



Incident Report

May 22, 2014 / KHRG #12-73-I8

Mergui-Tavoy Incident Report: Tatmadaw tortures villager and demands forced labour in Ler Muh Lah Township, 2002 - 2011

This Incident Report describes the torture of a T--- villager by a Tatmadaw captain in Ler Muh Lah Township, Mergui-Tavoy District in May 2003. The incident occurred when Tatmadaw LIB #557 Captain Htin Aung heard a rumour that Saw K---, who has a brother-in-law that served in God's Army, was in the possession of a weapon. After this incident, the Tatmadaw also restricted civilian movement in the area by requiring villagers to obtain a 'recommendation letter' for 100 kyat to travel. This report also describes how villagers were forced to labour for Tatmadaw LIB #557 soldiers two times per year, each year between 2002 and 2011, without pay.

Incident Report | Ler Muh Lah Township, Mergui-Tavoy District (2002 - 2011)

The following Incident Report was written by a community member who has been trained by KHRG to monitor human rights abuses. It is presented below translated exactly as originally written, save for minor edits for clarity and security.¹ This report was received in June 2012 along with other information from Mergui-Tavoy District, including seven other incident reports and thirteen interviews.²

Part 1 – Incident(s) detail

Type of Incident	Tatmadaw torture of a villager
Date of Incident(s)	May 2003
Incident Location (Village, Township and District)	T--- village, Ler Muh Lah Township, Mergui-Tavoy District

Victim information

¹ KHRG Incident Reports are written or gathered by a community member in Mergui-Tavoy District who has been trained by KHRG to monitor human rights conditions. KHRG trains community member in eastern Burma to document individual incidents of abuse 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 writing incident reports, community members are encouraged to document incidents of abuse that they consider to be important, by verifying information from multiple sources, assessing for potential biases and comparing to local trends.

² In 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. For additional reports categorized by Type, Issue, Location and Year, please see the Related Readings component following each report on KHRG's redesigned Website.

Name	Age	Sex	Ethnicity	Religion	Family	Occupation	Village
Saw K---	56	Male	Karen	Christian	Yes	Church committee	T---

Perpetrator Information				
Name	Rank	Unit	Base	Commander
[Htin Aung]		LIB [Light Infantry Battalion] #557, M--- [village] in Tanintharyi [Region]		Htin Aung

Part 2 - Information Quality

1. Explain the specific manner how you collected this information.

Saw K--- was arrested and tortured by [a captain from] LIB #557 in M--- [village] without fault [without a valid reason]. Saw K--- suffered beating and torture. This is his experience.

2. Explain how the source verified information accuracy.

N/A

PART 3 – Incident Details

Describe the Incident(s) in complete detail. For each incident, be sure to include 1) when the incident happened, 2) where it happened, 3) what happened, 4) how it happened, 5) who was involved, and 6) why it happened. Also describe any villager response(s) to the incident, the aftermath and the current living situation of the victims. Please, use the space prepared below and create attach if needed.

In May 2003, people in T--- village said [spread a rumour] that, “*there are weapons in the village*”, so the [Tatmadaw] arrested Saw K--- [who allegedly possessed a weapon]. He was taken by the [Tatmadaw] for a week. After one night of torture, they continued to ask [Saw K---] questions for three days. The person who tortured [Saw K---] was LIB [Light Infantry Battalion]³ #557 Captain Htin Aung. People say that [Saw K---] was arrested because his brother-in-law [allegedly] gave him a gun, [but the real reason why he was tortured was] because Saw K---’s brother-in-law served in God’s Army.⁴ The person who reported this to the SPDC [State Peace and Development Council]⁵ was called Saw G---. After that [the torture], the movement in [that area] was restricted and they [villagers] had to obtain a recommendation letter [to travel in the area]. They had to pay 100 kyat (US \$0.10)⁶ for the recommendation [letter] that allowed them to travel around for six days.

³ Light Infantry Battalion (Tatmadaw); 500 soldiers but most in the Tatmadaw are under-strength with less than 200 soldiers.

⁴ God’s Army was an armed force of ethnic Karen in the eastern Burma area, along the Thai-Burma border, which was led by teenage brothers Johnny and Luther Htoo and conducted a string of audacious guerrilla actions during the 1990s. The two brothers, including the 20 remaining members, surrendered to Thai soldiers in the early 2000s. For more information on God’s Army, see “Profile: God’s Army,” BBC, January 24th 2000.

⁵ In Karen, the Burmese phrases *Na Ah Pa* (SPDC) and *Na Wa Ta* (SLORC) are commonly used to refer to the Burma 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.

⁶ As of February 25th 2014, all conversion estimates for the Kyat in this report are based on the official market rate of 985 kyat to the US \$1.

In addition, [the villagers] had to porter things for the SPDC soldiers to Htee Moo Hkee Ler Ker [army base]. They [the villagers] had to pay money [a fine] if they lost goods while portering and they had to do [other kinds of] forced labour and sentry duty as well. They [Tatmadaw] also requested a sentry when they lived in the village. In 2002, they [villagers] left the village because of [the negative impact of living near the] Military Operations Command (MOC)⁷ #33 and LIB #557 Captain Tin Aung. Between the beginning of 2002 and 2011, they [the villagers] had to carry Burmese [army] rations twice a year.

Part 4 - Permission for Using the Details

Did the victim(s) provide permission to use this information? Explain how that permission was provided.

N/A

Further background reading on the situation in Mergui-Tavoy District can be found in the following KHRG reports:

- *Truce or Transition? Trends in human rights abuse and local response in Southeast Myanmar since the 2012 ceasefire*, (May 2014)
- “Mergui-Tavoy Situation Update: Te Naw Th’Ri Township, August 2012 to March 2013” (August 2013)
- *Losing Ground: Land conflicts and collective action in eastern Myanmar*, (March 2013)
- “Mergui-Tavoy Interview: Saw E--”, (March 2013)
- “Complaint Letter to Burma Government About Value of Agricultural Land Destroyed by Tavoy Highway,” (July 2012)

⁷ Military Operations Command; ten battalions for offensive operations; most MOCs have three TOCs, made up of three battalions each.

