta Ya was the final revolutionary name used by the veteran Cambodian Communist Ney Sarann. Ney Sarann, a Sino-Khmer, originated from Svay Rieng province where he joined the Indochinese Communist Party (ICP) along with Sao Pheum (later DK's Eastern Zone commander), Keo Moni and Keo Meas in the late 1940s. In the course of the First Indochina War he worked with Cambodian and Vietnamese cadres such as Tou Samouth, Ngo That Son (*alias* Son Sichan), Nguyen Thanh Son, Nong Saroun, Chay Saret, Sakiyavong and Hong Hy in the eastern region which extended from Tay Ninh up to Kratie. Ney Sarann trained in the Central Highlands of Vietnam during the First Indochina War and served as a liaison for the Khmer People's Revolutionary Party's little known northeastern branch, which was administered by Oum Seda and his deputy Ya Korn.

For a long time it was believed that the Cambodian Communists didn't have a true party branch in the northeast until the arrival of Ieng Sary and Son Sen in the early 1960s, but it was active under Oum Seda since the late 1940s. Oum Seda was the first regional secretary for the ICP, then the Khmer People's Revolutionary Party (KPRP), in northeastern Cambodia. His real name was Sieng Kim Seng and he was ethnic Khmer. The choice of the *alias* Seda is not known, but it is a Khmer botanic term. Seda can also be a Lao name, but generally it is spelt as Sida and applied to women. Nowadays there is a commune in Lumphat district named after Seda. Whereabouts Oum Seda originally came from in Cambodia is unknown, however, we do know that he was drafted by the French to serve in the colonial forces and was imprisoned in Nha Trang in Vietnam. In the course of the Japanese occupation of Indochina Oum Seda was released and then recruited into the Vietnamese revolutionary movement. He was trained by cadres in Lien Khu V (LKV), which was the region adjoining northeastern Cambodia and southern Laos in the Vietnamese Central Highlands, and then charged with building revolutionary forces inside Cambodia. Oum Seda then located himself in the area between Siempang, in modern day Stung Treng province, and Voeunsai, in modern day Ratanakiri province. His base was at Chantouk which nowadays is a small rural village near the western fringe of the Virachey National

Park. Oum Seda married a local Lao woman and learnt to speak the language fluently. He also spoke Vietnamese well.

An interesting point to note is that the northeastern branch of the KPRP was dominated by ethnic Lao. However, this should really be no surprise because the Lao are a large percentage of the local population. The founding committee consisted of five people, Oum Seda, Ya Korn, Chan Daeng, Chan Nukeo and Madame Huot. Ya Korn (*alias* Ouch Khamkorn) was an ethnic Khmer from Phum Krakor, Kratie. He came from a well-to-do family and was trained as a colonial official. Ya Korn initially came to Ratanakiri (then part of Stung Treng) as a public servant and held posts in both Lumphat and Voeunsai. As a result he fell in love with a local Lao woman, Chao Nang Oudone, and got married. Chao Nang Oudone was the granddaughter of Chao Ya Tham, who was the Lao prince from Champasak who founded Voeunsai in the late 19th century. At that time Voeunsai was tributary to the kingdom of Champasak in southern Laos, and important economic and cultural exchanges passed between the two regions. Chao Ya Tham served as the governor of Moulapoumok, the area covering northern Ratanakiri, during the French period. The name Moulapoumok is a variant of Mounlapamok, the southernmost district in western Champasak province from where most of the Lao settlers originated. As a result of marrying into the Lao noble house of Voeunsai, Ouch Khamkorn was given the honorific title Phagna which was commonly abbreviated to Ya. An interesting side note is that Ya Korn was the father of the Lao People's Revolutionary Party (LPRP) Politburo member Osakanh Thammatheva. In the early 1950s Osakanh was sent by his father for political training in northern Vietnam, while other ethnic Lao and Khmer Leu from Ratanakiri, such as Thongdam Chanthaphone, were sent for military training. Osakanh joined the PL, married a lady from Sam Neua and became an important military cadre in northern Laos. Thongdam, a Voeunsai native, joined the PL and later became the governor of Attapeu province after 1975. Osakanh was able to reunite with his mother and surviving siblings (a brother and sister died during DK) in 1979 when he visited Phnom Penh.

Chan Daeng (*alias* Thongsy) was a cadre who migrated from Laos to the Se San settlement of Pak Kalan in the colonial period. In Philip Short's study of the KR and Pol Pot he quoted a reference to Chan Daeng made by Ieng Sary who said that "Thongsy was an important veteran from the northeast". Chan Daeng studied in Vietnam after 1954 and returned to serve as a military instructor in the war against Lon Nol. His wife Khamlai (also called Borkai and Ba Keo Lai) survived the Pol Pot regime and settled in Stung Treng town. Chan Nukeo (*alias* Khamfort) was an ethnic Lao cadre who spent much of his time in Lumphat. Chan Nukeo was born in Champasak and then traveled to Phnom Penh to study as a monk at Wat Ounalom. In the Cambodian capital he was recruited by Communist agents active in the Sangha and then went to northeastern Cambodia and began his life as a revolutionary. Chan Nukeo married three times, first to a Bunong woman from Mondulkiri, then a Lao lady from Voeunsai who died in Vietnam and finally a Tampuan woman from eastern Lumphat. Not much is known about the final member of the founding committee, Madame Huot, who was an ethnic Lao native of Siempang and in charge of youth affairs. However, she did survive the Pol Pot period.

Another ethnic Lao cadre who had an important role for the revolutionary movement in northeast Cambodia was Bua Chuang. Bua Chuang was born at Kiet Ngong in Champasak, an area famous for its skilled elephant hunters. He was drafted by the French into the colonial security forces and as a consequence Bua Chuang was relocated from southern Laos to Stung Treng. In the course of the Japanese occupation Bua Chuang

participated in armed resistance against the Japanese in the vicinity of Bokeo and then joined the Issarak - a term referring to the armed nationalist forces allied with the Viet Minh. Due to his military training and experience Bua Chuang became chief of the Cambodian Communist fighting units in northeastern Cambodia.

I have interviewed ethnic Lao, Brao, Kravet, Kreung, Jarai, Tampuan and Khmer from Stung Treng and Ratanakiri who give differing accounts of Oum Seda. However, most of them agree he was active between Siempang and Voeunsai, and traveled to other parts of the northeast. This is an interesting point because the French drafted locals to build a landlink between Siempang and Voeunsai which was resented as a pointless endeavour in the eyes of the locals, who knew that the wet season would quickly erode/disable any road built through the wilderness. In addition, the French brought in Vietnamese coolies to help with public works. ICP sympathizers and agents in the public works recruited locals while working on the transport links and border demarcation projects. This is how the ICP successfully recruited Lao in Savannakhet and Khammuan in central Laos to join the revolutionary struggle.

In the early days of the Cambodian Communist movement, the northeastern revolutionaries had much more in common with the Viet Minh in the Central Highlands (in the region known LKV) and the PL in southern Laos (then based in Ban Hinlat, Sanamxai district Attapeu) than with its own leadership in Phnom Penh and eastern Cambodia. Communications were maintained with the PL through Siempang, the Viet Minh through Bokeo and the KPRP through a sole agent based in Kratie, who linked up with branches in Phnom Penh and eastern Kampong Cham.

A number of Khmer Leu from Taveng in modern day Ratanakiri traveled to the Bolavens Plateau region in southern Laos during the 1940s in search of employment on the coffee plantations being developed by the French as well as local entrepreneurs. These Cambodian labour migrants were recruited and trained by the Viet Minh and their PL allies in the late 1940s. They joined the PL in military operations in Champasak, Attapeu and Salavan as well as undergoing ideological training at the revolutionary stronghold at Dak Cheung, in modern day Xekong province.

In early 1951 an Indochinese front was formed by uniting the PL, the Viet Minh and the Cambodian Communists. At this time the Cambodians were represented by Son Ngoc Minh, Sieu Heng and Tou Samouth and the PL by Prince Souphanouvong, Nohak Phoumsavanh, Phoumi Vongvichit, Khamtai Siphandone, Sisana Sisane and Singkapo Sikhotchounlamany. From this group of revolutionaries only one, Khamtai Siphandone, had spent time in the Lao-Cambodian frontier region. Hence upper level contacts between Lao and Khmer Communists were very much estranged as compared to those had with the Vietnamese.

In 1951 Lao-Viet forces from southern Laos assisted Cambodian revolutionaries in the northeast establish a small base area in the vicinity of Siempang, Voeunsai and Taveng. The mixed Indochinese units succeeded in capturing remote government posts. However, they were quickly forced back into Lao territory when better equipped and trained reinforcements from Phnom Penh were sent to stabilize the region. While exiled in southern Laos the revolutionaries underwent political, cultural and military training so as to be more effective fighting forces and better able to win over the local populace with their propaganda.

In early 1954 a larger military operation was launched by Indochinese revolutionary forces to secure a liberated region encompassing southern Laos and northeastern Cambodia. It succeeded in defeating French forces and occupying the settlements of Attapeu, Siempang, Voeunsai, Bokeo and Lumphat while also threatening the Mekong towns of Stung Treng and Kratie. The aim of this campaign was to create a region in Cambodia that could serve as a stronghold for the Cambodian Communists, as similar regions had been established by the PL in northern Laos and the Viet Minh in northern Vietnam and the Central Highlands. However, many of the Lao participating in the Viet Minh-led attacks on northeastern Cambodia sought to reunite the region with southern Laos as it had been before the arrival of the French. Hence there were two conflicting agendas, the revolutionary cause of the ICP and the reintegration of the territories that constituted the former Lao kingdom of Champasak.

The terms of the 1954 Geneva Accords caused revolutionary contacts along the Lao-Cambodian frontier to weaken. This was because most of the PL forces were regrouped to the provinces of Huaphan and Phong Saly in northern Laos. The few cadres who remained as underground agents chose to locate themselves at the PL stronghold of Lao Ngam on the northern fringe of the Bolaven Plateau, i.e. hundreds of kilometers to the north. PL cadres who had served in northeastern Cambodia such as Seum Manovieng, Chamnien Bounloth, Somlat Chanthamat, Sawai Xaiyasena, Samane Vinyakhet, Boun Phommahaxay, Phoune Sipraseuth, Phomma Douangmala, Keo Luangsena and Thavone Chaleunsouk now continued their careers in the northern battlefields of Laos.

After the 1954 Geneva Accords Ney Sarann participated in Cambodian politics as a member of the Krom Pracheachon (the KPRP's legal front), and ran as a candidate in national elections for his home province. At the same time Ney Sarann worked as a teacher and educational administrator for the private schools in Phnom Penh (details of Ya's own education are sketchy). During the early Sangkum period Ney Sarann served as Saloth Sar's supervisor at the Chamroan Vichea School. From most accounts, Ney Sarann was a popular teacher like Saloth Sar and played an important role in recruiting monks and students into the Communist movement. However, it is not known how active he was outside of the capital during 1955-1963. During the late 1950s some of the leading cadres in the northeast of Cambodia were Veng Khuon (Taveng - Brao), Khamphay (Voeunsai - Lao), Thongbai (Voeunsai - Lao/Tampuan), Chanto (Voeunsai - Lao) Ty Pheng (Siempang - Lao), Gariam (O'Chhum - Kreung) and Chan Nukeo (Lumphat - Lao).

1957 was a critical year for the development of the Cambodian revolutionary movement in northeastern Cambodia. This was because the Vietnamese advisors in Cambodia were withdrawn from the field completely. In addition, the former secretary-general of the KPRP Sieu Heng began negotiations with the Royal Government of Cambodia (RGC) in the lead up to his defection from the Party in 1959. Sieu Heng, who was responsible for the rural networks of the KPRP, exposed many of his former comrades-in-arms to the iron-fisted justice of Sihanouk's security forces, then commanded by Kou Roun and Lon Nol. It seems that the ICP/KPRP generation of the Cambodian Communists was succeeded in the early 1960s by the KR, when Oum Seda and Ya Korn were liquidated by Sihanouk's forces following the defection of Siev Haeng. Differing accounts claim that Ya Korn was killed by government forces in Kratie in 1956 or in Lumphat around 1957. The death of Tou Samouth in 1962 marked the virtual end of ICP generation links at the senior level of the Communist movement inside Cambodia. Keo Meas remained as the only

Cambodian Communist with personal contacts with the PL leadership. However, during this period he spent most of his time hiding out in clandestine camps along the southeastern Viet-Cambodian frontier. In the 1960s some of the leading cadres in the northeast were Kham Len (Taveng - Brao), Sieng Noy (Taveng - Brao), Thongbai, Khamlai (Voeunsai - Lao), Thongsing (Voeunsai - Lao) and Kong Daeng (O'Chhum - Tampuan).

With the withdrawal of Saloth Sar from Phnom Penh to the Viet-Cambodian frontier in the early 1960s, Ney Sarann was reassigned to work in Mondulhiri. For Lao-Cambodian relations this was an important step, as Ney Sarann married a local lady of Lao ethnicity named Voeun and developed close relations with the local people, be they ethnic Tampuan, Bunong, Jarai or Lao. Ney Sarann's ethnic Lao in-laws were promoted into the KR art troupe and as drivers for members of Angkar Leu. Ta Ya's niece had an arranged marriage with Ieng Thirith's nephew. Other 'elder brothers' in the Cambodian Communist movement who joined Ney Sarann in the northeast in the mid-1960s were Son Sen, Um Neng and Nykorn. They were later joined by Ieng Sary, Saloth Sar, Chan Sareth (*alias* Ta Va), Koy Thuon, Yaem, Tiv Ol and for a very brief period by Nuon Chea. Saloth Sar drew a large number of his bodyguards from a Tampuan area on the northern banks of the Srepok River, while Ieng Sary recruited his from the Jarai in Andoung Meas and Son Sen from the Kravet living between Siempang and Voeunsai. Bou Phat was another ethnic Khmer who cultivated close relations with the Lao and the Khmer Leu of northeastern Cambodia. Bou Phat, a native of Takeo, came to the northeast later than Ta Ya and located himself on the Se San between Taveng and Voeunsai. Before coming to the northeast Bou Phat had worked with Khieu Samphan as a journalist. Um Neng was another ethnic Khmer who worked as a journalist in the Cambodian capital before entering the maquis. Um Neng was known as Vy in Ratanakiri. However, when later stationed at Siempang he was called Vong. His wife was known as Sorn in Ratanakiri, while their daughter was called Phat in Siempang.

The ethnic Lao of Mondulhiri, largely centred on the district of Kaoh Nhek, had important networks with Lao in Stung Treng, Lumphat, Voeunsai, Siempang and of course Laos. Ney Sarann, Ta Kat and other KR leaders who relocated from the capital were able to tap into these networks and rapidly develop the revolutionary movement in the northeast. This was because the ethnic Lao had historically been the most efficient networkers in the region, due to their trade in forest goods and Buddhist missionary activities. Thus this allowed them to successfully integrate with the local peoples and gain their trust, unlike the lowland ethnic Khmer (Khmer Kandal) who filled the ranks of the RGC's corrupt public service and armed forces. Since the early 1960s relations between the Khmer Leu and the lowland Khmer settlers had soured due to the seizure of land for rubber cultivation and the exploitation of cheap labour.

During the late 1960s and early 1970s Ney Sarann moved around northeastern Cambodia and Preah Vihear province recruiting people into the KR. In addition, he played an important role as a liaison with the Vietnamese and Lao when receiving military supplies down the Sihanouk Trail (note this refers to the northern branch which comes off the Ho Chi Minh trail in eastern Attapeu province and follows the Xe Kong River valley into Stung Treng province). Khmer Leu and ethnic Lao from the northeast commented that Ney Sarann's leadership at the local level was fair and pragmatic, although he was definitely linked to revenge killings of Lon Nol regime figures.

Bua Khao (*alias* Kae) was the veteran ethnic Kravet leader of Kok Lak commune, north of Voeunsai. In 1970 his forces helped feed and shelter the Khmer Hanoi who survived

the arduous journey down the Ho Chi Minh Trail to aid the KR against the Lon Nol regime. The Khmer Hanoi were KPRP regroupees who had spent the period from 1954 to 1970 training and working in the DRV as they were denied by the terms of the 1954 Geneva Accords a safe haven inside Cambodia. Some of the important figures in this group were Bua Chuang, Chen Reun, Puay Nuchan, Pen Sovann, Bou Thong and Soy Keo. Dy Pheng was a Lao veteran from Lumphat who went to the DRV in 1954.

In 1970 two large forces of KR from the northeast escorted senior cadres to new base areas west of the Mekong. The first group, including Chan Sareth (*alias* Ta Va), Bou Phat (*alias* Ta Piang), Ta Hai (*alias* Seuy) and Ta Phan, established a revolutionary command in Preah Vihear province, then referred to as Sector 103. Ta Hai was an ethnic Khmer from the frontier area between Svay Rieng and Tay Ninh, who had underwent training in Vietnam before serving in the northeast. He used to be a bodyguard for Khieu Ponnary and Ieng Sary. Ta Phan was an ethnic Lao from Preah Angkuel, close to the Lao-Cambodian frontier point on the Mekong. The group sent to Preah Vihear included three units mixed with Vietnamese soldiers serving as vanguard shock troops. The Preah Vihear CPK leaders had a security force of over one hundred soldiers, many of whom were ethnic Lao or Khmer Leu such as Bun Chan (brother of Kham Teung), Tew Soth, Ta Tan, Ta Song (Tampuan), Kat Yay (Kreung), Oy Deuan (Jarai) and Ba Taem (Jarai). Before arriving in Stung Treng, the northeasterners were armed only with crossbows and grenades. However, on arrival they were armed with AK47 machine guns and other rifles. Nearly all of these soldiers married local ethnic Khmer women once they settled in Preah Vihear.

The headquarters for Preah Vihear were first located at Anlong Svay, Rovieng district, and then shifted north to Phum Tumloab, where a dam and a camp with a hospital, radio station and barracks were constructed out of the wilderness. Once based in Preah Vihear the senior cadres renamed themselves; Chan Sareth became known as Ta Mann, his wife Pheap as Son, Bou Phat as Ta Hang, Ta Hai as Ta Pong and Ta Phan as Ta Pao. Both Ta Hang and Ta Phan were based at Phum Tumloab, while Ta Mann and Ta Pong were stationed in different spots in Chey Saen district. Ta Phan served as the economics chief of Preah Vihear, while Ta Hang had both a political and a military role. Ta Mann was the political commissar of Sector 103 and Ta Pong the security chief. Like Ta Ya, Ta Hang was well liked by the local people of Preah Vihear and few of them were killed by his order. Ta Hang married a Preah Vihear local called Pin and adopted local children to be trained into a special youth unit. His assistant was another person called Ya, but he was an ethnic Khmer local from Rovieng (his wife Sou is still alive). Ta Yuon, an ethnic Khmer, was the military commander of border forces at Preah Vihear temple. Ta Meak was the KR leader in Tbaeng Meanchey. Bun Chan became the district chief of Choam Khsant. Ta Mi an ethnic Tampuan was the district's military chief. He was accompanied by his wife Si who was also Khmer Leu.

The second group of Communist Party of Kampuchea (CPK) leaders, including Saloth Sar, Koy Thuon and Tiv Ol, joined Ke Pauk, Nuon Chea, Khieu Samphan, Hu Nim and Hou Yuon at the new Party headquarters in northern Kampong Cham province. They were escorted by a similar sized troop of Khmer Leu soldiers including cadres such as Vy Cheam (Jarai). Once the 'elder brothers' of the CPK were securely based in central Cambodia they began more actively pursuing a separate ideological path from the Vietnamese, which they implemented with strict discipline and unforgiving force.

Around 1972 the veteran cadres of the northeast began fearing for their lives as the KR leadership adopted a hostile stance against the Vietnamese and their former protégés. This included loyalists of Sihanouk who had rallied to the FUNK. The KR purged veteran ethnic Lao and Khmer Leu cadres such as Khamphay, Khamdaeng, Ta Kiang (Kreung), Khamphan (Voeunsai - Lao), Boun Chua (Voeunsai - Lao), Boun Kong (Koh Pir - Jarai), Chan Daeng and Ty Pheng, and destroyed local heritage sites such as the funerary monument built for Chao Ya Tham in Voeunsai. This incited panic amongst local base people and hardened revolutionaries who began initiating secret contacts with their Lao and Vietnamese allies in an effort to seek assistance and relief from the extremes of the KR. Khamvieng an ethnic Tampuan cadre from northeastern Lumphat district became a feared figure in northeastern Cambodia in his role as security chief of the region. He was married to an ethnic Lao woman called Sidom from Ba Deum, east of Stung Treng town. Khamvieng spoke Lao well and he centralized killing in the northeast. Many locals recall the arrival of Khamvieng's military jeep with a red flag in their cooperative as an omen of impending death. Khamvieng was lynched and killed by locals after the Vietnamese occupation in 1979. However, his wife survived and she now lives in southeastern Ratanakiri province.

A number of ethnic Lao and Tampuan cadres served as KR officials in Lumphat such as Ta Keng and Ta Peum. Ta Tum an ethnic Kreung served as Ta Keng's deputy. Ta Pon an ethnic Lao, but non-native of Lumphat, served as district chief. He was married to an ethnic Khmer woman from Svay Rieng called Huang. Huang is still alive and resident in Lumphat. Ta Nyang another ethnic Lao local succeeded Pon as district chief towards the end of DK. He survived the Vietnamese occupation and died a natural death at Ban Mai in 1984. Ta Peng, an ethnic Lao and a former monk who had studied in Stung Treng, served as a *chloarp*. In this role he summoned locals for study and also observed the killing of 'enemies' in the forest. Sithat, a Khmer Hanoi veteran, was one of the senior figures purged in Lumphat. Other ethnic Lao holding positions of power in the northeast were Thavone at the party office located at Sam Khuoy, code-named K-20, Ta Seila from Ban Hang Khu, and Kham Tat from Pak Kalan who carried out purges in Voeunsai.

In 1973 Ney Sarann received Prince Sihanouk's GRUNK/FUNK delegation at the Lao-Cambodian frontier in the vicinity of Ta Ngau (northern Siempang) with Khieu Samphan and Hu Nim, after the exiled prince had traveled down the Ho Chi Minh Trail. Ney Sarann and Ta Hang escorted Sihanouk and his entourage across the Xe Kong River at Phabang, a short distance north of Siempang town. From here they went on to Veunkham (Lao border crossing point on eastern bank of Mekong in southern Champasak province; a large fig tree marked the point where they rested) and then to Phnom Kulen (Siem Reap province) and back.

In 1974 the chief of Preah Vihear Ta Mann was killed by an ethnic Kuy bodyguard at his base in Chey Saen. As a result Ta Hang became chief of Sector 103. Ta Hang based himself at Phum Tumloab but also traveled to Rovieng regularly. His subordinates were located in Chey Saen and Chhaep. The wife of Ta Mann, Prum Son, also survived DK despite being mentioned in the S-21 'confession' of Bou Phat.

In mid-1974 the KR re-forged links with the PL leadership by sending a delegation led by Khieu Samphan and Ieng Sary to the PL headquarters in Sam Neua. At this time the key figure in the PL responsible for the Lao-Khmer relations was Khamphay Bouphe. However, veterans from the south of Laos such as Sithon Kommadam and Maha Kou Souvannamethi also met with the Cambodian Communists. Khamphay Bouphe liaised primarily with the FUNK representatives based in Beijing and Hanoi rather than dealing

directly with KR inside Cambodia. As a consequence the PL leadership only had a vague understanding of the goings on of the CPK and wrongly believed that Prince Sihanouk held a much more influential role in the Cambodian revolutionary movement.

Before the fall of Phnom Penh, Ney Sarann was moved from the northeast to the CPK headquarters in central Cambodia, where it is understood that he took charge of military logistics before the final seizure of the capital. After April 17, 1975 Ney Sarann served in Phnom Penh and joined a DK delegation seeking material support from China. The removal of Ney Sarann from northeastern Cambodia around 1973-74 resulted in a breakdown of local support in the KR as lowland cadres, such as Um Neng and Son Sen's brother Nykorn, enforced CPK policy more strictly on the indigenous community and overtly criticized the Vietnamese as evil parasites (A similar description of the Lao in the northeast had been made by the French seventy years earlier out of frustration at their failure to disentangle the Lao patronage networks from Champasak and Siam).

This resulted in groups of Khmer Leu and ethnic Lao, led by figures such as Bou Thong (Tampuan), Soy Keo (Kachok), Kham Len (Brao), Sieng Noy (Brao), Veng Khuon (Brao), Dy Pheng (Lao), Kham Teung (Brao), Bun Mi (Brao), Dy Phim (Siempang - Lao), Chen Reun (Taveng - Brao), Bua Chuang (Lao), Khamphin (Tampuan), Khamchanh (Brao), Puay Nuchan (Lao) and Nou Beng (Lao), fleeing to Vietnam and Laos. The refugees escaped from northeastern Cambodia to Laos along three routes: overland from Siempang to Ban Khinak; following the banks of mountain streams up to the border ranges; and by crossing the Naga's Tail in the far northeast corner of the country. They later became the new leaders of the People's Republic of Kampuchea (PRK) due to their privileged status with the Vietnamese, which was cultivated during their time in exile. Bou Thong became Defence Minister in the PRK and Soy Keo his deputy. Nou Beng became the PRK's Health Minister, but fell from grace after being caught trafficking opium. Bun Mi was also chosen for high office in the PRK, but he fell chronically ill and insane after receiving bad anesthesia during an operation to remove a bullet from his shoulder. Bua Chuang became governor of Ratanakiri and a senior commander in the PRK armed forces. Puay Nuchan became a senior military officer in charge of ammunitions. Chan Nukeo became the chief magistrate of Ratanakiri. When not overseeing legal affairs in the province, Chan Nukeo also promoted the preservation of Lao customs and songs.

So Sareuan (Khmer - Takeo) and Dy Thin (Tampuan) were two important KR cadres who held administrative roles in the northeast after the seizure of Phnom Penh in 1975, commanding military forces belonging to Division 801. Dy Thin married an ethnic Khmer woman, Van, from Kampong Spueu. This unit, which had around 3000 soldiers, was charged with the security of the northern frontiers with Laos and Vietnam. Division 802 was the military force tasked with border security along the western section of the Lao-Cambodian frontier. Division 802 had Kuy, Tampuan, Jarai and Kravet personnel. Keo Sareuan was the first chief of Division 802, but he was purged and replaced by Ta Chon. Ta Chon was from Kampong Thom and a brother-in-law of Son Sen. His headquarters were at Trapeang Kul near the headwaters of the Tonle Repou River. After the Vietnamese occupation he fled to the Phnom Dangrek and then in 1984 he joined Son Sen in Pailin, where he later died. Ta Chon's wife was from Kampong Spueu. Sim an ethnic Tampuan based at Chhaep was another key figure in Division 802. Another military force, Division 920, oversaw border security with Vietnam in the region of Mondulkiri. It was led by Chhin an ethnic Khmer from Svay Rieng and his deputy Soy, Koy Thuon's brother.

At this point, early 1976, Angkar Leu reassigned Ney Sarann to the northeast, so as to bring order to the region. In addition, Ney Sarann administered a larger territory which covered Stung Treng, Ratanakiri, Mondulkiri and Kratie. The embarrassment of the Khmer Leu refugees was complicated by border tensions between Vietnam and Cambodia, which had been simmering since 1968. This hostility arose from a difficult period for the KR when the Vietnamese refused to supply them with weapons and both forces were dealing with critical food shortages. In early 1975 Khmer and Vietnamese forces snatched territories from each other and argued over the exploitation of maritime resources. Being an elder brother of the party and fluent in Vietnamese, Ney Sarann was appointed as the senior negotiator in the DK-Socialist Republic of Vietnam border dispute, which extended up into the highland district of O'Yadav, Ratanakiri. Around this period, early 1976, suspicions were fermenting inside Angkar Leu as the party leadership felt threatened by 'hidden rivals' and Ney Sarann, then commonly known as Ta Ya, became a target of investigation. This witch hunt for party enemies emulated Mao's purge of rivals and factions in the Chinese Communist Party. In a way, Ney Sarann could be compared with the Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai who died in early 1976, as both figures promoted pragmatism while their superiors sought impossible goals.

It is known that Ta Ya had long-standing differences of opinion with Pol Pot with regards to economic management, but whether he actively conspired against him remains unclear. Certainly he was aligned with CPK moderates such as Koy Thuon (former chief of the KR's Northern Zone and then DK Economics and Trade Minister) and Hou Yuon, which placed him in dangerous company when the CPK leadership was seeking to elaborate on the experience of the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution in China. Nevertheless it cannot be doubted that Ney Sarann was a party loyalist as he actively pursued the party's interests in border negotiations. By late 1976 it had been decided by Angkar Leu that Ta Ya was a traitor due to his association with the Vietnamese and other party 'revisionists' also accused of plotting to topple the regime. This resulted in his arrest in September and imprisonment at Toul Sleng, where he was questioned and tortured brutally. Subsequently, a large number of cadres from the northeast and elsewhere were purged for being members of Ta Ya's 'Laos Plot' (this term appears in other 'confessions' and relates to a revisionist faction in the CPK seeking to adopt a moderate form of socialist construction as employed by the PL).

The interrogation of Ta Ya resulted in a series of wide-ranging purges within the CPK's ranks. Some of the cadres caught up Ta Ya's 'treacherous network' were Ta Soth (chief of Siem Reap), Chhin (Division 920 chief), Bua Khao and Ta Lao, an ethnic Jarai cadre from Andoung Meas and protégé of Ta Ya. It is interesting to note that Ta Lao's brothers Vy Cheam and Ta Weng survived DK. In addition, two senior Kachok cadres from Andoung Meas, Ro Mam Yon and Ga Lan Hwet, were sent back to the northeast after being arrested by S-21. Nhem San an ethnic Khmer from Kratie became the new chief of Division 920. Nhem San's wife survived DK and is now living in western Cambodia.

An interesting development from this tragic series of events was that relatives of Ta Ya in Mondulkiri survived the party crackdown and remained faithful to Angkar Leu right up until the 1990s. Ta Ya's ethnic Lao in-laws Ta Laing (secretary of Mondulkiri) and Khamphoun (deputy secretary), who took charge of Sector 105 in the 1970s, died at the hands of each other rather than the guards of S-21 at Toul Sleng prison (a detailed study of their activities by Sara Colm and Sorya Sim is being released soon by the Documentation Centre of Cambodia). Two deputies of Ta Laing, Sophea an ethnic Khmer-Jarai and Ra an

ethnic Lao, were purged by Angkar. Sao Saroun, an ethnic Bunong and relative of Ta Laing, became the chief of Sector 105 following the death of Ta Laing. Tit Ya an ethnic Lao local from Kaoh Nhek district served as a senior cadre as well. Ta Laing's brothers, Ta Lork and Ta Onsi, joined the Sector 105 administrative committee in 1978 and in 1986 led hundreds of KR followers from the northeast to the Dangrek Range, where they entered the service of Ta Mok, Son Sen and Ke Pauk.

Ta Onsi who served alongside Nhem San (former chief of Division 920 and Son Sen's killer) now lives in Anlong Veng town, a short distance from Ke Pauk's children and the S-21 photographer Nhem En, and spends his time gardening like many KR veterans. However, he does also serve as a military advisor for the regional military forces based south of Anlong Veng. Ta Onsi is married to an ethnic Lao woman from Stung Treng. As a youth he studied in Stung Treng as a monk and also had the opportunity to visit Laos. During this period Ta Onsi established close friendships with Lao monks who came to Cambodia to sponsor the development of Buddhist temples in the Srepok River valley. Mrs. Bua Channa, the niece of Ney Sarann's Lao wife, is now the women's affairs officer for Phum 105, the village where many Khmer Leu associated with the KR leadership are now based. Recently she was appointed deputy chief of the sub-district. Her husband Koy Tuan, the former personal assistant to So Sareuan (protégé of Pol Pot and Son Sen's killer) is also a sub-district official.

All of these veterans are firmly settled in Otdar Meanchey province, but maintain their Lao and Khmer Leu culture. They have also recently reunited with family and friends from Monduliri and Laos and participated in the construction of a Buddhist temple at Peam Chimeat on the banks of the Srepok River. Phum 105 sits at the base of the Dangrek escarpment below Pol Pot's now derelict bunker and to the west of So Sareuan's former base at O'Svay. It is an unusually tidy village in a picturesque setting, receiving support from a collection of NGOs. This is a sharp contrast to the squalor that surrounds the graves of Pol Pot and Ta Mok, located to the northwest of Phum 105. Some 5-10 kilometres away from the main road linking Anlong Veng with Chong Sa-ngam pass, Phum 105 enjoys a surprising level of harmony in an area where conflict dominated daily life for so long.

Like Ta Ya, Ta Hang was accused of plotting against Angkar, but was not arrested until early 1978 when he was identified as a treacherous element in the CPK. This was due to his links with Ney Sarann and also his relaxed administrative style. As a result he and his subordinates were arrested by cadres sent from the southwest. The daughter of Ta Hang, Muon, survived DK and was adopted by Chea Sim in 1981. Ta Hang's elder brother Bou Thit escaped to Vietnam and his sister survived DK. The prison staff at Anlong Svay, Lot (Khmer - Kampong Sralao), Muth (Bunong) and Guarn (Kuy), were also arrested. The KR operated prisons in Chhaep, Anlong Svay and Rovieng. In addition, there were killing fields near the KR base at Phum Tumloab. Mey Kri an ethnic Khmer from the southwest replaced Bun Chan as chief of Choam Khsant. Under her command the ancient brick Buddhist temple was destroyed. Mey Kri *alias* Ri was married to Soeun, another cadre from Takeo who served in Anlong Veng. Bun Chan was sent to Siem Reap and then forwarded onto S-21 officials in Takeo. He survived DK due to the arrival of Vietnamese forces in 1979. With the arrest of Ta Hang, the administration of Sector 103 was assumed by Chan Sam (*alias* Sae) and Khoem, but they were later purged by Angkar. Khoem who had taken charge of Sector 103 was replaced by Mok, an ethnic Khmer. Mok escaped to the Thai frontier in 1979. The former bodyguard of Ta Pong, Y Chhien, survived the Preah Vihear purges to become a bodyguard for Ieng Sary.

The low number of deaths in Preah Vihear during the KR period is due to a number of factors. Unlike other parts of Cambodia, there was hardly any Viet Minh legacy in Preah Vihear. In the course of the First Indochina War Vietnamese revolutionary forces had only briefly passed through the territory of Preah Vihear and been unable to establish a branch of the KPRP. In the eyes of the CPK leaders Preah Vihear was untainted and rooted in the purest traditions of Cambodian history due to its isolation and low level of development. High level Party links with the local populace also made a difference. For example, Khieu Samphan was married to an ethnic Khmer local from Rovieng called Roeun. The small population of Preah Vihear also helped deter large scale killings because the KR needed personnel to guard the frontiers with Laos and Thailand where hostile forces lurked.

Ta Ya's deputy Um Neng was reappointed chief of the northeast after Ta Ya's arrest. Um Neng and his family, who were all ethnic Khmer, shared good relations with the locals. His daughter trained as a nurse. Eventually Um Neng became a suspect in the wake of Angkar's purge of Ney Sarann's network in mid 1978. He was summoned to Phnom Penh, but committed suicide before being arrested by S-21 personnel. His family members were left unharmed following his death. However, the chief of Stung Treng, Ta But, was purged in late 1978 along with his Sino-Khmer wife Sipa. Ta But's brother Ta Kat was also arrested. The widows of Um Neng and Ta Kat became close friends after the disappearance of their husbands. They both joined Son Sen's entourage following the Vietnamese occupation in 1979. However, the eldest daughter of Um Neng, Boat, was separated from her mother and remained in Ban Lung and worked as health official. She lived in the same village as Ta Ya's ethnic Kreung messenger, Khamphong, who also survived DK.

The Vietnamese liberation of Cambodia in 1979 brought one final twist to Lao-Cambodian relations in the frontier region as opponents of the Vietnamese-backed regimes in Laos and Cambodia sought support from each other in the sanctuary of the Phnom Dangrek. Members of the Champasak royal family in Laos became key figures in the Ku Xat (Lao anti-Communist resistance) which operated bases close to the tri-border region which encompassed portions of Ubon, Preah Vihear and Champasak. KR refugees from the northeast cooperated with the Ku Xat to develop outside contacts and generate income from the sale of gems, artifacts and timber. In return the Ku Xat received arms. Again the desire the reclaim lost territories was perpetuated but it quickly faded due to factional feuding.

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