

Prison chief: Pol Pot ordered Four Westerners killed

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Khmer Rouge leader Pol Pot personally ordered the killing and burning of four Western prisoners who were captured while sailing in Cambodian waters, a former prison chief on trial for crimes against humanity testified Wednesday.

Kaing Guek Eav, also known as Duch, who commanded the communist group's S-21 prison in Phnom Penh, said the prisoners were an American, an Australian, a New Zealander and a Briton.

He also testified that several days before the Khmer Rouge were ousted by invading Vietnamese troops in early 1979 he was ordered to kill all inmates at the prison.

"The purpose was to have no prisoners left at S-21" when Vietnam's troops arrived, he said.

As many as 16,000 men, women and children were tortured at S-21 before being sent to their deaths during the Khmer Rouge's 1975-79 rule.

Duch is being tried by a U.N.-assisted tribunal for crimes against humanity, war crimes, murder and torture. About 1.7 million Cambodians died from forced labor, starvation, medical neglect and executions under the radical regime.

Duch (pronounced Doik) testified that Pol Pot, who died in 1998, personally ordered that the four Westerners be executed and then burned, and that the order was conveyed by Nuon Chea, the regime's No. 2 leader and chief ideologue, who has also been charged by the tribunal.

"I received an order from my superiors that the four Westerners had to be smashed and burned to ashes. It was an absolute order from my superiors," Duch said. "Pol Pot, not Uncle Nuon, personally ordered to burn the bodies."

In response to questioning from Judge Dame Silvia Cartwright of New Zealand, Duch denied reports that the four Westerners were burned alive. He said their bodies were burned near the prison after they were executed.

He testified that only four Westerners were detained while he commanded S-21, but prison records suggest there may have been as many as 11.

Several Americans and Australians are listed, but only one New Zealander, Kerry Hamill, and one Briton, John Dewhirst.