

## Grisly experiments recalled at tribunal

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In the Democratic Kampuchea era, killers loyal to the cause devised many ways to extinguish life: the blunt handles of axes, the power of firearms, overwork, torture and, according to a civil party testifying yesterday at the Khmer Rouge tribunal, medical experimentation.

“They did not bring corpses to be operated on. They brought real human beings for this operation,” said Em Oeun, 61, describing what he witnessed in 1977 and 1978 as a medic in Sector 20, a Prey Vang provincial base under the Khmer Rouge.

Recounting anecdotes comparable to the notorious Nazi medical operations and experiments on concentration camp inmates during the Holocaust, Oeun said trainees stood by to watch and learn as digits and limbs were lopped off.

“And the whole body would be chopped or operated and cut into pieces and put into a bag to be discarded,” he said.

It wasn't the kind of medical science Oeun had expected to encounter when he started to learn the practice as a child from relatives. The son of a doctor whose family provided him with a usable amount of informal training, Oeun was considered valuable to Khmer Rouge commanders after they took over in 1975. He was sent to work at a hospital and attend study sessions in Phnom Penh.

Soldiers had evacuated much of the city, so the hospital used medicine that had been swept up and foraged from the now-empty pharmacies dotting the empty urban landscape. The patients weren't normal members of the public, but workers, employees and officials who stayed on in Phnom Penh.

After a year or so, he returned to Prey Veng, where he witnessed, and seemed to take part in, operations on accused enemies of the state.

“I was told that the majority of these people had been spies, these people who remained from the old regime, those people who were classified as those who would be executed.”

After describing the operations, Oeun moved on to the haunting story of his forced marriage.

Khmer Rouge leadership in zones throughout the country would pair people unwillingly together, often in mass wedding ceremonies, and then ensure through threat of violence that they consummate the wedding. Like many others, Oeun and his wife did what they were told.

“So then we had a daughter, against our hearts,” Oeun, who has since divorced, said. “It was very difficult at times. My wife did not love me either, so whenever we stayed together at night, we cried to each other.”