



Karen Human Rights Group

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

News Bulletin

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The death of Saw Hpah Mee (November 13th 2015)

This News Bulletin describes the background of, and events leading up to, the death of Saw Hpah Mee, former Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) commander turned renegade. He was killed by soldiers from KNLA Battalion #102 on November 13th 2015, in Pa Teh Hta village, Htee Th'Daw Hta village tract, Bu Tho Township, Hpapun District. Saw Hpah Mee was well known in Hpapun District and beyond, as a capable fighter, but also as a human rights abuser who instilled fear in the civilian population. KHRG has previously published several reports detailing human rights abuses attributed to Saw Hpah Mee.¹

The death of Saw Hpah Mee

Former Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) commander Saw Hpah Mee has died. According to information received by KHRG, he was killed by soldiers from KNLA Battalion #102 on November 13th 2015, in Pa Teh Hta village, Htee Th'Daw Hta village tract, Bu Tho Township, Hpapun District. The group of soldiers who sought out and killed him were reportedly led by Lance Corporal Saw Kat Pa Li from KNLA Battalion #102. He was shot in the arm when the soldiers attacked him at the house he was staying in. He managed to flee the scene but was later killed by the soldiers. The soldiers confiscated 11 weapons, including rocket launchers, M16 and AK-47 assault rifles, ammunition, and different types of landmines in the house. Saw Hpah Mee's body was buried near the banks of Salween River, north of Pa Teh Hta village, Htee Th'Daw Hta village tract.

Saw Hpah Mee had complex affiliations with several Karen ethnic armed groups (EAGs), including the Karen Nation Union (KNU), the KNLA, and the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA). He started his military career in the KNLA as head of a local force at village tract level. He then joined the DKBA (Democratic Karen Buddhist Army) when it was formed in 1994, only to return to the KNLA after one year. He mainly served in Hpapun District and, over the years, Saw Hpah Mee garnered a reputation as a capable fighter. He was recognised as an accomplished tactician, despite his reported lack of formal education, and known for frequently ambushing his enemies.

He and a group of KNLA soldiers were ordered to infiltrate the DKBA (Democratic Karen Buddhist Army), and in 2010 after having infiltrated the organisation, they destroyed a DKBA ammunition warehouse in the Sone Na Thar Myaing Shwe Myout Daw section of Myaing Gyi Ngu. Upon returning to Day Poo Noh village and the Brigade 5 (Hpapun District) headquarters of the KNLA, he was promoted to the rank of captain by General Baw Kyaw Heh. Following his promotion, Captain Saw Hpah Mee and his followers were based Bu Tho Township, and mainly active in Htee Th'Daw Hta village tract.

¹ This News Bulletin was written by KHRG office staff and is based on information from a community member from Hpapun District who has been trained by KHRG to monitor local human rights conditions. It summarises information from one situation update received by KHRG in March 2016. In order to increase the transparency of KHRG methodology and more directly communicate the experiences and perspectives of villagers in southeast Burma/Myanmar, 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.

After being stationed in Htee Th'Daw Hta village tract, he started disobeying and defying the commands of his superiors. He refused to attend meetings and remained firmly based in his army camp in the Taung Kyar area, which is in the northern part of Pa Teh Hta village, where he regularly committed abuses against the civilian population. According to a KHRG field researcher, Saw Hpah Mee was involved in logging despite operating in an area where it had been prohibited by the KNU. He was also known to use *yaba*,² to the extent that he reportedly got out of control on several occasions and killed not only civilians but also fellow soldiers. His soldiers did not stay with him for long; some went to Mae La Oon refugee camp in Thailand and some joined a DKBA group led by Lieutenant Bo Bee. In the end, he had only two soldiers with him.

According to a statement released by the KNU on October 14th 2015, Commander Hpah Mee was dismissed from his position in the KNLA in response to his having committed numerous human rights violations and his failure to meet the commands of his KNLA superiors.³ One month later, he was dead. KHRG has received indications from individuals familiar with the case suggesting that Lance Corporal Saw Kat Pa Li acted on orders from higher up within the KNLA, rather than on his own.

Previous human rights abuses attributed to Saw Hpah Mee

KHRG has previously reported on human rights abuses in Hpapun District, in which Saw Hpah Mee was implicated. On August 5th 2009, he violently abused a villager on the road leading to Ma Htaw village in Dwe Loh Township, who was unable to get his truck out of the way. Saw Hpah Mee pulled villager U A--- out of his truck, threw him to the ground and beat him with a piece of wood meant for bridge repairs. Saw Hpah Mee then un-holstered his pistol as if to kill U A---, but the villager's profuse apologies were sufficient to convince him to put away his weapon without firing it.⁴

On October 15th 2012, Saw Hpah Mee assaulted Saw P---, a 51-year-old villager from M--- village, Htee Th'Daw Hta village tract, Bu Tho Township because he grazed his cows in an area where Saw Hpah Mee had prohibited it. He beat Saw P--- and shot and ate one of his cows.⁵ In July 2015, Saw Hpah Mee was implicated in the violent abuse and disappearance of Kyaw Dah Dah, the 56-year-old Htee Th'Daw Hta village tract leader. Later on, KHRG received information that Saw Hpah Mee killed Kyaw Dah Dah because he had reported on abuses committed by Saw Hpah Mee at a Bu Tho Township meeting.⁶

Furthermore, KHRG has received unconfirmed information that Saw Hpah Mee was involved in forced recruitment. A KHRG field researcher reported that Saw Hpah Mee killed Saw Kar Pay, a 45-year-old from Myaing Gyi Ngu as he failed to offer his child to serve in the military, as well as his fellow soldier Kyaw Heh Noh, aged 46, for failing to find new recruits.

² *Yaba*, which means 'crazy medicine' in Thai, is a tablet form of methamphetamine. First developed in East Asia during the Second World War to enhance soldiers' performance, methamphetamine has become increasingly popular in Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, Vietnam, and Burma/Myanmar where it is typically manufactured. See, [Yaba, the 'crazy medicine' of East Asia](#), UNODC, May 2008; "[Woman raped and killed in Pa'an District, October 2012](#)," KHRG, December 2012; and Chapter IV in [Truce or Transition? Trends in human rights abuse and local response in Southeast Myanmar since the 2012 ceasefire](#), KHRG, June 2014.

³ See, "[KNU Brigade 5 respond to the media, regarding media reports of forced recruitment in Brigade 5](#)," *Thaw Thi Kho*, October 2015 (Burmese/Myanmar version); English translation available at "[Clarification from the Karen National Union \(KNU\) Mutraw District Regarding Media reports on Forced Recruitment and Other Issues in Mutraw District October 14, 2015](#)," *Karen Kwe News Group*, October 2015.

⁴ "[Starving them out: Food shortages and exploitative abuse in Papun District](#)," KHRG, October 2009.

⁵ "[Incident Report: Violent abuse in Papun District, October 2012](#)," KHRG, April 2013.

⁶ "[Commander Pah Mee implicated in violent abuse, disappearance, and killing of village tract leader in Hpapun District, July 2015](#)," KHRG, March 2016.

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

- “Hpapun Situation Update: Bu Tho Township, November 2014 to January 2015,” (October 2015)
- “Fighting between Tatmadaw and KNLA soldiers leads to violent abuse and displacement of villagers in Bu Tho Township, Hpapun District, October 2015,” (October 2015)
- “Hpapun Situation Update: Bu Tho and Dwe Lo townships, April 2014 to February 2015,” (September 2015)
- “Hpapun Incident Report: Villager killed by Border Guard Force (BGF) Battalion #1013 in Bu Tho Township, March 2015,” (September 2015)
- “Human rights violations by Second Lieutenant Tha Beh of BGF Battalion #1014 in Hpapun District, between 2012 and 2015,” (September 2015)

Mu Traw (Hpapun) District

