



News Bulletin

January 13, 2012 / KHRG #2012-B2

Pa'an Interview: Naw K---, September 2011

This report contains the full transcript of an interview conducted by a KHRG researcher in September 2011. The KHRG researcher interviewed Naw K---, a 45 year old woman from L--- village in Pa'an District, who described an incident in which Tatmadaw LID #22 and Tatmadaw Border Guard soldiers forced local villagers to porter military supplies and equipment while wearing Border Guard uniforms during a joint attack on a KNLA Battalion #101 camp at Kler Law Hseh. In the interview below, Naw K--- explained that, while she was attending a funeral in Th--- village, many Th--- villagers were absent from the village, some having already been arrested by Border Guard soldiers to serve as porters and others having fled the village due to fears that they would be arrested to porter. Naw K--- told KHRG that the Th--- village head informed her that he had to wear a Border Guard uniform while forced to accompany Border Guard soldiers during their attack on the KNLA camp at Kler Law Hseh and she witnessed him departing Th--- village in the company of Border Guard soldiers. This incident was previously described in the KHRG report "Pa'an Situation Update: September 2011" published on October 24th 2011. In addition, Naw K--- also mentioned additional forced labour demands placed on local villagers to work on government-owned agricultural projects. She also described how villagers attempt to mitigate the harmful effects of forced labour demands through negotiation with commanding officers, and strategic temporary displacement to avoid arrest.

Interview | Naw K--- (female, 45), L--- village, T'Nay Hsah Township, Pa'an District (October 2011)

The following interview was conducted by a KHRG researcher. It is presented below translated exactly as it was received, save for minor edits for clarity and security.¹

Ethnicity: Karen

Religion: Buddhist

Marital Status: Married

Can you tell me about when you went to Th--- village or Sh--- village?²

¹ KHRG 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. KHRG's most recent analysis of the situation in Pa'an District can be found in the recent Field Report, *Functionally Refoulement: Camps in Tha Song Yang District abandoned as refugees bow to pressure*, KHRG, April 2010.

I went to Th--- village. I didn't dare to go to Sh--- village. We didn't go anywhere [outside the village]. We had to stay at home and at the house where the great-grandfather's funeral was held.

Who was the grandfather?

The funeral was for P---'s great-grandfather.³

Was the funeral in Th--- village?

Yes, because [P---'s] grandmother didn't have anyone to accompany her so I went with her [from L---] to visit.

Can you tell me about when the SPDC Army [Tatmadaw]⁴ and the Border Guard soldiers shelled the KNLA camp with 81 mm [mortar rounds] and when they arrested villagers to act as porters?

The evening I arrived in Th--- village they shelled 81 mm [mortar rounds], but not at the village. They shelled around the foot of the mountain. The next day before I returned to L--- village from Th---, there was fighting at the foot of the mountain.

Do you remember the day of the fighting?

I remember it was September 21st 2011. They stopped fighting at 12:00 pm.⁵ We were listening to the fighting and, while we were listening, the Border Guard soldiers came to the top of Th--- village with trucks. The village head had also come to visit [P---'s] grandmother, but he just said a few words before the Border Guard soldiers called him and he had to go with them again. The village head told [P---'s] grandmother: *"I'm the village head so I don't have time to rest. I have to follow the Border Guard and wear their army uniform. They force me to wear their army uniform."*

How many Th--- villagers had to go [porter]?

They didn't say how many villagers had to go. Every one of the villagers they arrested had to go with them, so the [other] villagers didn't dare to stay at home and hid themselves.

² Note that locations mentioned throughout this interview are censored consistently with those in a report previously published by KHRG in October 2011 that details the same incident described by Naw K---. See "Pa'an Situation Update: September 2011," KHRG, October 2011.

³ According to a KHRG researcher familiar with the situation in Th--- village, P--- is a prominent local KNU leader.

⁴ In 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 conducted the interview and interviewee, and "SPDC" is therefore retained in the translation of this interview.

⁵ A previously-published report detailing this same incident identified the timeframe of the joint LID #22 and Border Guard attack on KNLA Battalion #101 at Kler Law Hseh as being between 8:45 am and 10:45 am. See "Pa'an Situation Update: September 2011," KHRG, October 2011. According to a later update provided to KHRG by the same villager who wrote that report, Th--- villagers were again forced to porter military equipment for Border Guard soldiers on October 3rd 2011.

How many villagers did they arrest the day you arrived in the village?

They couldn't arrest [any more villagers] because all the villagers had already run away. The village head felt sorry for the villagers who had already been arrested so, before the soldiers came, he let the other villagers know and he said: "*If you can run, please run.*" If the soldiers tried and couldn't find them, the village head told the soldiers he couldn't find them either.

Were there any men left the day you went to the village?

No men were left except the old men who're about 80 years old. The only men who came to [P---'s] great-grandfather's funeral at first were old men. No young men came to begin with because no one dared to stay in the village.

Did the village head get any problems [for what he did]?

No, he's okay, but he had to do everything the Border Guard soldiers ordered him to do.

Does the village head still have to serve the Border Guard soldiers?

Yes, he still has to serve the Border Guard soldiers. So long as there's a chance the fighting will happen again, the village head can't come home. The village head has to stay with them. If the situation cools down, they'll release the village head so he can go home.

How many days did you stay in Th--- village?

I arrived in Th--- village in the evening time. I stayed there for three nights and two days.

When you returned [from Th--- to L---], had the Th--- village head come home yet?

He'd come back to Th--- [temporarily] because he needed something, but he had to go back again [to the Border Guard soldiers]. He'd just come back to buy lentils and other food. The fighting hadn't stopped and was still continuing [at that time].

He couldn't come back and stay in the village as usual?

No, he couldn't. He had to stay with the Border Guard soldiers where the fighting was taking place [near Kler Law Hseh army camp].

Were they fighting all the time?

No, they weren't fighting all the time. Before I left, they fought one time, but it was not that bad. When I was in Th--- village [on September 21st 2011], they fought from 9:00 am until the fighting cooled down at 12:00 pm. Two men came with me [from L---] when I went to [P---'s] great-grandfather's funeral. We didn't dare to return [to L---] by a direct path because we were afraid that we'd be arrested to porter for the army. We had to go around by the river because the Border Guard soldiers set up their army camp at the entrance to the village.

Who arrested the villagers to be porters?

They [the Tatmadaw] gave the power to the Border Guard soldiers, but it was only the Border Guard soldiers that arrested the villagers to be porters. The SPDC Army soldiers didn't come.

Did they only arrest porters on the day you arrived?

They had already arrested villagers before I got there on the same day I arrived, and they also arrested villagers while I stayed in the village. They came and arrested villagers to be porters from the house where [P---'s] great-grandfather's funeral was being held. Two of the men [attending the funeral] wanted to visit around the village, but [P---'s] grandmother didn't let them go outside and just kept them in the room because the Border Guard was arresting the villagers outside the house. The Th--- villagers were very busy. The Border Guard soldiers ordered two villagers to do work for them on the bean and corn plantations.

Who owns the bean and corn plantations?

They're the [Burmese] government's plantations. If the soldiers didn't force the villagers to work for them [for free], then they'd have to pay people to do it for them.⁶

How old were the two men that went with you [to Th---]?

I guess one was 24 years old and the other one was about 21 years old. The 21-year-old guy wasn't so handsome, but the 24-year-old guy, he looked strong and handsome and had to rub black charcoal on his skin and cover his face to make himself look weird so that the Border Guard wouldn't be interested in [arresting] him.

Did they fire the 81 mm [mortars] into Th--- village?

When I was there, the mortars weren't fired into Th--- village, but when we were returning to L---, we heard the 81 mm shells exploding near Th--- village.

Even though they didn't fire directly into the village and were shelling other areas nearby, did any debris [shrapnel] come into the village?

No, it didn't reach into the village because the village head had begged them not to shell near the village. It was also [P---'s] grandmother's father's funeral and she wouldn't be happy if they shelled mortars into the village. The village head wanted to make [P---'s] grandmother's father's funeral go well, so the village head begged the Border Guard soldiers not to disturb the great-grandfather's funeral and said he would obey everything the Border Guard soldiers told him to do. The Border Guard soldiers ordered him to wear the Border Guard army uniform, so he wore it and he followed them everywhere and he did as the Border Guard soldiers wished. The Border Guard soldiers knew it was [P---'s] grandmother who had come [to the funeral] and the Border Guard wanted to create conflict [with people attending the funeral], but the village head begged them not to and so they dared not to create conflict.

⁶ A previously-published report describing events in T'Nay Hsah Township during the same time period describes an incident in which local village heads were ordered on September 26th 2011 to arrange 100 villagers from M--- and G--- villages to provide forced labour on bean and corn plantations owned by Border Guard Battalion #1017 Commander Dih Dih in Za Ya Phyu [also known as Th'Ro Wah] village. See: "Pa'an Situation Update: September 2011," KHRG, October 2011.

Further background on the current situation in Pa'an District can be found in the following KHRG reports:

- "Incident Report: Villager shot and killed in Pa'an District, October 2011," (October 2011)
- "Pa'an Interview: Saw C---, October 2011," (December 2011)
- "Pa'an Situation Update: September 2011," (November 2011)
- "Pa'an Situation Update: June to September 2011," (October 2011)
- "Pa'an Situation Update: September 2011," (October 2011)
- *Displacement Monitoring: Regular updates on protection concerns for villagers in Dooplaya and Pa'an Districts and adjacent areas of Thailand*, (October 2011)
- "Pa'an Situation Update: April 2011," (September 2011)

