

Vietnamese Prisoners of War Executed at Tuol Sleng

By Sorya Sim
Documentation Center of Cambodia

According to the prison execution logs, photographs, biographies, and confessions, over one hundreds Vietnamese soldiers were killed at Tuol Sleng, the former Khmer Rouge secret prison then known as "S-21". One of the very few who survived detention at Tuol Sleng, Van Nath said that he saw Vietnamese prisoners. A former high-ranking Vietnamese soldier has stated that only "a couple of " Vietnamese soldiers were ever arrested by the Khmer Rouge. He added that the uniforms were from the 1950s. Were these prisoners Vietnamese, and if so, were they soldiers? The truth can be discovered. Through the use of Tuol Sleng's internal records, staff of the Documentation Center of Cambodia have already met with the families of 20 of the Cambodians who perished at Tuol Sleng, with 19 former prison officials who disappeared there, as well as with 19 former prison officials who have survived and gave interviews. The Documentation Center hopes to be able to find the same for these allegedly Vietnamese soldiers who were also executed at the hands of the Khmer Rouge. As the Vietnamese government is currently seeking the remains of their soldiers who were killed in action in Cambodia, researchers of the Documentation Center would like to share its findings with regard to the fate of the perhaps 126 Vietnamese soldiers murdered at Tuol Sleng prison between 1975-1979.

Tran Ngoc Tai was one of the 126 alleged soldiers of the total of at least 488 Vietnamese killed at Tuol Sleng prison. According to his Tuol Sleng confession, Tai was arrested on January 24, 1978, on Vai island, off the Cambodian coast. He was sent to Tuol Sleng prison on January 31, 1978 and was executed on May 27, 1978. Tai was born in Thi Tran village, Duong Dong sub-district, Phu Quoc district, Kien Giang province, Vietnam. He was accused of being a Vietnamese soldier holding a rank of a sergeant in platoon 2, company 1, Army of Phu Quoc district. Mr. Tai joined the army on February 3, 1976 and was sent to a political and military school for one month in Phu Quoc district. In one of his political classes, Tai was instructed by Tran Vuc Sy, deputy chief of Phu Quoc district, that the strategic objective of the Vietnamese Communist Party had been to form "Indo-China Federation," an original goal of Indo-China Communist Party created by Ho Chi Minh in 1930. Sy explained that this Indo-China Federation was to be formed after a complete liberation of Indochina from the imperialists. In 1975, according to the confession, Cambodia rejected the idea but Viet Nam remained intent upon making it a reality. Viet Nam aimed to exercise complete control over Indo-China and its resources by effectively turning it into one country, with Viet Nam as unchallenged leader, thereby eliminating Cambodian independence.

Tai's unit was assigned to guard Phu Quoc district. On January 23, 1978, the chief of his company, Em Cham Quat, ordered him to conduct espionage on Vai Island, where he was subsequently captured. While Tran Ngoc Tai's account must be seen as the product of a forced confession, experience shows that it, and those of the other purported Vietnamese soldiers who perished at Tuol Sleng, can be verified by investigation. A remaining question is whether or not justice will be served and the murderers of these prisoners of war properly charged with war crimes under the Geneva Conventions.

i Confession of Hu Nim

i Foreigners Killed at S-21

i Royal Family Members at S-21