

Investigative

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Note from a slaughterhouse

KHMER ROUGE ATROCITIES: As head of security, the notorious Deuch ran Tuol Sleng, the regime's bloodiest prison

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In June 1967, a group of Cambodian youths, inspired by the Chinese Cultural Revolution and enraged by criticisms of China published in a Khmer newspaper, sacked the paper's offices. A photograph of Prince Sihanouk was torn from the wall and a statue of the Buddha overturned. Mao's Little Red Book was being widely distributed, and student unrest was mounting.

Leaflets distributed in Kompong Thom province by Pol Pot's underground Communist Party of Kampuchea (CPK) called on people to "rise up" in rebellion. Their author was the principal of the local Balaing College, a tall, thin, pock-faced science teacher named Mam Nay. The College's deputy principal, leader of a 1967 incident in which rioters burnt a bus outside a police station, was a short, spindly Sino-Khmer named Kaing Khuek Iev. He later became Mam Nay's superior in the CPK.

After their party had taken power in 1975, Iev, using the revolutionary name Deuch, ran the Khmer Rouge regime's national security apparatus, the Santebal. Deuch and Mam Nay supervised the torture, interrogation and execution of thousands of people, including anti-Khmer Rouge dissidents. Their most famous victim would be the Cambodian leftist politician Hu Nim, a Minister in the Khmer Rouge cabinet until his arrest in 1977.

In 1967, Prince Sihanouk had put Mam Nay in the same category as Hu Nim, but ironically described Hu Nim as "the most dangerous". The Prince singled out the "pro-Chinese left" for "its subversive work". He banned the Khmer-Chinese Friendship Association, the local Hsinhua bulletin, and the General Association of Khmer Students.

The CPK was already set on its course. Hu Nim's "confession", his prison account of the ensuing events, composed in 1972 under torture by Deuch and Mam Nay, reveals the role played by the Party underground, in particular its Northern Zone leader,

Koy Thuon, who "pushed the situation further, and made it more tense by presenting a motion of protest ... demanding that Sihanouk re-establish the Khmer-Chinese Friendship Association. Sihanouk was very angry with him."

The Prince indeed concluded that "Hu Nim and his associates had excluded themselves from the national community", and told them to go live in China. Nim received quick orders from Pol Pot's CPK "Centre", to take to the jungle. The party proclaimed: "Khmer people, Khmer youth, rise up and overthrow the corrupt, dictatorial and anti-popular regime!"

Nim left for the Cardamom mountains from the Phnom Penh house of his brother-in-law. "It was raining. Comrade Kun came to meet me and asked me to cover my head with a raincoat and walk right across in front of the intelligence agents who were sheltering near the house."

Police arrived quickly. They claimed that Nim's brother-in-law poured petrol over his own clothes and set fire to himself. Student leader Phouk Chhay was gaoled, another associate was killed in police headquarters. Mam Nay, Deuch, and dozens of teachers and students from Balaing College were also gaoled.

"Sihanouk gave orders for the execution of many teachers and students who were suspected communists. They were arrested and brought in from very distant places and killed in a special place in Kong forest near Skoun. I saw them being taken there. People were denouncing one another, people they did not like, as communist."

Deuch and Mam Nay were released after Lon Nol's coup against Sihanouk in 1970. When they returned to Phnom Penh with the victorious Khmer Rouge army in 1975, they made the Sihanouk regime's repression of teachers, and its fostering of secret mutual denunciations, look like child's play.

From 1971 to 1975, Deuch ran the security forces of the CPK insurgency's

Special Zone, under Son Sen, who took charge of security issues for the CPK Centre. A CPK defector who met Deuch in 1972-73 recalled him as "ill-tempered, impatient, and doctrinaire".

The CPK security forces came to be dominated by a cabal from Pol Pot's native province of Kompong Thom, with connections to Son Sen. Sen and Deuch had both taught at the National Pedagogy School. Sen taught Mam Nay, who graduated in 1956. Another leading Santebal official was Sen's relative Nat (Ny Korn), a former mechanic in the Kompong Thom electrical works.

Like Son Sen, Deuch moved his operation to the capital after the 1975 victory. Some of the prisoners, he brought along were held there for nearly two years. Deuch's headquarters was now renamed "S-21". He continued to report to Son Sen. Deuch recruited 57 new prison guards between June and December 1975. During that year, 154 prisoners were incarcerated, mostly in Phnom Penh's former Bethlehem chapel.

In January 1976, Deuch moved S-21 to Takhmau, on the southern outskirts of Phnom Penh. By March, he had employed another 20 warders. In June, the prison moved again to S-21, the former high school now known as Tuol Sleng. This site could hold 1,000 prisoners. The Santebal flourished. By early 1977, Tuol Sleng employed 111 new warders, most aged 17 to 21. A mere half-dozen had joined the revolution before 1973, and only two had worked for the Santebal before April 1975. These people were to imprison and kill the vast majority of western CPK cadres, from Hu Nim and Mam Nay Thuon down.

Six weeks after Thuon's imprisonment in January 1977, Deuch wrote him a polite letter. It began by noting that Thuon's latest "confession" that the prison "environment" had "helped to educate you a lot".

Deuch went on:

From what I personally observed from all your reports so far, I see that you yourself ... carry out strenuous activities because of your strong belief.



Kaing Khuek Iev stands, between pastor Christopher LaPel, left, and pastor Daniel Ellis in this file photo taken on Jan 4, 1996, during the 22nd Annual Leadership Training Institute at the Chamka Samrong Christian Church in Battambang City, Battambang province. Kaing Khuek Iev, the feared chief of the Khmer Rouge's security services, who ordered the torture and killing of at least 14,000 people in the late 1970s, has been found and later taken into Cambodian government's custody.

beliefs.

I observe that this accords with the truth, I would like to express my thanks and appreciation.

But please make a further report, clearly and correctly, as follows: Why is your belief so wholehearted — if the CIA prison environment had helped to educate you a lot? — Deuch.

This is the issue that you will report frankly.

accurately reported. This is the issue that you are avoiding.

In the hope that you will report frankly.

This deadly letter encapsulates the process and mentality of Deuch's Tuol Sleng. His acknowledgement that dissidents like Koy Thuon had acted from political conviction is important. It is a rare and private confession.

Prisoners were routinely forced to confess that they were not Cambodian

political actors, but mere agents of foreign powers, motivated by greed or cowardice, not conviction or dedication. Deuch consciously required such statements for propaganda purposes. He saw the danger in revealing the fact that leading Cambodian communists could honestly dissent from Party policies.

However, he still considered CPK dissenters to be objectively working in