



Interview

July 24, 2014 / KHRG #13-86-T1-I1

Toungoo Interview: A---, August 2013

This Interview with A--- describes events occurring in B--- village, Thandaunggyi Township, Toungoo District in August 2013, including arbitrary arrest, detention and violent abuse. On June 26th 2013, Tatmadaw Infantry Battalion (IB) #35 Battalion Deputy Commander Hsan Htun punched and kicked A--- and hit him with his gun before ordering him to report to the nearby Tatmadaw camp. A--- sustained serious wounds to his body, which he still suffered from at the time of the interview, and was partially blinded in one eye. A---'s wife, a local school teacher, had attempted to negotiate with Hsan Htun when he continued to kick A--- while he was receiving initial medical treatment from a school committee member, and she subsequently reported the incident to members of the Burma legislature and to UNICEF. Despite his physical suffering and inability to work, A--- continued to be present at the Tatmadaw meetings regarding his incident. Ultimately, Operations Commander (G3) Ye Htunt provided A--- with 10,000 kyat (US \$10.32) as compensation. No action was taken against Battalion Deputy Commander Hsan Htun.

Interview | A--- (male, 31), B--- village, Thandaunggyi Township, Toungoo District (August 2013)

The following Interview was conducted by a community member trained by KHRG to monitor human rights conditions. It was conducted in Toungoo District in August 2013 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 Toungoo District, including three other interviews, one incident report, 47 photographs and one video clip.²

Ethnicity: Karen

Religion: Christian

Marital Status: Married

Occupation: Teacher

Position: Villager

¹ KHRG trains community members 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, community members 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.

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 categorised by Type, Issue, Location and Year, please see the Related Readings component following each report on KHRG's Website.

What is your name?

A---

How old are you?

31 years old.

Where do you live?

C---, Thandaung Town, Thandaunggyi Township, Brigade Two,³ Toungoo District.

What is your occupation?

Plantation [worker].

What is your religion?

Christian.

What is your ethnicity?

Karen.

Are you married?

Yes.

Do you have children?

Yes.

How old are they?

One and half years old.

We have heard some information about you. Can you tell us about it?

Yes, I can tell you about it.

How did it [the incident] happen to you? Could you tell us specifically about it?

The incident took place on June 26th 2013 in front of the Tatmadaw camp close to B---village. Battalion Deputy Commander Hsan Htun, two of his officers, one young man from Tai Pho [village] and the school headmaster U Moe Lwin were standing at the crossroad where the road turns off toward B--- village, and were having a conversation. When we arrived there on motorbike, they made us stop and they asked my friend D--- about an incident [with a car] that happened in the area [B--- village] last night. My friend D--- was trying to explain to him, saying "I do not know when the car passed [by my



The above photo was taken on August 3rd 2013 by a KHRG community member. It depicts the wounds that A---, a villager from C--- village, Thandaunggyi Township, still suffers from over a month after he was arbitrarily detained and violently abused by Hsan Htun, Battalion Deputy Commander of Tatmadaw Infantry Battalion #35. [Photo: KHRG]

³ This is referring to the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) Brigade #2, which comprises the same geographic area as Toungoo District.

house]; *it was while I was admonishing my brother-in-law. I did not notice it.* [I was asking my brother-in-law] *why did you do that? Since my brother-in-law had taken my motorbike, I could not go to work and I was admonishing him. So I did not notice the car was passing.*” Then, [Commander Hsan Htun] turned to me and asked me what I did yesterday. I explained to him [that I did not know anything about the incident], but he did not accept my response and he kicked me in the chest. I continued to explain to him, but he did not listen to me and he punched me in the face. He was not yet satisfied and he kicked me and my motorbike. At that time, I got off the motorbike and then I heard him say to the two officers “*This teacher [A---] is coming back from the city, so take him into the camp.*” I went to the camp, [but] as I was going to give a receipt for dog fruit⁴ to the daughter of the village head in B--- village, [I left the camp to finish my errand]. When I arrived at the village, I was talking to the village head. After a while, I told him that I was going back [to the camp]. However, as my motorbike does not have headlights, I left my motorbike at the village head’s house and I asked for a flash light from him. Then I gave my motorbike’s key to the village head’s son-in-law and I went back alone [to the camp on foot]. When I arrived in front of the camp, five soldiers of Battalion Deputy Commander Hsan Htun were waiting for me and took me to the camp. When I arrived at the camp, they told me that the reason they were calling me into the camp was due to the orders of Battalion Deputy Commander Hsan Htun. Then I sat and talked with the soldiers [for the rest of the night]. [The next morning] at 8:45 am or 9:00 am, I heard the sound of gunfire toward the Roman Catholic Church. [When they heard the shooting] the soldiers [in the camp] took their places and said, “*They [Hsan Htun and his soldiers] are drunk and they are rough.*” Then one of the soldiers came to me and told me not to be scared and then another one also came near to me and told me not to be afraid. I have never faced anything like this in my life. They also told me to stand up and stay still and if the Battalion Deputy Commander Hsan Htun comes back to you, [every time] reply “Yes” to him [to whatever he asks or says] or he will punch you. After a while, he [Hsan Htun] came back and said to me “*Ha! You are already back.*”

When you heard the sound of gunshots, who was shooting?

[I was told by the soldiers that] Battalion Deputy Commander Hsan Htun was firing.

Where was he when he was shooting?

He shot [from the camp] toward the Roman Catholic Church and the school.

What was the purpose of shooting like that?

I do not know about that since I was in the army camp at that time, so you can ask the villagers and village head about that and you will know. I think they will know. It was when I was talking to the soldiers [in the camp].

Was he shooting because he was drunk or was he just shooting like that [for fun]?

According to his soldiers, he was drunk and he was in the camp the whole day. Even his [Hsan Htun’s] soldiers were afraid that they would be punched by him. When the commander [Hsan Htun] arrived back where I was, he told me, “*I am not a teacher. Do you think I’m a teacher?*” He treated me in a wild and bad manner. He asked me, “*Do you not know how to fire a gun? Do not go.*” He called me to the tent where people usually eat food [in the camp]. When I arrived at the tent to take the food, one of the officers said to me, “*Go and pour alcohol into the cup!*” I was shocked by that. I was

⁴ Dog fruit, also known as jengkol, is a bean containing sulphur and a mildly toxic amino acid. It is native to Southeast Asia and is commonly eaten with rice and fish paste.

sitting and he asked me, “*Do you not drink?*” Then he scolded and ranted at me and I had to drink with an unhappy mind. He poured [another cup] and asked me to have another drink and I said to him that I would not have another drink as I had to help my wife prepare paperwork for the school. He did not accept this. He asked me “*Where is your motorbike?*” I replied to him that I left it at the administrator’s house in B--- village. As my motorbike does not have a headlight and I cannot drive my motorbike [at night], I left it there and I came back alone. Then he scolded and ranted at me and then I had to have that drink. Then he poured the third drink and asked me to drink that. I said I would not drink it. But I did drink it and then I went back to the village. I had begged and asked him [to let me go]. “*So drink it and I will send you back*” he had told me. After I had drunk it, I came back [to the village]. Then I arrived [in the front of the school] where the teachers were. At that time, as I wanted to urinate, I thought I would go past the [school’s] fence [to the back toilet] and then I would urinate. When I turned [back around], he said “*Bullshit*” and Battalion Deputy Commander Hsan Htun, [who followed me back to the village], punched me and kicked me and I fell down. Two of his soldiers [picked me up and] were holding my hands and he punched me as he liked and I fell down again. Then he hit me with the gun, kicked me and punched me and I fell down [again]. At that time, one of the teachers [who was watching] said, “*He is dead.*” Then they [Hsan Htun and his soldiers] all went back to the camp. One of the officers who had left [went to] my wife and said, “*Teacher! Come and look at your husband. I do not know what happened to him?*” Then my wife ran over to look at me and I was bleeding a lot. She was crying and she asked for help from the villagers. My friend D--- was running to me and he carried me to my house. When I arrived, one of the students and my wife cleaned up my blood. At that time Battalion Deputy Commander Hsan Htun was coming back to the village and my friend D--- was trying to hide because he was frightened. I then asked a school committee member to stitch up my open wounds. When the Battalion Deputy Commander Hsan Htun came back [again], he said to the school committee “*What kind of person are you? Who the hell is he [A---]? Do not stitch him up.*” Then he kicked me. My wife was crying and he told my wife, “*Why are you crying? We are not asking you to shoot a film. Do you think of yourself as the [Burmese] actress May Thet Khaing?*” He scolded her. Then he said that he would order me back to the camp and my wife was crying and begged him not to order [me back]. Battalion Deputy Commander Hsan Htun said, “*Starting from tomorrow, I do not want to see both of you.*” He said that to us and drove us out of B--- village.

When you say he was hitting you, why did he hit you?

I do not know the reason why he was hitting me like that. I have been going to work in B-- village for three years, including this year, as my wife has been working as a teacher there. I have never had to deal with a problem like this. I’m always used to getting along with the [soldiers at the] army camps. There is the proverb that says: the fields depend on the island and the island also depends on the fields. Nevertheless, I do not know what is wrong with this army camp. We are trying to stay on the best terms we can with them, and we have been staying here [B--- village] for three or four weeks [already this year]. In the first two weeks, I was also helping teach in the school [in E--- village], as there were not enough teachers. This year I would like to continue to help teach in the school like I did in past years. If they ask for help from me, the villagers and the village head will know the most how I have helped them. While I was teaching, they also came and looked at my teaching [abilities], whether I was teaching in the correct way. Some of them liked my teaching style and they do not want to blame me [for what happened].

Do you still remember the name of the operations commander (G3)?⁵

⁵ Operations commander (G3) refers to a lieutenant colonel or colonel. In the Tatmadaw they are also known as strategic and/or tactical commanders.

The name of the operations commander (G3) is Ye Htunt.

Could you also tell me how many times the Battalion Deputy Commander [Hsan Htun] hit you with his gun?

He hit me with his gun about five times in total. He also hit me many times with his hands and legs, but I want to say it was about six times in total.

Did you get serious wounds?

Yes, I got serious wounds. They are all over my face, eyes, left cheek and lip. My upper cheek was hit by the gun, my chest was hit by the gun, my neck was strangled by hands, my waist was hit by the gun and my thighs were kicked. I have suffered from these wounds very much.

I also heard that you suffered from many open [bleeding] wounds caused by his hitting. Could you tell us about that?

I have suffered from the open wounds a lot. A medical teacher from Leik Tho [Hospital] has stitched up the open wounds for me and I was able to recover.

How many places did the medical teacher have to stitch up for you, [because of the] open wounds?

There were ten places stitched up in total. It could also be more than ten places. I do not remember all of them, as I was suffering from the pain at that time.

What about your eyes?

It is said that there are still white cells inside my eyes [cloudy corneas from being hit]. Right now, I am curing it with medicine by myself.

When he punched you did your eyes go red [haemorrhage]?

Yes, they did. I can only see [well] with one of my eyes. As I could not afford to pay money for treatment, I am trying to cure my eyes by myself. I asked my friends [how to cure them] and I am trying to cure them that way.

After you were punched, did they [Hsan Htun and his soldiers] leave you like that? How did you get to the hospital?

The school committee informed the village head leader from E--- village [where my wife is a teacher]. The village head came to look after me and said, "*You cannot stay like this! We need to send the husband of the teacher [to the hospital] as he has been bleeding for the whole night. There is still blood around his mouth this morning.*" He was going to send me to the hospital as he was worried for me. But he sent me to the Thauk Yay Khant clinic first. When I was at the clinic, my wife went to meet with [Representative] Ko Win Myint at the Parliament [Assembly of the Union⁶ in the capital Nay Pyi Taw].⁷ She

⁶ The Assembly of the Union is the national legislature of Burma established by the 2008 national constitution.

⁷ *Nay Pyi Taw* is the capital city of Burma. In 2005 the military regime moved the capital from Rangoon to a greenfield at its present location, 320 kilometers (200 miles) north of the city. See "[Nay Pyi Taw now less of a ghost town](#)," *Bangkok Post*, December 11th 2013.

talked about the issue concerning me. Ko Win Myint left to send an NGO [non-governmental organisation] and UNICEF [from Nay Pyi Taw] and he then came back [to Parliament]. He then sent the information [about my eye condition] to the battalion commander from IB [Infantry Battalion] #30 [to arrange medical treatment for me]. As for renting a car, Ko Win Myint himself rented the car for me [to send me to the military medic in the camp]. After we had passed the river and the bridge, [we arrived at camp and] the battalion commander [from IB #30] himself was examining my eyes, which were in serious pain. My eyes were also bleeding. He did not stitch up [my wounds] for me and he wrote down the address of Leik Tho Hospital and he sent me there.

How long did you have medical treatment at Leik Tho Hospital?

It was nearly one month at Leik Tho [Hospital].

Did you arrange [the cost of your medical treatment at the hospital] by yourself?

It was by my arrangement. As well, the battalion commander in IB #30 himself asked his soldier, Sa Aa Pa, to give me 50,000 kyat (US \$51.60)⁸ and some snacks. I did not want to accept it, but it was an officer offering it to me, so I [had to] accept it unwillingly. This money is still in my hands right now.

Do you feel better now?

Recently, I have had stomach pain again. The wound in my cheek is also sometimes in pain as it was hit by the gun. I have had to suffer from this pain.

Is there any special danger from the processes used when you had medical treatment with the doctor?

According to operations commander (G3)'s examination, he said that my eyes need to have special treatment. However, as I cannot afford to cure [my eyes with special treatment in the hospital], I tried to have the medical treatment by myself [at home].

When you had the medical treatment, did he [operations commander (G3)] say that he would pay for you to have the medical treatment?

No, he did not say that he would help me pay to have the medical treatment.

So, according to what you have said, they are not taking full responsibility [for your injuries]?

No, they are not taking full responsibility. I also do not want them to help me.

Is there any [Tatmadaw] officer who will take action on this case?

The Tatmadaw have said they will take action on this case in words [only], but in reality, they have not taken any action on this case. We also have heard they are having a conversation [about a ceasefire]⁹ between the two groups [the Tatmadaw and the KNU

⁸ All conversion estimates for the kyat in this report are based on the July 8th 2014 official market rate of 969 kyat to the US \$1.

⁹ On January 12th 2012, a preliminary ceasefire agreement was signed between the KNU and Burma government in Hpa-an, the capital of Kayin State. The exact terms for a long-term peace plan are still under negotiation. For updates on the peace process, see the [KNU Stakeholder webpage on the Myanmar Peace Monitor website](#). For KHRG's analysis of changes in human rights conditions since the ceasefire, see [Truce](#)

(Karen National Union)]. The way that they [Tatmadaw] are taking action [on this incident] is not good enough yet.

What do you mean by not enough?

I mean the appropriate punishment. They have [a form of] punishment in their army camp, and we also have the law for the people in the country.

They have not given punishment according to the law?

As far as I know, they have not given any punishment yet.

Do you think you will have difficulty in the future [because of your injuries]?

There will be many kinds of difficulties in the future. I have to lay in bed [sick]. We are faced with many difficulties. As they [Hsan Htun and his soldiers] have never faced the difficulties [I have], they do not have any concerns. As for me, I am not able to participate in my work [earn a living]. Since I have to suffer with many wounds, I have to rest and stay in bed. My wife is a teacher. I have to stay like that and I have to depend on my wife's salary. As I am suffering like this, I have difficulties and I cannot participate in my work.

You and your wife are both government staff [teachers] and he [Hsan Htun] is also government staff [a soldier], was that officer [Hsan Htun] not charitable to you?

Regarding being charitable, he [Hsan Htun] even said that he did not want to see me and my wife teaching in E--- village's nursery school. He drove us out of that school.

That battalion deputy commander fired you two from the school [in E--- village]? Do the staff not know about this?

I do not know about that. It may be that he used his power [as a Tatmadaw commander] and did that. I would like to ask why they still need to use their power in this time when our country is a democratic country. I was summoned on the 23rd [of July] to go to LIB [Light Infantry Battalion] #124's camp, but I did not go on that day as I was seriously ill. The operations commander (G3) had ordered LIB #124's deputy headquarter commander to call me at my mother-in-law's house. I said to him that I could not go [to the camp], as I was not [feeling] well and that I would go tomorrow. According to the deputy headquarter commander of LIB #124 the operations commander (G3) had told him that he would support [me in treating my injuries]. The next morning, on the 24th [of July] I arrived at LIB #124's camp and gave the information [about what happened to me]. The operations commander (G3) had asked one of the soldiers to send me to Leik Tho [village]. When I arrived at Leik Tho, I entered the Leik Tho Hospital to show my wounds to medical teacher G---. She then gave me medicine for my eyes and I asked her about money for the cost of the medicine. Medical teacher G--- helped me with everything from the beginning to the end, such as the cost of medicine, stitching me up, as well as for the cost of living and food. She took care of me as her own son. When I went to the office of the operations commander (G3) [to continue to have medical treatment for my wounds], she was worried for me and she herself went with me. When I went there, the vice school headmaster teacher F--- and medical teacher G--- were together with me when I arrived. Once at the operations commander (G3)'s office, the deputy headquarter commander of IB #30 told me, "You are getting handsome again

[*or Transition? Trends in human rights abuse and local response since the 2012 ceasefire*](#), KHRG, May 2014.

and your wounds are also getting better.” I told him “No, I am not. My wounds are getting painful again. I am not lying to you. I do not know what is wrong with my wounds these days. But I hope to be better soon.” I wanted to say to him that I still have a wounded nose, but I did not [say this] as I am not an authoritative person. I was standing there as a civilian and I did not have the right to talk back as I am a victim. I did not have the energy to talk and I was sad. But I stood up and talked to the deputy headquarter commander [IB #30] about my eyes that needed to be shown to a specialist doctor according to the operations commander (G3). He said, “You do not need to worry. The eyes are like that.” He commiserated with me cheerfully. Then, the operations commander (G3) arrived and he talked to me. He stood up and begged me [for forgiveness]. Then he sat down and begged me. Actually, he does not need to beg me. The person who needs to beg me is the Battalion Deputy Commander Hsan Htun himself. I do not want them to involve only one person in the process to address the issue [and for those discussions to occur] without them [the perpetrator, Commander Hsan Htun]. I want to do this when there are both sides of us [here], because the person who did the thing [violent abuse] was Battalion Deputy Commander Hsan Htun in IB #35. I would like to know how people are going to take action against him when he is here.

What did they do when you were there?

What I saw is that they were keeping the file [about my incident] in front of me. When I arrived at the office of the operations commander, he showed me the file and I looked at it once and I saw that it did not include the Battalion Deputy Commander Hsan Htun’s name. I felt very sorry. Then, I did not continue reading it. I signed my name and then he asked me to provide my fingerprints on the paper. I turned to the next page and I saw that there were only six sentences. After I had read it, I did not want to sign my name [anymore]. However, I had to sign my name, provide my fingerprints and give the number of my ID card, although I did not want to. They said that they would give me 10,000 kyat (US \$10.32), but I did not want to accept it. However, as it was an officer offering it to me and also, I am a civilian, I could not deny it and I had to accept it in a frightened manner.

Finally, what would you like to add?

Finally, I would like to say that the country has just started on the road to democracy. According to the wounds that I have had to suffer from, from the punching and hitting, our Karen people, especially, have been suffering from oppression, abuse and torture since the past. [Now], we have democracy in our country and we also have hope from it. However, because authoritarian persons are misusing their power, I do not want civilians to suffer from it in the future. Also, I would like to speak to everyone in advance and [recommend that they] analyse the incident by themselves so that they will not find themselves in the same situation and have to suffer from the wounds of these kinds like me, such as hitting and punching, in the future. We all want peace all over the world and if all of the ethnic people are in unity, the whole world will be in unity. If only one person [works alone], there will be no unity. Only if all of the people are helping one another, will [unity] be manifest. That is all that I would like to say. One more thing that I would like to add is that in Burma’s history, a king produced a law, which instructed [people] not to wipe [hands that are dirty] on the lime wall when chewing betel nut.¹⁰ Nevertheless, the king forgot about the law and wiped [his dirty hand] on the lime wall when he was chewing betel nut. A duke saw the king wipe his hand on the wall. When there was an interrogation, no one knew who had done it. Finally, the duke told what he had witnessed: only the king had wiped his index finger on the lime wall. Thus, the index

¹⁰ Betel nut is the seed from an areca palm tree (*Areca catechu*) which is commonly chewed in Southeast Asia. Chewing betel nut produces a colourful red liquid which leaves a distinctive stain on surfaces.

finger of the king had to be cut off. All of the people from students to the elderly have memorised it. I would like to say to the person who has done this to me to analyse and see themselves by looking at that story. In conclusion, I would like to say that the authoritarians [Tatmadaw] still have the power now.

Thank you so much *nyi lay* [brother].¹¹

Thank you.

Further background reading on the situation in Toungoo District can be found in the following KHRG reports:

- “Tatmadaw mortar shelling and other military activities in Hpapun and Toungoo Districts,” (July 2014)
- “Chapter: The impact of anti-personnel and other mines in Southeast Myanmar since the January 2012 ceasefire,” (July 2014)
- “Toungoo Incident Report: Motorbike accident kills villager in Thandaunggyi Township, August 2013,” (June 2014)
- “Toungoo Incident Report: Tatmadaw transport rations and ammunition in Thandaunggyi Township, December 2013,” (May 2014)
- “Toungoo Incident Report: Sexual assault in Thandaunggyi Township, December 2013,” (May 2014)

¹¹ In Burmese, *nyi lay* is a familiar term of respect toward someone younger than you. Although it translates into ‘brother’ in English, in Burmese it does not necessarily imply actual familial ties between the ‘Brother’ and the KHRG researcher who conducted this interview.

Taw Oo (Toungoo) District



Karen Human Rights Group (KHRG)