

# Stilled Lives

**Photographs from the  
Cambodian Genocide**

**Wynne Cougill**

with  
Pivoine Pang  
Chhayran Ra  
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Village musical performance, New Years Day, Kratie province, 1975

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## Foreward

In the twenty-five years since the collapse of Democratic Kampuchea, we have learned much about the individuals who led the Khmer Rouge regime. Their objective was the destruction of the very foundation of Cambodian society: its family structure, and its norms and values. Ironically, we have also come to realize that the regime's leaders were not abstract political monsters; they had their own families and their own private lives, just like other Cambodians. But what they sought to destroy for others, they preserved for themselves.

Every Cambodian family, from that of the king to that of the poorest peasant, has had at least one member who died or simply disappeared during the Khmer Rouge's reign of terror. Nearly two million people were executed, starved or worked to death, and the legacy of the genocide is still with Cambodia's families today. The country resembles one vast, broken family and healing it will take generations. My mother lost her parents, three brothers, a sister, her husband, and her daughter.

But this book is not about the victims. Through photographs and the recollections of perpetrators and their families, it tells of those who brought great tragedy on us all. Their pictures and words teach us the importance of recognizing the humanity common to all of us, of the need to respect every human being's rights regardless of their crimes and regardless of our differences. They show the strength of the human spirit which is capable of enduring so much.

I am indebted to Wynne Cougill, who has been at the forefront of this project. She has become a member of my own family and that of the Documentation Center of Cambodia. And I am proud of her co-authors, Pivoine Pang, Sopheak Sim, and Chhayran Ra, who I hope have learned as much from the book as I have. It will help them to grow and go on to accomplish great things for themselves and for Cambodia.

### **Youk Chhang**

Director, Documentation Center of Cambodia

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Youk Chhang could light the world with his energy. He has lit our world in many ways, both large and small.



Ang-Krong village,  
Kratie province, 1975



## Introduction

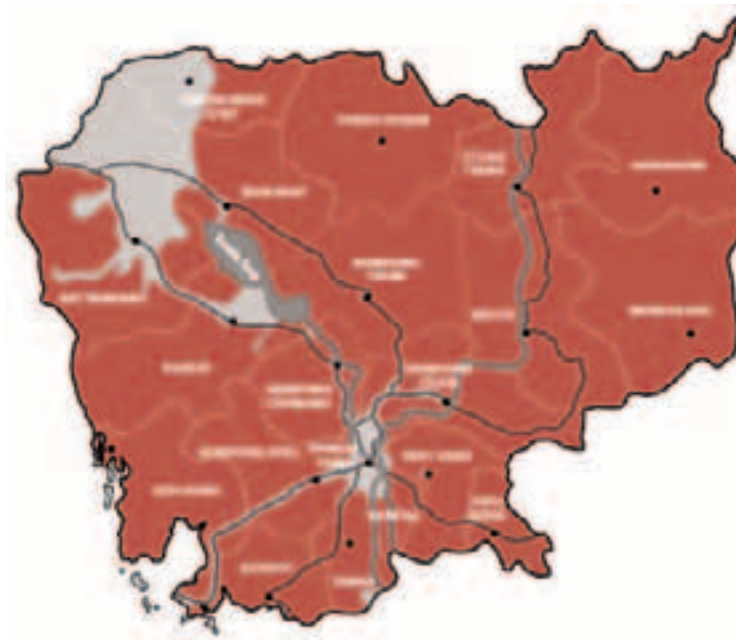
These are the stories of thirty-five men and sixteen women who joined the Khmer Rouge revolution. Most of them were recruits in their early- to mid-20s, and all were either conscripted by their village chiefs or volunteered.

Some of those who chose the life of a revolutionary were answering then-prince Sihanouk's call for Cambodians to go to the forest and fight against the Lon Nol regime.<sup>1</sup> A few were converts to the cause, believing the Khmer Rouge would turn Cambodia into an agrarian society where there were no rich and no poor, and where people worked together to rebuild their war-ravaged country. Still others succumbed to propaganda, which the Khmer Rouge used as a recruiting tool in the wake of the widespread bombing of Cambodia's villages between 1969 and 1973.

But most had a more practical reason for joining. Their educations interrupted by years of social disorder and with few means of earning a livelihood, signing up presented an opportunity to learn a trade or to avoid the drudgery of building dikes that was in store for those who stayed in their villages. For others, it fulfilled a desire for adventure, while still others realized that had they not volunteered, they would be recruited anyway and possibly face retribution.

The rural areas of the four provinces from which this book's subjects came – Kampong Cham, Kandal, Kampong Thom, and Takeo – were part of what was called the liberated zone. This zone comprised areas controlled by the Khmer Rouge

before it officially “liberated” the entire country on April 17, 1975 (some historians estimate that Cambodia's communist-backed guerillas, who were supported by the Viet Minh, controlled up to half of the country as early as 1954). It would be nearly four years before the Vietnamese and Khmer Rouge dissidents (the Front) came to Cambodia and toppled the regime on January 9, 1979.



**“Situation (May 1972) of the Cambodian Liberation by the Popular Armed Forces of the National Liberation of Cambodia”**  
(grey areas denote territory still under the control of Lon Nol forces)

Source: *Le Siege du Cambodge a L'organisation des Nations Unies*, Documentation Center of Cambodia catalogue number D24008.

Most of this book's subjects were among the poor and less educated who populated the rural landscape. The bulk were farmers, but scattered among them are a few small businessmen, including a caterer, a village photographer, and a martial arts performer in action movies.

The Khmer Rouge took down their biographies, as they did those of most Cambodians. These documents, which an individual may have written several times, served as a way of tracing a person's history and, for those whose luck had run out, "enemy activities." Such activities were often discovered through a connection to a relative or ranking superior, who had in some way been deemed to have collaborated with one of the regime's perceived foes: the CIA, KGB, or Vietnamese. But these documents also give an indication of the tenor of people's lives before and during Democratic Kampuchea. The vast majority of those from the countryside, for instance, were classified as lower- or middle-class farmers with a spare existence, and their biographies note their meager belongings: a bicycle, a buffalo, or a house with a one-peaked roof.

Once they became part of the Khmer Rouge regime, the individuals profiled here roughly fell into one of three groups. The first was the base people, who lived

in the liberated zones and formed the backbone of Cambodia's rural populace.<sup>2</sup> The second was the combatants and security personnel who fought in the armed forces or guarded the prisons. Third and highest on the chain were the cadres – those who enjoyed some sort of authority over others, and were usually members of the Communist Party of Kampuchea.

The twenty-one base people in this book generally remained in the village or district of their birth throughout Democratic Kampuchea. The Khmer Rouge also called them "non-military combatants," an appellation that aptly described the regime's requirement that everyone had to fight for the revolution in some capacity. They were forced to move frequently (some as many as ten times in three years), largely to meet agricultural demands. Later in the regime, the Khmer Rouge herded them to cooperatives in distant provinces in an effort to stay in control of the population while escaping the invading Vietnamese.

Their occupations also changed. Although many of the women who joined the revolution became medical workers, and stayed in those jobs throughout the regime, others' jobs were changed to suit the Khmer Rouge's perceived needs for labor – one day a photographer, the next a barber, and the

next a factory worker. And, nearly all of those interviewed at some point returned to their old occupations; they became farmers again in an attempt to fulfill the regime's policy of increasing rice production from one to three tons per hectare.

Severe deprivation, disease, hard labor, and food shortages were the lot of this group, which the Khmer Rouge claimed to revere. They were also vulnerable to imprisonment and "punishment" (a euphemism Cambodians use for torture, and a subject about which they are understandably reluctant to talk). Time in prison or "reeducation" at a labor camp could be meted out for such minor infractions as stealing food. But more often, sentences were imposed when a person was identified as being an enemy of the *Angkar* (the mysterious "organization," or "party," which represented the Communist Party of Kampuchea and whose members were unknown to those outside its ranks).

The Khmer Rouge also called military and security personnel combatants, reserving the term "soldier" for the enemy's personnel. The eighteen men and women in the army held ranks from division group chief to driver, while the two in the security system were guards at S-21 (this infamous central-level prison in Phnom Penh, also called Tuol Sleng, held largely

political prisoners; less than a dozen of its over 14,000 inmates survived Democratic Kampuchea). Both guards were born in Kandal province, which was home to the majority of S-21 security personnel.

Like the base people, the duties and positions of those in the military/security system changed frequently. When there were lulls in the fighting, they would be pulled from the battlefield and sent to work in the rice fields or to construction sites to build airports or other infrastructure.

The last category – the cadres – had positions of authority in the regime. These ten individuals held either political positions (district chief was the most common) or worked in the bureaucracy. A few, like Minister of Commerce Koy Thuon and District Chief Nhem Noeun, were long-time revolutionaries who joined the Khmer Rouge in the 1950s. But many others were simply sent up the ranks. As one family member interviewed observed, "the Khmer Rouge promoted the uneducated people to work; they did not care about the nation."

Cadres had more privileges and luxuries than the vast majority of others living in Cambodia. And they often shared the bounty they accessed with their families and villagers. Seiko watches, cloth, medicine, lamps, foodstuffs and other goods were dispensed on visits home or seen in Phnom Penh apartments by visiting relatives. In a nation where many could not recognize the difference between gold and brass, such largess made a deep and lasting impression on their recipients. These luxuries were largely within the reach of cadres working at the Ministry of Commerce.

The Ministry maintained a lively trade with China, and to a smaller extent, North Korea, Thailand, Hong Kong, Singapore, and Eastern Europe. On April 20, 1975, three days after the Khmer Rouge took Phnom Penh, the first Chinese ship arrived in the port of Sihanoukville laden with hundreds of tons of salt. Throughout the regime, the Chinese supplied the Khmer Rouge with weapons, military vehicles, bicycles, rice, cloth, fuel, medicine, chemicals, and a variety of machinery.

The Khmer Rouge, for its part, exported rice, rubber, food products, timber, and exotic animal parts; the latter were coveted throughout Asia. Democratic Kampuchea often got the short end of the bargain in its trade with other countries, selling its goods at a tiny fraction of their market value.



Monivong Boulevard, a major thoroughfare in Phnom Penh, with abandoned motorcycles, 1975



Many of those whose stories are told here, no matter what their position in the revolution, shared a number of things in common beyond the hardships of daily life. These included time spent in Phnom Penh, visits home, imprisonment, and disappearance or execution.

People who have seen pictures of the April 1975 evacuation of Phnom Penh think of the city as a ghost town during Democratic Kampuchea. But it held approximately 40,000 people, primarily cadres and military personnel, as well as a substantial portion of the 15,000 Chinese who worked in Cambodia as technical advisors to the regime's factories.

Thirty-seven of the fifty-one men and women in this book lived in the city for at least a brief period; many were able to visit or were brought to work in Phnom Penh by family members who held some influence in the regime. Kampong Cham, which was part of the North Zone, was home to many who worked in the Ministry of Commerce and brought their relatives to live with them. Often, the reasons interviewees gave for their relocation to the city were that their relative missed them, feared for their safety, or wanted them to enjoy some of the benefits of privilege (which included better medical care at the hospitals operating in Phnom Penh).



Khmer Rouge at Olympic Stadium in Phnom Penh, 1976 or 1977

Home visits were another factor that loomed large in people's memories. Most rural people could not afford even a bicycle, so a relative arriving home for a visit on a motorcycle or in a Jeep, or with a gun or bodyguards, was something that deeply impressed them. This may have contributed to the occasional tendency to overstate a loved one's rank or importance in the regime. But sometimes he or she did hold a position of

authority, even briefly, and the presence of a belt, hat, or watch in a photograph attests to this.

Few of the cadres or military personnel came home for more than a brief visit and almost none spent the night. And when they did, interviewees did not recall them talking about their jobs. Some reported they were so glad to see their relatives

that they simply didn't discuss work. And many people during the regime had good reason to fear reprisals against their family members should they be arrested. But people did remember that their relatives gave them advice, and it was always in the form of a warning: to be obedient, to be quiet, to agree with the *Angkar*, and not to send other members of the family to the revolution.

Prison was the fate of most of this book's subjects. Some were sent to be "reeducated" at camps like Prey Sar, a branch of S-21 located just west of Phnom Penh. Like the regime's other security centers below the central level, its purpose was to "re-forged" those with impure histories or who were involved with enemies of the state. Primarily, its inmates built dikes, grew rice, or otherwise labored in the fields, while those found guilty of serious infractions were sent to S-21.

The records of thirty-nine of the people described here were found at S-21. Often, its inmates came from the military, Party, and security personnel. The records from S-21 took the form of prisoner biographies, confessions, or both. Where no confession was found, however, it is assumed that the victims were executed or died within S-21's walls. None of the names of the people in this book has been found among the prison's known survivors.

Death seemed preordained for nearly all those who joined the revolution. Of the fifty-one people whose lives are recounted here, forty-two died during Democratic Kampuchea, and virtually all of them were executed. Of the rest, one died recently (a man who remained loyal to the revolution, took up residence in an area controlled by former Khmer Rouge, and reportedly succumbed to AIDS), six are still alive, and the fates of two are unknown.

Forty-six of those interviewed lost from one to more than ten members of their immediate families. Although our interviews did not focus on the fates of other family members, when people gave this information voluntarily, it was recorded. Thus, the actual death toll may be far higher than portrayed in the family trees that accompany the stories.

The authors wish to thank the sixty-six former Khmer Rouge and their family members who so generously shared their stories and photographs with us. Most of them were interviewed twice for this book, first by DC-Cam's Accountability Project teams, which trace former Khmer Rouge through their biographies, and then by the Photo Archive team.

Amid rumors – sometimes fueled by the statements of former Khmer Rouge leaders – that the "lower downs" could be held accountable for their crimes, and remembering that many perpetrators were tried and executed by villagers during the immediate aftermath of the regime, many of those interviewed were surprisingly candid. The reluctance of a few, who may have done things during the regime that they would rather not talk about, is nonetheless understandable.

For a few individuals, things that happened over twenty-five years ago are still vivid today. But for most, time has obscured the details or imbued many of them with knowledge that probably came from hindsight. For example, during Democratic Kampuchea, people were well aware that those around them were disappearing with terrifying regularity, but had no idea of the scale of executions in other parts of the country, for the killings were kept as secret as possible. Today, however, they are armed with the knowledge of the Cambodian genocide, and it has become a part of their stories.

The photographs families contributed to this book form a testament to the lives of fifty-one people who joined the Khmer Rouge revolution and were forever changed. Many of them show men and women in the bloom of youth, dressed in their best clothes, standing beside their friends, and ready to fulfill the promises the world held for them. And for those with access to a camera during the regime, the photographs also depict lives altered and hardened by war.

Perhaps the most difficult part of life for the survivors is the uncertainty over the fate of those who disappeared. After the Vietnamese entered the country in 1979 and for many years after, Cambodia was in chaos. People were separated from their families and places of birth, and the country was rife with rumors. Some making the pilgrimage home claimed to have seen their neighbors living in camps on the border, fleeing to the jungle, or leaving for a distant land. Without newspapers, radios, or televisions, families were left guessing and hoping, and many still are. As a result, a very large portion of those interviewed have long consulted fortunetellers about their lost family members, and some have been duped into traveling great distances and paying large sums of money to find them.

When seeking information on former Khmer Rouge, teams from the Documentation Center of Cambodia brought families a biography or confession from S-21. For many, this was the first piece of concrete news they had received in many years about their missing relative. Often, the news our teams conveyed was that the family member was almost surely dead. While this knowledge saddened the relatives, it also gave them some sense of relief. Net Phaly, who learned from our team that his brother had died at S-21 a mere two weeks before the Vietnamese entered Phnom Penh and released the prisoners there, took out his brother's photograph. His words speak for many of this book's families: "Now I see that the white ants ate it; this must mean it is the end of his story."

<sup>1</sup> On March 18, 1970, Lon Nol and Sisowath Sirik Matak deposed Sihanouk. The coup was popular with the educated in Phnom Penh, but proved anathema for people in the countryside, who revered their prince. Lon Nol's Khmer Republic regime ruled until April 1975, when it was overthrown by the Khmer Rouge. The new government was called Democratic Kampuchea.

<sup>2</sup> The other inhabitants of Cambodia were categorized as new, or April 17, people. Largely city dwellers, they were evacuated from Phnom Penh and other towns, and sent to the countryside after liberation. In general, they received far harsher treatment than the base people and died in greater numbers. The subjects of this book were located by tracing the biographies of former Khmer Rouge; because city dwellers were seldom part of their ranks, few new people are profiled in this monograph.





The return to Phnom Penh, 1979



**Ban Savoeun**

Factory Worker

**Srun Song**

Photographer, S-21 and Prey Sar Prisons

**Khvan Sichan**

Vaccine Maker

**Srei Yeng**

Rubber Transportation Unit Member

**Khuon Ny**

Region Medical Staff

**Khvan Sambann**

Medical Staff, Division 310

**Mong Sam Oun**

Water and Power Plant Worker

**Ing Vannak**

Photographer

**Peang Voar**

Sewing Machine Mechanic

**Chan Leang**

Sewing Unit Committee Member

**Eng Sam Ol**

Medical Staff

**Nop Ngan**

Airplane Factory Worker

**Chhim Vanndy**

Singer

**Phin Ly**

Medical Worker, Division 170

**Sok Heng**

Cook

**Y Thal**

Logistics Unit

**Nhem Sophan**

Medic

**Pen Pheng**

Cigarette Factory Worker

**Sieng Han**

Cooperative Member

**Ros Phal**

Medical Worker

**Chum Thay Y**

Chief of Messengers, P-27 Hospital

## Chapter 1

# The Base People

Khmer Rouge harvesting rice (photo courtesy of the family of Peang Voar, Kampong Thom province)

# Ban Savoeun

## Factory Worker

The stories of Ban Savoeun's brothers, Ban Sarin and Ban Saroeun, are told in Chapter 3

*Interviewed at Santuk District, Kampong Cham Province*

**M**y husband and I worked at a handicraft factory that made cotton thread. When the fighting began in Kampong Cham in 1972, many people died so we went to Phnom Penh. There, my husband worked as a statistician in the agricultural section of the Khmer Republic's Ministry of Planning and Statistics, and I worked on a farm first and then made cakes from rice powder and sugar; they looked like donuts.

Then the fighting came to Phnom Penh. Because there was a lot of bombing, we had to hide in holes in the ground. After I was hit in the upper arm by a piece of shrapnel, I returned to our village and my husband followed later.

Next, we were evacuated to Kratie province. We were called base people. If you were called a new person, the Khmer Rouge might kill you. In Kratie, a man recognized me and my husband from the factory. He accused my husband of having a high rank in the government. But someone who had worked with him in the factory tried to protect him, saying he worked in agriculture and was not high-ranking.

They accused my husband because he had a big belly, so he looked high-ranking. The Khmer Rouge didn't kill him that time, but they tried again later.

One day he said, "Two men asked me to go to work with someone named Peou Vath."<sup>3</sup> He knew then that he was going to be killed. So he told me that he wanted grilled chicken with fish sauce because tomorrow he would die. I had three chickens and killed one to cook for him. After he ate, there was a group meeting. I heard them say they wanted to kill my husband. So I crawled through the eggplant bushes to our small house. When I arrived, I honed a knife until it was white hot and very sharp.

My husband gave me poison. He told me if Peou Vath won, I should swallow it to kill myself, but if he won, he would kill Vath and come back and bring us to Vietnam. In the morning, Vath asked my husband to go away with him. My husband said he couldn't go because he had a headache. The next day Vath asked him again and he gave the same reply. But when Vath learned that we had 15 children, he took pity on us and told the upper ranks that my husband had been killed.

A month later, the chief and others with high rank in the village were killed, and we were taken to a prison called Koh Sokroam. There were nearly 50 people there. We were guarded by men with guns when we planted and harvested sugar cane. We squeezed the juice to make sugar, but we weren't allowed to eat it because they sent it to *Angkar*.

We were there a year or two when I had a dream in which a cement building that was nearby was collapsing. When the falling walls came to me, they stopped. Later, the people from the Southwest Zone came and released us from prison.

I had another dream after that. This time, I dreamed there was a flood and many cars were escaping from it. The next day, the Vietnamese came and my husband and I ran away to Stung Treng province. There was fighting on the banks of the river and the Khmer Rouge collapsed.

On our way home, my husband was apprehended by the Vietnamese. He was so frightened that his lips became purple. Someone recognized him and asked, "Why are you arresting him? He's Ta Chhoam's son." They told the Vietnamese that my husband worked in agriculture, so they released him.

When we came home to our village, my father-in-law was clearing the forest there and gave us a small plot of land. I became a teacher.



Ban Savoeun and three of her 15 children: Ek Chandy (age 8), Ek Chanda (age 7) and Ek Phornny (age 6) circa 1975





Ban Savoeun's sister Ban Saran and her husband Ol, circa 1975



Ban Savoeun's son Ek Sithy and niece Srei Nakk, Kratie province, circa 1978



Ban Savoeun's sister Ban Savath, second from right, in Siem Riep, 1960

# Srun Song

## Photographer, S-21 and Prey Sar Prisons



12-year old  
Srun Song's school photo,  
Phnom Penh, circa 1968

*Interview with his mother, Try Khorn, age 69  
and brother, Srun Srien, age 49  
Koh Thom District, Kandal Province*

**T**ry Khorn: In 1972, we were having lunch when my village chief and some others came to our house and told my son Song to join the revolution. I asked them to please let him finish eating first. They said they would have a lot of food for him after he joined the revolution.

I asked the chief where she wanted to take my son, and she replied, "Don't ask me like that." Then I cried. I didn't know where she had taken my son or if she had taken him out to kill him.

Two years later, Song was living as a combatant in Prek Sdei subdistrict. Someone met him there and said to me, "Your son is very thin." My husband and I went to visit him and saw that he was very sick; we asked if he could live with us, but the Khmer Rouge wouldn't allow it. My husband then took our son and ran back to our house. We had no money for medicine or food. But I did bring him some sugar; after he ate it, he felt better. I was also able to buy medicine with the little bit of gold that I had.

One day about a half a month later, when we had finished working on the farm, I called my son, but he didn't answer. Someone came and stole Song away. They had taken him back to the battlefield.

He came home again about 15 days after the revolution began. Song told me that if someone asked for another of my sons to join the revolution, I should not allow it. When he visited, he brought a lighter with him so that I could trade it for a chicken. He took these photographs then for us to have as souvenirs. He came back one more time before 1979. We weren't able to meet then because I was working, and when I ran to see him, he had gone.

Someone came to our village later to ask about the biography of my son Srien, and asked if he had a brother who worked in Phnom Penh as a photographer. I told him that Song didn't work in a prison, but in an office in Phnom Penh. Then Srien was arrested and taken to prison.

After the Vietnamese came in 1979, a man told me that Song was living in Leuk Dek subdistrict. I went to see him, but he wasn't there. Someone else said that he saw Song riding a horse in the mountains and asked him to come back to our





The Srun family, from left: Kim, Touch, Try Khorn, Lork, and Sim



Srun Song in Phnom Penh with AK47, post-1975



Srun Song, post-1975



Srun Song, circa 1975

village with him. But Song said he was afraid of the Vietnamese and wouldn't come back until they had left. I have been waiting for him ever since.

**S**run Srien: I joined the revolution in 1974. I was in a children's unit working as a combatant, and I had a gun. After liberation, I went to Chakk Ang-Re district in Phnom Penh, where I worked as a guard in Division 12.

In 1975, I was asked to live with Leng, the head of an artillery unit. After Leng was arrested, the Khmer Rouge knew I was connected to him, so they sent me to Office 08 in Phnom Penh [people were sent to this office to write short confessions]. They shackled me then, accusing me of running away from the battlefield, of being a Lon Nol soldier, and of being in Leng's network.

I was sent to Prey Sar Prison in the same year. I'm a good person, but they told my chief that I wasn't, and accused me of being an enemy from the Lon Nol regime. They kept me handcuffed and shackled my legs at night. They also hit my head with an axe handle, and tied electrodes to me and gave me shocks. A man named Chhuon tied my feet and hung me upside down.

In 1976, I saw my brother Song riding by on a bicycle to take pictures of the prisoners. He photographed prisoners in Phnom Penh and sometimes at Prey Sar. I called out to him and he told the guards to look after me. But the guards didn't believe we were brothers because Song had dark skin and I had light skin. Song replied that he looked like his mother and I looked like my father, so they finally believed him.

Before, they gave me only three cans of porridge to eat each day. But after we met, I was given more rice. They also released me from my shackles and sent me to work in the fields. Song then gave me a pair of shoes and sometimes a cigarette. He also took a photograph of me, but I put it in my pocket and someone stole it. Later they moved me to Kadal Pagoda, where I took care of cows and buffalo.

In 1977 and 1978, they sent me to build an airport in Kampong Chhnang province. I tried to work hard and join in the meetings. But in 1978, they sent me back to Prey Sar; I don't know why. They had me look after cows and buffalo again. I did this with old women; most of them were from 30 to 50 years old, and some were older. I stayed there until 1979.

When the Vietnamese came in 1979, I ran to the forest. After a long time without any food to eat and being so thirsty that I had to drink my own piss, I decided to come back home. A man who lived in the village hit my head with an axe and accused me of being a Khmer Rouge, then he drove off in a small car.

**T**ry Khorn: My house was destroyed by fire during the Lon Nol regime. The Vietnamese troops came to our village by boats along the Mekong and burned it down with gasoline. So my children and I took the bus to Phnom Penh and met my brother-in-law there; we had only the clothes on our backs. My husband didn't know how to find work in the city, so he became a *cyclo* [pedicab] driver.

In 1972, my husband said, "It's not easy to live in Phnom Penh," so we went back to our village. I wanted to go to Battambang, but my husband wanted to live in the village because he said there were lots of fruits to eat, and they were



From left: Sim, Srun Song's grandmother and Touch, circa 1975

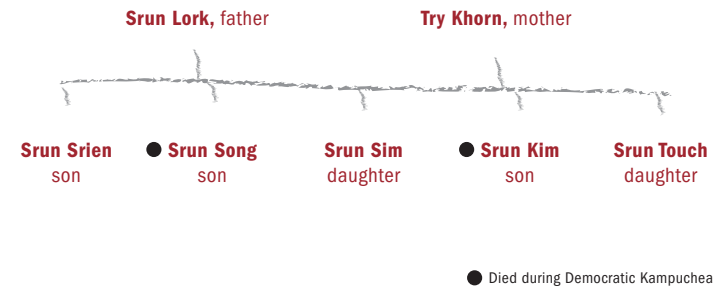


Srun Song,  
post-1975

easy to find. But when we came back home, there wasn't enough food and they were still dropping bombs. Someone accused me, saying I acted like a dog. So, I took my son Kim and ran away to find food. I stole some rice and put it in my skirt for him. I did this every day; if I hadn't, he would have died.

After six months in our village, the Khmer Rouge sent me across the river to Por Tonle prison; my mother and four of my children went with me. I hadn't done anything wrong, but they wanted to kill me there. A week later, someone sent a letter to the prison officials saying that I was from a good family and should be released.

I worked on the waterwheel, transplanted rice, and grew vegetables like corn and soy. If someone stole even one ear of corn to eat, they would be killed. I felt pity for my daughter



because she didn't have enough to eat, while the daughter of the village chief had a lot. One day, I was working at the chicken coop and saw some feed corn. I was also working in the kitchen, so I took one ear of corn and cooked it, then mixed it with some rice. I gave it to other people, not my daughter. But then someone accused me of stealing corn for her. But I did steal rice for my daughter every day. I wasn't happy doing this, but I wanted her to stay alive.

One time, the village chief held my head under water at the river after they accused me of stealing a chicken egg. When my mother saw this, she screamed and they released me. So then I tried to learn to swim because I was afraid they would do it to me again.

*Srun Song's biography was taken at Tuol Sleng on February 18, 1977. It states that he was a 21 year-old middle class farmer who joined the revolution on May 5, 1973, and that his family escaped to Phnom Penh from 1970 to 1973, and then returned to their village. Only his parents' names are given.*



Khvan Sichan and her husband, Thou Sarat, 1973

*Interviewed at Krauch Chhmar District,  
Kampong Cham Province*

**M**y husband Thou Sarat and I had this photo taken a year after we were married. I was pregnant with my oldest child then. Sarat brought me by bicycle to the hospital for a checkup; he pedaled and I sat behind him. I asked him for money to have a photo taken. When I came home in 1979 or 1980, I felt very sad when I saw the photo at my house. Every morning I clean the frame.

Sarat was deputy chief of my vaccine group. I didn't know at first whether he loved me or not, but he asked the group chief if we could get married. When the group chief came to me, I agreed to it. We didn't have a traditional wedding because

## Khvan Sichan

Vaccine Maker

we were in a Khmer Rouge unit and it wasn't allowed. But they did let my brother come; my parents were too old, so he acted on their behalf.

I always remember what my husband told me: "My whole life, I'm lucky to have you as my wife. If I lose you, I will not marry again." I asked him if he thought I was a good wife, and kidded with him: "Do you like me? If you lose me, you should take a new wife. She will be better than me." He said, "I will never take another wife." I told him that if he lost me and married again, I wouldn't be angry.

In 1975, they sent the medical workers from Kampong Cham to the former Pasteur Hospital in Phnom Penh, which the Khmer Rouge called Ph-3. We made vaccines there. After that, we moved around to different factories, and sometimes harvested rice, too. The last place we worked was at the vaccine factory in what had been Calmette Hospital, which was called P-1. My oldest daughter Leap died there in 1978 when she was four years old. I don't know what disease she had.

Staying in Phnom Penh was like being in prison. We had to work all the time. But when I finished work, at least I could go home to my husband.

**O**n January 6, 1979 [the day before the Vietnamese invaded] a boy came to me and said I should pack my bags because he saw all the older people packing their things. So, I found my husband and told him to go home. After I finished work, I walked home quickly and saw the medical staff putting their bags into trucks. When I reached our house, I saw that my husband had put the bags downstairs.

But I couldn't find my husband. One of the neighbors said someone had called him to bring merchandise from the warehouse and load it on the train. Many people who had packed their things were standing in front of our house waiting to go to the train station.

I had someone get our four-year old daughter Lun from the children's unit and then took her to the train station with my daughter Vet, who was less than a year old. Around 6 in the evening, the train departed. After two or three nights, we stopped at Battambang station and someone said the Vietnamese were coming.

I thought Cambodia was at war again. Many people were fleeing and I didn't know what would happen next to my children and me. When we stopped at Thmar Korl station, there was an explosion in back of our carriage. Many small children were injured and taken to the hospital; about three were killed. I didn't see their bodies; I was afraid to look.

The *Angkar* made us get into trucks and we left Thmar Korl on the same night. I sat in the front seat. Someone pointed a gun at the driver and told him to stop the car. He talked with the driver and they must have reached an agreement because we moved on.

That night, we slept at Bavel Hospital. The next morning, they would not let us get into the truck. Instead, they had us walk. I carried our bags on my shoulders and head. We stopped in the middle of a field later; the people from a nearby cooperative made us a small shelter and cooked and boiled water for us.

One night we were sleeping on the ground and looking up at the sky. Lun asked me, "Where is my father?" She said that the stars were so high. I told her, "It's so far; I hope to see your father there." Sometimes my daughter would say, "Mommy; I see father coming," but when I looked, I couldn't see him.

There is a saying, "the father has a four-fold noble nature: pity, sincerity, compassion, and joy." I told Lun that she and her sister had no father, but he loved them very much, and had rocked and kissed her. After I said this, my daughter saw me trimming bamboo and said that if her father were still alive, I wouldn't have to be doing that work. I replied that I must do it so we would have enough to eat. My daughter cried then. She said that she had no one to call father like other girls.

The Khmer Rouge told people to leave, so we headed toward Samlaut district and stopped at O'Reang Khen village. We were there for a while when my daughter became sick with measles. She would scratch until she drew blood. I was very frightened because it was difficult to find medicine. So I found coconut water for her to drink and she improved.

**A**fter she got better, we started walking again. We met a handicapped man named Vy on the way. He offered to carry my older daughter on his bicycle. If it weren't for him, I couldn't have taken care of my children.

When we heard that the Vietnamese were near, I tossed down my bag and screamed “Can anybody help my daughter?” I ran and then threw myself on the ground. I was so scared I could not stand up and pissed without realizing it. But my daughter didn’t cry. A group of men went running by. They picked up my younger daughter and helped her. Someone else helped me up, and we kept going.

The next morning, the man named Vy asked me “Where is your daughter? You threw her away, why didn’t you give her to me?” I told him that the night before, I was so tired that I just threw her away. Vy didn’t know that I was kidding, and became angry. He then gave me my daughter and left.

We stopped to rest one night and the people who were there before I arrived were eating porridge. Vy was there and invited us to eat with him. But the porridge had no brown sugar in it. It was also very dirty because the water was bad. Vy asked why I didn’t give him my older daughter earlier. I confessed that I had been kidding him. He put a pack on the back of his bicycle so that my daughter would have a comfortable ride, and told me, “Don’t worry about your daughter, I have rice for her to eat.”

Next we came to Pursat province. Someone told me that my husband was staying in Leach village there, so I decided to look for him. Vy offered to take Lun, saying that he could reach the village faster because he had a bicycle. The other people with us pushed me to agree. We thought that if my husband was in Leach village, he or our co-workers would recognize my daughter when she rode into town with Vy and know that I was alive.

But I wasn’t able to go to Leach because the Khmer Rouge and Vietnamese were fighting. The Vietnamese won and announced that everyone should go back to their home villages. I didn’t know what to do because Lun was with Vy in Leach, and I didn’t know the situation there. So I decided to go to my home.

A year or two later, I met a woman named Nai Seng who had worked in my unit. She had seen Vy along the road near Leach, and asked him to give my daughter to her so that she could bring her to me. Vy said that he wouldn’t give my daughter to anyone but her mother. Nai Seng said, “What’s wrong with you; you are a soldier and you should give her to me in case you have to fight.” Vy then said, “If I die, the little girl will die with me; if I live, she will live too. I will only give her back to her mother.” She also told me that my daughter called him “Pa.”

When I heard this, I began to be suspicious; I didn’t know Vy’s biography or what his family name was, although he had told me he came from Chamkar Leu district in Kampong Cham province. It’s a very big district; if I had known his village, I would have gone there to find my daughter. Otherwise, I thought Vy loved Lun like a member of his family.

Later I learned that Vy and my daughter reached Leach that afternoon, but were told that my husband had left the same morning. After that, he took her to his village in Chamkar Leu and died 18 days later.

**A**fter the Vietnamese came, I stayed with my mother-in-law. Many people were returning at this time, so I waited for my husband there. But he didn’t come home, so I went back to my village and waited. I stayed with

my sister. We ate rice mixed with corn, but there wasn't enough rice. I was afraid that my brother-in-law would blame me if I didn't do anything, so I worked hard and helped my sister.

I stayed with my sister for two years. Then I began working for others and was able to buy a cow, and a year later, a bicycle. I moved away from my sister's house in the third year because I had enough food to eat.

I used to buy things from a lady named Lang who was living in Rokar Khnor district and had a little grocery stall in the market. One day, Lang asked me about my story: how my husband and I became separated, how many children I had. I didn't want to tell her because then everybody might cry with me. But when I did, Lang always asked for details, and then cried with me.

One day, a neighbor came to my house. He said that someone had sent me a letter and told me to go to Peng Ty's house in my village to get it. Even though it was dark, I jumped on my bicycle and went there. I didn't even take time to comb my hair.

The letter was from Lang. It said she had met a girl who had been living in Chamkar Leu, but had run away to Sre Veal market. This girl said that she lost her mother, and when they were separated, her mother was holding her little sister. Lang suggested that I come and see if this girl was my daughter.

After Vy died, my daughter lived with several families. The last one was very poor. They only had wild yams to eat with their rice. One day, the head of the family told her to look after their cow. But instead, she went to drain water from the pond and the cow ran to eat rice in another field. The head of the family hit her and she ran away.

Lang met Lun at Sre Veal market on the day she ran away. When it was growing dark, Lang told her she should go home. Lun said "I'm not going back because those people who I live with hit me." She told Lang about the time she was with her mother, and said, "When we were running, my mother suddenly disappeared. She was holding my younger sister when I was separated from her." Lang found this very interesting. I had told her I was separated from my daughter and that the man who took her lived in Chamkar Leu.

When I learned about this, I stopped my work and went to the district hall to ask the chief permission to leave. Then I asked my brother to accompany me to Sre Veal. When we reached the market, the villagers said my daughter had moved to Che Yo subdistrict. When we arrived, a meeting was being held. I knelt before the people at the meeting and asked permission to talk. I told them I wanted to find my daughter. They sent me to the Women's Association.

The women there said my daughter had gone to Speu subdistrict to pick beans. It took two hours to reach that place. The Women's Association in Speu wouldn't agree to help me, saying they had no free time. I told them my daughter had scars on her arm and thigh, and that she had a small face, sharp chin, and smooth hair.

They told me to wait until evening when my daughter came back. But I was afraid that if I waited, they might bring a different girl. So I offered to pay a boy who was taking care of some buffalos to take me there. When we reached the bean field, I saw her and knew she was truly my daughter. But she had become ugly. Her skin, which had been light, was dark. I also wondered why she was so small compared to others of her age.

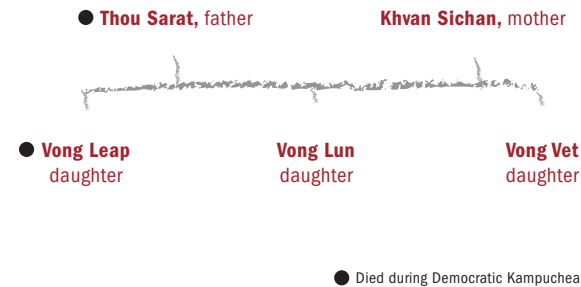


My daughter was afraid to look at me. I told her, “Do not be afraid. I just want to see your arm.” When I touched her hand, I saw the scar, and then asked her about the scar on her thigh. My daughter bowed to me and pulled her skirt up to show me. Then I hugged her and cried. All the other women also cried.

I said, “Now I know you are my daughter. I have come here to bring you back home.” But my daughter didn’t want to go; she wanted to stay with the Women’s Association. When she said this, I screamed and cried loudly. I told her that we had been separated for nine years and offered to stay with her until I died. I said I would leave my younger daughter in my village and stay with her if she wouldn’t go with me.

Lun wanted to ask the Women’s Association what to do. But the people there said that “a thief who wants to steal a buffalo already knows the buffalo’s scars.” They were implying that I was trying to steal my daughter. I replied, “I just came to this village; I have never been here before. I couldn’t have known who my daughter was. I have shown you the evidence [the scars].”

A woman at this meeting said that she loved my daughter very much and if I took her away, it would break her heart. I told her that she was not Lun’s mother; I was. I loved her more and said, “If you were separated from your daughter for nine years, when you see her, what is in your heart? I have been thinking about her all this time. She is really my daughter and I have enough food for her, so I would like to bring her to my home. If she were not my daughter, I would let her see her mother.” The woman didn’t reply, but she did ride away on her bicycle.



The district chief said we had to compensate the Women’s Association for taking my daughter away. He asked for 1,500 riel [the equivalent of about \$370 today]. My brother had 1,000 riel, so I needed someone from my village to bring the rest. But the people were afraid; no one wanted to go. I said I would guarantee the safety of the people traveling and that I would pay for them to go.

They stopped the meeting then, and the people talked with each other in private. But I went close to them so I could listen. I heard them say that I should pay 500 riel to each person at the meeting and give the Women’s Association 1,500. I agreed to do this if they would sign a permission letter for me.

**L**un lived with me for seven years. On the day she died, I was working in the fields. She stayed home because it was raining and she had a headache. My sister ran and told me something was wrong with Lun. I came home quickly, but when I got there, she was dead from epilepsy. She was 19 years old.

# Srei Yeng

## Rubber Transportation Unit Member

*Interview with his wife, Kum Men, age 55  
Stung Trang District, Kampong Cham Province*

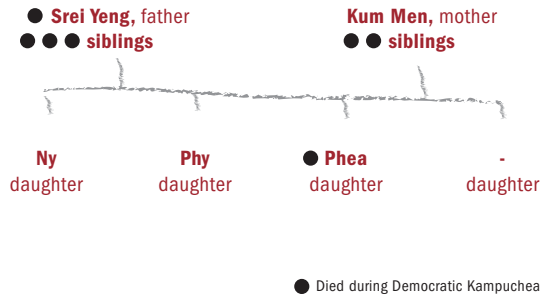
**M**y husband and I met when he was 21 and I was 19. He saw me working in the field and invited me to marry him in 1969. He joined the Khmer Rouge revolution to defend our village against the Lon Nol soldiers. At first he was a guard at the subdistrict office and farmed in the evenings. In 1976, he was assigned to the Ministry of Rubber and Plantations office at Boeung Ket. I worked about 10 km away tapping rubber. He didn't tell me about his duties with the Khmer Rouge, and I didn't ask him anything, either.

In 1977, I learned that the chief of the rubber plantation, a man named Sat, called him for training. I felt hopeless; I knew he had been executed. When the Khmer Rouge called people for training, they were really calling them for execution. Later on, I heard that Sat and the rest of the people in his unit, maybe 20 of them, were called for training at the same time. They were sent to Phnom Penh, but I don't know which place. I was frightened when I heard this. I felt that one day, the Khmer Rouge would kill me, too.

We had four daughters. During the revolution, two of them lived with me, and two with the old women at a children's unit. I didn't trust the old women very much because they didn't care for children like their mothers would. My daughters were small then; the eldest was only four or five years old and the youngest was only six months; she was just beginning to sit up when her father was arrested.

When I finished my work in the evening, I had dinner with my children and then put them to sleep. Early the next morning, I had to take them back to the children's unit. Sometimes, if I had even a little crusty rice, I kept it for my children; they didn't have enough to eat and I felt pity for them. The Khmer Rouge didn't allow us to take food, but sometimes I stole vegetables to make soup for them.

My daughter Phea got sick one day in 1977. I became very frightened when I saw her convulsing and talking deliriously, so I massaged her and hugged her. Some neighbors came to see her, but only a few, because they were afraid of the howitzers. No one called a doctor. Phea died the same day she got sick; she was only four or five years old.



They executed a lot of people at An-Dong plantation and threw them into wells. A man named Sim who lives near me was hit on the neck by the Khmer Rouge and thrown into a well. Many bodies were thrown on top of his, and then the Khmer Rouge shot into them. But he pushed the bodies away and climbed up. Then he called for his parents to come and pick him up. But when his father and brother came to get him from the well, the Khmer Rouge shot and killed them. Sim escaped.

Three of my husband's brothers were Khmer Rouge soldiers; since I've lost contact with them, I assume they are dead. I also lost two of my brothers and some cousins. They were soldiers and I think they died at the front lines.

I still miss my husband and my children still ask about him. I told them that their father was arrested; he disappeared a long time ago and there is no way he can still be alive.

*Srei Yeng's biography showed that he was arrested on April 2, 1977 and sent to Tuol Sleng prison. His confession has not been found.*



Srei Yeng, 1972 or 1973

## Khuon Ny

Region Medical Staff

## Khuon Sambann

Medical Staff, Division 310

*Interview with their brother, Khuon Tong Heng, age 43  
and mother, Voar Yang, age 83  
Chamkaleu District, Kampong Cham Province*

**K**huon Tong Heng: My sister Sambann took these pictures. She was the fifth of the eight children in our family and joined the Khmer Rouge revolution in 1972. I don't know what she did, only that she and her husband lived in Phnom Penh. She was married to a regiment chief named Mon; he kept a camera for taking pictures at the fields and canals.

In 1976, my parents received permission to go to Phnom Penh for two days. They met Sambann there, who told my father that Mon had been arrested. They accused him of being linked to the Vietnamese. His boss Oeun was arrested about two weeks after Mon. I wasn't frightened because I was so young, but my father was very concerned about my sister. He said, "If they ask you anything about your class, tell them that you're middle class; don't tell them you are bourgeois."

Later I learned that Sambann was arrested in early 1977, but I don't know why. She also had a daughter who I never saw. I think they were taken to Prey Sar prison; I didn't know about Tuol Sleng at that time. Probably they took her baby girl there too.

I didn't hear from her or my sister Ny after that. I consulted fortune tellers about Sambann many times. When they told me she was still alive, I felt happy. But now that I see the photo you [DC-Cam] showed me, I know she is dead.

My brother Ry was a Khmer Rouge soldier; he died in 1976 when he was 20. The other soldiers were angry with him because they wanted his tape player and he wouldn't give it to them. Rather than give it to them, he threw it away. So they asked him to climb up a coconut tree and collect the coconuts. Then they hit him with a long knife and killed him. All the rest of my brothers and sisters are still alive except my older sister; she was killed when she stepped on a mine at Sre Veal commune in this district.

**I** joined the revolution in 1975 when I was 12 years old and became a member of Children's Unit 310. Sambann recruited me, telling me that she wanted me to study. She and her husband took me by car to Phnom Penh, where I stayed in training centers at Preah Ketomealea [P-1] and Ang Duong hospitals. I only stayed there about a month, but it seemed like a long time to me.

In 1976 I was moved to Tuol Kork on the outskirts of Phnom Penh. We didn't have enough food and the work was hard. I

carried earth, watered plants, and took care of the farm. But my life was no more difficult than life for the people who lived in the villages. I lived apart from my parents. They were made to guard the cornfields because they had no teeth and wouldn't steal any to eat.

I returned to Phnom Penh in 1978, where I lived at Ang Duong hospital. I studied Khmer lectures and the alphabet there. In the same year, I moved to Thmuong Pagoda in the eastern part of Kampong Cham to care for the wounded. Every day, they brought about half a truck full of wounded soldiers there. Mostly I carried water and cleaned wounds; I also injected people a few times, but wasn't given proper guidelines. I wasn't hesitant to do this work, even though I didn't have any medical knowledge. But it was hard to look at the patients; I strongly detest wounds.

Next, I went to a place called Tuol Kei where they had me feed chickens. I was there only a month when the Vietnamese came. There was hot fighting in Phnom Penh at that time, so I escaped to Pursat province and farmed there until I came home around 1982.

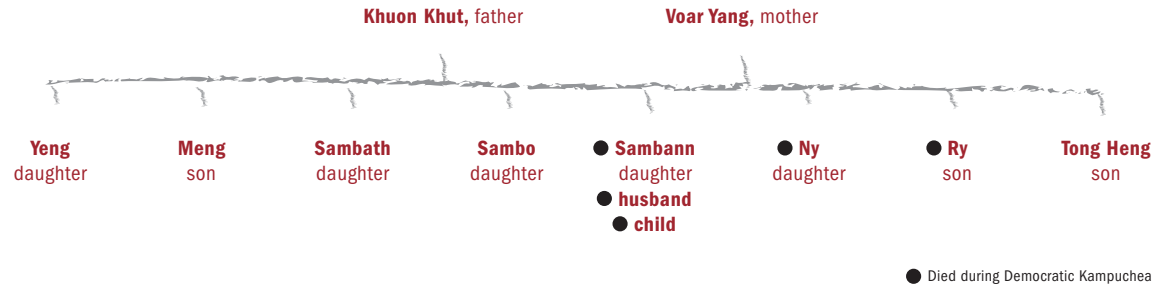
**V**oar Yang: I was happy when my children joined the Khmer Rouge, but also frightened. My daughter sent me a big cooking pot, but later, *Angkar* took it away to use in the collectives.

My husband and I went to Phnom Penh because Sambann wrote me and told me to bring sticky rice in order to celebrate the funeral of my daughter Ny. She had just died and Sambann was waiting for us before they cremated her. After that, she told us that Mon was arrested and detained in a prison north of his house. We were very afraid. I cried,



From left: Khuon Ny, her co-worker Sy, an unidentified co-worker, and Khuon Tong Heng, taken in Kampong Cham province, 1974

## Chapter 1



but did not make a sound, and the men around me looked sour. Then I saw the Khmer Rouge walk my daughter to the west and I wondered where they were taking her. My husband thought Sambann had been tied up in a rice sack and killed. Later, someone told me that if I wanted to see her photo, I should go to Tuol Sleng prison.

I met Sambann's daughter once; she was just a baby, unable to talk yet. I don't remember her name. I think she was killed because they had already arrested her parents.

My children were good people; they were not hard and never did anything wrong. They loved us very much. They died simply because they joined the revolution. I think they went to paradise.

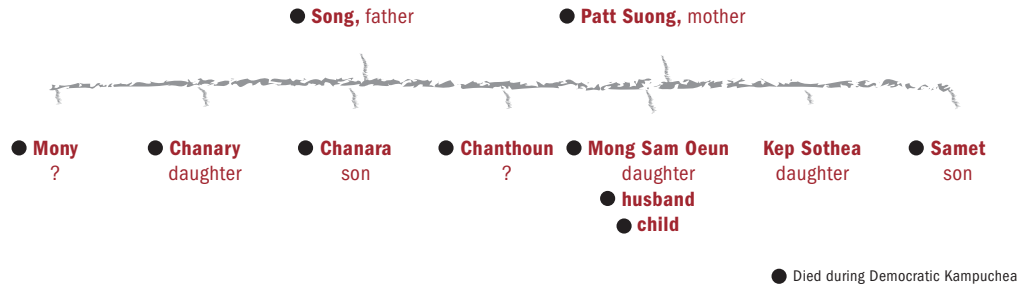
*Khuon Ny's biography states that she was held in Cell 2 at Tuol Sleng. Neither her nor her sister Sambann's confessions have been found.*



Khuon Ny, photographed at Phnom Penh



Khuon Tong Heng, Phnom Penh, 1975



# Mong Sam Oeun

## Water and Power Plant Worker

*Interview with her sister, Kiep Sothea, age 49  
Phnom Penh*

When my family was evacuated from Phnom Penh in 1975, most of them went to Kandal province. My uncle Men Thim told me the *Angkar* there announced that they were looking for people who knew about electricity and water. My sister Oeun and her husband Sarom had worked at the water authority in Phnom Penh during the Sihanouk regime. So, they returned to the city because they didn't want to go to the front.

They went to work for a man named Preap who was the manager at the water and power plant. Uncle Thim became the driver for the power plant's boss. Preap considered my family to be his own. But in 1978, the *Angkar* killed comrade Preap, his parents, brothers, sisters, nieces and nephews. A week later, my uncle saw six or seven Khmer Rouge with guns arrest Oeun, Sarom, their children, our parents, and others in our family – 12 people – and put all of them into one truck. My uncle thought that maybe my family died because of their work.

After 1979, my uncle became sick and his leg swelled up like that of a water buffalo. So, I took care of him and cooked beef for him. When he was better, he went to Sihanoukville by car, but it turned over and he died. He left behind five children for me to feed.

My younger brother Samet and my nephew both worked in a mobile unit and were separated from my family. A man who knew my father told me Samet was still alive. He had met my brother in 1979 and asked him if they could leave the unit together, but my brother was afraid he would be killed. The man didn't know anything about my nephew. There were seven children in my family, and five were killed. I still wonder if Samet is still alive.

In 1975, I was working in Phnom Penh at a textile factory called Seng Thai. When the Khmer Rouge entered the city, I was at my parents' house, so I ran home as fast as could to find my husband, Vuthy. I took the back roads so the Khmer Rouge wouldn't stop me. We met around 5:30 p.m.

The Khmer Rouge came to our house around 7 at night and told us not to sleep near the door because they were patrolling. I had some food left, so I shared it with them. After they finished eating, they told us not to bring money because it



Mong Sam Oeun at S-21



Patt Suong at S-21

would be abolished. They said to take only clothes, salt, and fish paste. I brought these, but I didn't believe them about the money, so I brought it too. I was able to use some of it later.

From Phnom Penh we went by boat as far as Prek Kdam in Kandal province; it took about four days and nights. There, the Khmer Rouge asked about our hometowns. I told them that mine was in Takeo province and my husband's was in Battambang province. So they asked us where we wanted to go. I told them Battambang, and they forced me to climb into a Jeep. My husband was carrying our suitcase and was not allowed to get into the car.

There were millions of people along the road and they tried to get into the Jeep with their luggage, and after a while I couldn't move my legs. I was also carrying my baby, so I screamed and asked them to take their things away. Eventually, they dropped me at Kampong Thom province and told me to get into a car. I didn't want to go and cried hard, asking if I could wait one night for my husband. They agreed and let us stay at the pagoda. The monks were very kind, so I gave them my radio and some records. Then I prayed to the gods to meet my husband. Twenty minutes later, my husband came to the pagoda; he had traded his luggage with an old man who gave him a bicycle.

Vuthy knew we were headed for Kampong Thom province, so he had flagged down a car full of cadres and asked them for a lift. He was lucky because they took him and dropped him near where I was staying.

The next morning, we left for Battambang province, but they dropped us in Kampong Cham province instead. I was surprised because it was the wrong direction. We lived there until the Khmer Rouge collapsed.

They didn't torture us in the village where we lived because they knew we were workers. We planted all kinds of vegetables, but weren't allowed to eat them; when they were ripe, we had to bring them to the *Angkar*. But we did have rice for four months a year.

The chief of our village was kind; he is still alive today. Someone reported to him that my husband was a major in the Air Force and I was a professor. That person was jealous because they saw me wearing jewelry. Usually, such a report would mean that you would be killed, but the chief talked to us first. We told him honestly that we were real workers; he believed us and didn't have us killed.

The district chief didn't believe us, however. He tried to follow our trail to see if we had connections. So I only talked about



technical things to show him that I was a worker. The district chief was killed later after they accused him of being an intellectual. They killed three or four district chiefs after him.

We lived in the same house with four or five other families from Phnom Penh. The *Angkar* killed all of them because they always boasted about themselves. They said they were rich and had cars and other things, but they were really poor. The *Angkar* had secret agents who lived with us and had children go under the houses to listen to what we were saying. I could see the children through a hole in the floor. So I talked only about our suffering.

During the regime, I had seven families to control; they were widows. My house was very big, and I told them they could live with me because I pitied them. Even though I helped them a lot and shared food with them, they were jealous because they saw that my husband and I had a lot to eat. They insulted me, saying that “If I had a husband, he would find food for me,” and reported that I was high ranking. They were all killed.

There was a place called Ta Pum where many people in Kampong Cham were killed, day and night. I could see it from the field; it was maybe one and a half kilometers away. When people there screamed, the wind would carry their voices. After the harvest, we worked as cowherds; sometimes we used this as an opportunity to go near the field and look secretly. We saw them digging pits at night for the people they killed.

In 1977 and 1978 the killing increased. If people were to be killed the next day, a messenger would come by horse to meet with the village chief at night. When villagers heard the sound of a horse, they couldn't sleep. The next day, people would be taken away.



Kep Sothea

*Mong Sam Oeun's biography was recorded at Tuol Sleng on January 26, 1977, when she was 33. Her mother Patt Suong's was written on March 16 of the same year, when she was 58.*

# Ing Vannak

Photographer

# Peang Voar

Sewing Machine Mechanic

*Interview with Ing Vannak's mother, Iep Keav, age 69  
and daughter, Voar Lim Thou, age 45  
Prasat Sambo District, Kampong Thom Province*

This story is recounted by Iep Keav, unless otherwise indicated by the initials of her daughter, VLT

Vannak was the eldest of our 12 children. He studied until he was 13, but gave up after the *coup d'état* and joined the Khmer Rouge revolution in 1974 when he was 16. Our neighbor Chab said he should stay and help his family because his father had already gone off to the revolution. But Vannak left anyway.

He was a serious person. He never argued with anyone, but he never joked with them, either. And he never complained about the work he had to do. When he saw me washing dishes, he always offered to do them himself. But he didn't help on the farm because he was always busy studying.

**VLT:** I don't want to show off; I'm telling the truth. Vannak liked watching people when they were repairing motorbikes. He also liked to repair radios. When he saw his father working on them, he just stayed and watched until his father finished. Vannak could fix watches and clocks and TVs just by watching; he didn't need a teacher.

**VLT:** He visited my mother every holiday; we had three a month, on the 10th, 20th, and 30th. We didn't stop working completely on holidays, but we had less difficult jobs and they gave us a half loaf of bread. When Vannak came home to visit, he never discussed what his life was like; none of our siblings did. He just came and went. He visited home often, but we just talked about everyday things.

**VLT:** My brother moved around a lot. In 1974, he was a photographer in a Kampong Cham militia. In 1976, he went to Phnom Penh, where he took pictures for the Ministry of Commerce and later for the Ministry of Propaganda.

**VLT:** Vannak disappeared around July 1977. My mother told me not to think about him anymore. While I was in the Chamka Leu reeducation center, a man who had worked in Vannak's unit said that my brother went off in an Akhmi truck; it had a closed bed. I think that if they put him on that truck, he died.

**M**y husband Voar worked for the king during the Sihanouk regime. This picture was taken with the king in front of the cow stable at the Royal Palace. He gave my husband a medal; I don't know why, but I think it was because Voar worked to build the country and never



Ing Vannak at left with his co-worker Leang, circa 1976 at Wat Phnom, Phnom Penh

tried to profit from it. When the *coup d'état* occurred, he was so sad and worried about the king that he stopped smoking cigarettes and couldn't sleep.

After the coup, there was fighting across this district and the deputy district chief evacuated my husband from the village. But the Khmer Rouge brought him back and made him the district chief after they took power. Later, he worked for the chief of Khmer Rouge arts and then at K-3. He was both a photographer and tailor. He was skilled at sewing and making patterns, so he also made clothes for the Chinese experts.

We had different jobs during Pol Pot time, and only met when they allowed us, so we didn't see each other often. When my husband disappeared, I didn't know about it. I heard from someone that they put him in a truck that went off to the west. He didn't know where my husband had been taken, but said he had gone for training. I couldn't cry in front of the man who told me; if I had, I would have died too.

My nephew Laut said that they had taken him to Kampong Kan-tout School near Phnom Penh. They closed everything: put boards on the walls and broken glass on top of them. No one could see inside or get in. I rode there on a bicycle to find out what had happened to my husband. But no one would tell me anything.

I wasn't really certain where my husband died, though, until Prin told me. She knew my husband well and saw his photo at Tuol Sleng prison. She said his hands were tied behind his back, and that the photo showed only his torso. He was wearing an undershirt. After that, my aunt Hao saw his picture, too. She put her *krama* [a traditional Cambodian checked scarf] in water and cleaned his photo with it. If the guard hadn't stopped her, she would have taken it off the wall.

I left my village around 1975 when the Khmer Rouge took over Kampong Thom province. I didn't want to go, but they said that all women married to Khmer Rouge soldiers must live with their husbands. I asked the people what I could bring. "It's up to you," they said. I gave a sewing machine, cloth, a Philips radio, a motorbike, and my house to the *Angkar*. After I left, my house was destroyed.

I stayed at Tuol Kork where they assigned me to take care of children. I sewed clothes for them, bathed them, and fed them rice and porridge. Their parents could only visit them for a short time. If the children were beaten, the parents wouldn't know. My daughter Bunna was accused of stealing cloth. Even though she said she didn't take it, they pushed her from a ladder and didn't give her any food for two or three days.

After they caught my husband, the Khmer Rouge drove up to the children's unit in a truck. It was early in the morning; I had cooked porridge for the children and called them to come and eat, saying it was delicious. At that moment, someone called me to get in the car. I had no feeling. I thought if they were going to take me, it would be up to *Angkar*.

They told me to pack my bags, but I said I didn't want to take anything. They then said I was going to the reeducation

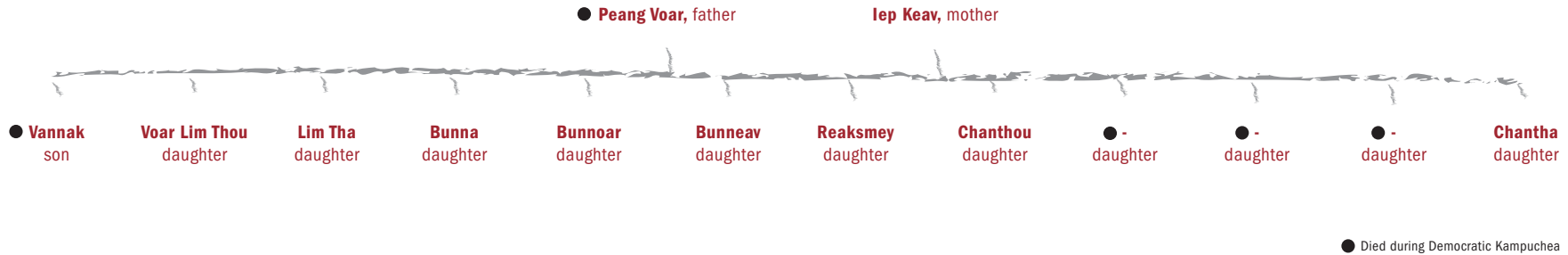
center at Ta Khmao in Kandal province, so I should take medicine, a bottle of wine, clothes and a mosquito net. I replied that I didn't need these things any longer.

One of my daughters became sick while we were living at the reeducation center. After four or five days, they told me that I should take her to the hospital because the center had no doctor. When we reached the hospital in Phnom Penh, she was losing a lot of blood so they gave her a transfusion. Later, they said she was better, so we were taken back to Ta Khmao. But after a few days, she was sick again so we returned to Phnom Penh. She is still alive today.

I gave birth to a son in Phnom Penh, and four months later they sent us to another place in Kandal province. They let me bring two of my daughters with me. The 8-month old was sick because I didn't have any breast milk. So I cooked porridge with salt and a little sugar for her to drink. But then the Khmer Rouge gave her Chinese and French medicine and she had a reaction. Ten days later, she was dead. I buried her.

Next they sent me to Thlok Kao in Kampong Speu. It was very hard to live there. One day someone would be alive and the next, dead. When the Jeeps came for us, I held my baby son close to my chest and I didn't dare to eat. When the Jeeps came to take the people away, we knew that we would probably die.

When the Vietnamese were coming, I ran to Kampong Speu province and finally to Phnom Penh. There, my daughter saw people selling cakes made from coconut. She told me how hungry she was, but I had no rice to trade for cakes. I told her that when we reached our village in Kampong Thom, we would have enough food. I lacked a lot then, so I stole materials from storage depots.



But I was afraid the Vietnamese would catch me and all of my children would become orphans. We had to stay in Phnom Penh because my daughter was wearing Khmer Rouge shoes made from rubber tires. Her feet became red and she didn't want to walk. She told me to go on without her. I told her she would stay with me.

One day, a policeman said we should wait because a bicycle cart was coming and we could ride in it. On the way home, we had no rice to cook. A man told me to ask the villagers for some. But I didn't want to do this; my god, in my entire life, I begged for food only once before. Someone told me not to be shy; be sure to ask the people. Before deciding to ask for rice, I rubbed my nose for good luck, and the people gave me rice. Then I continued walking until I reached home.

*Peang Voar's biography shows that he was arrested at the Ministry of Public Garments Industry on February 27, 1977, when he was 42 years old. He was held in Tuol Sleng. No confessions or execution dates have been found for him or his son.*



Ing Vannak's father Peang Voar with King Sihanouk, 1964

# Chan Leang

Sewing Unit Committee Member

*Interview with her sister, Chan Sok Kim, age 47  
Krauch Chhmar District, Kampong Cham Province*

There were seven children in my family. All of them joined the Khmer Rouge in 1970 except my sister Neung and me. Neung wanted to join the revolution, too, but her husband would not agree to it. My parents wouldn't let me because I was too young. But I joined in 1974. The schools had been closed since 1970, and I wanted to study medicine like my older siblings, who had learned it from the Khmer Rouge.

My sister Leang failed her baccalaureate, but then she got engaged. She married Nhem in 1967; he worked for a company that imported spare parts for motors. They had their first son in 1968 and joined the Khmer Rouge together after the *coup d'état*.

In 1975, they were transferred to Phnom Penh and I went with them. Leang worked at O Reussey in the sewing unit, and my brother-in-law and I went to Phsar Chass [both are markets in Phnom Penh]. He was on the staff at the Ministry of Commerce and I was a cook.

In 1976, the Khmer Rouge sent Nhem to China for a month. After he was back for six or seven days, they arrested him in the meal hall at Phsar Chass. When he came to tell me, he was carrying his third son. He said he had to go because *Angkar* had called him. About two months later, my sister was arrested. Two of her sons were at a children's unit, but they arrested the two who were living with her. The youngest one was less than a year old.

They held a meeting at Phsar Chass later and told us that my sister and her husband were hidden enemies. They said my sister was linked to the KGB and my brother-in-law was linked to the CIA. I was nervous because my sister had held a high position. They criticized me many times. I confessed that I accepted all my previous mistakes.

Next, they transferred me to a mobile unit at Phsar Chass; because I was a cook, I thought they were afraid I would put poison in their food. It was much harder work and there wasn't enough to eat at the mobile unit, so I became debilitated. The people at the mobile unit knew about my sister and so they didn't talk to me. I felt very isolated. Then I was sent to Pech Nil in Kampong Speu province and worked on the railway. Most of the workers there were prisoners, so they only criticized us for not working hard enough.

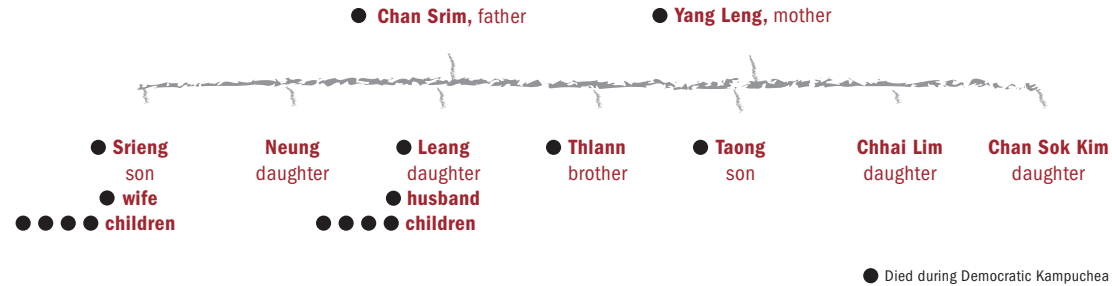


18-year old Chan Sok Kim  
at the sewing unit in  
Phnom Penh, 1976

Center: Chan Leang's  
husband Prum Nhem  
and Chan Leang, 1975



Chan Leang, left, 6 months  
pregnant, at Kampong Soam  
in 1975



When the Vietnamese came, the Khmer Rouge evacuated me to a cooperative in Battambang province along the Thai border. I escaped from there and walked about half a month before I reached home. I was scared because there were a lot of Vietnamese soldiers. The Khmer Rouge had told us that the Vietnamese would shoot and kill anyone they saw wearing black clothes, but they didn't.

I stopped at my brother-in-law's village on the way home; his siblings told me that my parents had been executed in 1977. They had accused my mother and father of being linked to the previous regime. They took them to the river and killed them. I didn't go to my parents' house after that; I was too stunned and sad.

My brother Thlann had heard of my sister's arrest and knew that the Khmer Rouge were watching him, so he ran home. But they caught him and executed him along with my parents. My two other brothers also died at the front lines fighting the Lon Nol soldiers.

I have so much regret that the Khmer Rouge cheated me. I sacrificed everything I owned and my happiness with my parents to serve the revolution. I expected that I would

liberate the country and bring it to prosperity, but instead they killed my parents and most of my siblings.

*Chan Leang's biography shows that she was arrested in December 1976 and sent to Tuol Sleng.*

*Prum Nhem, Chan Leang's husband, was a member of the State Commerce Committee at the Khmer Company for Foreign Trade, which was part of the Ministry of Commerce. Documents held at DC-Cam show that in 1976 he signed invoices for the sale of 1,052,770 metric tons of soy beans, white sesame, and rubber to the Korean Ministry of Trade. He also oversaw the sale of 752,001 MT of kapok, strychnine, malva and betel nuts, dried gecko lizards, armadillo scales, pepper, frangipani, Tiger Balm, chaulmoogra seeds (used for treating leprosy), raw rubber, coffee, cardamom, and lotus seeds to China in the same year.*



# Eng Sam Ol

## Medical Staff

*Interview with his sister, Eng Sithin, age 47  
Kang Meas District, Kampong Cham Province*

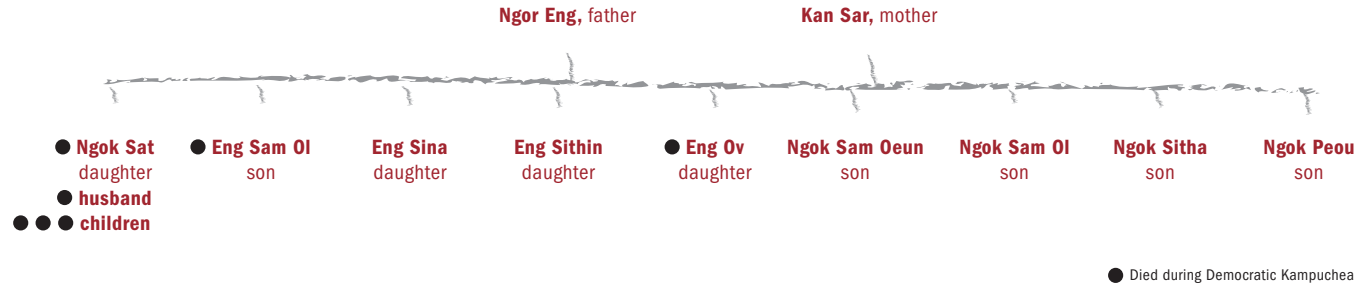
Sam Ol studied until he was 14. He then entered the monastery for a year, but was forced to disrobe after the schools and pagodas were closed. The Khmer Rouge didn't believe in Buddhism and wanted to eliminate it. They didn't need monks and didn't want people to celebrate any festivals. One monk in our village refused to disrobe, so they came in the middle of the night, tied him to a banana tree, and killed him.

Sam Ol joined the revolution in 1972 when he was 20 years old. He was recruited by Yem, who had also disrobed. At first, the Khmer Rouge asked him to serve as a soldier, but he refused. He said if they let him be a medic, he would go. Because he didn't have any medical skills, he studied for a year. After that, Sam Ol moved around a lot; he was in Kob Srov [a suburb of Phnom Penh] for about three years, and then in Phnom Penh just before he disappeared.

He visited home twice and also sent information to our parents. The first time was before Phnom Penh was liberated; he came with the chief doctor that time. He just spent the day; he didn't sleep here.

The second was in 1975; he came alone and was riding a bicycle. He was bringing a ripe melon for our parents, but along the way, an old man asked him for it. He saw that the old man was very thin, so he gave it to him because he was a good-hearted person. He didn't spend the night that time, either. Sam Ol brought his photo the second time he visited, and told us to keep it "just for looking." He talked about his work, too, but not much because my father didn't like it. My father always protested against the Khmer Rouge, so my brother told him, "Dad, just do what they order you and do not resist." He also wrote my father a letter in 1978 and told him not to complain or he would be killed. We were too afraid to reply to him.

Our family was evacuated from our village to Reay Pay [in Kang Meas district of Kampong Cham province] in 1976 or 1977; those who didn't want to join the revolution were considered new people and evacuated. Most of our village went there; they accused us of being high-class students. If people refused them, they tied them up and hit them, saying we had to respect *Angkar's* orders. I saw one man who ran home to hide from the Khmer Rouge. They captured and killed him at the riverside. Then they killed his parents and sister.



I worked in a mobile brigade carrying earth and transplanting rice. My parents were there too. My mother was told to pick corn. In 1978 she was hungry and ate some raw corn, and then put some in her pocket for my father. They wanted to take her for education, but she apologized to them and gave them a pillow, so they released her. No one could help us because we were April 17 [new] people; even the people who worked for the Khmer Rouge could not help their families.

Three of the nine children in my family were killed. My sister Ngok Sat and her husband were doctors during the Lon Nol period. Both were killed. Her eldest child was in a mobile unit and disappeared, and their other two children died of starvation. My sister Eng Ov was an April 17 person and also killed. Sam Ol was the only one of my brothers who died during the revolution.

*Eng Sam Ol's May 1976 biography from Tuol Sleng shows that he came from a middle-class farming family. It states that his sister worked as a midwife at an "enemy place."*



Eng Sam Ol at age 12

OPPOSITE  
 Left Monk Eng Sam Ol, age 18, at Dei Buon (The Four Hands) Pagoda  
 Right Eng Sam Ol at age 22-23



# Nop Ngan, aka Sar

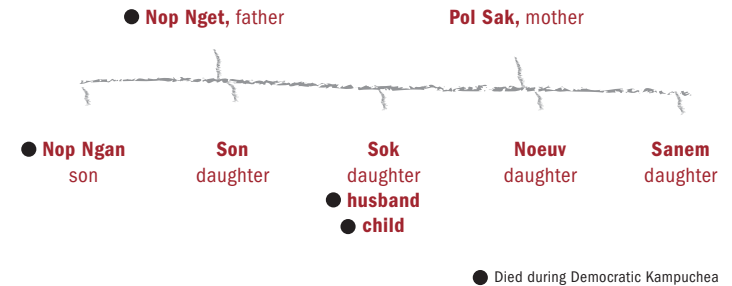
Airplane Factory Worker

*Interview with his sister, Nget Sok, age 56  
Daun Keo District, Takeo Province*

In 1964, when Sar was 18 or 19, he became a Lon Nol soldier. This is something he wanted to do and asked our parents for permission to join. After he was a first lieutenant for three or four years, he was transferred from the Tram Khnar military garrison to Phnom Penh. Our house in the village was burned down when the Lon Nol soldiers were fighting, so all of our family moved to Phnom Penh to live with Sar in the house he rented there.

Sar went to Taiwan in 1973 to study *tae kwan do* for three months. He was still working as a soldier, but didn't have enough money to help his family. So, because he was a good athlete, he became a second-level film star. The big stars in his films were Kong Sam Oeun and Nop Nem. I saw three of his seven movies: *When the Frog Cries*, *the Girl Panics*, *Tomato with Dried Fish Men*, and *Dad, Please Have Pity on Mom*. In the stories, men caught women and tied them up, and Sar helped them.

We were all evacuated from Phnom Penh the day after April 17; the Khmer Rouge told us we had to leave because the



Americans were going to bomb us. My family went to my grandfather's hometown in Kampong Speu province. I dug earth and transplanted rice. The older people did what they could; mostly they dug up trees.

We lived in small cottages with coconut palm roofs. I lived with my husband, while Sar lived with my parents and unmarried siblings. He dug rice, too, but he also transported it to other villages. The Khmer Rouge asked again and again about his job. They said he was an athlete. In the end, he thought they really believed he was a farmer.

But one day in 1976, they took Sar, telling him that he would join a special unit. He was the only one they called. Later the village chief told me that "your older brother was taken." I was not able to cry. If I had cried, they would have killed me.

I never saw him again. I kept this photograph of him in my shirt during Pol Pot time. I had another one of him when he was a soldier, but it was destroyed. After 1979, one of his friends, who had been a soldier with him, said that he saw my brother's photograph at Tuol Sleng prison. It made me sick to think about it, so I never went there.

**M**y father died in 1977. He didn't have enough to eat and became sick. They wouldn't allow him to rest at home, so they took him to the hospital and he died there.

During Pol Pot time, I had two children. The younger one lived with me. Phally, the older one, lived in a children's unit. When she was 10, she was digging into a termite hill and died. She had no water to drink.

One afternoon my husband Duk Huon and I were working together; the men were digging earth and the women were carrying it. The Khmer Rouge called him and 47 others to plow rice, saying they needed extra forces. I packed a bag for him and he left. I never saw him again.

*Nop Ngan's biography, taken at S-21, states that he had worked at a train station, as an athlete, and at an airplane factory. He was married to a Laotian woman and had studied in Laos. He was arrested in March 1976 for "wanting to flee to Laos."*



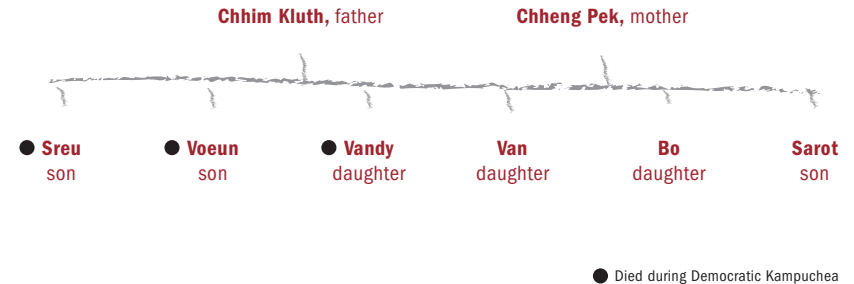
Nop Ngan, 1972



Nget Sok in 1967, a few days before her marriage

# Chhim Vandy

Singer



*Interview with her brother, Chhim Sarot, age 39  
and sister-in-law, Sok Kan, age 51  
Stung Tr'ang District, Kampong Cham Province*

**C**hhim Sarot: There were six children in my family; three are still alive. The oldest was Sreu; he disappeared, then Voeun, who died on the battlefield. The next was Vandy, who we called Dy. She was an artist during the Khmer Rouge, and would be about 50 years old today. She sang beautifully and she was very beautiful.

Four or five people came from the province one day and told our village that the person who could sing the best would be allowed to go. Many women tried, but Dy won. Our parents did not want her to join the Khmer Rouge because they were afraid to be separated from her and have her go far away. The province people gave her two or three days to make up her mind to join them. But if you decided not to join, they forced you.

She trained every day at the pagoda from six or seven in the evening until ten o'clock. In 1972 or 1973, they sent her to Phnom Penh.

She visited home once before she disappeared; it was in 1975. Dy came by herself and stayed for three days. Although she talked to my parents, I don't know what she said. I was young then and didn't listen.

My brother Voeun performed with Dy, but later he was sent to the battlefield. Three or four days after he was killed, they sent us a letter and told us.

**I** was a children's chief during the Pol Pot regime. I collected clusters of rice and cow dung with the other children. We went to the fields every morning and did not get to see our parents. I think they did not send me to the battlefield because I had polio since I was three months old.

I was happy when the Khmer Rouge liberated our village. The Lon Nol soldiers had bombed it many times. When the bombs dropped, I hid in holes in the ground. One time, many students were killed while they were walking home from school.

I miss my brothers and sister, especially when I see my neighbors living together while I am alone.

**S**ok Kan: Chhim Sreu and I got married in 1970. Five years later, he was forced to join the Khmer Rouge revolution. He was a zither player and was sent to Phnom Penh to perform for the soldiers. He disappeared in 1977.

He visited me once just before he disappeared. He wanted me to come to Phnom Penh, but I didn't want to go because the situation wasn't good there, I was very pregnant at the time, and I had another child to take care of. After I gave birth, he came back again and tried to make me live with him. But I wasn't in good health and refused to go. So he returned to Phnom Penh and disappeared. I heard that he stopped working as a musician and went to work in a factory. I miss him, especially when I hear wedding music.

**I**n 1977, I saw the Khmer Rouge arresting people who hadn't done anything wrong. They arrested them and took them away in carts, but I don't know where they went. They told people they were taking them to a new village. But when the carts came back, there was no one in them. Soon after, they began giving those people's clothes to the villagers to wear. None of us talked about this because they would have taken us to be killed.



Chhim Vandy, upper row, third from left

# Phin Ly

Medical Worker, Division 170



25-year old Phin Ly in 1975, shortly before the Khmer Rouge took power

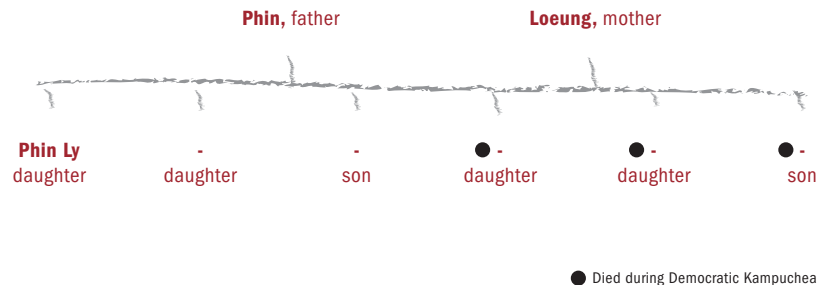
## *Interview at Sa-ang District, Kandal Province*

I joined the revolution in 1972 after the Khmer Rouge took over my village. I thought it was exciting and the village chief told me the East Zone needed medical staff. Also, I thought if I stayed home, I would have no work. Many joined, including all of my brothers and sisters; the men became soldiers and the women worked on the medical staff.

From then on, I was never allowed to visit home or write my family. They told me there was no need to visit because my parents were safe and had enough to eat.

At first I worked near my village in the East Zone hospital. I treated some soldiers who were wounded, but most of the patients had malaria. Around 1974, there was fighting, so they sent my unit to a place called Prek Pra south of Phnom Penh.

Chan Chakrei was the chief of Division 170 where I worked. They arrested him in 1977 and accused him of being on the side of the Vietnamese. But he was a gentle man, and he didn't join the Vietnamese. After



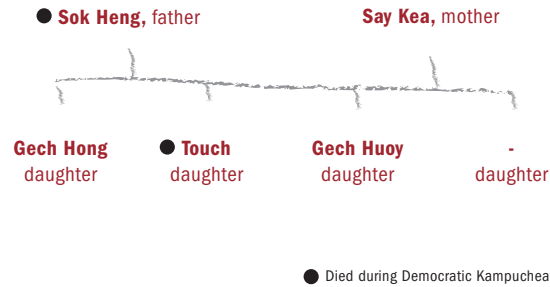
that, they accused me of an association with Chan Chakrei and I was taken to Prey Sar prison for reeducation with the other people in my unit.

I didn't do anything wrong. While I was there, the chief said that if anyone made any mistakes, they would be killed. So I learned the situation, and I always worked hard and struggled to live.

In 1977, I was sent to Kampong Chhnang airport to cut wood and plants. They took many people there to be reeducated. Many of them were from Division 170, and they accused these people of betraying *Angkar*.

When the Vietnamese came, we ran away to the jungle. I walked along the Cambodian-Thai border until my legs swelled. Someone said that if I tried to go home, they would kill me. But I missed my parents and in 1982, I persuaded my husband to go back. When I reached my village, I couldn't find all of my siblings. A few years later, however, my sister came home, and my brother after that. Another had died and two others disappeared during the revolution.





Sok Heng in a photograph taken at home, circa 1966

## Sok Heng

### Cook

*Interview with his daughter, Gech Hong, age 50  
Sa-ang District, Kandal Province*

**M**y father was a small businessman; he bought pigs and cooked them for wedding ceremonies. He was an honest person and never argued with anyone. He could not only read, but knew many languages fluently, like Chinese and Vietnamese. I remember when I was young he took me to eat noodles in Phnom Penh. I heard him speak Vietnamese to the waiter while they were bringing us food.

One day, the village and commune chiefs called him to the revolution to join the cooking unit. He did not want to go, but if he refused, they would accuse him of betraying *Angkar*. So, he followed them and did not complain. After that, they sent him to Koh Kor prison in Sa-ang district of Kandal province and we didn't hear from him again. They killed most people there because they had light skin and high education.

My mother cried after he left, but did not let anyone see her. If *Angkar* knew she cried, they would have killed her. I nearly went crazy because I was very tired and missed my father so much; I did not want to live any more.

*Angkar* suddenly appeared one day and caught my younger sister Touch when she was carrying cow dung. They accused her of being entangled with my parents. First they sent her to Koh Kor, and after that Tuol Krasaing to be reeducated. I looked for her everywhere, but nothing. I met a village woman who told me where she was and that I must be careful because *Angkar* would find me too. After I heard that, I no longer asked about her.

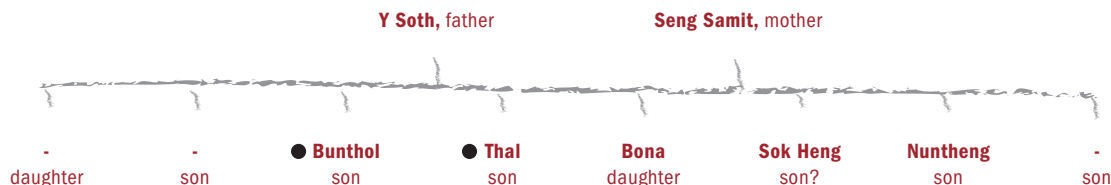
**I** built dams and carried earth during the revolution. Many boys and girls died from the earth falling down on them, and others died from starvation and being forced to do heavy work. Their health was destroyed because they constantly worked in the water and didn't have enough to eat. We didn't stop until liberation.

At first, I assumed that my father died at Koh Kor. But after liberation people in my village visited Tuol Sleng prison. I did not go with them because I was poor; I didn't even have a bicycle. They saw my father's photograph there and told me about it. Later I went to the Royal Palace in Phnom Penh, thinking my father's photograph would be there, but I could not find it.

*Sok Heng was arrested on March 7, 1976 and taken to Tuol Sleng. He was 51 years old.*

# Y Thal

## Logistics Unit



● Died during Democratic Kampuchea

*Interview with his mother, Seng Samit, age 73  
and friend, Nhem Nhien, age 52  
Prey Chhor District, Kampong Cham Province*

**S**eng Samit: Because of the fighting in our village in 1970, Thal's school was closed, so he went to study tailoring in Phnom Penh. He was 18.

In 1973, I flew there in an airplane to bring him back, but later he returned to the city. The village chief called him to join the revolution at the end of the year. Then Thal sent me a letter asking if he could go to Thailand. He said someone had bought a ticket for him. But I was afraid to let my son go there, so I sent a monk to bring him back to the village.

At first, Thal worked in a mobile unit at the rice fields. He had no gun anymore, only a grub hoe. Then he was sent out to be on the medical staff and worked as a tailor too. After liberation, they made him into a soldier and he was stationed in Phnom Penh at a military office. He worked there until 1976, and then he was sent back to Prey Chhor and other places. He always changed like this.

Thal often visited home for an hour or two. He told me to spend my money quickly because they wouldn't be using it anymore. But I didn't believe him and kept it instead.

My husband visited Thal in 1975, and said that he was fine. He sent us some salt, *prahok* [fish paste] and cotton, and told my husband to divide it among our family. I buried the salt because I was scared that the Khmer Rouge would learn that I had it. Thal came home that year, too. He didn't say much; only that he couldn't stay in the village and that the situation wasn't good, so he had to go back. His brothers Bunthol and Nuntheng went with him. Nuntheng is still alive.

When the Vietnamese came in 1979, I heard that Thal ran away in a car that had lots of sewing machines and clothes in it. Then in 1981, someone who had dug canals on the Thai-Cambodian border told me he had asked my son to come back with him. But Thal replied, "Why should I come home if my parents have disappeared?" The fortunetellers say he is still alive.

**N**hem Nhien: In 1968, I went to Phnom Penh to study, but because my family was very poor, I changed and began to learn tailoring. When I came back home in early 1973, the Khmer Rouge investigated my background



Y Thal, undated photo

every day, and at night they would sneak into my house and spy on me. They suspected that I was a government official. I was in a difficult position. I didn't want to leave my family because I was the only child. But if I stayed in my village, the Khmer Rouge would have killed me. I thought that if I had a gun, I could defend myself. So I made the painful decision to go to the battlefield with the Khmer Rouge. I was with them from 1973 until 1979 when Vietnam invaded Cambodia.

I was a gunman and fought along the Vietnamese border, but I was still a Buddhist. I knew what was a good result and what was a bad one. When I was fighting, I always prayed that I wouldn't kill anyone because the war was Khmer against Khmer. They tried to make me a group chief, but I refused because *Angkar* would order me to kill Khmer people. I didn't want to do this, and thought only about how to stay alive. I am happy because I survived.

*Y Thal was 23 when he wrote his undated biography at Tuol Sleng. It states that he joined the revolution in 1973; he did not name any members of his family.*



Y Bunthol, right, 1978

Chapter 1



Y Thal, left, with friend 1972



Y Thal, center

# Nhem Sophan

## Medic

Chapter 3 gives an account of Nhem Sophan's brother Nhem Noeun

*Interviewed at Prey Chhor District, Kampong Cham Province*

**T**oday I live in the same house where I was born 49 years ago. Five of the children in my family joined the Khmer Rouge revolution; I am the only one of them who is still alive. My brother Noeun joined first; he took my sister Thach in 1971, and then my sister Thol and me in 1973. No one forced me.

I worked in an office first, but then I had three months of training to be a midwife, and after that, three more months to be a medic. I took care of injured soldiers in a hospital, mainly cleaning wounds. Most of the patients were Khmer Rouge soldiers who were wounded on the front lines. At my hospital, we treated only those with slight wounds. If people were seriously hurt, we sent them to a top hospital.

I took this picture of my friend Kea and her husband Taing. Taing was a division chief and he sent Kea to live at the hospital where I was working so she could give birth there. Later, the Khmer Rouge sent them to the Ampil Teap cooperative. Taing disappeared first, and after that Kea and her baby.

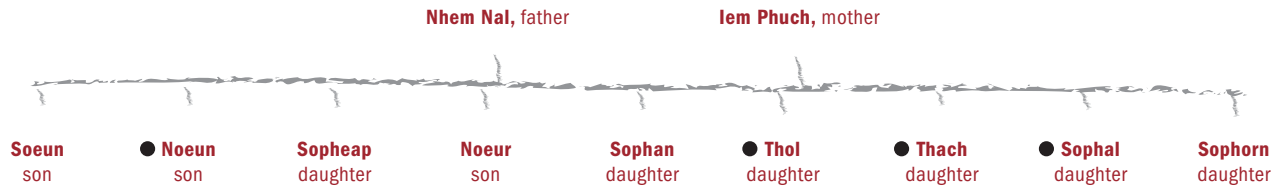
In 1975, I visited my brother Noeun for three days in Siem Reap. He sent someone from his unit to accompany me.

When I arrived he said he barely recognized me because we had been separated for so long. He stroked my head and took this picture of me in front of his house. I was happy because I'd never seen my photograph before.

I began working as a dentist in Kampong Cham in 1975. They sent dentists from Phnom Penh and Kampong Thom province to teach me for a little while; then they disappeared. Most of my patients were villagers. Some of them were hurt, and some wanted their teeth extracted or false teeth. Ke Pauk [then secretary of the North Zone; see Nhem Nouen's story in Chapter 3] came to my office to get new teeth. I shook his hand afterward. But when other chiefs came, I was scared to look them in the eye. I stayed at this work until my dentist group was demobilized.

Noeun was arrested in 1977 or 1978. The Khmer Rouge didn't tell me anything about it, just that my brother had betrayed the revolution. They called me to a meeting where they spoke about it. Then they sent me to live at the cooperative at Prey Tor-Toeung.

My chief told me later that someone had sent my name to a man called Tos in the West Zone. Then Tos sent a letter to the district. When the district chief saw it, he kept it and they



● Died during Democratic Kampuchea

started to follow me. Someone once called to me and told me to get into a car. I didn't know what they had planned, but I thought they were sending me to be killed. They told me I was going to work in agriculture and gave me some clothes; I knew these came from people the Khmer Rouge had killed. But I guess they weren't clear about my biography because they sent me to live in my village.

After the Vietnamese came, they killed our village chiefs in 1982 and 1983. The chiefs punished our people from 1975 to 1978, so the villagers killed them out of vengeance. I heard they tied them up and called the villagers to see them. If they had been good, they would still be alive, but they were nasty, so the villagers killed them.

*The biography of Nhem Thol was taken at Tuol Sleng. A deputy of the women's Office 51 in the Ministry of Commerce, she was arrested on February 25, 1977 at the age of 29.*



Nhem Sophan, age 15, in medical staff uniform, 1975



Kea, a friend and co-worker of Nhem Sophan, and her husband Taing, 1975



Nhem Sophan's friend Kea, at right, 1975

# Pen Pheng

## Cigarette Factory Worker

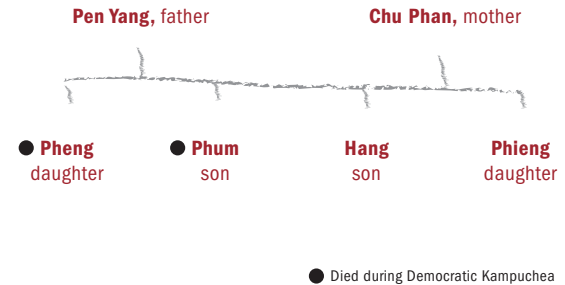
*Interview with her brother, Pen Hang, age 45  
Chamkar Leu District, Kampong Cham Province*

They came for my sister after she stopped studying in grade 9.<sup>4</sup> At that time, the Lon Nol and Vietnamese soldiers were fighting, and the airplanes began dropping bombs. A lot of people died, as well as cows and buffaloes.

She didn't want to go, but they pointed out that we had to. My parents cried because they didn't want her to join. Then my sister hugged my parents and they all cried.

At first, they took her, my brother Phum and many other people by horse cart to work at the dam near this village. Then she went to be a soldier. She visited home once two years later, and stayed for only a few hours; she took a shovel with her, but I don't know why. She hugged my family and told us goodbye, saying we would be separated forever.

A man named Kek who is dead now told me that she went to Phnom Penh and worked in a secret factory there. After the Khmer Rouge collapsed, I went to a fortune teller who told me she was dead, so I'm no longer waiting for her.



My father died in 1973 after my sister and brother left. He became sick because he missed his children. Before he died, he said, "I will go to meet my daughter."

I worked as a medical staff during the revolution, first at the commune hospital and later as a mosquito sprayer. I sprayed all the nearby villages; when I finished, I would do it again. And at the end of the day, I would work in the fields.

In 1978, just a month before the regime collapsed, they pointed to my name on a list and forced me to get married. The next day, I sat on a chair at the ceremony, determined to do what they said. Along with 160 couples, my wife and I promised to live together and have a child within a year. The Khmer Rouge gave us new black clothes and a cotton scarf, and they had food to eat at the ceremony. After the revolution, we came home and now have five children.

*Pen Pheng's biography shows that she was arrested on October 22, 1976 at the age of 22. Her confession was taken at Tuol Sleng. It states that she joined the revolution in 1970, working in an arts group and as a medic before quitting the Khmer Rouge because her family had been evacuated. Pheng rejoined in 1974 as a soldier. Transferred to Phnom Penh in 1976, she was sent to work in the B-4 cigarette factory. Her last confession was dated May 7, 1977.*

<sup>4</sup> This is equivalent to a fourth-grade education in the west (formerly, Cambodian children began school in grade 12 and graduated after completing grade 1).





Pen Pheng at S-21,  
1976 or 1977

# Sieng Han

Cooperative Member

*Interviewed at O Reang Ov District,  
Kampong Cham Province*

This photograph was taken four or five months after liberation, along the road at O Reang Ov. Many people were having their photographs taken, so I did too. I wanted one so that my children could look at it when I was dead. Only four of my seven children are in the picture; the three youngest died.

When the Khmer Rouge entered my village, they put my money and house into a collective. After that, I owned only a shell of a house and shell of a body.

I saw them call the villagers to be killed. When the villagers left, they never came back. I don't know what they did wrong, but the Khmer Rouge put them in a well near the school. I had a lot of pity for them, especially the mothers and children; they killed the children with pieces of wood.

My own children were very hungry and cried, and I wept for them. When I remember this, my heart is full of sadness.



Sieng Han, center, with children Yat, Nhe, Yay and Sambath, September 1975

# Ros Phal

## Medical Worker

*Interview her brother-in-law, Long Chhuon, age 65  
Sa-ang District, Kandal Province*

Phal volunteered for the revolution in 1972 when she was about 17. Her mother thought if Phal worked on the medical staff, she would gain honor. I don't think Phal knew much about the revolution; she only wanted a job.

After working at the region hospital, she was transferred to Phnom Penh. I went to see her after the Khmer Rouge liberated Cambodia, but I was scared to stay in the city so I went in the morning and came back in the evening. She gave me this picture and said she took it with other women in her unit.

I was just an ordinary person; I never joined the Khmer Rouge. I worked plowing the earth, and plowed until I nearly died. We only got three scoops of porridge a day and were allowed to sleep only at midnight.

We did not menace the people who were evacuated to this village. Later, some were sent to Battambang and some to other places. Those who weren't evacuated were killed at the pagoda.



Ros Phal, far left, 1978

# Chum Thay Y

Chief of Messengers, P-27 Hospital

*Interview with his sister-in-law, Pheng Sreng, age 58  
Koh Sotin District, Kampong Cham Province*

**Y** was born in 1946; he was a teacher for two years before the *coup d'état*. After he had gone to the Khmer Rouge revolution for a long time, his father went to Stung Trang district to find him, but Y didn't want to come back. He was a soldier.

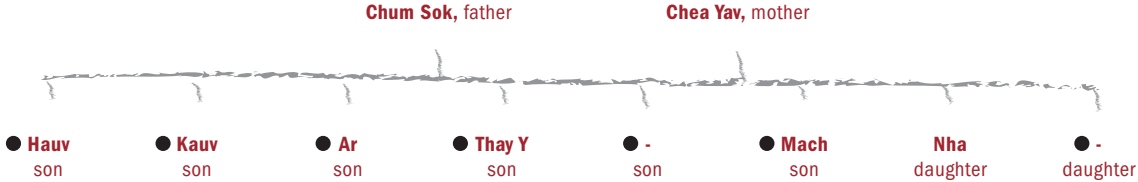
He visited twice after liberation. The first time he came alone, and after that with his wife. We ate rice and red corn for their visit.

I knew he was sent to Tuol Sleng prison because my relatives visited there and saw his photograph. They killed his older brother and all of his family two months before the Khmer Rouge collapsed, and earlier, they killed his younger brother.

*Chum Thay Y was arrested on February 17, 1977 and held at Tuol Sleng. He was 32 years old at the time of his arrest.*



Chum Thay Y, right, with his wife Oeung Kim Leang, center



● Died during Democratic Kampuchea



Chum Thay Y's brother-in-law, back row, center, in Kampong Speu province



Unidentified Khmer Rouge women in a communal kitchen



Unidentified photo, possibly taken immediately after the fall of Democratic Kampuchea

**Net Bunthy**  
Group Chief, Division 170

**Yan Yoeun**  
Combatant, Division 310

**Uong Lundi**  
Office Chief, Division 310

**Khorng Siv Lay**  
Combatant, D1 Factory

**Um Sarun**  
Combatant, Ministry of Commerce

**Chan Sim**  
Combatant

**Yim Meng**  
Combatant

**Uy Ren**  
Combatant, Company 55

**Ut An**  
Deputy Chief, Regiment 12, Division 310

**Ly Chhung Leng**  
Combatant, Division 920

**Chhuon Sroeu**  
Combatant

**Ien An**  
Brigade Chief, Logistics Division

**Say Sam An**  
Combatant

**Sreng Sreu**  
Driver for the Army

**Duong Nha**  
Combatant, Region 106

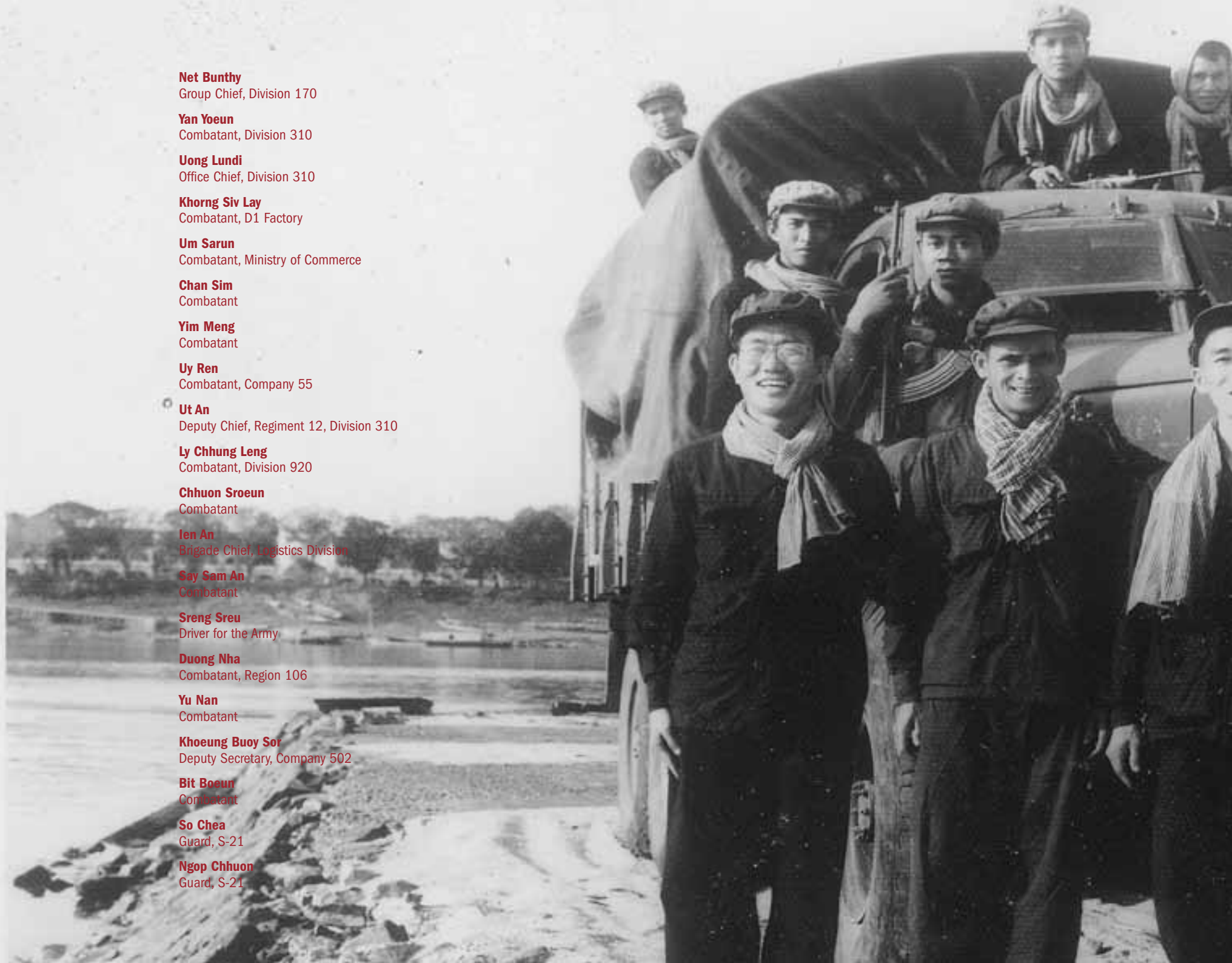
**Yu Nan**  
Combatant

**Khoeung Buoy Sor**  
Deputy Secretary, Company 502

**Bit Boeun**  
Combatant

**So Chea**  
Guard, S-21

**Ngop Chhuon**  
Guard, S-21





## Chapter 2

# The Military/ Security



Khmer Rouge and Chinese soldiers  
(photo courtesy of the family of Um Sarun)

# Net Bunthy

Group Chief, Division 170

*Interview with his brother, Net Phaly, age 46  
O Reang Ov District, Kampong Cham Province*

**M**y brother Bunthy was a lovely man. When he was in our village, all the people greeted him respectfully. But I think that all his life, he was never happy.

Bunthy joined the Khmer Rouge revolution in 1970, so he would have been about 19 years old then. He had heard the king speaking on the radio, telling people to go to the forest to struggle, so my brother left with over 70 other men and women. I was young then, and didn't join until 1974.

Bunthy was sent to many battlefields in Svay Rieng, Prey Veng, and Kampong Chhnang provinces. Later he was in Division 170 of the East Zone. He wrote us once a year from 1972 to 1975, and he would visit us every two or three months. When he came home, he was always wearing his soldier's uniform.

The first time Bunthy was wounded, he was fighting against the Vietnamese in Prey Veng province. It was about a month after Lon Nol collapsed. He was sent to the P-2 hospital with a wounded leg.

While he was in the hospital, he wrote his biography so he could give it to Sieng, the woman he wanted to marry. Both men and women had to do them. The men were soldiers and the women didn't know what the men did, so they sent their biographies over to the women's side. This made it easy for the women to know about the men and their work.

In 1978, he sent a letter to me through a friend in my unit. The letter said he was wounded and staying in April 17 hospital in Phnom Penh. It was near the place where I was working in a transportation unit. I got permission from my regiment chief to go see Bunthy, but when I came into his room, I didn't recognize him. He had long hair, which he had never had before, and was seriously wounded in the cheek. When I entered the room, I said "my brother, my brother," and he tried to stand up. His face was very swollen and I felt much pity for him. I cried for a while, and then we talked for an hour or two.

Bunthy told me he wanted to quit being a soldier and come back home and get married. He said he missed Sieng and that her parents had given permission for them to marry. I said "You have been wounded. You can ask *Angkar* to put you in a handicapped unit and escape from the fighting. If you

continue to struggle and fight on the front lines, I'm afraid you will be killed." He told me he would stop.

They had an IV in him. So I helped carry it when he went to piss. He didn't want me to help him. When he came back to the room, he fell down because he was so weak. So I grabbed him, holding onto him from behind. I screamed for the doctor, who came in and gave him an injection. When he woke up, he said I was disturbing him and he wanted to go to sleep. I said that he had just fainted and I told him that if I hadn't helped him, he might have gotten a concussion when he fell.

When they released him from the hospital, he asked *Angkar* to put him in a handicapped unit. He could no longer speak, so I told him that he should pretend he was a leper and deaf. But my brother told me that he was being sent to Kampong Chhnang province and that our division chief, Chhouk Sao, had been arrested and sent there. The Khmer Rouge told him that they weren't being sent there to fight, but to build the airport. They didn't trust any of the people who had worked for Chhouk Sao. After I saw him that last time, I lost him.



Net Bunthy, right, and Net Phaly, left, 1972

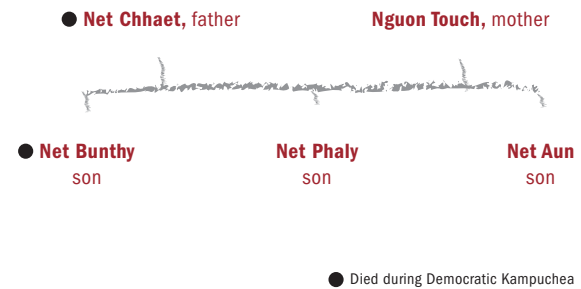
When the Vietnamese took over Phnom Penh in 1979, I ran to the camps near the Thai border. When I reached Samlaut, I looked for him because Khmer Rouge cadres who lived in Phnom Penh went there. I could not find him, so I wondered if he was dead. At first, I thought that he might have been killed when running from Phnom Penh. When you [DC-Cam] came, I knew he had been in Tuol Sleng prison.

When I returned home, my mother cried when she saw me; I was so thin that the wind would knock me down. And so many villagers came to visit me that my bed broke.

Sieng, the woman Bunthy wanted to marry, is my wife now. My brother disappeared a long time ago, and she waited for him from 1978 to 1980. So my parents decided I should marry her.

Bunthy wrote to our family in March 1978, shortly before I visited him at the hospital in April. He said he was wounded and coming home. I hadn't looked at the letter in a long time, but now I see that the white ants ate it; this must mean it is the end of his story.

*Net Bunthy wrote his biography at S-21. It shows he was arrested in December 1978, two weeks before the Vietnamese invaded Cambodia and freed the prisoners there.*



## Yan Yoeun, aka Yorn

Combatant, Division 310

*Interview with his brother, Yan Vutha, age 44, Chamkar Leu District, Kampong Cham Province*

**Y**orn was recruited to be a soldier during a meeting he attended at the pagoda in 1972. Many Khmer Rouge soldiers were there, and he volunteered. My parents allowed him to join because he wanted to support the king and rescue the country.

He came home once to visit us for a few days in 1972. It was before my brother Yim came home; Yim was in the Khmer Rouge too and was handicapped during the fighting in Kampong Cham. Yorn brought his photo to us then. I don't know much about his visit; I was just a kid and not interested in older people.

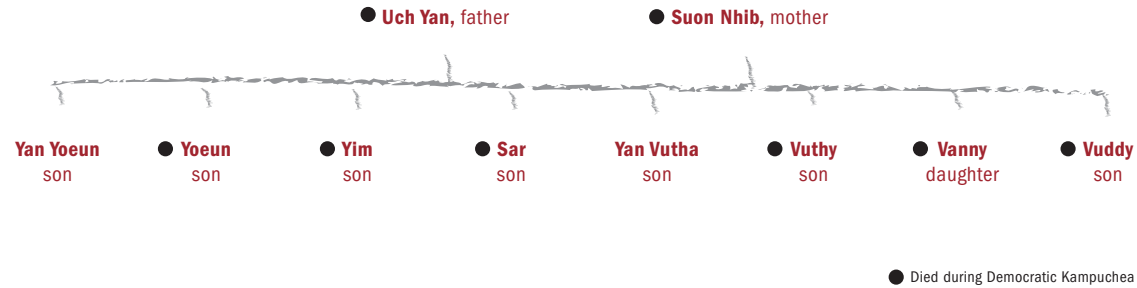
But my father met Yorn in 1975 or 1976. He was at the Ministry of Propaganda and went to visit workers in Kampong Som. Yorn and he talked for a little while. The Khmer Rouge accused my father of being a traitor after he came home. I tried to visit my father, but someone told me that he had been pulled out from his work. They killed him in the middle of 1977. I don't know exactly where it happened.

A little while later, they sent my mother to a cooperative and killed her there. Someone told me it was in Chamka An-Dong in Kampong Cham province. They accused her of being linked to the Americans and Vietnamese. They killed two of my younger brothers and my seven-year old sister along with her. My three older brothers were killed at different times.

The Khmer Rouge had a saying then: "To dig up the grass, one must dig up the roots," which meant that they had to kill the whole family. We would live if the Khmer Rouge couldn't follow up on our biographies. But if they found out that our parents had been killed, we would be killed too. I think they were afraid that we would take revenge for our parents, so they arrested all the relatives and even the workmates.



Yorn, circa 1972



When I was 14, I joined the revolution. First I worked in a children's unit and then at a weapons repair center. In 1977, the Khmer Rouge gave me a gun and sent me to fight against the Vietnamese along the border. I had known some Vietnamese who sold fish at the market, but otherwise, I wasn't exactly sure what they looked like. But I had to fight because I didn't have anywhere else to go.

Also, I had a bad biography. After my parents were executed, I was very nervous because the Khmer Rouge recorded my biography once a week and noted all my activities in detail. They kept track of me and moved me many times from place to place. They also went to my village to trace my consciousness and asked my group leader about me. Luckily, he liked me and reported my biography honestly to them.

I didn't hear anything from Yorn after 1972. Some people said he was dead, and others that he was still alive and staying in Pailin.<sup>5</sup> I wanted to visit him, but I lacked money. Also, Pailin was a hot place after 1979; it was still under the control of Khmer Rouge soldiers. But someone who lived near him said that he died recently. They said he was infected with HIV.

How can I avenge my family when I don't even know who the perpetrators were? Today, they say Ta Mok was the mastermind.<sup>6</sup> But even if we cut his flesh up to eat, it would not be enough for a million victims. It's impossible to compensate us for our suffering.

I feel alone; I have no family to help me. It's quite different for others who still have their relatives. So, every day, I just try to convince myself not to think about it because I can't bring them back to me.

*A 1976 biography has been located for Yorn. It states that he joined the Khmer Rouge when he was 19. His weak points are described as "Does not obey Angkar's rules, betrayed the collectives, not honest or loyal, and believes in freedom."*

<sup>5</sup> Pailin, which lies in southwestern Cambodia along the Thai border, was one of the last strongholds of the Khmer Rouge after the Vietnamese invaded in 1979. It served as a launching point for Khmer Rouge resistance until its forces surrendered to the Cambodian government in 1996. After the Khmer Rouge defections, the government rearranged the country's districts and removed Pailin from the administrative control of Battambang province.

Today, most of Pailin's inhabitants over the age of 40 are defectors from the Khmer Rouge, and the area houses such former leaders of the regime as Ieng Sary, Nuon Chea, and Khieu Samphan. Its governor is now former Pol Pot bodyguard Y Chhin and its deputy governor is Ieng Sary's son Ieng Vuth. Ieng Sary has formed a movement called DNUM (the Democratic National Union Movement), which publishes a magazine called *The Blossom*.

<sup>6</sup> Ta Mok (an alias meaning "old man") was Secretary of the Southwest Zone and a member of the Standing Committee of the Communist Party of Kampuchea. He is believed to have directed the massive purges of the Khmer Rouge, thus earning the nickname "The Butcher." In 1997, he seized Pol Pot, who died in his custody in 1998. Refusing to defect to the government, Ta Mok was captured by the Cambodian army in 1999 and has been held in a military detention facility since; he is the only senior Khmer Rouge leader in jail today.

# Uong Lundi

## Office Chief, Division 310

*Interview with his sister Uong Gech Huong, age 47  
Krauch Chhmar District, Kampong Cham Province*

**T**here were seven children in our family; five of them joined the revolution. My brothers Chhuong Hing, Chhuong Phuc, and Lundi, and my sister Gech Eng died during Pol Pot time.

Lundi was recruited to the Khmer Rouge by my brother Chhuong Hing in 1972 when he was 18 and had graduated from high school; he was very eager to join and insisted many times that my parents let him. All of my older sisters and brothers were very glad when he finally joined and to see him sacrificing everything for the revolution.

For a long time we had no word from him. My mother was very angry and blamed my brother for this. Chhuong Hing did have information about Lundi, but he kept it hidden from my mother because he knew that Lundi had been sent to the front lines and he didn't want her to worry.

But in 1974 he came home by motorbike with his bodyguard and was carrying a pistol. He told us that the Angkar had set a plan to take over Phnom Penh in 1975.

Lundi was married in 1975, and my mother went to Phnom Penh to be in his wedding. They allowed this because my brother Chhuong Hing was a high-ranking officer and he had this privilege. Lundi brought his wife here at the end of the year. Her name was Lin; she was quite beautiful and worked as a physician. They stayed four or five days.

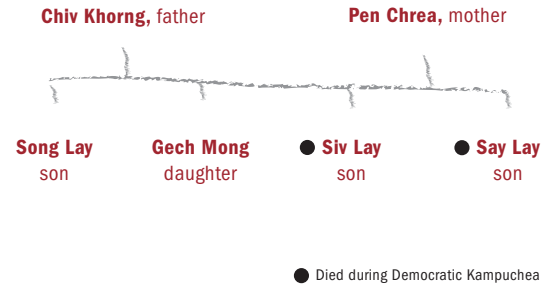
I was in a mobile unit at that time and I was always sent to work far from home. So my mother asked Lundi to take me and my younger sister to work in Phnom Penh, thinking it would be better than here. I worked at the garment cell in O Reussey market and my sister went to work at the doctor's office.

We met Lundi only once after that. But we saw his wife Lin very often when she came to visit her sister Khan, who was head of the garment cell where I worked. Lin was pregnant at the time. In late 1976, Khan told me that the Khmer Rouge had moved Lundi to another place. I saw Lin a little later, but then she disappeared too. And after that, Khan disappeared; she was about 40 years old and pregnant.

Later they removed me from my job at the garment cell, saying that I was related to someone with a traitorous







# Khong Siv Lay

## Combatant, D1 Factory

*Interview with his sister, Khong Gech Mong, age 55,  
Krauch Chhmar District, Kampong Cham Province*

I am the only one of the four children in my family who is still alive. My brother Song Lay died of heart disease during the Sihanouk regime. My brother Say Lay was adopted after our mother died when he was two months old. Because I was only 5, I couldn't take care of him. When he grew up, Say Lay was shot and killed by the Khmer Rouge.

In 1972, the chief of combatants in this commune invited Siv Lay to attend the Khmer Rouge meetings that were held in this village every day. He went three times, and then they came to collect him. He had a fever and asked if he could join the revolution later when he felt better. But they said he had to join at that moment. My father cried hard; he said they should let my brother cure himself first. The Khmer Rouge told us not to be so serious: all youths were joining the unit. So four men put him in a hammock and carried him down the stairs.

Later, Siv Lay sent a message that he was better and please not to worry about him. In 1973 or 1974, they moved him to Prey Veng province; he was a soldier there. In 1976, he sent two letters home to inform us that he was working at the D1



Khong Siv Lay, far right, with his cousin Chhun Hieng (far left), his nephew Chhun You Siem (center), and his friend Lan Sanh (second from right), circa 1967

factory in Phnom Penh. It was a textile factory, I think. He told us that he was fine there. We never heard from him again.

*Khong Siv Lay's biography was taken at Tuol Sleng. The year of his arrest is obscured. He was 26 years old when he was arrested.*

# Um Sarun, aka Rith

Combatant, Ministry of Commerce

*Interview his cousins, Yim Sambat, age 57  
and Chhim Chanty, age 37  
Kang Meas District, Kampong Cham Province*

**Y**im Sambat: Rith was rather educated; he studied for eight or nine years. He joined the Khmer Rouge revolution in 1970 when the Prince [Sihanouk] called for people to go to the forest and rescue the country.

At first, he was a member of our subdistrict's art performance group, and was then promoted to the region level. *Angkar* loved Rith so much that it later brought him to work in the zone as a messenger and put him in charge of the zone art performances.

When Rith came home, he rode a red CL motorcycle. His parents and other relatives always asked him what his work was, but he didn't talk about it. He said he came to see his children and that *Angkar* had given him a core assignment to find a bull. He also took some photos then; he had his own camera and developed his own film.

Rith and I were separated in 1974. I was the only one home the last time he came to visit, and we went for a walk

together. He said to me, "From now on, we will never meet again. Circumstances have become more serious and I am working with *Angkar*."

I still ask the people he worked with and fortune tellers for information on him. According to some of them, Rith is still alive. I also heard that he was imprisoned at Tuol Sleng, but we haven't been able to find out why he was treated so. A man he worked with said he saw Rith's picture at Tuol Sleng. I don't know if that means he's dead or not; maybe he only had his photograph taken there.

**I** joined the arts performance section in 1970 and danced in "Farmers Harvesting." They said that arts promoted culture. In 1971, I was sent to work as a medic and helped the wounded; because there was much bombing at that time, I gained a lot of practical experience. They had me do this because I was able to read French medical instructions. We used both French and locally produced medicines at that time.

I met my husband when he was a subdistrict medic and I worked with him. He had a lot of rivals for me, including the district chief, who was a good-looking man. But my husband played a trick. He asked his parents to talk with my mother,



Um Sarun, center, in Phnom Penh's Central Market

and they agreed to tell *Angkar* that I was no longer available because we had been engaged since the previous regime.

We got married in 1972 in the first model ceremony in our district. I was 21. It was not the time of the ten-couple wedding yet. We had a 15-table feast and there were wines. Our parents were allowed to join, but not the monks. The Khmer Rouge let us come home for a few days so that our relatives could give us their blessings.

One day, my husband was hunting birds with a gun. Unfortunately, he hit a villager. Because of this unintentional crime, they made him a soldier and he was sent to several battles in 1972; later he became a regiment chief.

Later, I heard that my husband had been fighting for eight months against the Chenla forces; their logo was the skull.<sup>7</sup> Thousands of Khmer Rouge soldiers had been killed. I had given up hope of seeing him again, but a messenger brought a letter from my husband saying he was in Division 1 in Phnom Penh.

I told the messenger that I wouldn't believe my husband was alive unless he came to see me in person. I was angry, not happy, yet I knew he had written the letter himself. I started crying and couldn't stop. My mother-in-law warned me that I would be blind if I cried too much late in my pregnancy. Three days later I gave birth to my son.

My husband knew nothing about this. Two days after the baby was born, a messenger brought a letter from him. My husband said he was still alive and fighting, and not to be stubborn. This was too much for me and again I couldn't stop crying. I have stayed very skinny to this day because I cried so much just after my son was born.

Half a month later, my husband came home bringing some milk and medicines, a stolen Seiko watch, and baby mats. He said "Now we have been separated for quite a long time and *Angkar* wants you to live with me in Phnom Penh." I agreed to go with him and we stayed near the National Bank. In February 1976, they moved me to Prek Phneou in Kandal province. The division chief told me not to worry because my husband was going to be a pilot. I didn't believe them; I thought *Angkar* had taken him to be arrested. But he said not to worry and that I would be allowed to meet him in a few days.

At Prek Phneou, we were given enough to eat and we had a bed, mattress, and good blanket. I could not help but appreciate the quality of situation, but not the lie that my husband would serve as a pilot. I became preoccupied with this. About ten days later, the rumors started that all the cadres' families would be taken to the cooperative. I told myself that I would never fear death since I was already full of bitter experiences. At 7 pm, a truck came and I was told to prepare my household things, including a mosquito net, blanket and thermos. In the middle of the road, the thermos exploded; it was a bad omen that my husband was being taken to be killed.

I was sent to live with an elderly couple who had no children. They were very sympathetic and when they saw me with a baby, they helped carry water for me. Once when I was eating with them, my rice bowl dropped off and crashed, another bad omen. Later, I dreamed of someone coming to cut my stomach open, and I guessed that my husband had been killed.

After this, they sent me to a village in Prey Chhor district. I was sick most of the time, and lived in a hut with an elderly woman and her adult daughter. She saw that I was weak from



From left: Um Sarun's cousins Yem Sambat and Phon, and younger sister Vuthy, at the village opera house



Unidentified cadre, photo courtesy of the family of Um Sarun



Um Sarun's co-workers

giving birth and just had me hand her palm leaves as she made a roof. She was the chief of the eating hall and brought me food, and she also took care of my baby when I became sick. The village chief came to pay a courtesy call on me and said I should recover in a few days so that I could see my husband when he was brought to me.

But my sickness became chronic and I was sent to the hospital in Kampong Cham. I spent 8 months there in late 1976. The hospital used both good medicines and those produced by the Khmer Rouge. They wanted to test us to see whether we could read the scripts on the bottles. If we were educated, we would be taken away, so I pretended I couldn't read them.

My husband and I were separated in February 1976; I remember the month because my son was 9 months old then. First, the Khmer Rouge imprisoned him at Kruoch Kor in Kampong Cham province, saying that he held the “blue insignia” [Free Khmer] rank, but I didn’t know about that. One of my cousins told me he had seen my husband there and he wasn’t shackled. Later, someone said that my husband had not been killed, but had died of malaria at Kruoch Kor. But then I heard that all of the prisoners detained at Kruoch Kor had been transferred to Tuol Sleng or had disappeared.

**C**hhim Chanty: Between 1973 and 1974, they dropped bombs on our village. Many people lost arms and legs, so Rith and his friends ran away and went to live near a small canal. Then he joined the revolution. First he worked as the chief of an artists’ group and took photographs. Then he went to the Ministry of Commerce in Kratie Province.

He came home a few times for a short visit. Sometimes he came by bicycle and sometimes by motorcycle. He didn’t say much, but sang songs to his siblings. He asked to have a big cow sent to his office, but I don’t know what he did with it.

I heard that he died. His driver told his mother that he no longer worked for Rith because Rith was taken to the forest. His sister went to fortune tellers; some of them said he was alive, and others that he was dead. She still hopes he is alive and living overseas. But for me, I think he is dead.

*Um Sarun’s biography was written at Tuol Sleng when he was 25. He was arrested on February 26, 1977.*

<sup>7</sup> Chenla I and II were offensives the Khmer Republic mounted from September 7, 1970 to December 31, 1971 to recover Cambodian territory lost to the Viet Cong. Chenla I was undertaken to clear Route 7 connecting Skun and Kampong Cham, while Chenla II was to reopen Route 6 between Phnom Penh and Seim Reap province. At the same time they fought with the Viet Cong, FANK (Forces Armées Nationales Khmères) had to battle the newly revitalized Khmer Rouge forces. However, padded with “phantom” troops, the Khmer Republic’s FANK forces were crushed. Together, these factors led to the infusion of massive US military aid to Cambodia to prevent Lon Nol’s government from

Um Chum, father

Ros Nay, mother

● Um Sarun  
son● Chun Vuthy  
daughter

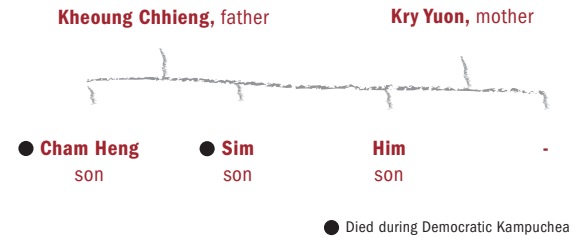
● Died during Democratic Kampuchea



Um Sarun at Chamkar Daung

# Chan Sim

## Combatant



*Interview with his brother, Chan Him, age 55  
Sa-ang District, Kandal Province*

Two of the four children in our family died during the revolution. Chan Sim was one of them. He first worked as a farmer, and then joined the Khmer Rouge in 1971, when he was about 18. No one who was unmarried could escape going to the army at that time. In 1973, the Khmer Rouge told me, “Soon, you have to join the movement,” so I joined.

Before, I had been a painter and photographer, but not as a professional; I just learned to take pictures from others. Sometimes I would be the photographer at weddings, but I wasn’t allowed to keep the money; I had to give it to *Angkar*. Later I painted pictures for a rally at Olympic Stadium. I painted the national symbol, female cadres marching with guns, and women soldiers fighting along the Mekong River.

When I joined the revolution, I brought along my own camera and took a picture of Sim and me together. He was visiting home, so we went to the rice field and I took it. I took it for memory because life is unpredictable, and I didn’t think we’d see each other often.

Around 1973, he visited home once for about three months because he was sick. He had a problem with his intestines. When Sim was sick, they allowed him to stay in the village and did not control him strictly. But he had an operation and got better, so they made him join Division 12. First he was a soldier and then they made him a barber. After a while, I joined him. We cut hair for soldiers working in many offices and departments, and I also helped to develop film.

But later they had many barbers, so they sent me to work in another field. I was appointed to a group that made clothing for the army. Then the Lon Nol soldiers began seriously attacking my division, so I decided to work for the free division [he escaped from the Khmer Rouge and joined the Lon Nol army]. Later, I came back home and wanted to work for my earlier division, but I was arrested because I had worked for Lon Nol. I was starving then and only wanted to fit into the situation, so I escaped to another place. But I was arrested again and accused of being a Lon Nol soldier. So I escaped again.

Later, I joined Division 703. This time, they believed me after checking to see if I had any weapons. From that day, I followed the Khmer Rouge guidelines when I worked.



The last time I saw Sim was in Phnom Penh, about six months after the liberation in 1975. We worked together as barbers for a while, and then I was sent to plant vegetables. He told me that he was accused of having links to the Vietnamese, but he didn't.

I also heard that Sim got into trouble because he criticized someone in his unit. My brother was a bit aggressive; he was the sort of person who would tell you if you were doing something right or wrong. He said he criticized *Angkar* for not giving the people enough to eat; that got him into trouble.

Next they sent him to work in the economics section of S-21; he was in charge of finding rice, water, and other things for people there. Around 1976, I went to a rally at Olympic Stadium and met my brother's friend Nam. He told me that Sim had been sent to build the airport at Kampong Chhnang. He said they always sent people working in S-21 there, but they never returned to the battlefield. It's hard to know the exact date because we didn't have any calendars at that time.

During Pol Pot time, one of Sim's friends was sent to China. His family announced on the radio that he was lost. Then he came back. If my brother were in China, he would be back home, too, but he might be staying somewhere else besides China, maybe in the United States.

*No record of Chan Sim's fate has been located at S-21.*



Chan Sim and Chan Him "This picture shows the friendship between Chan Sim and Chan Him. They have only one vision and one stand: to raise up the lives of the peasants and workers who suffered under the oppressors. This picture was taken on the 29th of November 1973. Signed, Chan Sim"

# Yim Meng

## Combatant

*Interview with his brother-in-law, Hao Va, age 60  
and his sister Kim Seng, age 56  
Koh Sotin District, Kampong Cham Province*

**H**ao Va: Meng was a novice monk for three or four years. About a year after the King was deposed, he quit and went to work in a charcoal factory in Kratie province. The villagers and I told him not to go to Kratie because they were conscripting people into the military there. But he went anyway. One day when he was cashing in his salary, he was arrested and forced to become a Lon Nol soldier. He escaped after three months and came back home; he was very skinny. And he was angry too, so he wanted to join the struggle to rescue the country.

After the 1970 coup, people went to the other side of the river to struggle. They felled *kapok* trees and anchored them in the river to slow down the ships. The ships and the people exchanged fire. There was so much bombing by the Americans and South Vietnamese in this area; hundreds of houses and the school were destroyed. Both tanks and planes came and people could not sleep. So they took pillars and other parts of their houses and used them to help build trenches and dirt-covered shelters.

The Khmer Rouge said: “Long live Samdach Ov [Sihanouk the father]; those who do not go will be chopped dead!” So we joined the Khmer Rouge to demand the return of the King. The people were parading around like in a demonstration. They came and pulled us by our collars to join them; you could not simply stand and watch.

The Lon Nol soldiers said we could meet them at 7 in the morning to negotiate about bringing the King back from France. But instead, the bullets came. Many of those in the front died. After that many young people went to the forest. Meng also went.

When he joined, the Khmer Rouge were fighting together with the Vietnamese, and he worked with a unit that had both Khmer and Vietnamese commanders. They called their fighting method *dakk kong*, or the blossoming flower technique.

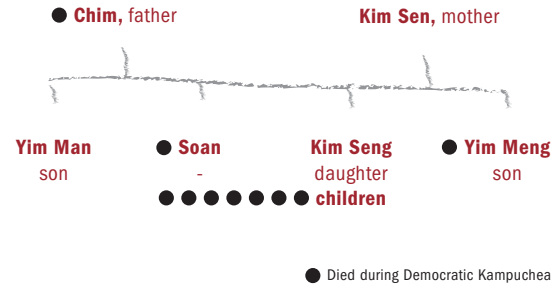
He came home once, in 1974. Meng said he would return in 1975, when the country was taken over by the Khmer Rouge. But he never came back.

Between 1975 and 1979, people were evacuated out of the villages. The times were very difficult and many children died. All six of my children died and my father swelled up from starvation and died.

**K**im Seng: When he was a child, my brother liked to dress as a soldier; he was always neat and tucked his shirt into his pants. Meng made a gun from the parts of a banana tree. Lots of kids liked playing with them, but he was different, he always liked all kinds of guns.



Yim Meng, left, with his stepbrother Soh, circa 1975



Our mother had a dream that Meng was tied up, but not dead. She told us about it over and over again. He was the baby of the family and she loved him the most. She took him everywhere she went. Our family only had 3.6 meters of land, so Meng always brought money to our mother when he was a laborer. He gave it all to her and did not keep more than 10 riels for himself.

Our father took a second wife; she was a Cham [Muslim] woman. The other one in the picture is Soh, her son by a different man. Meng and Soh were friends once and soldiers together. They didn't know that our father had married Soh's mother because they were in the army. After they learned about it, they stopped being friends.

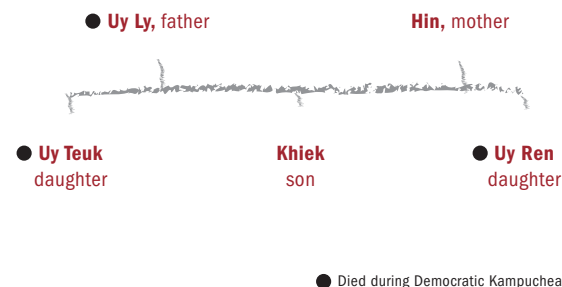
My mother wanted Meng to get married, but he did not think about women. He did not like to hear anyone talking about him asking for someone's hand in marriage. My mother said to him, "You had better take a wife," but Meng said, "Do not talk about me getting married."

When Meng came to visit, he said he would be back soon. It turned out to be forever.

*Yim Meng was arrested in May 18, 1976; he was 27 years old. He was held at Tuol Sleng.*

# Uy Ren, aka Mao

Combatant, Company 55



*Interview with her sister-in-law, Sum Touch, age 58  
Sa-ang District, Kandal Province*

Ren was a simple woman, not so bad. She joined the Khmer Rouge in Kandal Stung district in 1971 when she was 19. Ren asked her parents' permission because at that time, everyone was joining. It was better than staying in the village and carrying dirt. But the female youth teams in our village were asked to carry dirt at Tuol Krasaing [Kandal province] and they all disappeared.

The village chief at that time was a man named Huon; he recruited people. Anyone who refused to join the revolution in this village was taken to the 08 security center [the Munti Santesokk security office] at Traey Troeng or office 15 on Koh Thmei Island. Huon was a little cruel; my brother-in-law was taken away by him.

Ren was sent to the battlefield near Tonle Mekong to fight. There were only females in her unit and they fought on the front lines. She was a group chief; her soldiers called her grandmother Mao. Maybe this was because she had black skin. She fought at two places in Kandal province: Kok Ches and later at Chren Chrom.

Ren visited this village once quite a while before the Khmer Rouge took control of Phnom Penh. She came looking for cows. In July 1977, she came again to find food, this time in an army lorry. The others with her carried guns, but she didn't; she carried a gun only at the battlefield. Many villagers came to visit her, but she stayed for only one night and left early the next morning.

She didn't say much. But she did tell me not to dye all of our clothes black because a new regime would be coming up soon, and that she would be returning when the war was over. After that, she disappeared.

I kept her picture for the future, in case she would come back one day. But I don't think she survived the Khmer Rouge regime. Someone said that there was bombing at Srey Royong and that she died there. Later, a woman named Phan told me that she was taken to Tuol Sleng. Of the many people who joined the revolution with Ren, Phan is the only one who is still alive. I prayed for Ren a lot.

*Uy Ren's biography states that she was born in 1951 and joined the revolution at the age of 19. She was later made responsible for a female unit and then worked as a combatant.*



Uy Ren pre-1975



Uy Ren on left with an unknown friend, circa 1977

# Ut An

## Deputy Chief, Regiment 12, Division 310

*Interview with his sister, Ut Lon, age 64  
Kang Meas District, Kampong Cham Province*

**M**y brother An became a monk when he was 7 or 8, and stayed in the pagoda until he was 22. An said he quit because becoming a monk took a long time and he wanted to work. When he quit, I told him it was ok; it was up to him. It would have been difficult for him to stay here because there were many problems in our village at the time. America destroyed my house; they shot bombs from boats. An volunteered for the revolution in 1969 when he was 23. I don't know why he joined; he didn't tell me.

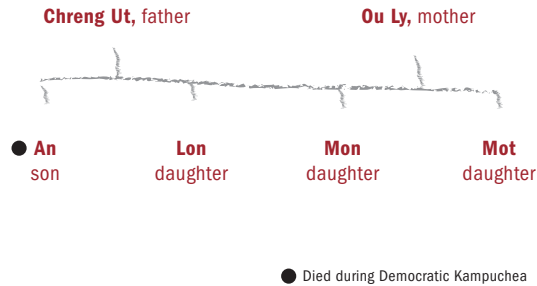
He went to Kampong Cham provincial town after that. I met him there and he gave me a watch for my husband. Then he moved to many places like Kratie and Phnom Penh.

An visited our family twice. The first time he came from Kampong Cham for four or five days. He didn't bring anything with him, but he carried a pistol. An told me that his work was secret and not to talk about it with other people.

The second time he came was around 1973, 15 days after he was married. *Angkar* arranged their marriage. I couldn't go to his wedding because I had to look after the farm, but I wished him a good future. His wife was a good woman; she was smart and kind to everyone. They had one child, a little girl named Hay Nin. When she was born, An was so happy that he looked like he had attained nirvana.

His messenger came to the village once. I had been sick and blood was leaving my body. The messenger told me that if I didn't get better, my brother wanted me to see a doctor in Phnom Penh. At first I wouldn't go, but his messenger came again and brought me to the hospital in Phnom Penh for three months. They took good care of me there. They loved me like their mother, and I often cleaned their clothes for them.

At the time, my brother was living near Phnom Penh. I didn't stay with him, but I visited his apartment; there were lots of steps up to it. When I had free time, I looked around. There were fish, chickens and snacks there. And new chairs, which I touched. I saw a lot of shoes and makeup, and lamps, too. I asked my brother if I could have a lamp; he replied that it was up to me. My brother also gathered lots of money, but I didn't get any.



After I left the hospital, An took me to Chroy Changva road east of the Tonle Sap River in Phnom Penh and said goodbye there. He said he didn't know when we would meet again. And he warned me not to argue with *Angkar* because *Angkar* collected people to kill them. I came home by boat at night; there wasn't any light so I had to note the sky in order to remember my house.

But my brother did not forget me. Less than a month later, he sent his messenger to meet me again. The messenger said that An missed me and wanted to bring me back to Phnom Penh. But I never went.

Someone told me that he is alive but far away. But I think he must have been killed because he had a high rank. I hear his wife is still alive; she lives at her village, but I don't know where it is. I think my niece must be grown up by now.

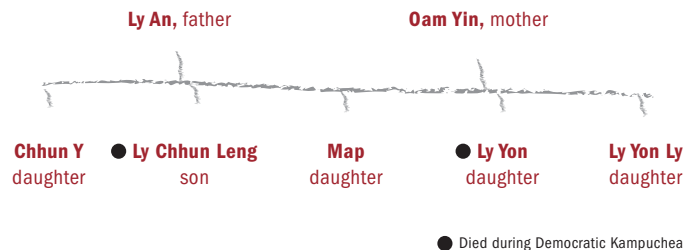
*Ut An was arrested on December 19, 1976 and taken to Tuol Sleng. His confession states that he had joined the Free Khmer and made contact with the Vietnamese to ask for weapons. He also confessed to poisoning combatants and cadres who objected to going along with his traitorous clique. His last confession is dated February 9, 1977.*



Ut An and his wife Chann Kinsrim, around 1973

# Ly Chhun Leng

Combatant, Division 920



*Interview with his sister, An Chhun Y, age 60  
Kang Meas District, Kampong Cham Province*

When the war came, Chhun Leng stopped studying and lived at our farm for a little while to help my family. The Lon Nol soldiers came to collect him in 1970; if he hadn't gone, they would have arrested him. But after 15 days, he ran away to the forest to become a Pol Pot soldier. He wanted to bring Sihanouk back.

My parents didn't want him to be a soldier, but he had already escaped to the forest when they learned about this. Chhun Leng thought that if he stayed in the village he would be killed.

No one could sleep in our village after 1971. They dropped bombs for seven days and seven night, and destroyed my house. When they dropped the bombs, I ran to the graves or the canal. Eventually, I went to live near the canal and built myself a small cottage there.

Chhun Leng visited home for a night in 1975 after the liberation. There were two bodyguards with him; they came by car and were carrying guns. While he was visiting, my parents told him to quit the Khmer Rouge, but he wouldn't.

They tried to persuade him to come home, but he said that if he stayed home, his only job would be carrying earth. He didn't want anyone in the village to control him, so he decided to stay with the Khmer Rouge.

The second time Chhun Leng came home he told me he had become the chief of a division in Mondul Kiri province. He said it was difficult living in the forest because he had to escape from the bombing and a lot of mosquitoes bit him. He also gave me advice, saying that if they told me to work, I had to work hard or they would kill me. Then he went back to Mondul Kiri.

A woman named Sieng who worked with him told me that they arrested him around 1978. Her husband was also arrested like my brother. I think they were killed together. They told my brother they were sending him to a meeting, but they were lying. Then they killed him after accusing him of being CIA and in the Vietnamese network.

But later, the fortunetellers told me that my brother was still alive and living on the Thai border. I went there three years ago, but couldn't find him. They cheated me out of 60,000 riel.



**E**ven though my brother had a high rank, I did not have enough food to eat and I worked hard. I had to, or they would have killed me. In fact, they accused me of being a high-class person and a social imperialist, and the Khmer Rouge asked the villagers about my biography many times after Chhun Leng disappeared. I did not dare argue with them.

We could never take a bath, and could drink only from the stream, but people also used the stream as a toilet. One day, the Khmer Rouge said that the rice I transplanted had died. They told me that if I continued to work like this, they would send me to O Tra Kuon in Kang Meas district. It's about two kilometers from the village where I lived during the Khmer Rouge. If you go there, you can see the skulls. Later, they realized that I hadn't transplanted the rice, so I was ok.

One of my sisters had high class; she lived in Phnom Penh and was a new person. She was sent from Phnom Penh to live at my house and was made to carry earth. She was arrested in 1977. They also killed another member of my family. He climbed a coconut and the Khmer Rouge hit him until he died. The Khmer Rouge beat my husband Chhorn; he was the village chief. They hit him with a piece of wood, but he didn't die.

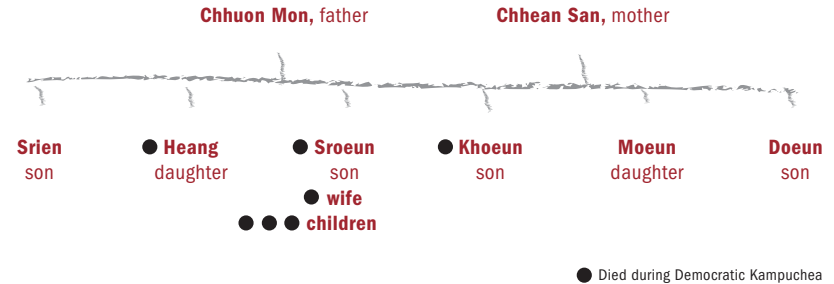
*Ly Chhun Leng's undated biography states that he was born in 1947 and was married to a woman named Dy who was also a soldier. It also noted that one of his sisters was connected with the enemy.*

Ly Chhun Leng, far right, 1971



# Chhuon Sroeun

## Combatant



*Interview with his mother, Chhean San, age 73  
and his sister, Chhuon Moeun, age 58  
Kampong Siem District, Kampong Cham Province*

**C**hhean San: Sroeun joined the revolution in 1970 when he was 18. Lots of people were joining at that time, so he just went along with them. He didn't tell me he was going. None of the three others who went with him has come back.

I think he left because his father beat him. When he was supposed to be tending cows, he went for a lot of walks instead. One day, the cows ate other people's rice, so his father became angry and beat him. Then Sroeun got angry and left.

In 1973 we were living in Tuol Sre in Kampong Cham province because the Lon Nol and Khmer Rouge soldiers were fighting in our village, and the B-52s were dropping bombs so we were running from them. Many people were dead in the streets. Sroeun visited us there at that time; he stayed for one night. We asked him to live with us, but he didn't want to.

Sroeun came back again in 1975, shortly after the Khmer Rouge took control. He didn't tell us anything. After that, he, my son Khoen, and my daughter Heang disappeared.

When you [DC-Cam] showed me his biography, I was so happy. I thought my son was still alive. But now I am convinced that the Khmer Rouge killed him.

**C**hhuon Moeun: Run, my brother's messenger, brought this picture to my mother after the Khmer Rouge took over Phnom Penh. Sroeun was married then, and had a few children. My mother sent some fruits for them. But we never met them and I don't know where his family is now.

Sroeun came himself a few times. The first was in 1973. He was riding a motorbike. He worked north of Phnom Penh doing cultivation and said he was in Division 315.

Sroeun sent us one letter before he was arrested. In it, he told my parents not to talk to anyone about him, and not to remind them about him. He said "Today I am good, but I can become bad tomorrow." We didn't understand at first, but later we found out that other Khmer Rouge soldiers were being arrested. In 1976, my mother's cousin told me that Sroeun and his wife and children were asked to go to study and disappeared.

After that, the situation became tense and the killing began. So the village chief came to ask if my brother was still alive. We told him yes. My parents did not lie about this exactly. They said they had heard from him. But at that time, you see, many families of Khmer Rouge soldiers were sent away by the village chief.

*Chhuon Sroeu'n's biography was taken at S-21 on May 8, 1976. It shows that he joined the revolution in April 1970 when he was 21, and became a full member of the Communist Party of Kampuchea in 1973.*



Chhuon Sroeu'n, left



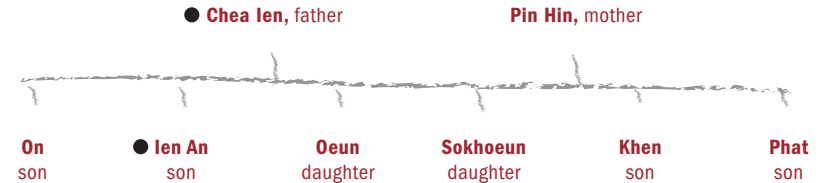
Unknown Khmer Rouge commander, from the family of Chhuon Sroeu'n



Khmer Rouge family, from the family of Chhuon Sroeu'n

# Ien An

Brigade Chief, Logistics Division



● Died during Democratic Kampuchea

*Interview with his brother, Chea On, age 54  
and sister, Chea Sokhoeun, age 46  
Kang Meas District, Kampong Cham Province*

**C**hea Sokhoeun: Our parents wanted An to be educated and sold their land so he could go to school. But he stopped studying in 1970 when the Khmer Rouge took control of our village and made him into a soldier. A little while later, he ran away from them and helped our parents at the farm.

After he was home for a while, An asked permission to join again. Our parents didn't want him to, but they bought him some pills and syringes so he could study medicine. He began working on the medical staff at the subdistrict about a year later. Next, the Khmer Rouge sent him to the battlefield in Kampong Cham and Kampong Chhang provinces, where he helped the wounded and slept in the pits made by the bombs.

An was wounded in Kampong Cham in 1974 while taking cover in the trenches. After he was in the hospital for a month, they sent him to work in Phnom Penh. He had 12 members to look after there. Each of them had a bicycle, and they also had a radio. When he came to the village, he researched their biographies.

**C**hea On: I went to Phnom Penh to visit him in 1975. When I reached the outskirts, soldiers arrested me and put me in prison for a night because they didn't want me staying in the city. But someone told An that I had been arrested and he had me released. He took me to his office and I stayed with him for three nights. I had a good place to sleep and enough food. My brother didn't say anything about his job; he just went in the morning and came back in the afternoon.

He brought this photograph here in 1976; it was taken in front of a flat in Phnom Penh. You can tell because where he is standing is high and the trees in the back look small and flat. I know he was given a high rank and they called him Ta Bet. This was because the Khmer Rouge called their 80 mm artillery *ta*, and he had an 80 mm gun.

One of my brother's subordinates worked in Phnom Penh and said they took him to Prey Sar prison for reeducation. After a year there, he disappeared. I don't believe An made any mistakes or killed anyone; the *Angkar* caught all people who were unit chiefs and took them to prison.

**C**hea On: During the Khmer Rouge, I fished, transplanted rice, and worked on the waterwheel. I lost all my hair from lack of food. In 1976 and 1977, they had me bring the Chinese and new people from Phnom Penh – especially the very old and young people – by boat to Khchao. Although Khchao is in this district, it took two days to go there. Once the people reached Khchao, they put them in cells. Before they killed them, the Khmer Rouge played music so loud that no one could hear their cries.

**C**hea Sokhoeun: In 1975, they brought me back to a village near my hometown and I was appointed to be chief of the small children in the morning, and collect cow dung and scare off the birds from the rice fields in the afternoons. At first, I didn't want to teach the children because we were nearly the same age. But when the village chief ordered me, I agreed to do it.

After a year, I walked back to my village. When I arrived, I saw my father; he was sharpening bamboo. He was very happy, but I also saw that he nearly cried because he felt pity for me. My father died of starvation in 1978.

*Ien An's biography was taken at Tuol Sleng in February 1976. It states that he was born in 1950 and was a monk and student before the revolution. After joining the Khmer Rouge in 1970, he became a medic, artillery chief, and then brigade chief in a logistics division. In his biography, he gives the names, ages, marital status, and occupations of his parents and siblings.*



Ien An, circa 1976

# Say Sam An

## Combatant

*Interview with her brother, Say Chouly, age 46  
Kampong Siem District, Kampong Cham Province*

Sam An was a simple woman, not so bad. She was the second-eldest of the nine children in my family. My neighbors admired her; she was a modest person and had compassion for her brothers. Sam An studied at the Lyceé in Kampong Cham until she was 16, but failed her Baccalaureate I and left home before the *coup d'état* in 1970. After that, she sent letters and money to my family, but she never visited home. Her letters only asked about my family's health and safety.

My brother brought her to Phnom Penh to avoid the turmoil in our village. He arranged her marriage to Un Tha, a widower who had asked for her hand. He was a mechanic who became a colonel in the Khmer Rouge. But Sam An and her husband didn't get on well with each other. She said that she didn't love him.

My mother remembers more about my sister than I do, but she has a mental problem because she lost so many children. The Khmer Rouge killed six of my brothers and sisters. My brother Say Kim Hieng was killed in 1974. He was my leader at the battlefield and also head of the rice wine distillery for the zone. At that time, wine was still being sold. Mothers who

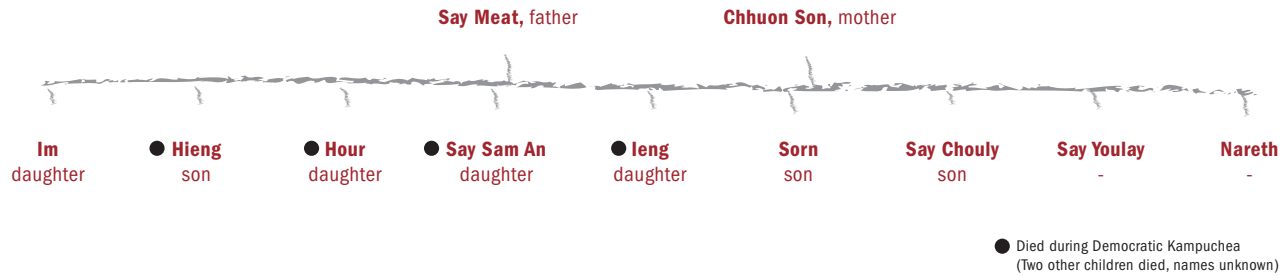


Wedding photo of Say Chouly and Un Tha, altered by the family, November 1978

had just given birth drank it to reduce blood clots. Another of my brothers was a district clerk during the Lon Nol regime, so he and his connections were killed. I heard that two of my sisters were killed at the mountain, but I don't know what happened to the others.

In 1972 or 1973, they tried to bomb our village perhaps ten times, but they never hit it. Then our village chief forced me to join the revolution in 1974 when I was 15. I first went to Thmar Poun in Prey Chhor district with my brother Hieng; I volunteered to go, but if I had waited only one or two days more, they would have forced me to take a gun and fight anyway. Later I was sent to Baseth Mountain, where I drove an ammunition truck. In 1975, I was transferred to Phnom Penh to transport rice and vegetables from the Ministry of Commerce to the battlefield. I did this until 1978. There was big fighting in 1979, so the *Angkar* held a meeting; they decided to have the rice workers move to Battambang to live.

I left Phnom Penh on the night of January 6, 1979. I was to transport rice to the soldiers who were fighting the Vietnamese



on the border; the fighting lasted until 1980. I lived at a refugee camp in Smach, near the Thai border, until 1991 or 1992. Then I came home.

I tell my children about the regime, how hard we had to work and that we didn't have enough to eat. They believed me when they saw photos on the television. I often advise them to study hard to be educated so they can know right from wrong. In the Khmer Rouge time, there were few educated people, and they put the poor peasants in positions of leadership.

*Say Sam An's biography has not been located.*



Say Sam An, circa 1970

# Sreng Sreu

Driver for the Army

*Interview with his sister, Sreng Sroan, age 50  
Kang Meas District, Kampong Cham Province*

Sreu was a monk for three years and then disrobed and became a student. His friends persuaded him to join the revolution in 1973 when he was 22. Everyone in the village joined the army then, and the Khmer Rouge said he couldn't stay alone.

I cried when he left because my mother was dead and he was leaving me too. It was two or three days before my father learned that he had joined. He was very, very angry and went out looking for him. My father said that first his wife had died, and now his son was running from him.

Sreu came home three or four times in 1975. He was a driver for the Khmer Rouge, so he arrived in a Land Rover with his messenger. The airplanes were bombing along the road he would travel on to our village. Once he was thrown from the car and took shelter in a trench; at other times, he had to drive fast to escape the bombs.

Sreu knocked on the door one night while I was sleeping and brought these photos. When I saw him, I cried because I was



Sreng Sreu, circa 1975

so excited. He told me to take care of my father, but he had died since Sreu was home last. Then Sreu said that I wouldn't know if he died, and he wouldn't know if I died, either. He seemed embarrassed.

Another time when he visited, he took two of my brothers back to Phnom Penh with him. I haven't heard from any of them again. His wife disappeared, too, and his small daughter died.

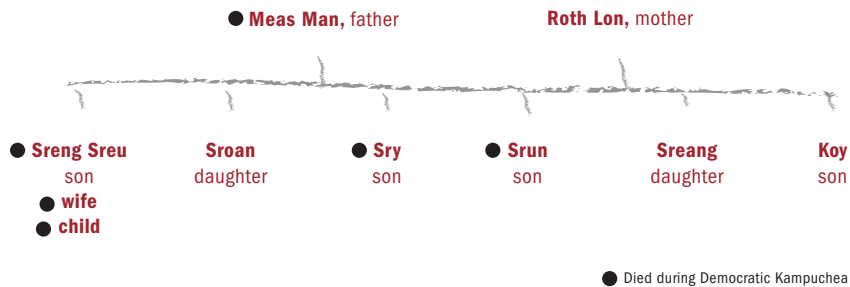


The Khmer Rouge wanted to kill me and choke my daughter because my brother was a high-ranking cadre. They said I ate a lot because I had a relative of high rank. But I was so hungry, I could hardly carry my daughter. After I gave birth to my second child, I went back to carrying earth and building dams. Today, I don't have such good health.

*No documents have been found to indicate the fates of Sreu or his two brothers.*



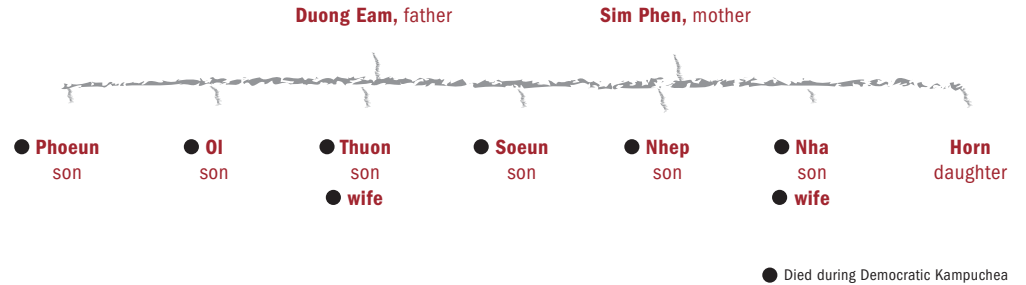
Mean Ly, wife of Sreng Sreu, circa 1975



# Duong Nha

## Combatant, Region 106

Duong Nha's brother Duong Thuan was deputy chief of state at the Ministry of Commerce. His story is told in Chapter 3



*Interview with his brother, Duong Ol, age 62  
Kampong Siem District, Kampong Cham Province*

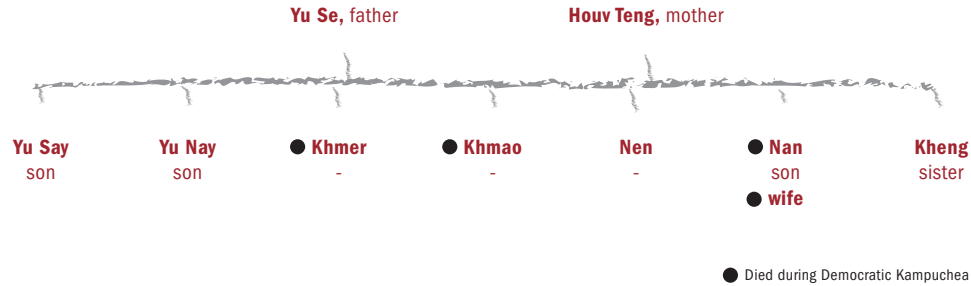
**N**ha left home after the liberation in 1975 and went to Siem Reap province with my brother Thuan. He worked as a messenger for the provincial chief; his name was Sot. They said that Sot got into a power dispute and was arrested. The whole village talked about it, and because he was arrested at night, we all assumed that he was killed. Nha disappeared after that; I don't know why.

**M**y brother Soeun was evacuated back to our home village after liberation. I think he was killed because one day when he was plowing, they tied up both of his hands and took him to the mountain along with two or three other people. I was very quiet when I saw this and told myself not to do anything; I was afraid they would kill me.

*Duong Nha's biography was written on February 21, 1977 at Tuol Sleng when he was 20 years old. It states that he was a combatant in Region 106.*



Duong Nha, center, at Angkor Wat, circa 1975



*Interview with his brother, Yu Nay, age 60 and sister, Yu Kheng, age 42, Prey Chhor District, Kampong Cham Province*

**M**y younger brother Nan stopped studying to join the Khmer Rouge after he was called to free the King in 1971. He told my parents that he wanted to fight to liberate the country, and they agreed. He was the only one in our village who joined.

Nan came home for a short time in 1973 or 1974, but didn't say what he was doing. He took Kheng to work with him in Phnom Penh, but he kept it a secret that she was his sister. He told the Khmer Rouge that her parents had died.

The second time he came home was in 1975. He stayed only for the day; we had a meal together and he said he was fine, but I didn't ask him anything because we were just so happy to be together. He took this photo of himself with his own camera.

Nan came back for the last time around 1976. He was driving a red Commander car because he was delivering vegetables and fruit. His wife Rai was with him; I never knew her family name and the *Angkar* arranged their marriage. He reminded all of us to do anything they directed us to do, and not to go against them.

I learned that he was arrested in late 1976 when I tried to visit him. His wife also disappeared. It's clear enough that he died.

*Yu Nan's biography states that he worked as an artist before the revolution and as a guard/soldier at Office 51 after joining the Khmer Rouge. He named his parents, but not his siblings, in his biography. Nan was arrested at the age of 27, on September 11, 1976, and held at Tuol Sleng.*

## Yu Nan

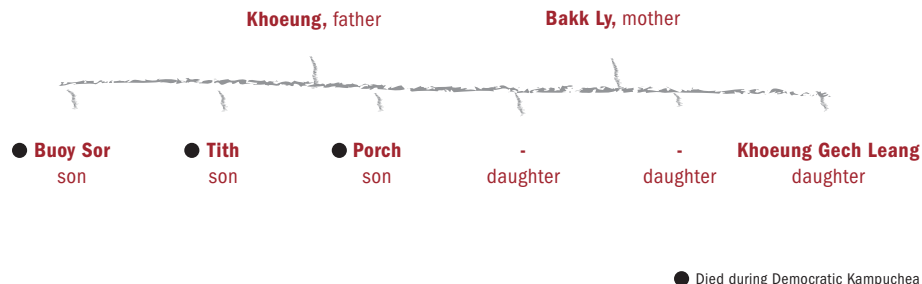
### Combatant



Yu Nan, left, at his wife's village, 1975

# Khoeung Buoy Sor

Deputy Secretary, Company 502



*Interview with his sister, Khoeung Guek Leang, age 36  
and his mother, Bakk Ly, age 75  
Sa-ang District, Kandal Province*

**B**uoy Sor was our village chief before the revolution. But conflicts arose because he wouldn't allow the people here to sell their corn, and another villager accused him of loving their daughter. Because he didn't want to cause a problem for our family, he joined the Khmer Rouge. I don't know what his position was.

Once, before 1975, he came home with a friend. He brought needles and medicine, and was very thin. He didn't say anything about his work; I don't think he wanted us to know. But he did tell us he would be back when the country was peaceful. We never heard from him again.

Before the Khmer Rouge were overthrown, some of their soldiers came to our village to make people write their biographies. The only ones at home were old people in their 80s; they were interrogated and killed. The soldiers also asked some people about my brother: what nationality he was, what kind of person he was, and so on.



Khoeung Buoy Sor, left, at the pre-1975 wedding of his friend Sok Heng, who died during Democratic Kampuchea

Later we heard that he was sent to Prey Sar prison for reeducation and then arrested and sent to S-21. I think my brother is dead because the others have all returned. Twenty years have gone by and he still hasn't come home. Now we are at peace; if he were still alive, he would have come back. I haven't seen him in all this time, even in my dreams.

*Khoeung Buoy Sor was arrested in February 1977 and held at Tuol Sleng prison; no record of his execution has been found.*



Khoeung Buoy Sor, far left, circa 1972

# Bit Boeun

## Combatant

Pen Nouth (front row, fifth from left), with a Chinese delegation to Phnom Penh, post-1975



*Interviewed in Kandal Stung District, Kandal Province*

I joined the Khmer Rouge in 1971. Some people who went around the countryside came to my village to propagandize that year. They said that we were to wake up and struggle to protect the country and fight corruption. And they shouted through loudspeakers about King Sihanouk calling people into the *maquis* [forest]. They were in the village for several months, so many people joined. When I saw that the others were going, I decided to go, too. I was 21 years old.

At first, they sent me to Kampong Chhnang province, where I stayed until 1973. To avoid the Lon Nol soldiers, we traveled by foot, walking only after dark; it took two or three nights to get there. My job during the day was finding tree roots. An old Vietnamese man in the village cooked them for a few nights and made them into small balls, which they used for medicine to cure malaria or fever. At night, they taught us about struggling for the nation, liberating the country, and fighting corruption, capitalism, and the feudal class. We had rice, beef, pig, and chicken at this time and I had enough to eat.

Between 1974 and 1975, I fought at Kampong Ous in Kampong Chhnang. I became a soldier in Battalion 229. There were only

women in my unit, and my job was artillery. They gave me an AK-47 rifle, an MC from France, and a general gun that came from China. Our unit also had one rocket launcher; it was very heavy and ten to twelve people were needed to operate it. But I could do it. First, I put bullets into the gun. Then someone else told us the distance from the gun to the enemy, which made it easy to point. Then I shot. Sometimes we fought every day, depending on the situation. A messenger or *nisara* [spy] would report on how often we fought. Klim [pictured at left in the photograph] was a messenger. She was a woman, but was really more like a man.

This photograph was taken at Veal Kapp Srauv near Phnom Penh in 1974. I was a deputy group chief then, and had 12 people to look after. It was taken when we were walking to the battlefield at about 4 in the afternoon. First, we would form a line and then walk all night until we came to the place where we would fight.

They sent me to fight at many other places, such as Trapeang Preay and Baset Mountain.<sup>8</sup> I saw many Lon Nol soldiers die at these battlefields.



Bit Boeun (fifth from left) with her co-workers Klim, Rann, Ren, and Phal (sixth from the left), at Veal Kapp Srau, outside Phnom Penh, 1974

The Khmer Rouge didn't allow us to be homesick. After Phnom Penh was liberated, I saw the roof of my house when I was walking into the city. But we were not allowed to ask permission to visit home. They said I had protected my country, but now I had to help it obtain peace and develop.

After the 1975 liberation, it was very quiet in Phnom Penh. I didn't see any ordinary people, only soldiers and combatants. It was difficult for us to walk around in the city; they limited the places where we could go. At first, they assigned me to Division 801 at the old stadium in Phnom Penh. My job was cleaning it and looking after it. I would work there for about a week, and then walk to the fields near the airport to plant and harvest rice. I worked so hard that I nearly died.

My brother Nang came to visit me in Phnom Penh. He had heard that I was in the city. He told me that my father died when they shelled our village. But then Nang died during the regime, too. So did my sister Reth and brother Von.

There wasn't enough food after liberation. Mostly, we had porridge to eat, and sometimes bread, but only a very small loaf in a day. The women could manage on this, but not the men. They needed more bread, so they didn't have much strength. Next, they took me to be a tailor near the Chinese Embassy. We made uniforms for the soldiers. Some of the old workers taught me to use a sewing machine. I had to work very fast; if I didn't complete my job during the day, I would have to work until 10 or 12 o'clock at night. I also worked in the rice fields near O Bek Ka-am and Stung Mean Chey. Those places were also dangerous because there were mines in the land. If someone made a mistake or broke something, even a needle, they were accused and sent to the rice fields.

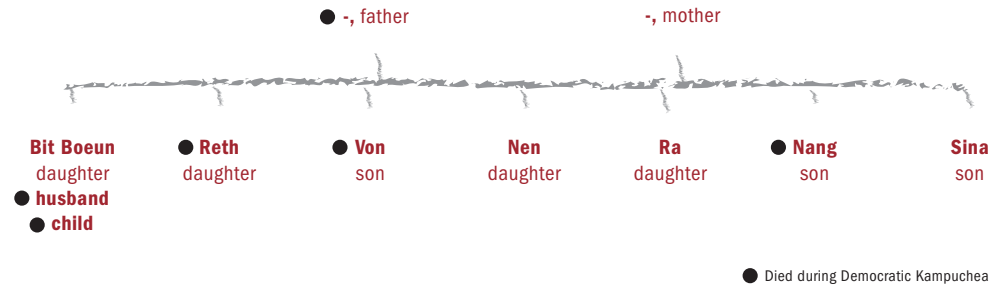
While I was in Phnom Penh, I saw them put many people into trucks and then take them away. I don't know where they were taken; I was afraid to ask because I thought they would take me, too. But people whispered that those put in the trucks were being taken to be killed at Boeung Cheung Ek [the killing fields].

In 1976, the Khmer Rouge had me go and greet Sihanouk at the airport when he came back to the country. His wife was with him, and a high-ranking person named Pen Nouth.<sup>9</sup> They had us put on traditional Khmer dress; the clothes were the color of egg yolks. I cried when I saw the King. Our job was to say "Welcome, Sihanouk the King, long live the United Front for the National Salvation of Kampuchea." After we welcomed him, they took the clothes back.

After that, they sent me to the Ministry of Commerce. I was in control of a small cell that looked after the quality of cereals, corn, coffee and peanuts. My job was selecting good-quality foods. I put them in one place, and the poorer-quality foods in another. It was heavy work because I had to carry the products from place to place. I don't know where they sent the food after we labeled it.

**M**y chief at the Ministry of Commerce was an old man named Hong. One day, they put him in a car, telling him he would be attending a meeting. But I think he was arrested and sent to be killed at Tuol Sleng. He never came back. Hong was a kind man, and everyone loved him. After he was arrested, Van Rith became the chief.<sup>10</sup> A lot of people were afraid of him because he was very nasty; no one could be near him.





After Hong was arrested, they told my husband Bun Thong that he was being sent to a new place in the Ministry of Commerce. Thong had been Hong's messenger. The Khmer Rouge had arranged our marriage. They asked my permission, but it was ok because we had worked together and we had met often. They must have taken him out and killed him; we had only been married for a month.

I was pregnant when they arrested Thong. Rith sent a woman to ask me about this. Then they gave me an injection of some kind of medicine and made me jump up and down to make me lose my baby. I nearly died then and could not move my arms or legs, but I didn't lose it. A month later I got sick and they gave me a different kind of medicine. I lost the baby then.

Then they removed me from my position and sent me to a place called Kok Khsach near the airport to be educated. I was afraid because I knew if they arrested the leader, they arrested the members next. But in 1978, they sent me back to Kampong Chhnang to work in the rice fields, and I stayed there until the Khmer Rouge collapsed in 1979. The work was very hard for me and there wasn't enough to eat. My kneecaps became bigger than my head.

When it was almost 1979, the Khmer Rouge sent me to Pursat province. I heard from someone who worked in my unit there that they wanted to kill me. First they told the men that they were going to a meeting, but took them to be killed instead. I didn't see this with my own eyes, but I often heard the sound of guns. Next they were supposed to kill the women, but the Vietnamese came instead. Then I was able to turn back home.

<sup>8</sup> Both are along the road from Kampong Chhnang province to Phnom Penh. Baset Mountain was one of the locations of the Chenla II battles (see the story of Um Sarun).

<sup>9</sup> Pen Nouth was Sihanouk's 73 year-old prime minister for GRUNK (the Royal National United Government of Kampuchea) and one of the King's closest political advisors. GRUNK was the government formed by the Communist Party of Kampuchea and Sihanouk in 1970. In 1975, Sihanouk was confirmed as the chief of state and GRUNK nominally became the government of Democratic Kampuchea until 1976 when Sihanouk "resigned". On February 18, 1976, Amnesty International wrote to Pen Nouth expressing deep concerns about allegations of widespread executions in Democratic Kampuchea, and requesting that GRUNK make inquiries into these allegations. Pen Nouth did not respond.

<sup>10</sup> Van Rith worked at the Ministry of Commerce under Khieu Samphan. A well educated man, he had been imprisoned in 1952 and 1968 before fleeing to the liberated zone in 1972. He then became chairman of a Sector 25 military office, where he was responsible for logistics and food supplies. After 1975, Van Rith took some of his forces from the sector to Phnom Penh to work at the state warehouse. He claimed that all of them survived and none were ill-treated.

Van Rith said his work was purely technical and that he never held ministerial rank. In 1976, he was put in charge of spending loans made by China to Democratic Kampuchea; the monies were used to purchase spare parts for western tractors and vehicles, and Chinese lathes and rice milling equipment. Van Rith recalled that he complained to Khieu Samphan about the misery the people were enduring from lack of food, and that as a result, the "kids" working for him were beaten and duped into implicating him in their responses (he claimed he was falsely implicated in 18 documents). However, he stated that he was not arrested because there was no one at the Ministry of Commerce who was qualified to replace him. From an interview by Youk Chhang, February 2003.

# So Chea

Guard, S-21

*Interview with his sisters Em Phan, age 54,  
and Em Touch, age 50  
Sa-ang District, Kandal Province*

**T**he chief of our village made my brother and many others join the Khmer Rouge. Things were so strict then that my parents had to no choice but to allow him.

At first they sent him to fight at Neak Loeung in Prey Veng province and he was injured.<sup>11</sup> My mother went to visit him afterwards and tried to get him to leave the Khmer Rouge, but he was too scared to try. Then they moved him somewhere else and he disappeared.

**T**hey brought me to work, too; I carried earth at Tuol Krasaing in Sa-ANG district. When I was 20, the Khmer Rouge called me one day and told me to come back at 5 o'clock in the evening. I thought I had made a mistake and they were sending me to be killed. But they said that I shouldn't be scared, they only wanted me to get married. My husband worked in my cooperative, but I had never seen him before the wedding. I was too afraid to refuse him. We are still husband and wife.

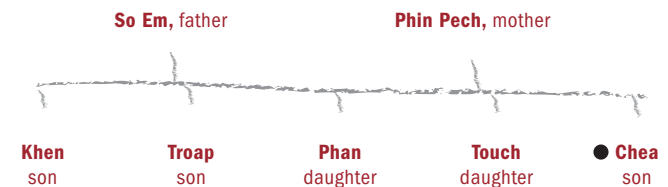


So Chea's Khmer Rouge biography photograph, 1977

OPPOSITE  
So Chea, left, sitting on his mother's lap, Em Touch, his father, and Em Phan

*So Chea's biography shows that he joined the revolution in December 1975 when he was 20 years old and went to work at S-21 in November 1976. His confession has not been found.*

<sup>11</sup> Neak Loeung was a key Khmer Republic government river port situated on the Mekong River midway between Phnom Penh and the South Vietnamese border. It was mistakenly razed by US B-52s in 1973, killing or wounding over 400 people. Former Khmer Rouge soldiers have related their stories of swimming across the river under Tak Mok's orders in order to destroy ammunition depots there. Neak Loeung became a site of intense fighting when the Vietnam People's Army began its campaign to invade Cambodia on December 24, 1978. The Khmer Rouge ordered local inhabitants to flee the Vietnamese advance, and destroyed bridges and roads as they escaped.



● Died during Democratic Kampuchea



# Ngop Chhuon

Guard, S-21



Ngop Chhuon

*Interview with his sister Nbop Chim, age 47  
Koh Thom District, Kandal Province*

**C**hhuon was a gentle man. He never went to school; instead, he helped my parents on the farm. In 1973 when he was 20 years old, they called him to a meeting and asked him to join the revolution. But he didn't have any choice – *Angkar* made all the males and females around the age of 11 and older join.

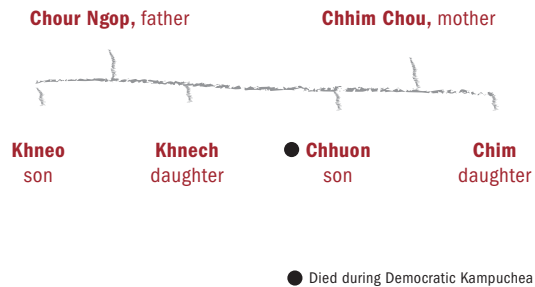
He visited only once after they took him from the meeting. He was wearing black, a scarf, and rubber sandals. I was working in my unit as a weaver, making mosquito nets and scarves, so I only saw him for a moment. He didn't say anything, but he brought photographs with him. He left again on the same afternoon.

After the Vietnamese came to Cambodia, I heard one of the villagers say that he died. None of the others who joined the revolution in this village came back either.

**I**told my children about the difficult time I had under the Khmer Rouge, such as digging dams and carrying earth, and working in the sun and rain. But they didn't believe

me. They said they didn't live in that time or see it, so I stopped talking about it. But then they saw shows about the regime on TV. They were surprised and said, "Oh, my mother's generation was very difficult."

*Ngop Chhuon's biography states that he was born in 1953 and joined the revolution on May 5, 1973. The next day he was assigned as a combatant, and by 1975 had become a group chief. In March 1976, he was transferred to S-21. No further information has been located on him.*



Ngop Chhuon

**Koy Thuon**  
Secretary of the North Zone,  
Minister of Commerce

**Im Sakhan**  
Member Region 42,  
North Zone

**Nhem Noeun**  
District Chief,  
Siem Reap Province

**Ban Sarin**  
Santopal  
(Security) Chief of the North Zone

**Ban Sarouen**  
Deputy of Region 505

**Ing Mut**  
District Chief,  
Siem Reap Province

**Duong Thoenu**  
Deputy Chief of State  
for the Ministry of Commerce

**Huon Yeng**  
District Chief,  
Kratie Province

**Nhip Sreng**  
Group Leader,  
Ministry of Commerce

**Srei Sambo**  
Commercial Chief,  
Region 32



Chapter 3

# The Cadres



A cadre meeting under the banner "Long Live the Communist Party of Kampuchea," Kampong Thom province

## Koy Thuon<sup>12</sup>

Secretary of the North Zone, Minister of Commerce and Central Committee Member

## Im Sakhan

Member, Region 42, North Zone

*Interview with Im Sakhan's niece, Sok Rany, age 45  
Srey Santhor District, Kampong Cham Province*

**M**y aunt Im Sakhan met Koy Thuon when she was a student and he was a teacher. Thuon was a very popular man and he always smiled. When he visited home, he gave things to our family, like clothes and watches, so that we could have a better standard of living. His wife was the same; she always helped people.

In 1975, I went to live with Thuon in Phnom Penh. Sakhan was there too, but she didn't stay long or visit often. She worked in Zone 304 [the North Zone].

Thuon brought me to work in the April 17 Hospital. I did not have any skills, but I gave injections anyway. At first, the hospital had a doctor from the Sihanouk period, but later, the doctors were arrested, like all people with high educations. When they took them away, *Angkar* said they had been promoted. Many people blamed Thuon for this.



Ul Sophorn, mother of Sok Rany,  
with her children Min and Man

When they arrested Thuon, they accused him of being immoral, saying that he had over one hundred women. At first I didn't believe them, but later I didn't know. They said the women he had were from the ministry where he worked. They also stripped him of his rank and made him resign, saying that he was CIA.

The Khmer Rouge announced his arrest at a meeting. I wasn't there, but many others were. Someone who worked with me and had been at the meeting asked in a whisper whether I knew that Koy Thuon had been arrested. He said *Angkar* told the people at the meeting not to say anything.

I heard they wanted to arrest his relatives too, so I was afraid. After that, the *Angkar* asked me how I felt about having an uncle in the CIA. So I blamed Thuon and cursed him.

Thuon's daughter Min worked at the same hospital as I did, but was not allowed to go to the meeting. When she heard that her father had been arrested, her face fell and she could not sleep. She said that she didn't know if Thuon had



betrayed her, but I know he named only himself. After that, they took her from the hospital and told her she would be moving to another place.

Sakhan was arrested a little later. Because she was pregnant, the *Angkar* waited to arrest her until after the baby was born. People said the Khmer Rouge had a 1-inch thick dossier on her. All seven of her children were arrested and killed.

They tried to arrest my aunt Vit too, but took the wrong person instead, my great uncle's wife Kin, who was imprisoned at Prey Sar. She survived, but her child died there. They also arrested Thuon's brother Ea.

I saw my aunt's picture at S-21 [Tuol Sleng prison]; she was wearing a sarong and was shackled on one leg. Later, I saw a picture of Koy Thuon there; he was shackled. If my father had been in Cambodia at the time, he would have been arrested too. They would have accused him of having a "connection." My parents didn't know that the Khmer Rouge were killing people. When they came back from Korea, they were surprised.<sup>12</sup>

I stayed at the hospital until the Vietnamese came in 1979, then I ran to Battambang province and the mountains, where I lived at a cooperative with over 10,000 people. We were hungry all the time; I had no rice



From left to right: Im Sakhan's father Im Ol, Koy Thuon, Im Sakhan's grandmother, and Im Sakhan, in a pre-1970 photo



Koy Thuon with a Khmer Rouge dance troupe (Source: DC-Cam files)

for five months and everyone ate tree leaves instead. Many people tried to escape and were killed.

The Khmer Rouge had me work on building Damnakk Chikroam dam. Someone whispered to me not to go behind the dam; they said many people had died there. But when I walked there once, I saw a lot of corpses with my own eyes.

One day when I was working, someone said that the Vietnamese were coming and I ran away. But after a half hour or so, I saw they were not Vietnamese, but Khmer, so I came back and saw that some people had been killed and were lying near the waterfall. Someone told me that we were just waiting to die because we had no place to go. So we slept, like many others, waiting to die. People were afraid to leave the mountain because there was no food and they were too tired to walk.

Later, someone told me that they were disappointed that I didn't run away. But we didn't know where to go. The handicapped people took grenades and killed themselves; they were disappointed with their lives.

After working at the dam, I decided to go back to my village. On the way, I saw some Vietnamese officers in Pursat province. They had built a camp with cottages. At first, I was afraid. I was hungry because I hadn't eaten for a long time, and I wasn't able to walk because my leg was swollen, so I had to crawl instead. I thought it was better for me to die than go on.

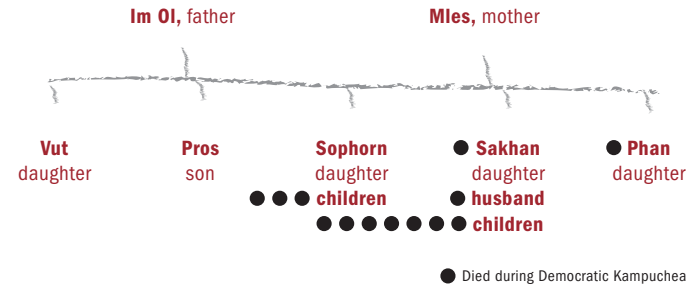
The Vietnamese saw that I was still wearing black clothes and thought I was a Khmer Rouge cadre. So they tied me to a tree. Then there was bombing and they went off to fight. I was certain I was going to die. But when they came back, they pointed guns at about ten of us and told us to go. One of the

Vietnamese soldiers said we should stay with them, not the Khmer Rouge, so we could survive. So I stayed with the Vietnamese and studied with them until 1982, when I left again to return to my village.

**O**n the way home, I met a man named Srun who was in the hospital at Pursat. Later, he became my god brother. He invited me to live with him because he pitied me. Neither of us had anything, except that he had one cooking pot. Whenever they gave him porridge, he always gave some to me. Sometimes he exchanged his clothes for rice or dry fish, and then shared it with me. After he got out of the hospital, I stole into the cooperative early each morning and dug potatoes and eggplants to sell at Pursat market so I could buy rice. Digging potatoes by hand was hard for me. I wasn't healthy at that time; I became pale and my body swelled up.

Then, my god brother asked me if I wanted to go back to his home village with him. We went in a car that was departing from Pursat. He pulled me up, and someone else pushed me into the car. The driver was charging one *chi* per person [equivalent to about 75 grams of gold], but we snuck on. When the car arrived at kilo 7 in Phnom Penh, Srun told me to jump out because he was afraid the driver would ask us to pay.

Early the next morning, he called a horse cart. I rode, but he walked because he was stronger than me. When the cart neared Tauch Market, he told me to get off and we walked as far as Ta Khmau near Phnom Penh. There, we got on a boat, but were separated. When the boat reached Prey Chrey near the Vietnamese border, the owner asked me where Srun was. I told him I didn't know, but he must have jumped off during the night.



I got off in Prey Chrey and went to the house of the oldest man in the village. I was afraid to climb up to the house, so I hung onto the ladder. The old man told me that I should not be afraid; I should climb up. He was like a father.

In the meantime, Srun had reached his village and sent his brother to find me at Prey Chrey. When he arrived, he was very wet because he had swum there. He asked the villagers whether they knew a skinny person with a pale face who had just come from Phnom Penh. Then he recognized me. The oldest man in the village told me not to go; he said it would be easy for me to live in Prey Chrey.

But Srun's brother persuaded me to go with him to their village in Kandal province. I stayed there for two years with my god brother. The people there were friendly to me.

I thought I had no relatives left in my village; I assumed they were all dead. But I wrote a letter and gave it to a medicine salesman who was visiting Srun's house. A month later, my mother's older sister Vut came to Kandal to take me home.

*Koy Thuon joined the revolution in the 1950s and was arrested on January 25, 1977. He left over 700 pages of confessions at S-21. His last confession was dated April 3.*

*Im Sakhan was arrested in the North Zone on February 8, 1977. Her 23-page confession, which is marked by Duch, is dated February 16. It states that she and Thuon were married in 1956, when she was 16.*

<sup>12</sup> Koy Thuon was born in 1933 in Kampong Cham province. In 1953-1954, he failed his degree exams and began studying to be a teacher. He was inducted into the Communist Party in 1960 by Son Sen, who later became a member of the Standing Committee of the Communist Party of Kampuchea. In early 1965, Koy Thuon was designated as secretary of the North Zone, where his deputy was Ke Pauk (see the story of Nhem Noeun, next). Koy Thuon's confessions state that by the late 1960s, he personally felt quite close to Pol Pot after the two spent over a year together in Rattanakiri province. After the Khmer Rouge took power in 1975, Koy Thuon was assigned to take charge of the Ministry of Commerce, where he oversaw the movement of goods between parts of the country and units nationwide.

In his autobiographical account, Ke Pauk states: "In early 1977, there was news leaking from Phnom Penh. I saw a document about as thick as my little finger, which had one section erased so that I could not read it. When I placed the erased section against the light, Koy Thuon's name was clearly revealed. As I saw this, I summoned Sreng, Tol and Sey to meet me and told them not to say anything; otherwise, they might be killed.

"After Hoh and Achar Ven were arrested, they retrieved answers from them relating to Koy Thuon. A document relating to Koy Thuon was sent to me...In February 1977, Phnom Penh sent security trucks to arrest the chiefs of the ministries of agriculture, industry, commerce [Koy Thuon] and public affairs." "Ke Pauk Defended Himself to His Death," *Searching for the Truth*, Issue 27, March 2002, pp. 2-7.

<sup>13</sup> Sok Rany's father, Sim Son, was Democratic Kampuchea's ambassador to Korea from 1975-1979.

# Nhem Noeun

## District Chief, Siem Reap Province

Nhem Noeun's sister, Nhem Sophan, tells her story in Chapter 1.

*Interview with his wife, Ros Sithat, age 62  
Prey Chhor District, Kampong Cham Province*

**N**hem Noeun and I were married in 1962 in Kampong Cham province. He was my second cousin, but because he was older, I called him uncle. Later we lived in Siem Reap, but Noeun was still studying in Kampong Cham and wasn't there often.

My husband went to the revolution before we were married. He joined with Hu Nim and Hou Yuon; they had studied together at the same school.<sup>14</sup> All of them educated me on the revolution.

In 1970, I went to Siem Reap to live with my husband. He was working as a Khmer Rouge combatant then, but he didn't fight; he just sent food to the battlefield. In addition to working for the revolution, he was a teacher.

**K**e Pauk called me to the revolution in 1970.<sup>15</sup> He was the provincial chief then and his brother-in-law Oeun was a district chief with my husband. He taught me himself for two years. At first I refused to join because I was helping my parents and my husband, who was already working for the revolution. I didn't see why I needed to join, but he

kept trying. He was gentle and joking, and had a background as a playboy. However, if someone said something wrong, he looked at them and they were afraid.

In 1973, Ke Pauk built me a house; he said he wanted me to devote everything to the revolution. He would come to the house every evening and take a bath, then leave around 4 or 5 a.m. He snored very loudly, but if someone walked by the house, he would hear them and know who it was. Once, after he had eaten, he wanted to write a letter. But he didn't know how, so I taught him.

Ke Pauk was married to a woman named Roeun who he took from a five-star general. She was very pretty and Pauk loved her. He tortured Roeun's husband so he could have her, and called her the general's wife. I asked him, don't you think it's a sin to do that, and he said it wasn't a sin. Then I asked why it wasn't a sin that he stole someone else's wife. He just laughed and didn't say anything.

**I** volunteered to be the district chief of a women's group in Siem Reap. I only did this because they didn't have enough people to fill the positions. The villagers I worked with were poor and old, so I wrote a letter to Ke Pauk and

Ros Sithat and Nhem Noeun after their marriage in Kampong Cham



asked for some cotton. He sent me 10 or 20 pieces of cloth. The Khmer Rouge also gave me two or three weaving machines. So I introduced the villagers to silk weaving, and designed and cut clothes for them.

There was a meeting of Khmer Rouge leaders from Phnom Penh at Koulén Mountain in 1974. I was one of the cooks for the meeting, and I made black clothes for the King and the people attending. This allowed the people there to change their clothes three times a day.

When my husband and I came home from the mountain, we learned that our son Sothea had died of malaria. He was four years old. Our first child had also died this way in 1966 when he was two.

I quit being district chief after that. No one forced me to quit; it was difficult work and I had to walk very far to reach the village. I just asked them for permission to stop and they gave it to me, partly because our son had died.

My husband was also a district chief in Siem Reap at the time, but he didn't quit. We were living apart then because he was working at another place. When he came home, he sometimes slept in my house and sometimes he just visited

with our children. We had three children alive then, and my oldest always asked for my husband. They wanted him to live with me, but I wouldn't agree to it. I was lazy. So in 1975, I began working at the cooperative at Koulen Mountain, farming and weaving silk. It was easy for me to live far from my husband.

**N**oeun was arrested in 1977. Someone told me they put him in a sack and dropped him in the river after people from the West Zone accused him of betraying the revolution. They said that Kae Pauk put him in a car and drove away.

I thought I would be arrested next. A month later, a few soldiers came to the mountain, saying that the *Angkar* wanted me to move to meet my husband. I thought if I went with them, I would die soon. My son Sokhin was at a cooperative then, but my daughters Kea and Sokny came with me to the security office [prison] in Sotr Nikum district. After I was in prison for a month, I gave birth to my daughter Sokha.

While I was in prison, they interrogated me and accused me of betraying the revolution. Also, I didn't have the same accent as people from Siem Reap, and they knew that. But when people at the prison saw I was from Kampong Cham, they helped me keep it secret because my husband had looked after them; he treated them when they were sick and gave them clothes.

Soon after I gave birth, Kae Pauk came to visit the prison and saw me there by accident. My children recognized him and cried, "Mummy, uncle has come." He said he had been unable to find me and then ordered the security chief to bring me food so I could eat by myself. They gave me dried fish.

Ke Pauk had a handsome, sweet face. In the past, I had sometimes looked at him directly, but often, I couldn't because I was very shy. When he came to the prison, I looked at him and then took a cotton scarf to dry my tears. I told him that I had made revolution to get freedom and rights for the people, but now they accused my husband of betrayal. What had Noeun done wrong? And I told Pauk he had led me, so why were they doing this to me?

I asked him to please tell me about Noeun. Pauk admitted that he had taken my husband to study one night. He also swore to me that Noeun wasn't dead, but had been sent to Ratanakkiri province. Pauk told me not to be afraid. I believed him because I trusted him.

Then he had me released and sent to a cooperative where I carried earth and worked on a rice hulling machine. The Khmer Rouge there asked the villagers about my background. But the villagers were nice to me because I had just given birth. We ate two or three times a day. I had rice, never porridge, and when I finished work, I found fish. They didn't punish me.

**A**fter the Khmer Rouge collapsed, I went to Sotr Nikum district and took my children. The Vietnamese had told us to stop calling the Khmer Rouge "*Angkar*." They gave me a cow and cart after I begged them, saying I had nothing to do with the Khmer Rouge regime, that my husband had been arrested, and that I had children.

I think about my husband every day. Sometimes I feel that he's still alive, but he hasn't come back to my village in all this time. I'm still waiting for him. He looked after me and took care of me.



Nal Sokhin and Yeap, his grandmother, circa 1973

I never heard from Ke Pauk again. But one of my relatives from Anlong Veng told me that he was living near their house. When I learned that he died, I felt pity because he was a person full of kindness. If I had money, I would have gone to his funeral ceremony.

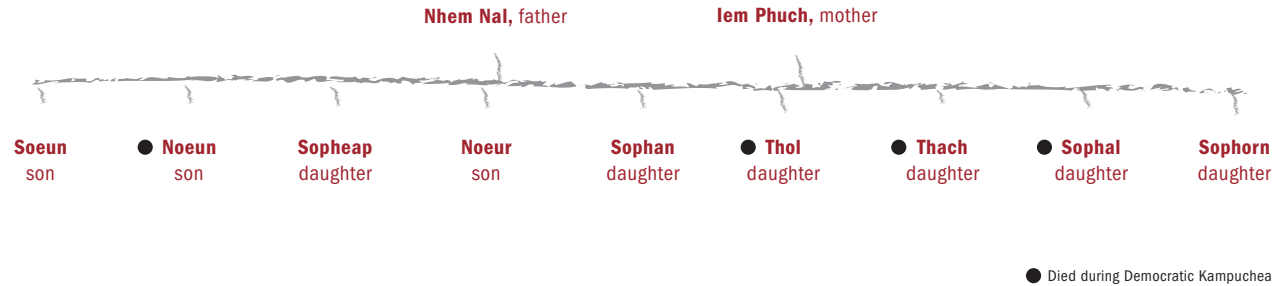
*Interview with Nal Sokhin, son of Nhem Noeun  
and Ros Sithat, age 38  
Preh Chhor District, Kampong Cham Province*

**B**efore the Lon Nol regime, my father was a teacher and photographer at wedding ceremonies. He took this picture of my grandmother and me.

My father brought me to this village to visit my grandmother in 1974 along with 15 cars of monks the Khmer Rouge sent from Siem Reap to Kampong Cham. After liberation, I came here again, but this time to live. My parents were at Siem Reap.

When I was ten years old, they took me to the revolution. I collected cow dung in this village and later, they called me to carry earth and build dams at Tik Chhar and Toul Trabek. I was in a children's unit, so I lived apart from my grandmother. We slept in a big cottage at night. All the boys slept in a line; I was cold because I had no clothes to wear, only a blanket and a cotton scarf.

If someone stole something to eat, they were tied with a rope and kicked repeatedly. They were also punished if they tried to catch fish in the field; I saw them pulling out children's fingernails for stealing rice and trying to hide it.



I never did anything wrong because my grandmother prevented me. She didn't allow me to take anything to eat, even when I was hungry. However, I didn't care what they did. I was a farmer, but I wasn't allowed to eat what I grew.

After the Vietnamese came in 1979, I went back to live with my grandmother. At that time, the Khmer Rouge wanted to send people to be killed west of the village, so they dug a communal grave. I don't know why, but they wanted to kill all the people in the village.

*One of Nhem Noeun's undated biographies was written after 1975. It states that he was born in 1938 and had been involved with the Khmer Rouge since 1962. His wife Ros Sithat was born in 1942. Nhem Noeun was interrogated at least three times at Tuol Sleng and left over 100 pages of confessions. His last confession was dated May 6, 1977.*

<sup>14</sup> Hu Nim was a representative of Kampong Cham province in the National Assembly before joining the Khmer Rouge; he was Minister of Information and Propaganda during Democratic Kampuchea. Hu Nim was arrested on April 10, 1976 and executed at Tuol Sleng on July 6, 1977.

Hou Yuon was a Kampong Cham representative in the National Assembly. Later, he became a member of the Communist Party of Kampuchea's (CPK) Central Committee and Minister of the Interior, Cooperatives, and Communal Reform. He was arrested in 1975 and was sent to Tuol Sleng. The date of his execution is unknown.

<sup>15</sup> Born in Kampong Thom province in 1935, Ke Pauk was jailed by Sihanouk's police from 1954 to 1957 for communist activities. After his release, he married a woman named Soeun, with whom he had six children. During Democratic Kampuchea, Ke Pauk was secretary of the North Zone (and later the Central Zone when it was subsumed into the North Zone) and in this capacity was the military commander of Koy Thuon (see the previous story). He was a member of the CPK's Central Committee from 1972 to 1990, and there is evidence to show that he was also on the Standing Committee. Ke Pauk died in his sleep in February 1992.



Nal Sokhin, undated photo



## Ban Sarin

Santebal (Security) Chief  
of the North Zone

## Ban Saroeun

Deputy of Region 505

Ban Saroeun, the sister of Ban Sarin and Ban Saroeun,  
gives an account of her life during Democratic Kampuchea in Chapter 1

*Interview with their sister, Ban Sarun, age 54  
Prey Chhor District, Kampong Cham Province*

**M**y brother Sarin studied technology in Kampong Cham. When the Khmer Rouge called the students to demonstrate, he went on strike with them and later joined the revolution as a combatant.

Sarin visited us once in Kratie in 1976. He said: “Go to work, don’t be lazy. Be careful or someone will take you go be killed.” When my brother was arrested, I asked the governor where he was. The governor replied that Sarin had betrayed the revolution.

I have kept these pictures until now and have given them to his daughter Pheak so that she can see the truth. The Khmer Rouge killed both of her parents. At first they caught Sarin and a few days later took his wife away. They didn’t send her to Prey Sar for reeducation, but killed her at O Trakoun pagoda.

**S**aroeun recruited Sarin and my sister Savath into the revolution. He looks better dressed than the others in the photograph because he was a leader. Before 1975, he was the provincial governor. I also know that Saroeun went to



Ban Sarin at a temple in Kampong Cham Province



Ban Sarun with her nephew Nak and niece Reak, at her village, 1975



Ban Sarin



Sarin's wife, Yung Kim (center), and mother, Hen Yin (right)



Ban Saroeun, third from left



Ban Sarun's sister Ban Sarom on her wedding day with husband Thiem, 1975, before the Khmer Rouge took control



# Ing Mut

District Chief, Siem Reap Province



Colleagues of Ing Mut: Min, far left, and Sreng, second from right

Nob, father

Thae, mother

- Ing Mut  
son
- wife
- child

Other siblings  
unknown

- Died during Democratic Kampuchea

*Interview with his son, Nob Mai, age 39  
Prey Chhor District, Kampong Cham Province*

I was only ten years old when my father was taken away, so I didn't witness what happened to him. But I asked the older villagers about him, who told me he was a district chief in Siem Reap province starting in 1975. The Khmer Rouge cheated my father by telling him he should attend a conference, but they arrested him and his guard instead.

There was a rumor that cadres from the Northeast Zone accused my father of betraying the nation and people. They said the Khmer Rouge tied his hands behind his back and put him into an airplane. Some other people told me that he was thrown into the river, but they may have said this to insult me because I was Ing Mut's son.

Next, my mother disappeared along with my eight-month old sister, and I was assigned to work at a cooperative in Siem Reap.

*Ing Mut's undated biography was written at Tuol Sleng. It states that he was born in 1925 and joined the revolution in 1963.*



Unidentified cadres  
at Angkor Wat



Ing Mut, center in dark scarf,  
at Kang Meas district, Kampong Cham province, 1975

# Duong Thoeun

## Deputy Chief of State for the Ministry of Commerce

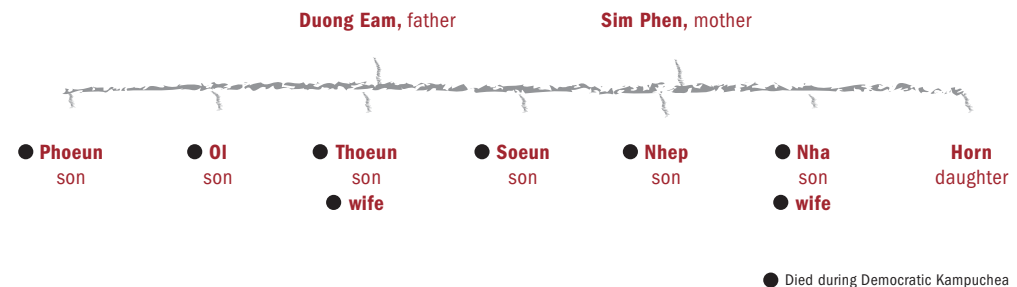
Duong Thoeun's brother, Duong Nha, was a combatant during the Khmer Rouge regime. His story is told in Chapter 2

*Interview with his mother, Sim Phen, age 82  
Kampong Siem District, Kampong Cham Province*

**T**hoeun studied in Kampong Cham and passed his teacher's exam. His wife had died during the shelling in 1973, and then he joined the Khmer Rouge without telling me. They arrested his boss Norng Suon for betrayal; then they arrested my son in 1977. People whispered to me that he had been killed.

At first, when I heard the sound of a *moto* [motorcycle] I thought my son was coming back. I cried every day for the six children I lost during the revolution and studied Buddhism so I could calm my mind. Now I feel better.

*Duong Thoeun's biography was taken at Tuol Sleng on March 20, 1977 when he was 33. It lists him as rising from chief of Region 44 to deputy chief of the State Ministry of Commerce.*





Duong Thoeun at Angkor Wat, circa 1974





# Huon Yeng

## District Chief, Kratie Province



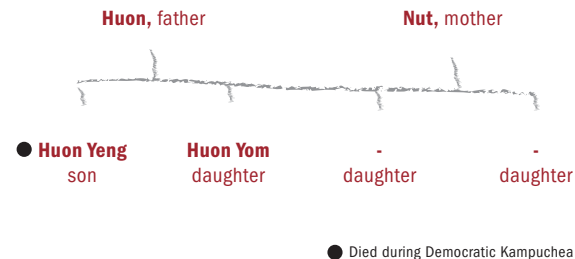
Huon Yeng before the revolution

*Interview with his sister, Huon Yom, age 50  
Batheay District, Kampong Cham Province*

**Y**eng joined the revolution when he was 18 years old. His parents tried to dissuade him, but he wanted to go. He came home to visit twice. The first time was in 1973, after he had been wounded and had just gotten out of the hospital. The last time he came home was in 1975; after that, he disappeared.

His story is no longer with me. It is over now.

*Twenty-nine year old Houn Yeng's biography was written at S-21 on December 12, 1978, less than a month before the Vietnamese invaded Cambodia and the Khmer Rouge collapsed. He was a district chief in Region 505 of Kratie Province.*



# Nhip Sreng

Group Leader, Ministry of Commerce

*Interview with his brother Nhip Srim, age 47  
Krauch Chhmar District, Kampong Cham Province*

**F**ive of the children in our family joined the Khmer Rouge. We weren't forced; all of us volunteered because we believed in the *Angkar*. Only my youngest sister Touch didn't join.

Sreng joined at the end of 1970 when he was 17. Nhem, the chief of the commercial unit for Krauch Chhmar region, persuaded him and many other people. At first, he was a messenger delivering letters from one region to another. Then he was sent to Kampong Som [today, the city of Sihanoukville].

In 1974, he came home for three days. He rode a bicycle and was carrying a rifle. He brought this photo with him. Sreng said he took it for his relatives to have and told us not to hang it up until he died. He didn't say much else; he wasn't a talkative person.

**I** wasn't very healthy so I didn't have to carry earth like the other people in this village. Instead, they assigned me to work on traditional medicines. We made compounds from bark; I accompanied the old men to the mountains to collect it. But the medicines we made didn't work. I stayed in this unit until the Khmer Rouge fell.

My older brother and sister were sent to the North Zone. Both of them died during the revolution. The Khmer Rouge shot my father to death while he was trading rice.

*Nhip Sreng's biography, taken at Tuol Sleng, shows that he was arrested on February 8, 1977 at the age of 24. No record of his execution has been located.*

*DC-Cam holds a training notebook for radio operators like Nhip Sreng. It contains instructions on such technical matters as how to send and receive messages in Morse Code, how to communicate with and without employing messages, and how to record messages and transfer data, among others. The manual also identifies various types of radios used by the Khmer Rouge, including those made in China and the United States (the latter were probably recovered from the U.S.-supplied Lon Nol regime).*

● Neang, father

Din Mao, mother



● Nhib Sreng  
son

● Eng  
daughter

● Nhip Srim  
son

Nhip Srieng  
son

Nhip Sreum  
daughter

Touch  
daughter

● Died during Democratic Kampuchea



Nhip Sreng at Kampong Som

# Srei Sambo

Commercial Chief, Region 32

*Interview with his sister, Oak Touch, age 67  
and nephew, Oak Sara, age 48  
Kampong Svay District, Kampong Thom Province*

**O**ak Sara: My uncle Srei Sambo went to the forest in 1970. He had planned to study in a university abroad, but then the *coup d'état* came and it stopped him. After King Sihanouk went on the radio and appealed to all patriots to join his movement in the forest, Sambo became a Khmer Rouge.

Sambo often came home to visit. His job before 1975 was in the economic unit of Region 32, and he was responsible for providing economic support to the soldiers. So when he came to our village and saw that the people were suffering, he decided to distribute rice to them. He also sometimes brought them medicines. When he came, it was in a truck, and he had five messengers with him.

After 1975, Sambo was assigned to work as a chief of commerce in Phnom Penh. I visited him there twice. He had some materials at his home as well as his own car. The only advice he gave me was not to talk too much or they would investigate me.



Srei Sambo, Phnom Penh, 1976

**O**ak Touch: When he came home in 1977, he was on his way to Poipet [along the Cambodia-Thai border in Battambang province] to gather supplies. He said, "The situation now is not so good, so you must not say anything against the *Angkar*. You had better do your assigned work." Because he was traveling near the border, it would have been easy for him to escape from the Khmer Rouge, but instead he went back to Phnom Penh to be with his wife and children.

**O**ak Sara: The woman in this photo is Keo, his wife. I think the *Angkar* arranged their marriage and they had two children. In 1977, Keo told me that Sambo had escaped to Poipet along National Road number 6. She said that he had met with my mother in our village and asked her to cook rice for him. I don't know why he was there because I was in the hospital in Kampong Cham at that time. I never saw Keo again; I'm certain that they executed her and her children, too.

**O**ak Touch: After he disappeared, a group of ladies traveled to our village from Phnom Penh in motorcycles and cars. They came here to assault him, saying he was a traitor. They said that he had a car and even a watch, so why did he think he needed more?

**O**ak Sara: After I was released from the hospital, I was arrested as well. I don't know why they arrested me, but they put me in jail at the A-Cha-Laek camp. I was tortured and interrogated with 12 other people; only two of us are still alive today. I was frightened because they accused me of being linked to a traitorous network. I still don't know which network they meant. I was released in late 1977 or early 1978, when the Khmer Rouge sent me to the Cambodian-Vietnamese border to join in the heavy fighting there. I escaped home then.

After the Vietnamese liberated the country, I kept asking people who went to visit Tuol Sleng if they could find out anything about him. They only found the name Hean, but his name was Han [an alias Srei Sambo used during the regime]. Most of the eight children in our family died during the regime, and nothing can be done to change that.

*Srei Sambo's biography from S-21 shows that he also went by the name Han during Democratic Kampuchea. He was arrested in 1977 at the age of 35 at the commerce unit, where he was chief of a rice mill.*

Keo, wife of Srei Sambo,  
and her sister





Srei Sambo (seated) with his messengers comrades Saun, unknown, Saut, Ly (Srei Sambo's nephew), and Chooun, 1976



Srei Sambo, second from left, Phnom Penh, 1976



Srei Sambo, back row, center



Srel Sambo, back row, third from left,  
with Koy Thuon, minister of commerce, fourth from left



Um Sarun, left, in Phnom Penh





Um Sarun in Kampong Som province







**On April 17, 1975, Khmer Rouge soldiers marched into Phnom Penh. They emptied the cities, killing those who worked for the former regime and forced the rest of the inhabitants into the countryside to labor in the fields. In attempting to turn the country into a classless, agrarian society, the Khmer Rouge eliminated schools, money, markets, the press, the post office, religion, private property, and freedom of movement. Over the next nearly four years, more than a quarter of Cambodia's population perished from starvation, disease, overwork and execution.**

**This essay tells the stories of 51 men and women who joined the Khmer Rouge revolution.**