



Karen Human Rights Group

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

News Bulletin

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Papun Interview Transcript: Naw P---, November 2011

This report contains the full transcript of an interview conducted during November 2011 in B--- village, Bu Tho Township, Papun District by a villager trained by KHRG to monitor human rights conditions. The villager interviewed 30-year-old hill field farmer Naw P---, who described how B--- villagers were forced to porter supplies for the Border Guard and Tatmadaw, and porter ammunition for the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA). She also detailed an incident in which all of the B--- villagers were ordered by Border Guard Company Commander Hpu Meh Ka to repair the B--- village vehicle road and clear vegetation and discarded coconut skins from the roadside, and villagers were violently abused by Border Guard soldiers. Naw P--- also provided information pertaining to the killing of three villagers; the former B--- village head was killed by a remote controlled explosive device in approximately April 2011 whilst portering for the Tatmadaw, and a T--- villager named L--- was killed in 2010 by a Border Guard landmine when portering for the DKBA. Also in Papun District, the DKBA was reported to have killed 50-year-old N--- from W--- village. Tatmadaw, Border Guard, and DKBA soldiers were consistently implicated in the theft and looting of villagers' livestock, as well as demands for food. Tatmadaw soldiers were also described as issuing demands for building materials such as bamboo poles.

Interview | Naw P---, (female, 30), B---village, Bu Tho Township, Papun District (November 2011)

The following interview was conducted by a villager in Papun District and is presented below translated exactly as it was received, save for minor edits for clarity and security.¹ This interview was received along with other information from Papun District, including six other interviews and 149 photographs.²

Ethnicity: Karen

Religion: Buddhist

Marital Status: Married

Occupation: Hill field farmer

¹KHRG trains villagers in eastern Burma to document individual human rights abuses using a standardised reporting format; conduct interviews with other villagers; and write general updates on the situation in areas with which they are familiar. When conducting interviews, villagers are trained to use loose question guidelines, but also to encourage interviewees to speak freely about recent events, raise issues that they consider to be important and share their opinions or perspectives on abuse and other local dynamics.

²In order to increase the transparency of KHRG methodology and more directly communicate the experiences and perspectives of villagers in eastern Burma, KHRG aims to make all field information received available on the KHRG website once it has been processed and translated, subject only to security considerations. As companion to this, a redesigned website will be released in 2012. In the meantime, KHRG's most recently-published field information from Papun District can be found in the Report, "Papun Interview Transcript: Saw L---, June 2011," KHRG, March 2012.

Where do you farm?

I farm on the other side of the river.

Do you have to travel far from here to get to the other side of the river?

Yes.

How many hours does it take?

It takes one hour.

Do you have a family?

Yes, I have a family.

How many children do you have?

I have four children.

What is the name of your eldest child?

His name is Saw G---.

And what is the name of your youngest child?

His name is Saw H---.

How old is your eldest child?

He is 13-years-old.

How old is your youngest child?

He is four-years-old.

Does your eldest child go to school?

He has only been studying for two years.

How many standards [grades] has he studied?

He hasn't studied any standards because he has only studied for two years.

How about the youngest child?

He can't study because he is four-years-old.

How many armed groups have come to your village?

The Border Guard, the DKBA [Democratic Karen Buddhist Army] and the KNLA [Karen National Liberation Army] have come to the village.



This photo, taken in November 2011, shows 30-year-old Saw P--- who explained how B--- villagers were forced to porter for Tatmadaw, Border Guard, and DKBA soldiers, and described three cases involving the killing of villagers, as well as the theft and looting of villagers livestock and demands for food. [Photo: KHRG]

What do the Border Guard [soldiers] do when they come to the village?

They order [villagers to] porter.

What things do they order people to carry?

They order people to carry rice, packages, and clothes.

Where do they order people to carry those things to?

Some [must] reach Htee Doh Hta [village].

How long does it take people to porter between here and Htee Doh Hta?

One hour.

What do the DKBA [soldiers] do when they come to the village?

They order people to carry things to Mee Mweh Hta [village].

What things do they order [villagers] to carry?

They order them to carry bullets.

How long do they order people to carry the bullets for?

Sometimes it takes one day and sometimes two.

What kinds of bullets?

Bullets for heavy weapons.

How many people do they order from the village head when they order [villagers to] porter?

They order ten people at one time.

Do you always have to porter for them, or is it once per month?

For the past two or three months they have ordered [villagers to porter] three or four times per month.

Have you ever portered things for the Burmese Army [Tatmadaw]?

Yes, I have portered once.

How many days did they order you to carry things for at that time?

It took one or two hours.

Did they release you?

Yes, they released me.

How many soldiers were with the armed group that ordered you to carry their things?

There were 50 or 60 soldiers.

What was their battalion [number]?

I don't know their battalion [number].

Do you know their column [number]?

I don't know their column [number] either.

How about their company?

I don't know that either because they [that particular Tatmadaw company] just came once.

What was the name of the column commander?

I don't know.

When they ordered you to porter did you only go with the villagers?

We went with the Burmese [Army] soldiers. Sometimes, they ask the village head and the village head sent them.

Did they beat you?

Sometimes they didn't beat us but sometimes they beat us. The [B---] village head died.

How many people died?

One person died.

Did they [Tatmadaw soldiers] beat them with their hands?

No, they were ambushed with a remote controlled explosive device.

Had they [Tatmadaw soldiers] ordered people to guide them when they were ambushed by the remote controlled explosive device?

Yes, they were ambushed on the upper part of the road [by B--- village]. They [Tatmadaw soldiers] were going back with the DKBA [soldiers].

Where on the road were they ambushed?

In K--- [village].

Were any women or little boys included when you were portering?

It was mostly men.

How old were the men?

Some were 30-years-old and some were 40.

Did they hurt the men who portered?

Sometimes, they kicked and stamped on them.

When the Burmese [Army] soldiers came to the village and ordered the [villagers to] porter, did they shoot and eat their chickens?

Yes, they shot and eat their chickens. They stole some.

How many chickens did they shoot and eat?

There were 10 or 20 chickens. They ate every chicken they saw. Some cows and buffalos were hit by landmines.

Where did they [Border Guard soldiers] plant landmines?

They planted them in the paddy fields and they [the landmines] hit and killed people, cows and buffalos.

Which armed group planted those?

It was the Border Guard. We don't know their officer's name because we didn't see them.

Did the landmines hit the villagers?

Yes, they hit one villager when they were portering [for the DKBA] in T--- [village].

What was the name of the one who was hit and killed [by the landmine]?

His name was L---. It wasn't this year but in the past [2010].

Where did he live?

He lived in T--- [village].

How old was he?³

He was around 30-years-old.

Was he single or married?

He was married.

How many children did he have?

He had two children.

Do you know his eldest child's name?

I don't know. His youngest child is 10-days-old.

³It should be noted that although the interviewer is enquiring here about L---, a T--- villager who was killed by a Border Guard landmine in 2010, the villager at this point begins talking about a separate incident initially mentioned earlier in the interview, concerning a B--- village head who was killed by a remote controlled explosive device whilst portering for the Tatmadaw in approximately April 2011. This continues for the next six questions, before switching back to discussing L--- from T--- village.

How many years ago was he hit by the landmine?

In the past year [2011] at the water festival.

In which month is the water festival?

It's around April.

Did you see the one [person] who was hit by a landmine yourself or did you hear about it from other people?

That one I saw myself because he [the person hit by the landmine] was my cousin and the head [of B---] village.

What about the one [the villager who was hit by a landmine] who you said was from T---?

I didn't see that one. I only heard people talk [about it].

Are you certain [that L--- was killed by a Border Guard landmine while portering for the DKBA]?

Yes, I'm certain.

Where is the Border Guard [which is under the control of] SPDC Thein Sein's government⁴ unit based [which planted] the landmine that hit L--- villager?

It is based in Mee Mweh Hta [village].

What is that [Border Guard] company commander's name?

People call him Hpuh Meh Ka.

How many soldiers does he have?

I don't know.

Naw,⁵ when you said that you had to carry things for the Burmese [Army] soldiers; did they provide you with rice?

Yes, they provided that.

How many times a day did they provide you with rice?

On the day that I portered, I didn't eat even though they provided me [with rice].

⁴In Karen, the Burmese phrases *Na Ah Pa* (SPDC) and *Na Wa Ta* (SLORC) are commonly used to refer to the Burmese government or to Burma's state army, the Tatmadaw. Many older Karen villagers who were accustomed to using the phrase *Na Wa Ta* (SLORC) before 1997 continue to use that phrase, even though the SLORC has not officially existed since 1997. Similarly, despite the official dissolution of the SPDC in March 2011, many Karen villagers continue to use the phrase *Na Ah Pa* (SPDC) to refer to the Burmese government or to the Tatmadaw; see: "Mission Accomplished as SPDC 'dissolved'," *Myanmar Times*, April 4-10th 2011. The term *Na Ah Pa* was used by the villager who wrote this conducted this interview and interviewee and "SPDC" is therefore retained in the translation of this interview.

⁵S'gaw Karen prefix for women

When other people portered, do they provide them [with rice]?

Sometimes, [but they] didn't get enough rice.

Did they provide them with the same food as their soldiers?

Even if they provided them with [the same] food as their soldiers, they sometime didn't get enough rice to eat.

Did the food they provided include delicious food?

Yes, it included delicious food.

Naw, how much did the things that they ordered you to carry weigh?

They weighed twenty or thirty *viss* (32 kg. / 70.4 lb. or 48 kg. / 105.6 lb.).⁶

What things did you carry?

Rice.

How many baskets of rice did you have to carry?

I carried only one basket (32 kg. / 70.4 lb.).

Could you ask to rest on the way if you became tired whilst you were carrying things?

I didn't rest at any time.

Did the Thein Sein's SPDC government people [Border Guard soldiers] kick or stamp on the villagers when you were portering?

Yes, if they were male.

Which village were the villagers who were kicked and stamped on from?

Villagers from all the villages that were ordered to carry [supplies] to Mee Mweh Hta [were kicked and stamped on]. They went at nighttime.

Do you know the names of the villagers who were kicked and stamped on?

No, I don't know.

Did they kick and stamp on the porters who couldn't carry their things?

[The Border Guard Company Commander] Hpuh Meh Ka kicked and stamped [on porters], but he didn't pull their hair or slap them.

When your carried their things, did you sometimes have to sleep there [away from your village]?

If a man portered, they had to sleep [away from their village] for a week [at a time].

⁶A *viss* is a unit of weight equivalent to 1.6 kg. / 3.52 lb.

When they had to sleep [away from their village] for a week, did they let them sleep in a nice place?

No, they had to sleep in the bushes.

When the porters were sleeping in the bushes did they wait near them with guns?

Yes, they waited near them with guns, as they were afraid that they would try to escape.

Did they tie them up?

No, they didn't tie them up.

When the porters were staying overnight with the soldiers [whilst on portering duty], did the soldiers follow them if they went to defecate?

Yes, they followed them.

Naw, please tell us. Did they look after the porters who were ordered by the SPDC Army [Tatmadaw] if the porters were ill?

No, they didn't look after them. When they came back they had to look after each other.

Did they give them medicine?

No, they didn't give them [medicine].

Did other Burmese Army [Battalions] come to the village when people went to porter?

The Yellow Scarves⁷ came. They came to bring back the village head.

Did they hurt the villagers when they entered the village?

No, they didn't hurt them.

Did they shoot and eat their chickens?

They shot and ate chickens on the other side of the river. They shot and ate a lot and they just took them [without asking].

How many chickens did they shoot and eat?

They ate all the chickens that the villagers had, and also little goats.

How many goats?

There were five or six goats.

What about the chickens?

There were seven or eight chickens.

⁷ 'Yellow scarves' is a term commonly used by villagers to denote the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA), in reference to the yellow scarves that form part of their uniform.

When they entered the village, did they hurt, torture, or kill [any of] the villagers?

They killed one person in C--- [village].

Did they kill a male or female [villager]?

They were male.

How old was he?

He was 50-years-old.

What was his name?

His name was N---.

Did they take the villagers' things?

Yes, they took pots, spoons and clothes from owners who weren't at home and when no one could see them.

How many things did they take?

They took everything from the huts. They also took all of the paddy and milled rice.

How much paddy and milled rice did they take?

There were five or six baskets (160 kg. / 352 lb. or 192 kg. / 422.4 lb., respectively) of rice in ten huts.

Have you ever seen the SPDC Army order the villagers to work for them?

Yes, I have.

What things do they [the villagers] have to do for them?

[They have to] go and cut bamboo poles.

What types of bamboo do they have to cut?

They had to cut *wah bway* [a type of bamboo].

How long [were the pieces of bamboo]?

[Each] was 20 cubits (30 ft / 9.14 m.)⁸.

How many did they order?

If [they ordered] 50 [bamboo poles] per house, people had to cut 50 [bamboo poles]. There were *[censored for security]* houses.

⁸A standard measurement of the length of bamboo poles commonly referred to in Karen as the length from one's finger tips to one's elbow, about 18 inches / 45.7 cm.

When you portered, did you come back by yourself, did they release you, or did you try to escape?

We didn't try to escape. We came back by ourselves.

Did they hire you [provide payment] when you carried things for them?

No, they didn't hire us.

Did you carry [supplies] for free?

Yes, we carried [supplies] for free.

Has the armed group [Border Guard] that you carried things for come to your village again since you returned?

Later, they came but now they don't come.

Did they reprimand [the villagers] or order [things] when they came?

Yes, they ordered things.

What things did they order?

They ordered the village head to find chickens.

How many chickens did they order them to find?

They ordered them to find four or five viss (6.4 kg. / 14.08 lb. or 8 kg. / 17.6 lb.). If they [the villagers] didn't do as they ordered, they [Border Guard soldiers] slapped their faces.

Did they kick and slap them?

Yes, they kicked and slapped them.

Whose face did they slap when they came to the village?

They slapped the village head's face.

How many times did they slap him?

They slapped him two or three times.

What is the village head's name?

His name is Saw W---.

You said the village head is Saw W---. What is the name of the person who slapped the village heads' face?

The [Border Guard] Company Commander Hpuh Meh Ka.

Which battalion does he belong to?

I don't know. I only saw that they came [to the village].

Do you have any information that you want to tell me about when the SPDC [Border Guard] came to the village and harmed the villagers?

They ordered people to repair the vehicle road [which passes through B--- village], pick up coconut skins and clear [rubbish and vegetation] from the roadside.

How many coconut skins did they order you to pick up?

There were a lot. The whole village [had to participate].

They ordered you to pick up the coconut skins. Why did you have to do that?

They ordered us to clean the road.

When you said that they ordered [villagers to] repair the vehicle road, how many villagers did they order?

They ordered the whole house [village].

When they ordered people to repair the vehicle road, did they scold or beat [the villagers] if they didn't do it?

Yes, they did. They hurt them.

Do you know the names of the villagers who worked on that [the vehicle road]?

I can't name them because they ordered the whole house [village].

What kinds of things did they do to hurt [the villagers]?

They hurt them by doing things like slapping their faces and beating them about the head.

How many times did they slap them?

If they [Border Guard soldiers] slapped [people's faces], they would slap them as much as they wanted, such as four or five times.

Which was the armed group that slapped the villagers' faces?

It was [the Border Guard led by Company Commander] Hpu Meh Ka.

Did Hpu Meh Ka come alone when he ordered villagers to do clear and repair the vehicle road? [If not], how many people did he come with?

He came with his fellows [soldiers].

How many of his fellows?

There were 40 or 50 [soldiers].

Naw, do you want to report anything else?

I don't have anything else to report. I only have to report my health and vocation.

What do you want to report about the SPDC Army?

[They] kick and stamp [on villagers], and harm them by slapping their faces and pulling their hair. They order [villagers] from the village head to travel [when forced to porter for or guide soldiers], porter, cut bamboo poles, trees and thatch shingles, everything. We always have to go to Mee Mweh Hta and Meh Koo Hta [villages]. I can't tell you everything. We have to go and work once every four or five days, once every two or three days, once every three days and once every second day. They always order [things] and we always have to go to them.

Do you want to report anything else, like their demanding chickens?

They enter [the village] and demand chicken without paying for it. They steal. They take rice paddy and milled rice. Their officer orders them to steal things and to take paddy and milled rice at night-time. Cows and buffalos are hit by the landmines. They go and hurt all the villagers.

Is there anything else?

The citizens want [this to stop] because they suffer and it's very difficult.

Do you want to report anything else?

Only that we would be happy if the Burmese soldiers didn't order us to do things or oppress us, if there were development, and if they went back to their country. We want our leaders from the upper [Karen National Union (KNU) headquarters] to help us.

About education, did the SPDC [Army] or another armed group build [a school] in your village?

The leaders from the upper [KNU headquarters] built it.

What kinds of leaders?

I can't name them.

Which leaders built the school?

The KNU.

How was your school built?

The KNU built it.

Who helped the KNU?

The logging people helped them.

How did the logging people help them?

They provided trees [as building materials].

How much does each [logging] person provide?

They [the loggers] help one school at a time. If they have cut the trees that year they provide them [the school] with money, one million [kyat] (US \$1222.49)⁹.

What subjects are taught at the school?

The subjects are Karen, Burmese and English [languages].

Are the teachers male or female?

[There is a] female teacher.

Where does the female teacher live?

K--- [village].

Does the female teacher who teaches here get a salary?

The [KNU] leaders help them a little.

How much do they give them?

5,000 [baht] (US \$166.67).

How much is it [their salary] for one month?

That's [their salary] for the whole year.

Is that in Thai or Burmese currency?

Thai currency [baht].

How many students attend the school here?

There are only 20 students this year.

How many standards are taught?

Four standards are taught.

How many teachers?

There is only one teacher.

What teaching curriculum is used? Is it from the Burmese or *Kaw Thoo Lei*¹⁰?

The teachings are taken from the *Kaw Thoo Lei* [curriculum].

⁹ As of April 10th 2012, all conversion estimates for the kyat in this interview are based on a rate of 818 kyat to US \$1. This reflects new measures taken by Burma's central bank on April 2nd 2012 to initiate a managed float of the kyat, thus replacing the previous fixed rate of 6.5 kyat to US \$1.

¹⁰ Both the researcher conducting the interview and the interviewee used the term 'Kaw Thoo Lei', which refers to Karen State as demarcated by the Karen National Union (KNU). The exact meaning and origin of the term 'Kaw Thoo Lei' is disputed; see: Jonathan Falla. *True Love and Bartolomew: Rebels on the Burmese border*, Cambridge University Press: 1991.

Are people allowed to teach the Karen language here?

There are Karen books, Burmese books, and English books.

Can they teach [Karen] freely?

Yes, freely.

How many students can't attend the school in the village?

There are around ten students.

What about those who attend the school?

There are 20 [students].

Are there any problems [which make it difficult] for parents to send their children to school?

Some parents have [problems] because they don't have enough food and they can't grow enough paddy.

How can they send their children to the school?

They can send them because the leaders [KNU] help them.

What do the villagers in the village know about education?

They know that they can live together and attend the school.

What is the future plan for those who will attend the school?

They need the leaders' [KNU's] help.

What are their [the students'] opinions of the village after they have attended the school and become educated?

[After graduating they will be] useful for the country.

What opportunities are there for people who live here and finish school?

They can study medicine.

What else?

If their education is improving, they go to teach in other [people's] houses [in the village].

Whose houses [villages] do they go and teach at?

[They go to] Wah Klue Hko.

.... *[censored for security]*.

Further background on the current situation in Papun District can be found in the following KHRG reports:

- "Papun Interview Transcript: Saw L---, June 2011," (March 2012)
- "Papun Interview: Maung R---, August 2011," (February 2012)
- "Papun Interview: Saw H---, March 2011," (February 2012)
- "Papun Situation Update: Bu Tho Township, May to June 2011," (February 2012)
- "Papun Interview: Saw T---, August 2011," (January 2012)
- "Papun Situation Update: DwehLoh Township, Received in November 2011," (December 2011)
- "Villager executed in Papun District," (November 2011)

