

# The Phnom Penh Post

## **Tuol Sleng victim recalls abuse** **Robbie Corey-Boulet** **July 1, 2009**

*'I am like a mentally ill patient,' says first S-21 torture survivor to testify.*

Chum Mey, a former mechanic, spent the first years of the Khmer Rouge regime repairing boats and sewing the black pajamas worn by cadre of the Communist Party of Kampuchea (CPK).

In 1978, he was asked, along with two others, to take on a different assignment: to travel to Vietnam to "repair vehicles" in preparation for a CPK-led military assault.

"The three of us did not object, and we volunteered to go," Chum Mey, 79, told Cambodia's war crimes court Tuesday. "However, we were told that we did not need to bring the tools."

The assignment turned out to be a ruse: Instead of Vietnam, the group was taken to Tuol Sleng prison, where Chum Mey was photographed, handcuffed, blindfolded and ultimately subjected to 12 days of "hot" torture methods, during which his toenails were pulled off with pliers.

"The nail was completely detached from my toe. They twisted the nail with the pliers, and because the nail did not come out they pulled it out," said Chum Mey, the first Tuol Sleng torture victim to testify in the trial of prison chief Kaing Guek Eav, alias Duch.

"It took one month before I recovered and could walk properly," Chum Mey said.

He said guards on two occasions placed a wire "attached to the very fresh current" into his ear, shocking him unconscious. They also beat him with sticks, he said, adding that his fingers were broken during one beating when he put up his hands to defend himself.

Duch previously testified that interrogators were divided into three groups: the "hot" group, which applied torture; the "cold" group, which did not; and the "chewing" group, which subjected prisoners to long-term torture.

But Chum Mey said all of his interrogation sessions involved torture of some kind. "When I was sent inside, there was no cool method," he said.

During interrogation sessions, Tuol Sleng staff accused Chum Mey of spying for the CIA and the KGB, organisations he said he had heard of but knew nothing about.

"I did not know the roles of those people," he said Tuesday. "Even until now I am still longing for the reason why I was accused of being CIA and KGB because I have never known anything about them."

Prompted by his lawyer, Chum Mey was allowed to ask Duch directly about the CIA charge.

In response, Duch said, "CIA here were not people who received a salary organised by the Americans. It was meant to refer to people who opposed the CPK."

He added, "They only identified you as someone opposing them. That's why you were identified as CIA."

After 12 days of torture, Chum Mey said, "They stopped interrogating me because I confessed that I joined the CIA and the KGB. It was due to my confession."

### **Escape from Tuol Sleng**

After he confessed, Chum Mey was sent to a workshop in the Tuol Sleng compound, where he repaired typewriters, sewing machines and water pumps.

He told the court how he left Tuol Sleng when the CPK was toppled in January 1979. He was reunited with his wife, who was detained in Prey Sar prison and who gave birth to their fourth child while Chum Mey was at Tuol Sleng. They fled together but came under fire from Vietnamese soldiers and were separated, Chum Mey said. His wife and newborn both died.

Chum Mey, who also described losing three other children during the Khmer Rouge years, said attending Duch's trial, which he does frequently, had been emotionally taxing.

"Every time I hear people talk about the Khmer Rouge, it reminds me of my wife and kids," he said as he batted away tears with a tissue.

"I am like a mentally ill person now," he said.

He acknowledged, though, that Duch was not among the men who tortured him.

"Duch did not beat me personally," he said. "Otherwise he would not have seen the light of day. I would just like to be frank."