

Journal

Khmer Rouge chief ready for justice over John Dewhirst murder

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The man being tried for the murder of a North East teacher in Cambodia yesterday asked to be given "the harshest punishment".

The chief of the Khmer Rouge's main torture centre, is being tried by a UN-backed tribunal on genocide charges.

Kaing Guek Eav, known as Comrade Duch, has already confessed to murdering John Dewhirst (pictured) in 1978 while the Newcastle teacher was backpacking.

Mr Dewhirst, 26, was captured, tortured and killed at the now infamous prison Tuol Sleng, known as S21. He was the only Briton among 17,000 people to die at the jail.

He was captured during a career break from a teaching job in Japan. He had been sailing through the Gulf of Thailand with friends Stuart Glass, a Canadian, and New Zealander Kerry Hamil.

Their motorised boat the Foxy Lady drifted into Cambodian waters, raising suspicions among the Khmer Rouge, which swooped.

Mr Glass was killed instantly but the other two were taken to S21 where they were forced to sign bogus confessions that they were CIA agents. Mr Dewhirst's note, written in Cambodian and English even said his father was a CIA agent whose cover was as headmaster of Benton Road Secondary School.

It added that he had been recruited as a spy by his father and, between 1972 and 1976, he was trained in espionage techniques, including weapons handling.

Yesterday, Comrade Duch, who headed S21, said: "I accept the regret, the sorrow and the suffering of the million Cambodian people who lost their husbands and wives. I would like the Cambodian people to condemn me to the harshest punishment."

Mr Dewhirst's sister Hilary Holland, 53, who lives in Cumbria, has spoken about how she is still haunted by his death.

Duch is the first of five senior Khmer Rouge figures scheduled to face trials and the only one to acknowledge responsibility for his actions. His trial, which started in March, is expected to finish by the end of the year.