

Annex 1: Hell during Pol Pot Regime Part 1

[ERN: 0039567-0039568]



A massive crowd of people, and cyclos (bicycle rickshaws) and three-wheel motorbike tuk tuks were everywhere, both inside and outside the warehouse compound and all over the road. Looking at the compound, I saw a single-storey building facing south; it was 20 metres in length and 10 metres wide with wooden walls and a cement roof.

A lot of people, regardless of age and gender, had gathered in front of the warehouse, where several soldiers of the liberation army holding Chinese-made rifles were restraining them from entering it. No one could get inside it, but the people were pushing each other in front of each entrance with warnings from the soldiers, “Stop! Do not enter yet. *Angkar* will come out and give you the supply. Do not push the door! I am warning you!” Due to the multitude of people, the people at the front were pushed forward by the crowd and had no way in which to retreat. The soldiers then shot in the air just above the crowd to frighten them, but the crowd pushed even harder.

Then the black-clad soldiers aimed their rifles at the wall and shot at it before turning to shoot the people in the front. The crowd went chaotic like some crashing waves.

As the shooting sounds died out, in front of me were dead and injured people. However, the people were determined to get the free supply of rice because they were suffering from starvation, price inflation and political chaos. The crowd passed by the soldiers, broke down the doors, and squeezed against each other to enter the warehouse. Those who were physically weak and fell down were stamped terribly by the door. I was wearing a pair of flip-flops and was also among the crowd; I was about to fall down too because one of my feet was stepped on.

Inside the warehouse, I saw piles of rice sacks (each contained the amount of three baskets of rice) and piles of sugar sacks up to the roof. Since I had been born

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until the age of 20, I had never carried anything weighing more than 10 kilograms, but at that moment, I could lift up a 50-kilogram sack.

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...Cambodian people were experiencing another stage which was unpredictable. If this continued, the entire population would be wiped out.

I tried to lift up the sack of rice on my shoulders again, but it was heavier than the first time I tried to lift it, so I could only put it on my back after several attempts. I stopped many times before I reached home.

As soon as I arrived home, my mother told me, "Sokha, do not go outside because the new people (*Angkar*) has ordered Phnom Penh residents to leave the city now. They said that we would only leave for three days because American aircraft will bombard the city and those who insist on staying will die."

My mother prepared a meal while waiting for my father's return, so that we could leave in the evening. My father had not arrived home yet by 4 p.m.

While still waiting for him, I walked to LON Nol's military hospital located by a basketball and volleyball court in Borei Keila (ប៊ុរីកើលា). In the morning on that day, I had seen many doctors, nurses and patients there. But it was very quiet in the evening. Only swollen corpses and dying patients with catheters attached to their hands remained there. A day earlier, I had seen LON Nol's doctors bring some injured people from a battlefield to the east of Mekong River to in front of the Royal Palace, amongst whom there were three seriously wounded soldiers of the liberation army. The doctors tried their best to treat those three soldiers despite their enemy status.

On that evening, I did not see those three soldiers, and why were LON Nol's dying soldiers left behind?

My father returned in the evening. He came with a military car which he had earlier driven to guide the liberation army around the city.

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[ERN 00359573-00359576]

Part II

Evacuation from Phnom Penh

My family finished dinner at 6 p.m. A moment later, my grandfather said there were some liberation soldiers instructing my family and other families staying near Borei Keila (ប្រីកីឡា) to leave the city immediately because there was still some enemy there. Any stubborn family refusing to leave would be held responsible for their own destiny.

After we had had discussions, my grandfather, parents, uncles and aunts had unilaterally agreed we would travel along National Road 4, passing through Pôchentong (ពោធិ៍ចិនតុង), in case we were able to stay at our own home there again. We had only a Zeep truck to transport our belongings.

Due to the urgent instructions of the liberation troops, my family started to leave at 7 p.m. along Tep Phân (ទេពផ័ន) Street to the west. My family members got on the Zeep driven by my father. There were many people travelling along the roads. My father kept sounding his horn to get the crowds of people to move out of the way. Our truck which had been made in the United States was still new and its headlights were quite bright, which allowed me to see clearly the events taking place along the way on both sides of the street. Later, our truck arrived at the Russian Confederation Boulevard on which there were so many people flocking out of Phnom Penh. Some put their belongings on their heads and shoulders, while others were pulling and pushing carts forward aimlessly.

At 7.30 p.m., my family arrived at Pôchentong Market and I looked at the market but I did not see its roof as it had been bombarded by T-28 aircraft the evening before. The entire market was completely destroyed. Our truck stopped in front of my grandparent's house. We parked along the road around 100 meters to the west of the

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market. While we were still getting out of the truck, a group of soldiers wearing black clothes came to instruct us to leave that location immediately. They did not allow us to enter our home to take our belongings, even though my grandparents begged them.

My father was ready to drive away but suddenly there was another group of soldiers in black clothes who stopped us and checked our truck thoroughly. Then, I realized that there was a C-25 radio in the back pocket of the right front seat of the truck along with three grenades. My grandparents were quite worried because when we had got into the truck, nobody had noticed those objects. After the soldiers had checked the truck, they did not say anything besides asking us to change our Zeep to another Zeep. The Zeep given to us by the liberation troops had no headlights. My family were suddenly all united in fear. After we had changed the truck, we were forced to keep moving forward. Thus, my father started to drive away to the west. As it had no headlights like the previous one, my father just tried to drive it, both slowly and fast when possible, and sometimes he shouted to alert the people to stay out of our way. There were hundreds of thousands of people walking along the road. It was night and I saw dust flying away from their soles. As they were walking, the shadows of the people were not quite visible. When there was a car headlight or any light flashing on their faces, I noticed that they looked sad and hopeless. My family's vehicle passed Pôchentong International Airport and I looked at the places nearby with a great nostalgic feeling. Trucks were driven across zinc plates that had been dropped and scattered on the road as a result of aircraft bombings. I also saw some dead bodies on the way past the airport as a tough fighting had occurred there five or six days ago.

Our truck arrived in front of a fortress (a former driving school) and I could see the light of a lamp while the buildings inside the fortress had been demolished. I believed that they had been destroyed by the aircraft after the soldiers had deserted it. Consequently, the liberation troops occupied the fortress. After we had just passed the fortress, there were fewer people on the road so my father could drive faster.

We arrived at Chaom Chau (ចោមចៅ) at 8.30 p.m. and when my father was driving

along National Road 4, a group of soldiers in black clothes did not allow us to go

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further because they said there were enemy troops ahead. As a result, my father turned onto National Road 3 instead. My family decided to take a rest to the west of a fortress, Zeny (ស៊ីនី). The buildings inside the Zeny fortress were completely on fire, causing a lot of smoke to whirl into the sky. My mother prepared and unfolded mats under and around the truck for us to sleep on to get some energy for further travelling the next day.

[ERN: 00359580]

At 4 a.m. on 18 April 1975, there was a group of armed men coming to force my family to continue moving forward. I woke up with a grotesque madness and heard the loud and noisy sounds of people talking and the sounds of vehicles moving, among other things. The dew had soaked my sleeping mat, parcel and my body for the whole night, making my body wet and cool. I breathed into my lungs and felt the cool steam of the mist with a pure odour before dawn broke.

My family started loading our belongings into the vehicle. After everything was set, we got into the truck ready for departure. Unfortunately, the truck car did not work when my father tried to start it. No matter how hard we tried to push it forward to get the engine started, it still did not work. Then we helped push it forward without the engine running with my aging grandparents sitting in the truck. Only then did I realise that my mother had brought along a piglet that had been placed in the vehicle. At her request, the piglet was allowed to be left in the same place.

My family travelled with other families leaving Phnom Penh city.

[ERN: 00359583]

Then, there was also a group of armed men coming to tell the evacuees to continue moving forward more quickly. After having a meal and taking a bath, my family members continued to move further. Previously, we had pushed the car along the smooth roads, which was not so difficult, but now the car had to go down a slope

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across a flowing stream; so this time, it was really, really difficult. To avoid this difficulty, however, my father promised that he would try to start the truck again, and it actually worked this time; the strong sound of car engine gave us signals of hope. Then my father drove the truck to run up the stream gradient with ease. I ran following the truck closely with a feeling of joy. Now all my family members gathered together ready for boarding to continue our journey.

The hope of less hard work vanished into thin air when a soldier told my father, “Allow *Angkar* to request this truck...as it is war booty that belonged to the enemy, *Nhôm!*” You all have to remove all the things from the truck and move forward quickly!” It was like a broken stone falling on me...

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This was because of the oxcart moving in parallel with my family on the same road to Boeng Khyang (បឹងខ្យាង), and thanks to my family’s earnest promise to pay some tribute for such kind assistance provided by the cart driver. The cart driver then agreed to give a ride to my younger sister.

My family arrived in Boeng Khyang Village, located along National Road 2 in Kandal Stueng (កណ្តាលស្ទឹង) District. We stopped over and took a rest there for a period of one week, along with the families of other evacuees, waiting until my younger sister’s sore feet were really healed. Separately, my uncle and his spouse did not rest there; they instead asked permission from my grandparents to move on.

One week later, my sister got better. On that morning my family decided to continue our journey. We travelled along another dirt path, passing Thmei (ថ្មី) Village directing to S’ang Phnom (ស្រែងភ្នំ) in S’ang (ស្រែង) District. While my family was travelling, I suddenly saw *Angkar* soldiers walking a queue of men tied with a red

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rope. All of them moved southwards. My father saw this and felt concerned, so he tried to speed up the journey to avoid *Angkar's* attention.

At noon, my family passed through villages on a path and arrived at a vast field accompanied by a lake located north of S'ang Phnom. We took refuge under small freshwater mangroves and prepared our meal. My father and I went down to the lake to forage for clams and freshwater scallops. We made a good meal indeed. In the evening, my family travelled up to the top of the S'ang Phnom Mountain and rested there overnight.

The next morning, my family moved down the mountain towards the Basak River. During lunchtime, we rested at the riverside in front of Wat Sampan Pagoda (វត្តសំប៉ាន) in Kaoh Thum Kha (កោះធំ “ខ”) Commune. At the pagoda, I saw a certain number of buildings ruined by war. A large number of evacuees were camped there, from the mouth of the Basak River up to the inside compound of the pagoda. They were waiting for the boats of *Angkar* to convey them to the other side of the river. During the waiting period, ...