

April 17, 1975 is the day that Khmer Communists made history with their victory over American troops. The regime of the republic that was supported by the American government was turned up-side-down by the Khmer Communists, who claimed that their victory over Capitalism was the greatest in Cambodian history. They fought with American troops using no weapons until they kicked them out of the country. It was the greatest victory of the Cambodian revolution. No revolutionists in the world would do like the Khmer Rouge. They fought and fought without giving up. Finally, they won.

When they finally captured the country, every Cambodian thought that the war was over. It was santrane (meaning "peacefulness"). We would live in a peaceful country again. We would not hear of any fighting any more. Life would be prosperous forever. Unfortunately, the Khmer Rouge soldiers turned their country into the killing fields. Their victory over American soldiers did not turn the country into a peaceful land as they had propagandized but they turned the whole nation into chaos, tearfulness and sufferings.

A few days after they had claimed victory over the American soldiers, the Khmer Rouge soldiers invited those who were associated with the republican government to appear before the Angkar Loeu (meaning, higher organisation). They said that they would be sent to study the new doctrine so that they could work cooperatively with the Angkar Loeu in the future. Those who wanted to maintain their positions in a higher rank were enthusiastic about reporting to the Angkar Loeu, so that they would be sent to study the new doctrine. But, those who were sent to study the new doctrine would never come back. They were all killed. The word "study" or "to go to school" for the Khmer Communists really meant to be executed or to be killed.

These people were highly educated, but none of them were aware of being poisoned psychologically and intellectually. They fell into the trap of the Khmer Rouge. They trusted the Angkar absolutely, because they could not comprehend the Khmer Rouge's mentality. They could not predict what would happen to them. Everything was unpredictable. No one, especially those intellectual people, really believed that the Khmer Rouge would kill people. No one would believe that the Khmer Rouge would turn the "land of paradise" into the killing fields.

Not long after they claimed their victory over the republican government, the Khmer Rouge went through every single house, telling the people that the Angkar Loeu believed that there were American soldiers hiding inside the city. The city needed to be cleaned. The Angkar Loeu humbly invited the people to leave the city for just three days, so that the Khmer Rouge would have a chance to clean the city properly. They told us that since we were leaving for only three days, we did not need to take all of our belongings with us. The Angkar Loeu would take responsibility for all the missing property whenever we came back. We needed to prepare food to eat for only three days.

Page two is the same story after I rewrote it

“Kampuchea has now entered into a new life. We, democratic Kampuchea, have defeated American soldiers. We have liberated our people from capitalism.” It was early morning on April 17, 1975, and National Radio from Phnom Penh was announcing a victorious end to the war. “We will live in peace and harmony. Bravo. Bravo. Bravo, democratic Kampuchea. Bravo. Bravo. Bravo, democratic Kampuchea. . . .”

It was a historic day. The regime of the republic that was supported by the American government had been overturned by the Khmer Communists, who claimed that their victory over capitalism was the greatest in Cambodian history. Having few weapons, they had fought the American troops until they kicked them out of the country. It was the greatest victory of the Cambodian revolution. No revolutionists in the world would do like the Khmer Rouge. They fought and fought without giving up.

Finally, they won. Finally came the announcement that the war was over. It was *santrane* (peacefulness). We would live in a peaceful country again. We would not hear of fighting any more. Life would be prosperous forever.

Despite the announcement, the Khmer victory had not yet reached the city of Siemreap, where I lived with my parents and nine brothers and sisters. I was almost eleven at the time. Cambodian government troops were still in control in Siemreap. Chaos reigned. The stores, schools and government offices suddenly closed. Government soldiers patrolled the main intersections. People gathered to talk about the peace, but with a sense of anxiety and uncertainty. Some were overjoyed at the news; others were worried; some would not leave their houses.

About 7:30 that evening the electricity was cut off in the whole city. Fighting broke out between the Khmer Rouge and government soldiers. Within an hour the Khmer Rouge had captured Siemreap. They marched through the streets, shouting.

“Bravo. Bravo. Bravo, democratic Kampuchea. Bravo. Bravo. Bravo, democratic Kampuchea. We have defeated the American soldiers. Bravo. Bravo. Bravo, democratic Kampuchea. . . .”

We could not see them in the darkness, but we heard them. The marching and chanting through the night was unnerving. Our parents kept us in the house, afraid we would be caught in gunfire. Although our parents sent us to bed, no one could go to sleep.