

ABUSE UNDER ORDERS

**The SPDC & DKBA Armies
through the Eyes of their Soldiers**

Karen Human Rights Group

March 2001

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The SPDC and DKBA Armies Through the Eyes of their Soldiers

An Independent Report by the Karen Human Rights Group
March 27, 2001 / KHRG #2001-01

This report looks at the armies of the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) military junta ruling Burma and the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA), a Karen group allied with the SPDC, through the eyes of their own soldiers who have fled: the recruitment, the training, life in the battalions, relations with villagers and other groups, and their views on Burma's present and future situation. What we find, particularly in the SPDC's 'Tatmadaw' (Army), is conscription and coercion of children, systematic physical and psychological abuse by the officers, endemic corruption, and the rank and file of an entire Army forced into a system of brutality toward civilians. According to Tatmadaw deserters, one third or more of SPDC soldiers are children, morale among the rank and file is almost nonexistent, and half or more of the Army would desert if they thought they could survive the attempt. The Tatmadaw has expanded rapidly since repression of the democracy movement and the creation of the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC, former name of the SPDC) in 1988. The Armed Forces as a whole have expanded from an estimated strength of 180,000 to over 400,000, making it the second-largest military in Southeast Asia after Vietnam. Military camps and soldiers are now common all over Burma, especially in the non-Burman ethnic states and divisions. With this increased military presence has come a rise in the scale of abuses and corruption committed by the Army. To achieve this military expansion, children as young as nine or ten are taken into the Army, trained and sent to frontline battalions. Of the six SPDC deserters interviewed for this report, five were under the age of 17 when they joined the Tatmadaw.

The Tatmadaw, despite its size, does very little fighting against opposition forces; instead, it targets its military operations against villagers in order to undermine the resistance and establish control. Its officers would rather spend most of their time using villagers and their own soldiers on money-making enterprises, or simply extorting money from the villagers. The soldiers of the Tatmadaw are often portrayed as mindless thugs and killers, but this oversimplifies the issue. Many of the common soldiers in the Tatmadaw are not willing volunteers, they must fight a war in which they have no interest, and they are forced by their officers and non-commissioned officers to abuse villagers. Throughout the time they are in the Army, they have their pay and equipment stolen by the officers and must watch as the officers get rich while the soldiers rarely have enough to eat. Any dissent, whether against this corruption or against the abuse of villagers, is met with verbal and physical abuse from the officers. A climate of fear is pervasive among the privates, which results in their committing acts which they might not otherwise do. Some units are worse than others, and in the particularly bad units, the soldiers are so brutalised that they take out their frustration on the nearest villagers. The officers are often content to let the soldiers do what they want as long as it doesn't interfere with the officers' lives or their profits. Most rank and file soldiers hate their situation but can see no way to escape it. Seeing no way out, some commit suicide. The desertion rate in the Army is soaring, but the penalty can be harsh if caught; often it is death.

The current situation of the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA) is also covered in this report. A Karen splinter group formed in late 1994 with the support of the SLORC, it has acted as an arm of the SLORC/SPDC Army in subjugating villages in Karen areas, but also runs its own operations.

*In order to produce this report, KHRG human rights researchers interviewed SPDC and DKBA deserters who fled from units in Pa'an and Papun Districts of Karen State. These testimonies are augmented by quotes from previous interviews with SPDC deserters and villagers. To see more reports concerning SPDC deserters, readers should see the KHRG reports **"Interviews with SLORC Army Deserters"** (KHRG #96-19, 18/5/96), **"Testimony of SLORC Army Defectors"** (7/8/94), **"Comments by SLORC Army Defectors"** (20/6/94) and **"SLORC Abuses in Chin State"** (KHRG #97-03, 15/3/97). Further background and information about the DKBA can be found in many KHRG reports, including **"Inside the DKBA"** (KHRG #96-14, 31/3/96), **"Beyond All Endurance: The Breakup of Karen Villages in Southeastern Pa'an District"** (KHRG #99-08, 20/12/99), **"Uncertainty, Fear and Flight"** (KHRG #98-08, 18/11/98), **"Caught in the Middle: The Suffering of Karen Villagers in Thaton District"** (KHRG #99-07, 15/9/99), and **"Attacks on Karen Refugee Camps: 1998"** (KHRG #98-04, 29/5/98). These reports are available on the KHRG web site (<http://www.khrg.org/>).*

This report consists of several parts: this preface, an introduction and executive summary, a detailed description of the situation including quotes from interviews, an index of interviews and the full text of selected interviews. An Appendix is also included giving a breakdown of units within the SPDC Army, the Tatmadaw. The full text of all interviews used in compiling this report is available as a separately published Annex, and can be obtained from KHRG upon approved request.

Notes on the Text

In the interviews, all names of those interviewed have been changed and some details have been omitted where necessary to protect people from retaliation. False names are shown in double quotes. The captions under the quotes in the situation report include the interviewee's (changed) name, gender, age, rank and unit, and a numeric reference to the interview. These numbers can be used to find the quote in the full text of the interviews. Although measures have been taken to hide the identity of people in this report, please do not pass this report in its present form to any representatives, agents or business partners of the SPDC regime.

*All numeric dates are in **dd/mm/yy** format.*

Terms and Abbreviations

SPDC/Tatmadaw

SPDC	State Peace & Development Council, military junta ruling Burma
PDC	Peace & Development Council, SPDC local-level administration (e.g. Village PDC [<i>VPDC</i>], Village Tract PDC, Township PDC [<i>TPDC</i>])
SLORC	State Law & Order Restoration Council, former name of the SPDC until Nov. 1997
Tatmadaw	Army, also ‘Pyitthu Tatmadaw’ (People’s Army); the SPDC Army
IB	Infantry Battalion (SLORC/SPDC), usually about 500 soldiers fighting strength
LIB	Light Infantry Battalion (SLORC/SPDC), usually about 500 soldiers fighting strength
LID	Light Infantry Division (SLORC/SPDC), 10 battalions for offensive operations
Sa Ka Ka	Abbreviation for SPDC’s Military Operations Commands, for offensive operations
Su Saung Yay	Depots where newly recruited men are kept before being sent to training camps
Pa Take	Burmanisation of the word ‘practice’; used by Burmese soldiers to describe the non-military labour which they must perform
Bo Muh	Literally ‘major’, but also used to refer to all officers
Saya/Saya Gyi	Literally Teacher/Big Teacher; terms of respect used to refer to Corporals and Sergeants respectively
NCO	Non-commissioned officers; lance corporals, corporals and sergeants

DKBA and KNU

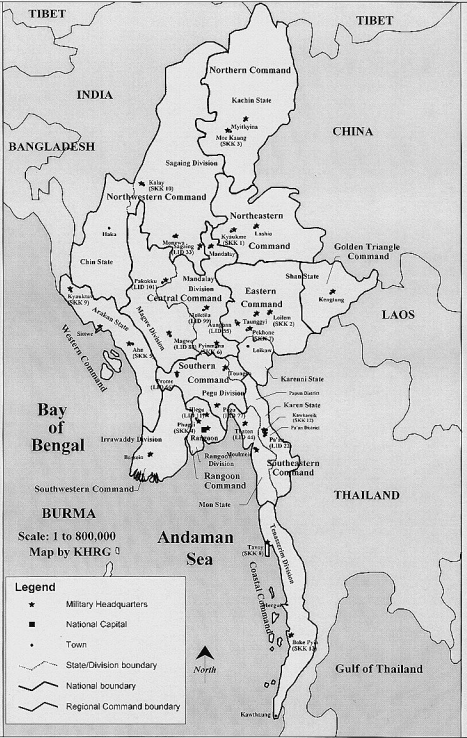
DKBA	Democratic Karen Buddhist Army, Karen group allied with SLORC/SPDC
Ko Per Baw	‘Yellow Headbands’, common name for the DKBA
KNU	Karen National Union, main Karen opposition group
KNLA	Karen National Liberation Army, army of the KNU
Nga Pway	‘Ringworm’; derogatory SPDC slang for KNU/KNLA
Ko Per Lah	‘Green Headbands’, name used by some villagers for the KNLA
Kaw Thoo Lei	Karen name for their homeland, also often used to refer to KNU/KNLA

Miscellaneous

Viss	Unit of weight measure; one viss is 1.6 kilograms or 3.5 pounds
Bowl/Pyi	Volume of rice equal to 8 small condensed milk tins; about 2 kilograms / 4.4 pounds
Kyat	Burmese currency; US\$1=6 Kyat at official rate, 500+ Kyat at current market rate
loh ah pay	Forced labour; literally it means traditional voluntary labour, but not under SPDC

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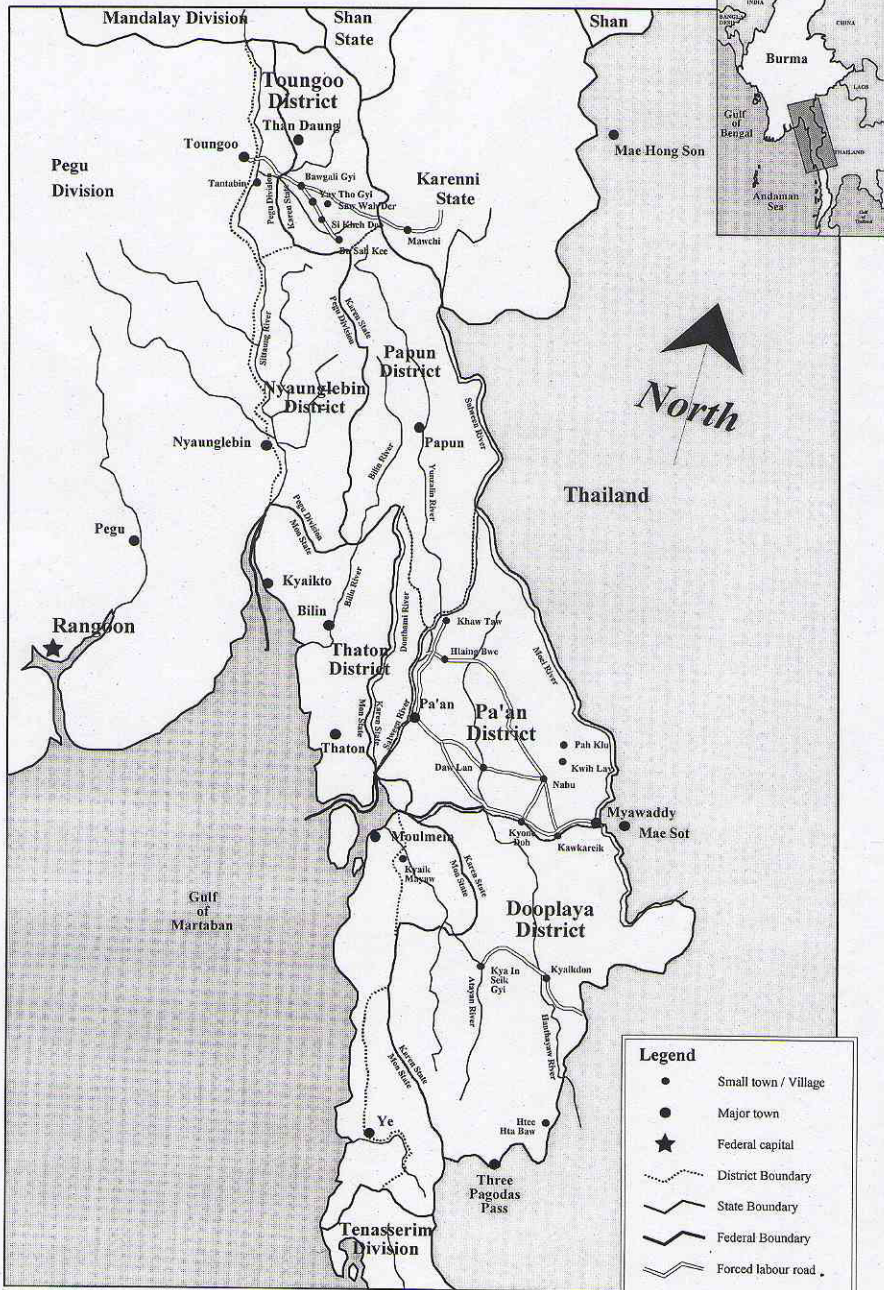
Scale: 1 to 800,000
 Map by KHRG

Legend

- ★ Military Headquarters
- National Capital
- Town
- State/Division boundary
- National boundary
- Regional Command boundary



Districts of Karen State



Legend

- Small town / Village
- Major town
- ★ Federal capital
- - - District Boundary
- State Boundary
- Federal Boundary
- == Forced labour road
- ~ River

Scale: 1 cm to 22 km
1 in. to 35 miles

I. Introduction / Executive Summary

Never hesitating, always ready to sacrifice blood and sweat is the Tatmadaw.

– Tatmadaw slogan

The Burmese Army has been involved in military operations against resistance groups since Burma gained independence from Great Britain in 1948. Fighting was widespread with various Burman and ethnic political groups engaged in campaigns to create ethnic homelands or change the Burmese government. The Army was seen as the defender of the Burman people from these groups. This all changed after the coup of 1962 which installed the military government that has continued in power, under various names, until now. In the early 1970's the Army began what it called the *Pya Lay Pya* or 'Four Cuts' campaigns in various parts of the country. These campaigns were aimed at cutting off the food, funds, intelligence and recruits to the resistance groups. By 1988 the military junta had virtually destroyed the economy and the people were ready for a change. Up until this time the Army was able to get more volunteers than it needed and many Burman people still believed in the Army as their protectors. That all changed with the brutal crackdown on the pro-democracy protests and the 1990 elections. The people had stood up to the Army and it was no longer the respected institution that it had been. There was also still the problem of the ethnic armed resistance movements on the borders. The new State Law and Order Restoration Council's (SLORC) response was to begin a programme of rapid expansion of the *Tatmadaw*, the Burmese Army, and an increased militarisation of Burmese society.

The SLORC's expansion programme has seen the Army grow from 170,000 to over 400,000 and close to a stated goal of 500,000. This makes it the second largest military in Southeast Asia after Vietnam, and one of the largest in the world. Army camps have mushroomed all over the country and areas that almost never had a military presence before now have an almost constant one. This expansion is despite the fact that Burma has no aggressive external enemies and most of the resistance groups have cease-fires with the regime. The programme has also included the modernisation of the Tatmadaw's weapons. Small arms, heavy artillery, tanks, fighter jets and ammunition have been bought from various countries, especially from China. In addition to this, China and Singapore have been assisting the military-owned Defense Services Industries to modernise old factories and to build new ones to produce new lines of small arms, ammunition and landmines.

This rapid expansion has had an almost opposite effect on the quality of the officers and men of the Tatmadaw. A constant stream of new recruits must be brought in to ensure the continued expansion and to replace losses. The Army's loss of prestige has meant that its old recruitment practices cannot guarantee it enough recruits. To make up for it the Army has been accepting young men which it would have denied as physically unfit before. They have also begun using more devious tactics of recruitment. Young men are tricked into joining by being promised jobs or after being invited to drink alcohol. People arrested for minor offences are threatened with prison if they do not join. Children are also targeted as they are easy to convince or trick. The result is that the Army has a high percentage of men who did not choose to be there and thus the enthusiasm and professionalism in the Army has suffered greatly. The training for the new soldiers is usually for four months although some have been known to stay for as long as six because their equipment has not arrived and they must work around the training camps for the profit of the instructors. The training consists of drills in military parade and discipline, tactics and weapons. No human rights, politics or cultural awareness courses are taught. This is also

where the new soldiers become aware of the endemic corruption and abuse in the Army. The trainees have to work on projects which benefit the instructors monetarily and they are beaten or otherwise abused for poor performance in the training.

The life of a soldier in the Burmese Army is not an easy one. In the rear area battalion camps the soldiers are assigned duties on the battalion projects. After the rations were drastically cut in 1998, many of the battalions seized land from the villagers and used it to grow crops for the soldiers to eat. The villagers still do most of the labour on this land, while the soldiers supervise them. Soldiers are also put to work in brick kilns and cutting trees and bamboo. The bricks, wood and much of the produce from the fields are sold by the officers for a profit. The soldiers get nothing. Many of the rations that are sent are also stolen by the officers and quartermaster sergeants and sold, leaving the privates with very little to eat, while the officers have very good curries. Most of the soldiers' uniforms and equipment must be purchased by the soldiers themselves, which further reduces a salary which has had many deductions taken out already. The officers claim that these deductions go to good causes like support for schools, but the schools and other projects never see any of this money and the privates know that it is just pocketed by the officers. Any complaints about food, work, salaries or anything else to the officers is met with scorn and quite often a slap across the face or a more severe punishment. The soldiers are cut off from home with leave almost never granted; letters from home are destroyed before they arrive and those sent are thrown away by the officers. Soldiers are not allowed to listen to the radio and only allowed to read what the Army says they can.

The resistance groups in Burma operate in small guerrilla units and so there are no real frontlines, but areas of relative control. In the areas where the resistance forces operate the problems for the Burmese soldiers are compounded by the tension of possible ambush or landmines. Combat is not frequent, but the threat is always there. Losses for the Burmese Army are usually much higher than for the resistance. Medicines and medics are available but not in large quantities and the distances travelled before reaching help are considerable. The soldiers are treated even worse by the officers at the 'frontline'. Beatings and other punishments are severe for even minor infractions. The soldiers often don't get enough food and must resort to stealing it from the villagers, while the officers simply issue an order and receive pork or chicken from a village. This food is never shared with the privates. The soldiers are ordered to force the villagers to work on roads, as porters and in the camp. Although the soldiers are uncomfortable with this, they are more afraid of what the officers will do to them if they show any leniency to the villagers. Soldiers are forced to participate in things which they disagree with but see no way out of it. Many are brutalised to the point of not caring anymore.

The expansion of the Tatmadaw has also seen a corresponding increase in human rights abuses perpetrated by it. The Army's Four Cuts campaigns are no longer carried out in small areas for relatively short periods of time. They are now almost constant in most ethnic areas, especially the areas of operation of groups which have not made cease-fires with the SPDC. The soldiers are not unaware of how the villagers view them. They don't like what they are doing, but don't see many ways out. The SPDC tries to keep the soldiers politically unaware by controlling what they can read and listen to. Any soldiers or officers who get together to talk about their problems and how to change them risk being reported by the network of informers in the military. Soldiers and officers have been imprisoned for just talking about democracy. Despite these attempts to stifle dissent, most of the soldiers have no respect for their officers and have seen the abuse of the villagers with their own eyes. They no longer believe in the Tatmadaw as the unifier of Burma and the guardian of its people.

There are very few ways out of this for the soldiers. Some see no way out and choose suicide. Others attempt to desert. This is very risky since recapture means imprisonment or even execution. This is especially the case for soldiers who desert while on operations or if they take a weapon with them. There is also much uncertainty involved since the officers often tell the soldiers that they will be tortured and killed by the resistance soldiers if they are caught. Once the soldiers reach the resistance forces they are treated well. They cannot, however, go home as they will be arrested. Some join the resistance groups while others join the illegal immigrant work force in Thailand.

In southeastern Burma the SPDC has an uneasy ally in the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA). The DKBA was founded in late 1994 by the Buddhist monk U Thuzana from dissatisfied Buddhist members of the KNU and KNLA. The SLORC (now SPDC) supplied the new group with arms, ammunition, salaries, rations, and logistical support, and promised it control of Karen State if it would help to eradicate the KNU. In response the DKBA, which had already signed a peace agreement with the KNU, tore up this agreement and began helping the SLORC to attack the KNU/KNLA as well as most of the Karen refugee camps in Thailand. When it became apparent that the SLORC's promises would never be honoured and that the DKBA was not helping the situation of the villagers, most of the ex-KNLA and KNDO soldiers, who originally formed the bulk of the DKBA, left. They were replaced by villagers who joined because of the money and power it would give them, so their families would not have to go for forced labour, or because they were conscripted. This spelled the end for any political aims of the DKBA to improve the situation of the villagers.

The DKBA has 1,500-2,500 soldiers spread out in Pa'an, Papun, Thaton and northern Dooplaya Districts. There has never been much centralised control in the DKBA and most of its officers function as petty warlords in their areas. The DKBA headquarters at Myaing Gyi Ngu, once a growing town, has seen most of its population return to their villages because of lack of food. DKBA soldiers regularly fight the KNLA as well as assist SPDC units on their operations. Both the DKBA and the SPDC soldiers are wary of each other and fights have been reported between them. Over the past few years the SPDC has gradually taken away support from the DKBA. DKBA soldiers no longer receive salaries from the SPDC, food rations were cut back and now have been discontinued, and weapons and ammunition are only given in small quantities. The KNU has made it their official policy to welcome back DKBA soldiers and their families who want to join them, but no talks have been held to reunite the two organisations or establish peace between them.

While some DKBA commanders still try to help the villagers and even protect them from the worst of the SPDC's abuses, most units are increasingly turning towards money making projects. The DKBA is heavily involved in the black market logging business and in smuggling cattle to Thailand. DKBA units levy taxes on villagers' crops, demand money at checkpoints along roads and rivers, and demand forced labour to work in the camps and on money making projects for the DKBA. Other forced labour involves repairing roads, building pagodas and portering for DKBA units. In general the conditions while performing this forced labour are better than doing forced labour or portering for the SPDC. However, some DKBA commanders are known for being vicious, burning houses of suspected KNU sympathisers, and torturing and even killing villagers for failing to pay DKBA taxes or other minor 'offences'. Families of KNU or KNLA members are particularly at risk. In areas where the DKBA works closely with the SPDC or behaves just as badly as the SPDC troops, many villagers no longer distinguish between the two, referring to both as "the Burmese". When the DKBA was first formed, many civilians gravitated towards the group because they saw hope for a possible break in the age-old deadlock between the KNU and the Burmese regime; but the DKBA is now seen as little more than a self-interested SPDC-controlled militia, and civilian support for the group is all but nonexistent.

II. The Burmese Army

Only when the Tatmadaw is strong will the nation be strong.

– Tatmadaw slogan

The Burmese Army is the second largest in Southeast Asia and one of the largest in the world. There are at present about 400,000 officers and men in the Army. This is a very large standing army for a country with no real external enemies. In neighbouring Thailand, a country with a slightly larger population, the Royal Thai Army numbers only about 150,000. Organisationally, the Burmese Army is not structured to deal with an external threat, but to wage counter-insurgency operations as well as keeping the civilian population in check. Large battles rarely take place in Burma, with most of the fighting involving small ambushes in the jungle or assaults on remote mountain top camps. The last major offensive involving tens of thousands of soldiers from various Light Infantry Divisions and Regional Commands was in the Doooplaya district of Karen State and in Tenasserim Division in 1997. Since that time, the Burmese Army has been engaged in low-intensity counter-insurgency operations against the various ethnic resistance groups. This is partly because the resistance groups have forsaken bases and large formations for mobile guerrilla warfare, but also because of the negative foreign attention which large-scale offensives bring.

The bulk of the Army is divided into twelve regional commands, each of which is responsible for one or more of Burma's states or divisions. The regional command commanders are also the chairmen of those states and divisions under their control as well as members of the Central Committee of the SPDC. Their positions make them the military as well as the civil authorities in the region. Their membership in the SPDC Central Committee also makes them responsible for what happens in those areas on a national level. The regional commands each have three to four Strategic Operations Commands (SOC) which are responsible for areas within their region. Each SOC has three to four battalions assigned to it for garrison duties and limited offensive actions. Battalions rotate in and out of the 'frontline' areas every three months. Regional commands responsible for central Burma are in areas where there have been no active resistance movements for many years, but they still have at least 10 battalions on garrison duty. This is a large number of troops for an area, such as Rangoon, where there has been no insurgency since the 1950's. They could probably be better used at the frontline, unless their purpose is to watch the civilian populations of those areas. Occasionally these commands do send units to the frontline in other command areas, usually for the purposes of specific offensive operations. An example of this is the SOC from the Western Regional Command in Arakan State which for a number of years has been stationed in Toungoo district in the Southern Regional Command area.

The main offensive arms of the Burmese Army are the Light Infantry Divisions (LID) and the *Sa Ka Ka* [*Military Operations Commands*]. The ten Light Infantry Divisions are under the direct control of Army headquarters in Rangoon. Each of the LID's have ten battalions in three Tactical Operations Commands (TOC), which act as operational headquarters for three to four battalions each. These divisions have been used extensively in counter-insurgency operations since their inception in the mid-1960's as well as having a central role in putting down demonstrations in Rangoon in 1974 and 1988. The thirteen *Sa Ka Ka* are similar to the LID's with ten battalions in three TOC's. It is unclear yet whether they are under the command of the regional commands in which they are based or directly under the War Office in Rangoon. They are, however, offensive formations and do sometimes operate in other areas besides where they

are based. Both the LID's and the *Sa Ka Ka* are sent wholly or in part to frontline areas for specific operations which may last for as long as eight months or more.

The Burmese Army has infantry, artillery, armour, engineer and transport battalions, but the mountainous and forested nature of the resistance areas has made the infantry battalion the usual operational unit of the Burmese Army. There are two kinds of infantry battalions, the Infantry Battalion (IB) and the Light Infantry Battalion (LIB). The IB's are for garrison duty and patrolling while the LIB's are for offensive operations, but sometimes the roles are reversed; the offensive LID's have both IB's and LIB's. Each battalion has a battalion headquarters, four rifle companies, a heavy weapons company (mortars and machine guns) and a support company. In the field, battalions often operate in columns of several platoons or companies. Occasionally columns are formed out of a whole battalion or even several battalions. Officially, each battalion is to have 777 officers and men, but in practice there are no more than 500 and often far less than that. Two deserters interviewed for this report from Pa'an District indicated that their battalion was down to only about 170 officers and men and that other battalions had no more than 200. The very high desertion rate since 1998 was given as the reason. Reports from KHRG field reporters and KNU indicated that this is true of the battalions in Thaton, Papun and Dooplaya districts also.

“I was in Company #x. When we were moving, there were five people in one section and the Saya Gyi [sergeants] controlled them. In most of the companies there are 20 or 21 soldiers.” - “Tin Aung Win” (M, 17), Private from Light Infantry Battalion #549, Pa'an District (Interview #1, 12/2000)

“There are 21 people [in his Company]. There are over 170 people in the battalion. It is not many. The organisational structure is not full. In the past there were 777 men in one battalion. This was from 1996 to 1998. Then this was no more. Many people fled. Some were sent to prison [for desertion] and left the Army. Then the Army arrested them again [after they had served their prison terms]. Most of them had fled. Everyone fled. The Saya [Corporals] and also the Saya Gyi [sergeants] fled. ... The other battalions are the same. They all fled. Now there are over 170 people in a battalion. The other battalions have no more than 200.” - “Aung Zaw Moe” (M, 19), Lance Corporal from Light Infantry Battalion #549, Pa'an District (Interview #2, 12/2000)

Until the expansion programme began in 1988, the weapons and equipment for the Burmese soldiers had often been inferior to that of the resistance forces. After the crackdown and coup of 1988, the SLORC began receiving increased foreign military assistance from various sources, especially the People's Republic of China. In addition to the foreign material assistance, there has also been help in the way of improvements to the SPDC's defence industry with new plants being built with Chinese and Singaporean assistance to produce everything from landmines to a new line of assault rifles. The result is that Burmese soldiers are equipped with a variety of weapons. The standard assault rifle has for decades been the G3 and the standard light machine gun the G4; both made in Burma with the help of the German company Fritz-Werner. Since 1988, AK47 and M16 assault rifles have been obtained from China and Singapore respectively and issued to the soldiers. In the last few years the Burmese arms industry has been producing several new weapons of its own. A line of weapons known as MA1 to MA4, designed with Chinese help, have been issued to some units (MA stands for 'Myanmar Army'). The MA1 is a copy of the Chinese AK47 with the MA3 the same with a folding stock and the MA4 with a grenade launcher under the barrel. The MA2 is a copy of the Chinese RPD light machine gun. An MA7 is also produced, a copy of the Chinese RPG7 rocket propelled grenade launcher. A

new line reported as MA11 - MA14 is now being issued to replace the MA1 - MA4 line because the latter were deemed to be of poor quality. These appear to be based on the Israeli Galil assault rifle and the MA13 on the Israeli Uzi sub-machine gun. It is not clear how widely these have been issued, but KHRG has seen captured versions of these weapons carried by KNLA soldiers. The heavy weapons companies are equipped with recoilless rifles, rocket launchers and 60mm, 82mm and 120mm mortars from various sources. The SPDC has also purchased heavy artillery from China and other countries, but these are rarely used due to the highly mobile nature of the guerrilla war being fought by the resistance groups. There appears to be no dearth of ammunition for these weapons, soldiers carry enough for about 4 or 5 magazines plus loose ammunition, and more is carried by the porters. The deserters interviewed commented that they felt it was enough for the frontline although less ammunition was issued in the rear areas.

“They gave me an MA 1. It is the same design as the AK. They didn’t tell us where it was made, but the name of the gun is MA 1. The [serial] number of my gun was xxxx. The Chinese sent them to Burma and then the Burmese designed it. ... I could take 240, 250 or 260 bullets with a guarantee [the soldiers have to account for all of the bullets when they hand them back in after a patrol or operation]. We took four or five magazines. The gun and bullets were enough for me at the frontline.” - “Tin Aung Win” (M, 17), Private from Light Infantry Battalion #549, Pa’an District (Interview #1, 12/2000)

“I was issued an MA 2. It is not the same as an MA 1. The MA 2 looks like a Chinese machine gun. There is also an MA 3 and an MA 4. ... I was given 360 bullets. It was enough for me. It was enough for one fight. They also ordered the wontan [‘servants’, i.e. porters] to carry boxes with over 1,000 bullets inside each.” - “Aung Zaw Moe” (M, 19), Lance Corporal from Light Infantry Battalion #549, Pa’an District (Interview #2, 12/2000)

The personal equipment carried by the soldiers does not appear to have enjoyed the same quality upgrade as the weapons. Much of this has to do with the endemic corruption in the Tatmadaw. All of the deserters interviewed say they were issued with poor quality OG-brand uniforms. OG is a company in Burma known for its poor quality, but cheap clothing. These uniforms reportedly fall apart in a very short time, especially on operations in the jungle. Only one uniform is issued per year and the soldiers have to buy their own replacements. Some soldiers get a hold of better Det Tret uniforms by buying the material and sewing them up themselves. Soldiers are also given jungle boots, a jungle hat, towel, mosquito net, a thick, rough blanket, and a set of web gear. Mess tins are only given to corporals and sergeants. Vests and slippers are also occasionally given. Much of what is sent by the government is sold off by the officers and supply sergeants for a personal profit. Inferior equipment is bought and issued to the soldiers and the difference in price pocketed by the officers. Whatever the soldiers don’t have like backpacks, tents, slippers, and even rank and unit insignia, the soldiers have to buy themselves. For these reasons, the soldiers spend much of their pay buying new boots or another uniform. This has had a direct effect on the morale of the soldiers, who know what they are supposed to be issued but are forced to buy the equipment and go to the frontline with equipment which they know is inferior, while the officers and supply sergeants get rich off the equipment they have sold off or exchanged for lower quality goods.

“The OG uniform [OG is a brand name of clothing made in Burma which is known for its poor quality; they also make the uniforms for the Burmese Army] they gave us was no good to wear. It was very heavy when it got wet. The uniforms were all ragged after we went for a military operation for one week. We couldn’t wear them anymore.” - “Tin Aung Win” (M, 17), Private from Light Infantry Battalion #549, Pa’an District (Interview #1, 12/2000)

“They gave three sets of OG uniforms. They also gave jungle boots, a jungle hat, towel, mosquito net, a thick, rough blanket and equipment. ... They gave us a uniform when we were at the training school. We had to buy it ourselves with our salary. They gave us one once a year. They gave us an OG uniform and jungle boots. Sometimes they gave us a vest and sometimes they gave us slippers. This was only every one or two years. They also gave us a mess tin every one or two years. If we didn’t have them, then we had to buy uniforms, backpacks, tents and everything, even slippers.” - “Aung Zaw Moe” (M, 19), Lance Corporal from Light Infantry Battalion #549, Pa’an District (Interview #2, 12/2000)

“They only gave us OG uniforms [a cheap type of uniform that wears out quickly] once every 6 months, and new web gear, hat and boots once a year. Lately, we were wearing Det Tret uniforms [better material] that we sewed ourselves.” - “Saw Tha Ku” (M, 21), Private from Infantry Battalion #19, Papun District (Interview #3, 3/2000)

III. Recruitment

Abiding by the law is the way to safety and felicity.

- SPDC slogan

“The next morning one of the soldiers came to them and the police handed me over to him. Then they sent me to the Mingaladon Su Saung Yay place in Rangoon [this is a gathering and processing centre for new Army recruits]. I told them, ‘I would like to go back to my parents. Send me to the monastery.’ They told me they couldn’t send me back.” - “Tin Aung Win” (M, 17), Private from Light Infantry Battalion #549, Pa’an District (Interview #1, 12/2000)

The Tatmadaw claims to be an all volunteer force with the young men of Burma joining out of national pride and a sense of duty. For the most part this is a myth spread by the SPDC’s propaganda machine. Some young men do join the Tatmadaw for the same reasons that many young men all over the world join the military, for the fancy uniform and a chance to prove their bravery in a glorious battle. This is rare though, as the Tatmadaw no longer enjoys the respect that it once did among the population, especially since the brutal crushing of the pro-democracy movement in 1988. Of those who volunteer for the Tatmadaw these days, most are impressionable teenagers drawn by the uniform and the lure of a few hundred Kyat in cash every month. Many of them have family problems they are trying to escape, feel that they are a burden to their families because they are unemployed, or feel that if they join their families will be protected from forced labour or extortion.

“My economic situation was not going well, so my friends called me to enter the Army, and I joined. My friends told me that if we joined the Army, when we got permission we could go back home wearing our uniforms proudly. We would also get money and wear gold and silver. They spoke to me like that and that is why I followed them. They had heard that from other people. They had also seen one or two soldiers. Three of us joined. One of them was named Nay Myo, but I forgot the name of the other one. People said that Nay Myo got malaria and died. It was at the frontline. I don’t know where the other one went.” - “Aung Zaw Moe” (M, 19), Lance Corporal from Light Infantry Battalion #549, Pa’an District; he joined when he was 14 (Interview #2, 12/2000)

The rapid expansion of the Tatmadaw and attempts to keep up its strength level despite desertions and casualties has fostered an insatiable need for new recruits which cannot be met by luring impressionable volunteers. Standards of age or fitness are no longer applied; now the Tatmadaw will take almost anyone, and is using increasingly aggressive tactics to get them. A large proportion, possibly even the majority, are now taken into the Tatmadaw against their will. Recruitment centres are given quotas, and issue orders to villages in the area to hand over young men on a regular basis to fill them; villagers have told KHRG that the bribe necessary to escape this quota conscription is far more than they can ever pay. Undercover recruiters in plain clothes latch onto men at bus stops, in tea shops and at festivals, say they have a good job available and then take them to the recruitment offices. Sometimes they invite teenagers to eat and drink, get them drunk and then drag them to a recruiting station. One man interviewed for this report was invited to drink alcohol with a stranger in plain clothes until he passed out; when he awoke, he was on a boat which functioned as a recruiting station. The recruiter was nowhere in sight, and the Sergeant told him he had already been signed up and if he tried to refuse he’d be sent to prison. Some of these undercover recruiters are soldiers, while others appear to be agents paid by recruiting offices for each person they can drag in by whatever means necessary.

Other methods are even less subtle; deserters have described being arrested by the police and then being given the option of joining the Tatmadaw or going to prison. One young man was caught out at night while going to a festival without his nationality card. He was accused by the police of “hiding in the dark”, an offence so sweeping that almost anyone out after dark can be arrested, and then given the option of the Army or jail. Some of those arrested are not even charged with anything, just told that if they refuse to join they must be a spy so they will go to prison. In past interviews with KHRG, some former soldiers have also reported that when their tour of duty was over they were told that they would only be released after they had provided 5 or 10 new recruits - and to get these recruits, most of them go to the schools and markets to look for young boys.

“[I] went to the Bayinnaung festival in Rangoon with my friends. On the way, I visited a section [of Rangoon] with a group of my friends. I asked my friends to wait for me in the dark so I could urinate. I don’t know if they heard me or not. When I finished, my friends were not there. Five or six police came to me. They ran and chased me to arrest me. They tried to arrest all four of us, but the others fled and escaped. They could only arrest me. They asked me if I had brought my nationality card [identity cards which are supposed to be carried by all Burmese, but are commonly left at home]. I told them I didn’t bring it, but that I was a student and had come with my friends. I pointed to my friends, but they were gone. They had disappeared. I told them I hadn’t brought my student card. They didn’t like that. They put handcuffs on me and took me to their station. ... They questioned me about why I was going around in that section without a nationality card. They told me they had arrested me because they suspected me of doing something or hiding in the dark [this accusation is often used by Burmese police and is so sweeping that almost anyone can be arrested for it just by being out after dark].” – He was sent the next day to become a soldier; “Tin Aung Win” (M, 17), Private from Light Infantry Battalion #549, Pa’an District (Interview #1, 12/2000)

“When I was younger I fought with my stepfather. My stepfather punched me, so I returned and beat him. Then I ran away. When I ran away my stepfather said I had beaten him and run, so he asked the police to arrest me. Then the SPDC pointed at me with a pistol and called me. They arrested me in B--- in Mingaladon.” - “Soe Tint” (M, 18), Lance Corporal from Light Infantry Battalion #10, Papun District (Interview #4, 11/2000)

“When my father died, I went to find a job in Rangoon. When I got off the Sawbwayi Gone bus [in Insein, Rangoon] I went to look for a job. While I was looking I met two SPDC sergeants and they said, ‘Come brother, we will give you a job.’ I said, ‘Yes, I will follow you.’ At first they didn’t ask me if I would join the Army, they just said they would find a job for me [in this ‘recruiting’ method the soldiers don’t wear uniforms and do not say they are soldiers. They only reveal their identity after they have taken the ‘recruit’ to the Army recruitment depot]. They sent me directly to the Su Saung Yay [depot for new recruits] and cut my hair. I had to sleep there for two nights and then they sent me directly to the training.” - “Thein Htay” (M, 26), Private from Light Infantry Battalion #340, Papun District (Interview #5, 11/2000)

“I think I was 13 years old at that time. They took my book and everything, so I don’t remember what year. It was in the daytime at 11 or 12:00, during the cold season [December - February 1996].” - “Tin Aung Win” (M, 17), Private from Light Infantry Battalion #549, Pa’an District; at 13, he was arrested for not having an identity card on him and forced into the Army, though he says he only wanted to continue going to school (Interview #1, 12/2000)

Shanghaied

“Before I reached my village up the stream, I came to M--- village. The Burmese were having a religious festival there. I went in to the festival and drank alcohol with my friends. The festival lasted until morning. We drank alcohol until 12 a.m. At 1 a.m., a policeman came and called me. I’d always seen this policeman at K--- village, and I thought he wanted me to show the way to someone’s house so I followed him. He took me to a Burmese man in civilian clothes, left me with him and said, “Young brother, wait a while here for me”. I waited, but after awhile I thought he wasn’t coming back. Then the Burmese said, “Young brother, don’t worry if he doesn’t come. Follow me for a while.” He was in civilian clothes, so I didn’t think he was anyone in particular. He asked me, “Do you know B--- village?” B--- village is to the east of M--- village. I told him, “I know that place, in the past I stayed there.” Then he said to me, “Send your brother [me] to B--- for a moment.” I didn’t know that he was a soldier. I had always tried to escape from the soldiers and never let them see me. One of them had already tried to persuade me before, but I didn’t follow him. He said, “If you enter the army, we will give you money and give money to your parents.” But I didn’t follow him. I was careful.

This time, I saw that he was wearing civilian clothes and I didn’t remember to be careful. He asked me to send him to B--- village. He was one of the people who recruit soldiers [but I didn’t know it]. When we got there he couldn’t convince me to get onto the boat [a boat in the river]. So he asked me, ‘Younger brother, what kind of food do you like?’ I said, ‘I like alcohol. I drink alcohol.’ Then he fed me alcohol until I was drunk. When I was drunk he called me onto the boat.

When I woke up, I looked around and he was not there. At the writing table on the boat I saw a person with three chevrons [Sergeant] holding a pen. I looked at him, but I dared not call to him. I thought if I talk to him, do I call him an officer or a corporal? I dared not talk to him. A soldier came toward me and said, ‘Younger brother, are you going to enter the army?’ I said, ‘Elder brother, I’m not going to.’

“For example, some people in Rangoon are going to market. When they are at the market, they [people who recruit for the Army] call the children and feed them snacks. Their parents don’t know about it. The SPDC changes their names and addresses. Then they order the children to attend the training. I saw two or three children like that when I attended the training.” - “Soe Tint” (M, 18), Lance Corporal from Light Infantry Battalion #10, Papun District (Interview #4, 11/2000)

The ‘recruits’ are taken to the *Su Saung Yay*, the recruit depot where they are processed, have their hair cut and wait to join a training session. They cannot protest their ‘enlistment’; they are told they have already been put on the register and cannot leave. All of their clothing is confiscated and they are issued one pair of shorts. The *Su Saung Yay* consists of only a few barracks in a compound. Recruits are sent to the training camps when there are enough men in a group to go; the wait is sometimes a few days and sometimes as long as a month. The food is poor at the *Su Saung Yay*, and the recruits must remain indoors at all times to prevent escape. The recruits interviewed by KHRG said that they were even required to strip naked if they wanted to use the toilet, and that sentries were posted outside.

at Seventeen

He said, 'You say you're not going to, but last night you came here staggering and said that you would join the army.' I said, 'No, one Brother asked me to come here. At that time I ate and drank a little.' Then he told me, 'You will enter the army as you told me when you arrived here. You told us that when you arrived. You say we called you here. Never mind.'

Later as we went along the way, I told him that I wouldn't join the army. They sent me to xxxx, at my village. There is a camp there called K--- that takes security for the village. That is where Infantry Battalion #xx Sergeant K--- was staying. When I arrived there, I refused to join but they said, 'You can't. You have come to us, and you must join the Army.' I said, 'I won't join. I don't dare be a soldier. I have no experience, I am a farmer with no education. I can't be a soldier.' He said, 'You can do it, don't worry about it.' So I said, 'Even if I can, I won't.' Then Sergeant Kyaw Ngwe asked me, 'If you don't want to enter the army, did you bring your headman's signature? Did you bring your nationality card?' I said, 'No, I didn't.' I told him that someone called me in the night and asked me to send him along his way, and I did. I was just visiting a festival, so I didn't have my nationality card or recommendation letter. He said, 'No, you can't do like that. You went from one village to another. Even if you didn't take an ID card, you need a letter of recommendation.' He told me that if I didn't bring it then I didn't have it. If I didn't have it, then he would arrest me as a spy. He then asked me my nationality. I told him that I am Karen. He said, 'You Karen people are no good. All of you Karen people are bad people, relatives of the rebels. If you don't have a recommendation letter and a nationality card, we will arrest you as a rebel spy. Will you go to prison, or will you join the Army?' That was not a difficult decision for me. If I went to prison, it would be for 4 to 6 years. I thought that if I joined the army and if I didn't die, one day I would arrive back to my village and see my parents. If I went to prison, my parents' name would be destroyed. My status in society would be lowered. I told him that I would join the Army."

- "Saw Tha Ku" (M, 21), Private from Infantry Battalion #19, Papun District (Interview #3, 3/2000)

"When I told them I would like to go back outside [to go home], they asked me, 'Will you enter here, or will you enter prison?' They gave me only two options. I didn't want to be in prison. My parents had told me about prison. So, I joined them [the Army]. ... We had to stay inside all the time. When we went to the latrine, they ordered us to take off all our clothes, then they allowed us to go to the latrine. They kept one, two or three sentries. They were worried we would escape." - "Tin Aung Win" (M, 17), Private from Light Infantry Battalion #549, Pa'an District (Interview #1, 12/2000)

"They kept us for one night there and then sent us to Toungoo Su Saung Yay, at Toungoo. We stayed there over a week. There were about 500 people there in 2 buildings. All of us were new recruits - they gathered together all the people they'd captured or recruited, and people who'd joined because their businesses failed. They confiscated all of our clothing and gave us only short pants to wear, then kept us locked up in the building all day in our short pants." - "Saw Tha Ku" (M, 21), Private from Infantry Battalion #19, Papun District (Interview #3, 3/2000)

IV. Training

To prevent disintegration of the Union is our aim, so shall we strive.
- SPDC/Tatmadaw slogan

“They taught us how to shoot guns, how to carry them and how to fix them. They allowed us to shoot the guns and throw hand grenades. They taught and we had to shoot. We also had to practice climbing mountains and they taught us many other things. ... They didn’t teach us about politics, or how to treat civilians, or human rights. They didn’t tell us anything. They gave us only military training.” - “Aung Zaw Moe” (M, 19), Lance Corporal from Light Infantry Battalion #549, Pa’an District (Interview #2, 12/2000)

Once the recruits are processed through the Su Saung Yay, they are sent to one of the training centres. The training centres are located in various places throughout Burma; the deserters interviewed for this report attended training at Oak Twin and Toungoo in Pegu Division, Kyo Pyu in Rangoon Division, Yamethin in Mandalay Division and at Mergui in Tenasserim Division. There are as many as 250 - 450 trainees in each training session, although this varies from school to school. There are five to eight instructors at the training centres, both officers and non-commissioned officers (NCO’s). One soldier said that his instructors were ordered by their superior officers not to give their names to the trainees; even so, after several months of training many soldiers seem to know the names of their trainers.

“They sent me to attend the training at the Oak Twin training school in Pegu Division for 6 months. They sent me by truck. There were over 50 people attending the training with me. The whole group went there, about 54 people. They were the people who had stayed and slept with me in the same barracks. It was all of them. They [the camp officials] called our names and the names of our parents and then they sent us. The people in the other barracks were being gathered to attend the next training.” - “Tin Aung Win” (M, 17), Private from Light Infantry Battalion #549, Pa’an District (Interview #1, 12/2000)

“They took me to the training place at Kyo Pyu Tine Ba Hoh #1 [Kyo Pyu Division Headquarters #1]. I didn’t start training at once. I had to rest for one month. They gave me a chance to rest for one month. They didn’t send us to the Su Saung Yay [gathering place for new recruits before they are sent to the training camps] because we were close to Rangoon. They were worried we would run back, so they sent us directly to the training place.” - “Soe Tint” (M, 18), Lance Corporal from Light Infantry Battalion #10, Papun District (Interview #4, 11/2000)

“There were five or six instructors. In the six months the Bo Muh [the officers] didn’t tell us their names. Their superior officers told them not to. They just gave us the training. After they trained us, they went back to their Army family camp [the camp where soldiers and their families live]. They came to teach us at 10 a.m. or 12 p.m. and in the afternoon they went back at 4 or 5 p.m. We didn’t get a chance to learn their names and we couldn’t ask them.” - “Tin Aung Win” (M, 17), Private from Light Infantry Battalion #549, Pa’an District (Interview #1, 12/2000)

“I attended over 4 months of training. 250 people attended that training. We had military training in small arms and military parade.” - “Saw Tha Ku” (M, 21), Private from Infantry Battalion #19, Papun District (Interview #3, 3/2000)

Four months basic military training is given at these centres. Soldiers are taught discipline, parade drill and military terms. They are taught how to travel and eat in the field and how to climb mountains. Tactics such as mountain assaults and how to engage the enemy are taught. The trainees are instructed in such small arms skills as how to carry their weapons, care for their weapons, how to fix weapons and how to shoot them. The proper way to plant landmines is also taught. The trainees are first taught by the instructors and then allowed to practice skills like shooting and throwing grenades. No political or human rights training is given. There are also no courses on how to deal with civilians or about the non-Burman ethnic nationalities in the areas where many of them will be posted. This seems to be the norm, although one deserter did claim to be taught not to steal people’s things and not to abuse the civilians. He then went on to say that when he arrived in the field, the soldiers were doing it anyway. One soldier said that field training was given from 6 a.m. to 12 noon, then the trainees were sent to study military terms and discipline, after which they were taken back out into the field for lectures on military topics. Sometimes the training is only in the morning, after which the soldiers must go to perform labour on projects for the instructors until 5 p.m.

“They taught us the military methods. They taught us how to hold guns, how to run and how to fight the enemy. They taught us what to do when we were travelling or eating. They taught us how to fight when our enemies were staying on a mountain. They also had us practice it ourselves. ... They taught us from 6 a.m. to 12 p.m. After they taught us, they sent us to a hall for writing and explained to us about the military terms. Then they told us what we shouldn’t do [this is what they shouldn’t do militarily and not what they shouldn’t do to civilians]. Then they drove us outside [the camp] again. After we got there, we had to queue up and then each group of us had to go under the bamboo or under the trees where one of the officers held a book in front of us and taught us.” - “Tin Aung Win” (M, 17), Private from Light Infantry Battalion #549, Pa’an District (Interview #1, 12/2000)

“They ordered us to do military training in the morning. It started at half past 7 a.m. until 12 noon. They stopped at 1 p.m. and ordered us to do Pa Take until 5 p.m. For Pa Take we had to cut firewood and pick stones which they [the instructors] then sold for their families. We had to do it for them. They called it Pa Take. It is Burmese language and means to have to do social service.” - “Aung Zaw Moe” (M, 19), Lance Corporal from Light Infantry Battalion #549, Pa’an District (Interview #2, 12/2000)

“In the training, they said to not steal people’s things and to not abuse the civilians. They taught many things, but when we arrived here [at the frontline] they were doing it and it hurt the villagers. That is why I don’t like it. I came here when I arrived at the frontline. When they saw a paddy barn, they burned it. They burned whatever they saw. They are doing it under duress. So, I don’t like this.” - “Soe Tint” (M, 18), Lance Corporal from Light Infantry Battalion #10, Papun District (Interview #4, 11/2000)

“They taught us how to handle a gun, that we must dare to fight the enemy and that we must protect the civilians. They didn’t teach about human rights in our unit.” - “Soe Tint” (M, 18), Lance Corporal from Light Infantry Battalion #10, Papun District (Interview #4, 11/2000)

“They didn’t teach me about politics or the Karen. They taught me about how to fight, how to meet with the enemy, how to go and how to walk. They teach it all. The trainer was Major Soe Chit. The soldiers obeyed in front of him, but they behaved differently behind his back.” - “Saw Tha Ku” (M, 21), Private from Infantry Battalion #19, Papun District (Interview #3, 3/2000)

After the four months of military training, some soldiers reported being forced to do labour at the training centre for another two months. The soldiers call it *Pa Take*; a military term described by deserters as ‘social service’ labour much like *loh ah pay* is for civilians. *Pa Take* is a Burmanisation of the English word ‘Practice’, a kind of joke since the practice they are doing has nothing to do with military exercises. One deserter commented that the reason for having to wait was because their equipment hadn’t arrived yet. Much of the work is on agricultural projects like rubber plantations and tree planting, probably for the personal profit of the instructors and senior officers. Other agricultural work involves growing vegetables like roselle and gourds. Wood and bamboo is also cut for the instructors’ families, whether to build their houses or to sell for personal profit. The villagers’ bullock carts are also commandeered for this. Wood is cut for firewood and stones are gathered, both to be sold by the instructors for their own profit and to be used in the camp. The soldiers are ordered to work from 6 a.m. to noon. They eat rice at 1 p.m. and then start working again at 1:30.

“It was not only military training. We also had to do agriculture; making rubber plantations and planting trees [they were not taught agriculture, but had to work at it]. We had to do Pa Take. We called it Pa Take. Pa Take means Loh Ah Pay [the term used for civilian forced labour]. It means we have to work. We had to go and do Loh Ah Pay.” - “Tin Aung Win” (M, 17), Private from Light Infantry Battalion #549, Pa’an District (Interview #1, 12/2000)

“Sometimes they didn’t send material for the Army, so we had to work for two months [until their equipment arrived]. We had to do Pa Take. We had to do Loh Ah Pay [forced labour]. They ordered us to work from 6 a.m. to 12 p.m. After we ate rice at 1 p.m., we started to work again at 1:30 p.m. We had to cut bamboo and trees on the hill for their families [the instructors’ families] to lay their floors and build their houses. After we cut the trees, we had to carry the wood back to the car road. Then they demanded bullock carts from the nearby villages and sent the wood to the Army camp.” - “Tin Aung Win” (M, 17), Private from Light Infantry Battalion #549, Pa’an District (Interview #1, 12/2000)

The food during the training is generally bad. One soldier described it as “the same as pig food”. The trainees interviewed by KHRG were fed one plate of rice with one plate of bean curry, with some pumpkin and gourd in the morning. The food is not enough for the trainees, and they are not allowed to ask for more. They are told by the instructors that this is practice to prepare them for life in the field, but the practice became a regular occurrence. In reality, what was probably happening was that the instructors and officers were selling off the good rations for personal profit, leaving only insufficient quantities of bad quality rations for the recruits; this is also what is done in the field by Tatmadaw officers. The food and water were also reportedly not clean. The food for the instructors, however, was very good. Only one well was provided for the

trainees at *Tine Bo [Division Training Centre] #5* outside Toungoo and this had to be used by the 250 trainees for washing, drinking water and for cooking. Sick trainees are given medicine and allowed by the instructors to rest in the barracks, and the instructors periodically look in on them to make sure they are really sick.

“When they ate, the rice was very white. Everything including the curry was very white [meaning that it was very good quality]. They fed us rice and curry that was the same as pig food.” - “Tin Aung Win” (M, 17), Private from Light Infantry Battalion #549, Pa’an District (Interview #1, 12/2000)

“During the training, they fed us one flat plate of rice and one plate of bean curry on a plastic plate. They fed us like that. In the morning they fed us gourds or pumpkin. ... It wasn’t enough rice. We couldn’t ask for any more from them. They said they were giving us practice. It was a training school so they told us they were giving us practice [at the frontline there is usually not enough food for the soldiers]. At first, I was fed more than when I stayed at home, but later, they told us they were giving us practice [by cutting their rations] and this became regular.” - “Aung Zaw Moe” (M, 19), Lance Corporal from Light Infantry Battalion #549, Pa’an District (Interview #2, 12/2000)

“Sometimes they fed us good food, and sometimes it wasn’t good. When we attended training, the food and water were not clean. We ate badly. As for water, there was only one well for bathing for 250 people. We had to bathe, you fetch, I bathe, I fetch, you bathe. We cooked rice with that water, used it for bathing, and drank that water too.” - “Saw Tha Ku” (M, 21), Private from Infantry Battalion #19, Papun District (Interview #3, 3/2000)

Beatings are meted out to the trainees as punishment. One soldier interviewed was beaten for saying that the officers at the Su Saung Yay had been doing bad things to the civilians. He was informed on by one of the other trainees and then slapped, punched and kicked by the instructors. Another form of punishment was to have a half a bag of sand mixed in with the rice before it was cooked. This punishment was meted out to all the trainees if any one of them performed badly. Soldiers who tried to escape from the training were dealt with harshly. After being recaptured, they were forced to lie down and be beaten by each of the remaining trainees, as many as 450. The escapees were then put in mediaeval-style leg stocks until the training was almost finished, then allowed out to complete their training. At another training camp, the deserters were beaten with a bamboo stick on the back and buttocks. Each company took a turn until all 250 trainees had a chance to hit the deserters one time each. Although they bled from the wounds, their wounds were not treated and they were placed immediately in the stocks where they remained for four to six days. This treatment instilled enough fear in the trainees that few tried to escape after that. Salaries are not always paid to the trainees and they must use whatever money they have. One soldier said that he was supposed to be paid a salary of 450 Kyat per month during his training, however so much was deducted from it that he only received between 40 and 60 Kyat. The deductions were for things like snacks, documents, erasers and chalk.

“I was beaten by them within the first two or three months of the training. I was together with my friends and talking about the bad things done by the officers at the Su Saung Yay. A person who heard us went to tell the instructors. They slapped my cheek, punched me with their fists and kicked me with their boots. I told them, ‘We are young people, friends talking and joking.’ They told me someone had come and told them. Then they punched me, slapped my cheek and kicked me. ... That person went to tell them that I was speaking about the officers doing bad things to the civilians. He was attending the training and in the same unit with me. ... When the news was sent that someone was not good, the Bo Muh [Major, or officer] from the training had a bad habit of putting a half a sack of sand into one sack of rice. Then they fed us. We ate, but we bit on stones. Each time we would chew we would bite a stone. There were also insects in the soup. If one of the trainees was no good, then all the trainees had a problem. They [the instructors] said they hated it when a person went to complain to them. That is why they did it.” - “Tin Aung Win” (M, 17), Private from Light Infantry Battalion #549, Pa’an District (Interview #1, 12/2000)

“In our session there were four people who fled. Ko Ko and Yeh Min Htun were two of the people. There were two others from Tine Boh #1 [Division Training Centre], called Aung San and Pyi Than. Many people fled from there. They were not interested [in being soldiers]. If they could flee, they fled and if they could not flee [were recaptured] they were all beaten. They [the instructors] called all 450 trainees together and had them beat the deserters one by one. Some couldn’t endure this, but they dared not flee. They were afraid when they saw the SPDC recapture the trainees and beat them. The instructors ordered the deserters to lie down and ordered the soldiers one by one to beat them. Over 450 people beat each person who fled. They ordered every one to beat them. So, those trainees dared not flee. They were afraid. We were also afraid and dared not flee.” - “Soe Tint” (M, 18), Lance Corporal from Light Infantry Battalion #10, Papun District (Interview #4, 11/2000)

“If their mistake was big, they were put in the stocks. If their mistake was small, they just beat them. The people who fled had made a big mistake. ... Four of them fled. Four people were put in the stocks, but not at the same time. The first time they put three together and then after that just one. ... One company beat them and then another company beat them until all 250 people had beat them. One person one hit. They were beaten on the back and on their buttocks. They beat them with a fresh bamboo stick. It is 1½ inches around. They bled but they didn’t die. ... They put them immediately into the stocks without treatment. They went and gave them food twice a day. They beat the first three people, but not the fourth one. The Captain didn’t let them beat him. They released them whenever they wanted to release them. They released them after four or five or six days. The fourth one was in the stocks for only four days and then his battalion came and took him.” - “Aung Myint Win” (M, 15), Private from Light Infantry Battalion #504, Papun District (Interview #6, 3/2001)

“They never gave money to me. I had to be poor and use only the little bit of money I had brought from the monk [the monk at the monastery where he was studying had given him some money]. I brought a little over 2,000 Kyat from the monk. They didn’t give me a single coin of money.” - “Tin Aung Win” (M, 17), Private from Light Infantry Battalion #549, Pa’an District (Interview #1, 12/2000)

“Yes, at first it was 450 Kyat, but in the end we only got 40, 50 or 60 Kyat. They cut off money for this and that and we also owed for snacks. We had to give for documents and other things like erasers and chalk, whatever.” - “Aung Zaw Moe” (M, 19), Lance Corporal from Light Infantry Battalion #549, Pa’an District (Interview #2, 12/2000)

After the training, the soldiers are given their personnel numbers and sent to their assigned battalions. No home leave is granted first. The soldiers interviewed for this report felt that their training was enough to cope with the conditions at the frontline and in combat. Refresher training is given to some soldiers after a few years. Soldiers who have been selected by their officers are sent to Non-Commissioned Officer (NCO) training; usually this is after five years' service, but can be earlier. This training lasts for over three months and was described by one deserter who went through it as commando training. The prospective NCO's are taught how to lead the other soldiers in combat. This usually happens after five years of service, but some soldiers are selected for it after basic training.

“I had to continue the training for more than three more months. That training is A’Kyat Ngyay training [preparatory training for Non-Commissioned Officers]. ... [It was] Commando training, they chose the soldiers and asked us to attend the special military training [a training for soldiers who are particularly clever or brave]. On the battlefields we must be brave. We must dare to go. They were planning like that and they ordered us to attend the training. After that training we had to do sentry duty at the camp for two years. After two years we came to the frontline.” - “Soe Tint” (M, 18), Lance Corporal from Light Infantry Battalion #10, Papun District (Interview #4, 11/2000)

V. Child Soldiers

The Army is your true mother, your true father. Trust none but your own blood.

- Tatmadaw slogan taught to recruits

“They take them forcibly. The children are not interested [in being soldiers]. I also was not interested, but they pointed a gun at me and I was worried that they would shoot me dead. That is why I had to follow them. Then they changed my name and address and I had to attend the training and I was sent to the frontline. They did like that.” - “Soe Tint” (M, 18), Lance Corporal from Light Infantry Battalion #10, Papun District (Interview #4, 11/2000); he was 15 years old when he joined the Tatmadaw

Although the minimum enlistment age in Burma is 18, many children aged 13-17 are enlisted, and according to the deserters interviewed, some children as young as 9 are enlisted, both willingly and through coercion, into the Tatmadaw [see the above **‘Recruitment’** section]. There have also been reports of children being taken from their parents for what is described as a better study opportunity or into a group called the ‘Ye Nyunt youth’, only to later find themselves in a school run by the Army from which they are expected to join the Tatmadaw. Of the six SPDC soldiers interviewed for this report, one was 13 years old, one was 14 years old, two were 15 years old, and one was 17 years old when they joined the Army. One of the soldiers reported that of the 170 men in Light Infantry Battalion #549, forty to sixty of them were under the age of 18. This is a very high percentage, but is consistent with the proportion of underage deserters among those interviewed by KHRG in the past.

“The youngest is 11 or 12 years old. There are many soldiers younger than me. Right now, on November 8th [2000], before I left, there were 15 more trainees who arrived at the singles barracks. I asked at least one child, ‘How old are you?’ He told me he was 10 years old. When I asked him if he had joined because he enjoyed it, he told me he was angry with his parents and went to sit on the Rangoon platform [at the train station] in the nighttime. A soldier called to him and told him he would give him pocket money. Then he could see his parents again. Then the soldier invited him to go and stay at his house freely. When he spoke to him like that, he followed. The next morning he [the boy] had to go to the Su Saung Yay for three days. He said, ‘Brother, I want to go back to my house.’ The soldier said to him, ‘Young brother, you are a soldier. You can’t go back.’ He told me that. He was a new soldier so I didn’t ask his name. He was a child, that is why I asked him why he joined. I had been in the Army for four years so I had experience. That is why I asked him.” - “Tin Aung Win” (M, 17), Private from Light Infantry Battalion #549, Pa’an District (Interview #1, 12/2000)

“There are 9, 10 and 11 year old boys staying in the Army. When they are small like that, they are kept behind at the headquarters for one or two months. If there are not enough people in a company, they put two of them in each company. They have completed all the training, but they are young and the officers don’t send them out yet. They can’t carry their own backpacks yet. They keep them behind the lines and order them to do Pa Take [forced labour for the officers]. They have to dig the road, dig the earth, clear the grass and cut the brush. They order them to do everything. ... There are 40, 50 or 60 people. There are not very many of older age. When they are 60 they have to leave the Army. There are some who are 50 or over 50 years old. Right now there is one man who is 60 years old. I don’t know if he has left the Army yet.” - “Aung Zaw Moe” (M, 19), Lance Corporal from Light Infantry Battalion #549, Pa’an District (Interview #2, 12/2000)

The children attend the same basic training as everyone else. Once the children arrive at their assigned battalions, the younger ones who cannot yet carry their backpacks and guns are kept at the battalion camp for periods from a few months to a few years. If they are still very young (age 12 or below), the some officers don't send them out on operations due to their youth and because they are useless in the field if they can't even carry their own gun. One 15 year old child soldier interviewed by KHRG related how his company commander kept his gun for him while he was given only a hollow piece of bamboo and a stick to stand sentry at night. Although he had been taught how to use small arms in training, he wasn't strong enough to pull back the bolt and chamber a round to fire his G3 assault rifle (the bolt on the G3 is notoriously hard to pull back). When his company moved from one camp to another he had to carry his company commander's backpack as well as his own, but not a gun. Some child soldiers are ordered to stay behind and work on digging the roads, digging the ground, cutting the grass and bushes and taking care of the chickens, goats and cattle. A few of the children are sent to school. However, once the children are 12 or 13 they are sent out on operations. The young soldiers are sometimes used as punching bags by the older soldiers whenever they want. A 15 year old deserter stated that he was beaten with gun butts and slapped by his company commander, the NCO's and the other soldiers because the two backpacks he was carrying were too heavy and he couldn't keep up. In the end the beatings drove him to desert his unit.

“They also have children as young as 10 or 12 years old. They really need the manpower at the frontline on the battlefield so they arrest children. Some are too young so they keep them to take care of the goats, cows and chickens [at the camps]. They also have children that they send to school. It is because they need higher numbers of soldiers that they are arresting them like that. ... The 10 and 11 year olds have to attend the training. If they couldn't follow to the frontline and couldn't carry their backpack and gun, they were ordered to go to the rear area and raise goats for one or two years.” - “Soe Tint” (M, 18), Lance Corporal from Light Infantry Battalion #10, Papun District (Interview #4, 11/2000)

“I stood sentry in the nighttime. They didn't give me a weapon, just a hollow piece of bamboo to hit [to keep the time]. I had to hit it every fifteen minutes. ... The company commander kept my gun. ... They taught us about the G3 [assault rifle], MA1 [assault rifle; Chinese AK47], and 62 Sten [sub-machine gun]. I couldn't pull back the G3 bolt myself [to chamber a round for firing], the NCO pulled it for me.” - “Aung Myint Win” (M, 15), Private from Light Infantry Battalion #504, Papun District (Interview #6, 3/2001)

“They beat me in morning. I had to carry a very heavy backpack when we climbed the mountain and they didn't let me take a rest. It was like that since we started walking from Kyauk Kyi. Whenever I couldn't carry the heavy backpack they beat me. They all beat me. I got beaten when we went to the frontline. ... I didn't carry a gun, just two backpacks. They were the Company Commander's backpack and mine. It weighed about 10½ pay tha [16.8 kgs. / 36.8 lbs.]. ... If I couldn't climb the mountain they beat me. They beat me with a gun and slapped my face. The company commander, T--, and the Sit Kyu both beat me. I don't know how many people beat me or how many times. It was so I wouldn't be late or slow and fall behind the other people.” - “Aung Myint Win” (M, 15), Private from Light Infantry Battalion #504, Papun District (Interview #6, 3/2001)

VI. Life in the Tatmadaw

Tatmadaw and the people, cooperate and crush all those harming the Union.

– Tatmadaw slogan

The SPDC divides Burma into ‘white’ areas, which are under complete SPDC military control; ‘brown’ areas, which are essentially under SPDC control but where resistance forces can occasionally penetrate; and ‘black’ areas, where there is regular armed resistance activity. ‘Black’ areas are often referred to as ‘frontline’ areas, though there is no fixed frontline; the situation is much more fluid than that, with the resistance operating as guerrilla units, holding *de facto* control over certain areas but getting out of the way (as do most of the villagers) when big SPDC columns pass through, then reappearing after the column is gone. The resistance forces use hit-and-run ambush tactics and landmines to harass the SPDC troops and restrict their movements and activities. Most SPDC officers would rather focus their activities on making money than fighting, so they and their soldiers prefer to stay in their camps or harass the villagers in the surrounding villages rather than going out to attack the resistance forces. SPDC officers often deliberately avoid areas where they think there will be resistance forces or landmines except when directly ordered to seek out the enemy, and when this happens they usually form large columns of 100 to 400 soldiers in order to protect themselves.

In the Rear Areas

Soldiers spend much of their time in garrison at rear area camps. These large battalion-sized camps are spread throughout Burma in both resistance areas and in more ‘peaceful’ central Burma. The regional commands have battalion camps spread out throughout their areas. Those battalions near ‘frontline’ or ‘black’ areas rotate up to the frontlines every three months. Units stationed in less dangerous areas, like in central Burma, usually stay in garrison and rarely go to the frontline. Most of the Light Infantry Divisions and the *Sa Ka Ka [Military Operations Commands]* are based in central Burma, but their units are often sent out for operations at the frontlines. Battalion camps are often fairly large compounds and contain the battalion offices, a parade ground, barracks for the single soldiers and a separate area for the married soldiers and officers and their families. There are between 150 and 400 soldiers and officers in these camps and also their families. The battalion camps nearer the resistance areas also have bunkers, trenches, barbed wire and other defensive works. Although these camps are rarely attacked, they are in resistance areas. A support company stays at the camp and is responsible for supplies and payroll, even when the rest of the battalion is at the frontline. Some of these camps have been built after the villagers were forcibly evicted and their lands confiscated. Nabu Army Camp in southeastern Pa’an district is one example of this; in July 1995 Light Infantry Battalion #547 forcibly evicted the Muslim half of the village, as this 60-year-old Muslim farmer told KHRG at the time: *“In the middle of July 1995, Kawkareik Township authorities arrived at our village and called one person from each family to attend a meeting. The authorities gave blank sheets of paper to each person and told them to sign it. After that, the Secretary of Kawkareik Township Law & Order Restoration Council said that the villagers’ farms and ricefields were all being taken to build a new Battalion camp for LIB 547. More than half of the village itself and many acres of ricefields were taken. The next day, they set up red flags and warning sign boards reading ‘Army Land, Do Not Enter’. Villagers receive no compensation for their land and houses. The villagers asked the Township LORC Secretary why their farms were taken*

and he said LIB 547 wanted the land.” [Excerpted from “The Situation in Pa’an District” (KHRG #96-17, 15/5/96), Interview #3.] An Army deserter interviewed at about the same time added, “There are quite a lot of Muslims, but now some ran away and some moved because LIB 547 took exactly half of the village. The only Indian [Muslim] part remaining is right around the mosque. The road cut the village down the middle, and one side became the LIB 547 compound. Many good houses were demolished. The Army also took the ricefields for their own bean plantations, ‘bocate’ and ‘mart’ beans. Nabu village has about 700 families, and about 300 families lost their land.” [Excerpted from “The Situation in Pa’an District” (KHRG #96-17, 15/5/96), Interview #4.] The battalion often sets up agriculture projects on the land surrounding the camps, using the forced labour of the villagers who once owned the land to farm it.

“LIB #549 is at the Nabu battalion camp. In the past the Indians were staying there [Burma-born people of Indian descent, most of them Muslims]. They [SLORC troops] destroyed the Indians’ Arabic school and drove out the Indians, then they built the car road. I saw the place. ... I know because one of the Saya Gyi [Sergeants] told me about it. He said, ‘The place where we are building the battalion camp is not our own land. The mothers and uncles [the villagers] cried because the land and paddy were confiscated from them.’ He told me, but he didn’t tell the other soldiers. He believed in me and told me about this so I thanked him.” - “Tin Aung Win” (M, 17), Private from Light Infantry Battalion #549, Pa’an District (Interview #1, 12/2000); he is referring to Nabu camp which was built in 1995.

Life begins for the soldiers with morning line up and roll call. After roll call, at 6 or 6:30 a.m., the soldiers are sent to work at *Pa Take* (a military word used to describe non-military labour done by the soldiers) on agricultural and construction projects, most of which are money making ventures for the officers. The soldiers are detailed to bake bricks in large brick kilns, which are sold by the officers for their own profit. They are also ordered to cut bamboo and wood to build buildings in the camp or to be sold by the officers. A deserter interviewed for this report who had served in central Burma reported that the soldiers are treated well in the camps in central Burma and that their salaries were occasionally increased because the SPDC was afraid of them deserting. Another reason for this better treatment may be because they are stationed much closer to the political heartland of Burma. Supply lines in central Burma are much stronger, and life in the Army camps in these ‘white areas’ is generally much better than life in ‘frontline’ camps. Although the rear area camps in the resistance areas are rarely attacked, life there is more difficult than in central Burma. The proximity to the ‘frontline’, the officers’ dislike of being stationed in the remote ethnic areas, and the generally more corrupt nature of these camps makes them much more tense. Soldiers are beaten and reviled by officers who come back to the camps drunk. A common punishment is to be made to walk like a crocodile or to have their backpacks filled with stones and then run with their gun until the officer says to stop. Soldiers are also sometimes put in the camp jail for major offences. Little fighting takes place around these camps, but death from illness is a danger. There are clinics in the camps, but there are not enough medicines and the medical personnel are undertrained. Soldiers who are sick are not always granted a reprieve from work. In some of the battalions they are still required to stand sentry. Although soldiers are treated for illnesses, some die from malaria and other diseases every month.

“They dealt nicely with them in the rear areas. In the rear areas they increased the salary. They did this because they were afraid the soldiers would desert and hurt the Army’s name. They dealt with us nicely. However, they were not friendly in the frontline. If the commander wants to punch you, he punches you. When the soldiers make a small mistake, the officers give punishment. Some soldiers fled.” - “Soe Tint” (M, 18), Lance Corporal from Light Infantry Battalion #10, Papun District (Interview #4, 11/2000)

“They punished us. They ordered us to walk like a crocodile [they had to crawl on the ground dragging their legs behind them] and to put stones in a pack, carry a gun and run. If they didn’t punish us like that, they put us in the jail.” - “Aung Zaw Moe” (M, 19), Lance Corporal from Light Infantry Battalion #549, Pa’an District (Interview #2, 12/2000)

“One night I couldn’t do sentry duty, so I told the Sergeant, ‘Saya, tonight I can’t do sentry duty. I’ll rest here and sleep.’ He said, ‘You can’t. You didn’t just become a soldier yesterday. Don’t come and talk to me like this.’ I said, ‘I’m sure that I can’t do sentry duty. Please understand me.’ He said, ‘You must. Even we Sergeants still have to stand sentry when we are sick.’ I couldn’t suffer it, but they wouldn’t believe me and they forced me. That night I got a fever, but I had to stand sentry.” - “Saw Tha Ku” (M, 21), Private from Infantry Battalion #19, Papun District (Interview #3, 3/2000)

The married and single soldiers are allowed to mix. The married soldiers are dissatisfied because the officers always send them to the frontline and the men can’t take care of or feed their families. Some soldiers have told KHRG that with no money or food while their husbands are away on patrol or at the frontline, the wives of the rank and file can become easy prey for the officers; for example, this 21-year-old soldier interviewed in Tenasserim Division by KHRG in 1994: ***“At the base, when the soldiers went to the frontline the officers didn’t care about our families. Some of the officers slept with the wives of soldiers who were at the frontline. Some prostitutes from Mergui came and called the soldiers’ wives to become prostitutes like them. All of these things happened in 17 Battalion. The soldiers’ wives and children faced a lot of trouble whenever their husbands were away, and their husbands knew nothing about it.”*** [Excerpted from ***“Comments by SLORC Army Defectors”*** (KHRG, 20/6/94).] Other soldiers have testified that officers sometimes offer money or food to the wives of soldiers to sleep with them. At some Army camps, while their husbands are away at the frontline the wives are forced to attend women soldier’s training. The women hate this, especially since they never joined the Army, they are simply civilians married to soldiers.

“Some soldiers who were married didn’t receive enough rations from the officers, and when they didn’t have enough there were problems. The officers sent the husbands to the frontline and kept their wives behind, and they forced the wives to take women soldier’s training. The women hated it. The men couldn’t take care of their families or feed them because they were always at the front line.” - “Saw Tha Ku” (M, 21), Private from Infantry Battalion #19, Papun District (Interview #3, 3/2000)

In camp, the soldiers are fed one time in the morning and one time in the evening. The rations are sent to rear area camps between once a week and once a month. The rations were drastically cut in 1998 by the War Office in Rangoon, and orders were sent out to Battalions throughout the entire country to either produce much of their own food, or take it from the local people. As a result of this many units began farming their own fields to have enough food to eat. The land is usually confiscated from the villagers who are then used as forced labour to do most of the work on it; in many cases they are even forced to provide the seed for the crop without any

compensation. The produce grown in these battalion fields is mostly sold for a profit by the officers. Officers and soldiers also force villagers to hand over their good rice in exchange for an equal quantity of the terrible quality Army ration rice. Even before the rations were cut back in 1998, the officers and quartermaster sergeants were already taking and selling many of them for personal profit, including fishpaste, salt, tinned milk, tinned meat, and rice, and the troops were told to get their food in the villages. The result of all of this is that there is often enough rice at the meals, but nothing much to go with it. The soldiers get bean soup and sometimes potatoes, but usually no meat. The soldiers are unable to complain. When they do, the officers tell them that because they are allotted an allowance of 5 Kyat's worth of food per day, they only get 5 Kyat's worth of food and must be content with that. Some of the married soldiers say they don't receive enough rations for their families. The married soldiers eat separately with their families, while the single privates and NCO's cook together in the same pot, but eat separately. The soldiers are responsible for cooking for the officers, but do not eat with the officers. The officers eat much better, because they hold back any good rations for themselves, and they have money to buy better food and meat or can demand it from the surrounding villages.

“They fed us one time in the morning and one time in the evening. They fed us enough rice, but there was not enough curry for one plate. The rations were sent each week. All the single men had to eat together. We all had to gather together and cook in the same pot. The married soldiers also got their rations each week, but they ate in their houses with their families. ... We had to cook and feed the commanders differently and separately from us. They ate good curries because they were officers. The soldiers had to eat bean soup and sometimes, potatoes. We wanted to complain, but couldn't. They said, ‘You get 5 Kyat per day [as a food allowance]. Therefore you receive 5 Kyat [worth of rations]. You must eat only this.’” - “Aung Zaw Moe” (M, 19), Lance Corporal from Light Infantry Battalion #549, Pa'an District (Interview #2, 12/2000)

The soldiers are allowed to read magazines and newspapers, although only those approved by the SPDC. Listening to the radio is not allowed unless it is to listen to music cassettes. In mid-2000, the soldiers were banned from listening to foreign radio broadcasts from shortwave stations like the BBC (British Broadcasting Corporation), VOA (Voice of America), RFA (Radio Free Asia) and DVB (Democratic Voice of Burma), which broadcast in Burmese and are the main sources of news for many people in Burma. The soldiers commented that they are not usually allowed enough free time to listen to the radio anyway. This policy is directed at keeping the soldiers ignorant of what is really going on in Burma, and preventing them from hearing any criticism of the Army [*see ‘Feelings on Political and Social Change’ below*]. Soldiers are officially allowed to write letters and to receive them, but the letters are usually destroyed by their officers. Letters sent to parents and family disappear because the officers and sergeants take them out of the mailboxes, read them and throw them away. Letters from home are also destroyed before reaching the soldiers. The soldiers are not told about this, but find out from their peers. The letters are destroyed out of the SPDC's fear that the soldiers will learn what is actually going on in Burma outside the Army, or that their families, and therefore the general public, will hear about problems in the Army. There is also the fear that once the soldiers are able to make contact with their families, their desire to escape will become stronger. Soldiers are sometimes granted leave, but it is usually only the married soldiers. This is probably because the officers believe these soldiers will come back to the camp because their families are still there. There was previously a policy to allow one soldier leave after the one who had leave before him came back, but so many soldiers deserted while on leave that it is rarely granted anymore.

“They allowed radios, reading books, and magazines. They didn’t allow us to listen to the radio [they could only use it to listen to music cassettes]. When the Saya Gyi [sergeant] saw one radio, he asked, ‘What is that?’ I told him it was nothing and I turned on a cassette [he had been listening to the radio]. He said, ‘That isn’t true. Bring that radio to me.’ Then they kept it in a box. We couldn’t listen to it anymore.” - “Tin Aung Win” (M, 17), Private from Light Infantry Battalion #549, Pa’an District (Interview #1, 12/2000)

“I don’t have a home so I didn’t write [his parents are deceased]. Some people wrote. Most of the people who wrote have deserted. They make contact and run away often, so if the soldiers write letters, the SPDC goes to look for the letter in the post and if they find it they take it and destroy it. Sometimes, if we gave it to the office [the Company office], it disappeared in the office. The letters did not arrive and disappeared. They made it disappear.” - “Aung Zaw Moe” (M, 19), Lance Corporal from Light Infantry Battalion #549, Pa’an District (Interview #2, 12/2000)

“[T]hey asked that anyone who wanted to go back must go and report [to the officers]. They will do it when we go to report. They will write a letter of recommendation. When someone had gone back, they would let another person from the battalion go back only when the first person returned. But the first person didn’t come back to the battalion and fled. Therefore, very few of us were given permission. They didn’t dare give permission. Many people fled. When we sent letters to our parents, none of the letters reached them. They [the officers] took them from the mailbox, read them and then threw them away. They didn’t let us read any of the letters from our parents. They disappeared.” - “Tin Aung Win” (M, 17), Private from Light Infantry Battalion #549, Pa’an District (Interview #1, 12/2000)

“Yes, I heard a little bit sometimes. I didn’t listen to it too much. We had to work. They ordered us to work the whole day and it was never finished. Only the leaders talked about it. The battalion commander talked about it. If they talked, they didn’t talk to us. They talked about it to the lower officers and the Saya Gyi [sergeants]. They didn’t talk about it to the soldiers.” - “Aung Zaw Moe” (M, 19), Lance Corporal from Light Infantry Battalion #549, Pa’an District (Interview #2, 12/2000) talking about discussing democracy or Aung San Suu Kyi

At the Frontline

“Then they sent us to the frontline at Ba Hine. I was with a company of 30 soldiers. They sent us with three days rations, but it took so long, nearly one month. We were hungry for rice because we didn’t have any more rations. When we didn’t have rations, we ate the pith of the banana tree trunks and other things. As for the officers, they brought noodle packs [packets of instant noodles made with boiled water]. For us soldiers there was nothing to eat. We just had to watch them eating.” - “Thein Htay” (M, 26), Private from Light Infantry Battalion #340, Papun District (Interview #5, 11/2000)

The frontline camps are where the situation is the worst for the soldiers. The camps at the frontline are usually small, isolated outposts from which the soldiers are expected to patrol the surrounding countryside. Columns are formed out of one or more companies, and sometimes as large as a battalion or more, to march through the countryside. These operations are supposed to be for the purpose of seeking out and engaging the resistance forces, but more and more they are ordered to find and destroy fields and villages, and hunt down villagers hiding in the forest. The privates and NCO’s are put under tremendous pressure not only by being in a war situation

where they could be ambushed or step on a landmine at any time, but also by being ordered to do things to civilians which they know are wrong, while knowing that they will be severely punished or executed for failing to carry out the order. Some units find themselves in combat situations quite often, while others only see combat a few times a year. One soldier said that his unit usually only saw action 4-8 times a year, and that 2 or 3 people are killed and 4 to 10 people wounded. As explained earlier, most SPDC units avoid direct fights with the armed resistance and prefer to focus their military operations against the unarmed villagers; so when clashes do occur, they are usually either planned ambushes by the resistance or accidental encounters. Most of the engagements are ambushes by a few dozen resistance troops against a Company-sized (100 troops or less) or smaller SPDC group, and the SPDC troops usually get the worst of it. Occasionally there are larger engagements, when resistance forces attack an SPDC camp or when an SPDC column attacks a resistance camp; though the latter is very rare now due to the mobile guerrilla tactics of the resistance forces. In these engagements, the Burmese soldiers are often ordered to charge headlong at the enemy positions. This tactic results in very high casualties among the Burmese soldiers. It also shows a lack of planning and tactical skill, and a lack of concern for the lives of their soldiers on the part of the officers. The rank and file soldiers can see this, and it only makes them resent their officers all the more. Operating in areas with a population which is entirely against them and always afraid of ambush, the fears of the soldiers are made even worse by the opposition's increasing use of landmines. Facing a shortage of manpower and ammunition, groups like the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) are increasingly relying on landmines to harass SPDC columns and restrict their movements and activities. At present in Karen areas, more SPDC soldiers are wounded and killed by landmines than by combat. The soldiers must be afraid of these at all times and in all places. Medics are assigned to the units and they try to treat the wounded and get them evacuated, but the medicines they carry are usually inadequate and the distances that soldiers have to be carried before they arrive at a clinic are so long that many bleed to death. It is not unheard of for commanders to leave severely wounded men behind, and Tatmadaw soldiers have even told KHRG in the past of officers shooting their own wounded soldiers. As one SLORC deserter described it to KHRG in a 1994 interview, ***“Any of our own soldiers who were seriously wounded were killed. If it isn't serious, if they can walk or if it's easy to take them, then they're taken back. If not, they're killed. The company commander orders this. When I saw things like that happen I felt very sad. It's a terrible fault. Our own soldiers, we must bring them back but we didn't. It's a crime. It's like frog eating frog, fish eating fish.”*** [Excerpted from ***“Testimony of SLORC Army Defectors”*** (KHRG, 7/8/94).]

“[A]t the most, battles occurred four, five or eight times each year. ... There were only two or three people who died each year. There were also about 4, 5 or 10 people who got wounded.” - “Aung Zaw Moe” (M, 19), Lance Corporal from Light Infantry Battalion #549, Pa'an District (Interview #2, 12/2000)

“When we went on operations we saw landmines, but we didn't plant them. We planted landmines when we were staying in the camp. We didn't plant them when we went to the frontline. We saw the landmines from our enemies. We dug them out.” - “Tin Aung Win” (M, 17), Private from Light Infantry Battalion #549, Pa'an District (Interview #1, 12/2000)

During the operations, the soldiers are not given enough rations to complete the operation. When the columns pass through villages, the officers demand chickens and pigs from the villagers or just order the soldiers to catch and take them. The officers get priority on these animals and the soldiers don't usually get a good chance to take any for themselves. Food is also a problem in the frontline camps since the officers are often still able to sell off the soldiers'

rations or horde them for themselves. The officers are able to demand food from the surrounding villages, but don't usually allow the soldiers to do this. The result is that the starving soldiers steal the villagers' chickens, livestock, vegetables and rice in order to eat. In areas where the columns are under orders to destroy the villagers' rice stocks and livestock, the soldiers are only too happy to be able to loot the rice and get some meat from the slaughtered animals. At the frontline Army posts, rations are usually sent up from the rear camps once a month using the forced labour of villagers as carriers; but even here, the supply sergeants and officers sometimes hoard or sell off the rations. The officers demand that surrounding villages give vegetables and meat and sometimes order the soldiers to demand these things for them. The villagers' attempts to escape these demands are met with threats and often physical punishment from the officers. Even those officers who seem indifferent back in the base camps often become tyrants in the frontlines. Soldiers are commonly punished for even the smallest mistakes by the officers. They are punched by the officers whenever the officers want to punch them. Soldiers are slapped by officers and NCO's for not carrying out orders well enough. What is created is such an atmosphere of fear that the soldiers will do things to avoid punishment which they don't really agree with. They will beat porters more when an officer passes by, torture villagers and even execute suspected rebels when ordered to by the officers.

“Sometimes they called us to go in an emergency and to enter and clear a village. They asked us to kill the chickens and pigs. As a group we did this, but I never did it alone. I killed one pig in Paw Hta village. There all the soldiers stole chickens. They also beat to death one cat. The old sergeant beat the cat.” - “Saw Tha Ku” (M, 21), Private from Infantry Battalion #19, Papun District (Interview #3, 3/2000)

“When I went on an operation in Papun [district], one of the soldiers from Signals [the communications unit of the battalion] went down in the valley and saw an AK [AK-47 assault rifle]. Above the bank of the river there is a village and it was before we arrived at that village. They suspected a person we saw near there. When an officer saw the gun he suspected that man. Nearby there was a boy looking after some cows. ‘Where are you from?’ They asked the boy who the man was, but he didn’t know. They arrested the man and asked him, ‘Whose gun is this?’ They interrogated him and punched him. Later, when they couldn’t ask him anything else, they called the village head. He asked a soldier to go and call the village head. The village head said he had never seen this person. He also didn’t know what village the man was from. They asked him again and again, but they couldn’t get an answer. They asked through an interpreter because he couldn’t speak Burmese. He didn’t answer so the senior officer gave us an order, and we had to kill him ourselves. The one who ordered us was from our company and his name is Captain A---. He is the company commander and has two stars. They [the soldiers] took a mattock from the village, dug a hole and killed him. I saw it. I killed only this person. Three or four soldiers were there. Each soldier shot him two or three times. He was dead and we buried him there. ... They couldn’t tell whether he was a villager or an enemy. They saw an AK, so they suspected him and killed him.” - “Tin Aung Win” (M, 17), Private from Light Infantry Battalion #549, Pa’an District (Interview #1, 12/2000)

“Sometimes I had to beat them. The officers ordered us to beat them so we had to. None of the villagers died when we beat them.” - “Aung Zaw Moe” (M, 19), Lance Corporal from Light Infantry Battalion #549, Pa’an District (Interview #2, 12/2000)

“When they [the officers] arrived in a village, they demanded chicken and rice from the village headwoman. We saw it with our own eyes and didn’t agree with this. Once they got it from the village headwoman, they sent it to their section. There is a Company office and the officers are in charge of it. There are 6 or 7 or 8 officers living there. They take the good things for themselves, and the poor things like potatoes, they gave seven of them to each section. We have five or six soldiers in each section and we can’t eat enough with just seven potatoes. We complained, but they didn’t respond to us. We had to take the things they gave us, had to eat what they fed us and had to do what they forced us to do. The commander told me it is the orders of the Army. I didn’t say anything in reply because he is a higher officer than me and also older than me.” - “Tin Aung Win” (M, 17), Private from Light Infantry Battalion #549, Pa’an District (Interview #1, 12/2000)

The Officers

“I feel very happy that I have escaped from the ‘house arrest’. When we were staying with them they were ordering us to work the whole day in the hot sun. We were sweating and we had to work. When they came back they were drunk from alcohol and reviled us and they beat us.” - “Aung Zaw Moe” (M, 19), Lance Corporal from Light Infantry Battalion #549, Pa’an District (Interview #2, 12/2000)

The SPDC often talks of the danger of dividing the Tatmadaw, but that divide has already occurred and is growing. The officers have created for themselves a separate class in society, using both the soldiers under them and the civilian population for their own personal benefit. They see the privileges given to them as their right as officers and not something which must be earned. They demand the loyalty and obedience of their soldiers and harsh punishments are given to those who disagree. This attitude of the officer corps has over the years alienated the soldiers under it. Morale and discipline have greatly suffered. Many of the soldiers desert as a direct result of abuse from their own officers. The privates do not feel much respect for their officers. Soldiers look at their officers and see that they are only interested in acquiring wealth for themselves and their families, often to the detriment of their troops.

Most of those who become SPDC soldiers have previously heard the SPDC propaganda painting the Army as a harmonious and united family and have seen soldiers lording it over the civilians, so even if they are afraid of combat and Army discipline, they at least believe that once in the Army they will be treated well by their commanders. However, they all say that in the training, if not sooner, they were quickly disabused of that notion by seeing the abuse of common soldiers by officers and NCO’s. The officers and NCO’s use systematic humiliation and abuse to keep the soldiers in line so that they can be used for their commanders’ personal benefit. In the field, most officers focus on enriching themselves as quickly as possible by extorting money and labour from the local civilian population, and by collecting money in lieu of forced labour. They also use their own soldiers for money-making projects in addition to their normal duties, whether baking bricks or growing cash crops. But the abuse of their own soldiers does not stop there. Most officers also steal half or more of the pay of the soldiers under them, usually in the form of deductions from their salaries, and they sell many of the rations intended for their soldiers and tell them to go and get their food in the villages. Not only do the villagers have to suffer the systematic demands of the officers and SPDC authorities, but the looting and abuse of hungry rank and file soldiers set loose on their villages to plunder in order to survive.

“There were people they called ‘Sit Kyu’ [‘C.Q.’, Chief Quartermaster; a position usually held by a sergeant or sergeant major] who were stealing the rice and rations, so we didn’t get enough food to eat. The higher-ups sent enough rations for the soldiers, but they took it bit by bit until we didn’t get enough food. When they cooked rice, they put soda in it. When they cooked bean curry, they put soda in it. When we first arrived the food was okay, but later people got gas in their intestines and oedema [symptomised by swelling all over the body]. Some got sick because of the food. One of the new recruits died.” - “Saw Tha Ku” (M, 21), Private from Infantry Battalion #19, Papun District (Interview #3, 3/2000)

The result is a thoroughly undisciplined Army, with soldiers being abused by NCO’s and officers, and all levels preying out of control upon the civilian population. Soldiers and NCO’s are almost never punished for any abuse against civilians, only when they do something which intrudes on the privileges of the officers. The civilians have no one they can dare to complain to, nor do the soldiers. The Tatmadaw has rules whereby soldiers are supposed to be able to pass any problems they have up to the officers through their NCO’s, but instead the officers use the NCO’s to keep any problems out of their hearing by threatening and abusing the rank and file soldiers.

“When they couldn’t order me to do something, they slapped my cheek. The Saya and Saya Gyi beat me [Saya and Saya Gyi are usually used for teachers, but in the Army refer to corporals and sergeants respectively]. I don’t know their names because there were many and they transferred to another battalion.” - “Aung Zaw Moe” (M, 19), Lance Corporal from Light Infantry Battalion #549, Pa’an District (Interview #2, 12/2000)

As a result, the soldiers feel that the officers have no idea about what is happening with their soldiers and sergeants under them. The soldiers have to solve their problems themselves. The officers eat separately from the soldiers and they eat well, while the soldiers get barely enough to eat. One deserter described how only three days’ rations were issued to his company for an operation which took almost a month. The soldiers were forced to eat the trunks of banana trees while the officers had instant noodles which they had brought along, and didn’t allow the soldiers to eat. On operations, the officers tell the privates to round up villagers for forced labour as porters and for other work, not to get wounded, and to try to capture guns for them. If the soldiers do manage to capture any guns, the officers then take them and present them to their superiors in the hope of promotion or other rewards. However, most guns are actually ‘captured’ by capturing and torturing village elders until their villagers can find a gun somewhere to hand over. Officers commonly slap soldiers across the face for not carrying out orders well enough. This makes the soldiers very angry, as their own parents have never slapped their faces like that. There are some officers who do believe in some sense of duty to their country, its people, and the soldiers under them, but these officers are very few. Most have been corrupted by the system.

“He didn’t watch or take care of us. The officers ate well. They didn’t know what was happening with the soldiers. They told us not to get wounded when a battle occurs, and to get things from the KNLA. To get guns for them.” - “Aung Zaw Moe” (M, 19), Lance Corporal from Light Infantry Battalion #549, Pa’an District (Interview #2, 12/2000)

“The officers and the soldiers are divided in their living conditions. They are not friendly with us. They take us when we have to go on operations. They tell us to go carefully. They oppressed the soldiers.” - “Thein Htay” (M, 26), Private from Light Infantry Battalion #340, Papun District (Interview #5, 11/2000)

Most of the loyalty of the officers to the regime is based on the impunity they are given to plunder the countryside in return for crushing any opposition. This is why the SPDC is so unwilling to take concrete steps against forced labour and other abuses; the regime realises that if it takes away the means by which the officers enrich themselves, and if it begins calling them to account for their abuses, it may begin losing the loyalty of the officer corps and a split in the Army could result. However, the SPDC has only considered the loyalty of its officers and has completely ignored the welfare of the rank and file soldiers, assuming that they can be beaten down and used like the civilian population. This could be a serious mistake, as no army which has ignored the well being of its rank and file so blatantly has ever been successful for long.

“The attitude of the battalion commander who has arrived now is that as long as his family is living comfortably he doesn’t care about anything. He allows us soldiers to live as we like. He is a battalion commander who doesn’t look out for the benefit of many people, but only looks out for his own benefit. The officers who are staying in the battalion camp are working hard for their families to be comfortable. They don’t know what is happening to the soldiers and Saya Gyi [sergeants] who are under them. If we have a problem, we are supposed to send the news to the Saya Gyi, and the Saya Gyi sends the news on to the officers, but we couldn’t do that. We had to clear the problem ourselves, and the company commanders stay as though they don’t know.” - “Tin Aung Win” (M, 17), Private from Light Infantry Battalion #549, Pa’an District (Interview #1, 12/2000)

“We didn’t respect the officers. Some soldiers had already been in the Army and fled, and the Burmese had recaptured them. These men knew about the Army, so they refused to obey the trainers and refuted them.” - “Saw Tha Ku” (M, 21), Private from Infantry Battalion #19, Papun District (Interview #3, 3/2000)

Corruption and Battalion Businesses

“When we grew it they said it was for the Battalion, but when we finished the harvest that changed. I saw them take the paddy and sell it. For example, we got 3,000 [baskets] of paddy from 35 acres. They sold 2,500 [baskets] and sent the other 500 to the Battalion camp. Then they used some of that to feed the soldiers’ women in the Battalion camp. They said that they sent the money from selling the paddy as a donation to headquarters, but we heard that they only sent half of it and the [battalion] officers took the other half.” - “Saw Tha Ku” (M, 21), Private from Infantry Battalion #19, Papun District (Interview #3, 3/2000)

Being in the Tatmadaw for many officers is a way not only to power, but also to money. Although some officers are less corrupt than others, corruption in the Tatmadaw has become so institutionalised that it would be a very rare officer who was not involved in it in some way. At the higher levels of the SPDC there are kickbacks from companies, businesses, cronies and others seeking favours, and ventures such as money-laundering, as well as a portion of the take handed over by subordinate officers in the field. Several of the foreign companies which have withdrawn from Burma in recent years have grumbled that it is almost impossible to turn a profit while meeting the ever-increasing demands for bribes by the top generals. In the past two years some senior officials and officers have been arrested or forced to resign on corruption charges after flagrantly displaying their ill-gotten wealth, though it is likely that the real reason for their ouster was either due to rivalries or because they failed to share the take properly with the right people. It is at the middle and lower levels of the officer corps where the corruption is the most

visible. These are the officers in the field and with closer contact to the villagers. The corruption comes in many forms. As already mentioned, officers routinely steal over half of the salaries of the soldiers under them in the name of various 'deductions'; they also force their soldiers to pay for replacement uniforms and equipment which are standard issue, and they sell off many of the rations (sometimes even to the opposition forces) and tell their soldiers to get their food from the villages. Army officers regularly extort money from frontline villages under the threat of relocating the village, or arrest villagers at random and hold them for ransom. Bribes are taken at Army checkpoints and money is collected for letters of recommendation which are needed by villagers to travel outside their villages. Arbitrary taxes are sometimes levied on crops or goods traded in an area. These taxes are usually not asked for by the central government, but are demanded and the money pocketed by officers in the field.

Porter fees constitute another form of corruption. The local Army unit orders a village head to provide forced labourers or porters. There are usually quite a few villages around a camp and the order is sent to all of them. The villagers don't want to go, so they collect money and pay the local commander to not have to go. Sometimes this money is just a euphemism for extortion money, but other times it is actually in lieu of labourers. Payment of this money becomes routine, but the Army camp still needs labourers and demands them in addition to the money. If the villagers can't go for this labour, they pay to get out of it until these payments too become routine, while the Army still makes additional demands for more labourers; and so on, resulting in villages being forced to pay several kinds of forced labour 'fees' while also doing forced labour. When the camp really needs labour, the soldiers either catch people to do it or notify the village head that they will accept no money this time, they want people. If at any time the village head fails to provide the people and money demanded, he or she suffers the consequences - which range from detention and beating of the village head to the burning and forced relocation of the village. In some areas, the local units and village tract Peace and Development Councils, knowing that the villagers don't want to go, go ahead and hire itinerant labourers to be porters and then order the villagers to pay for the labourers as well as the travel costs.

In addition to these payments related to forced labour, "donations" are also demanded from the villagers for the building and equipping of schools, clinics, and pagodas. Much of this money is simply pocketed by the officers, leaving the villagers to build the school or clinic at their own expense. Most schools lack the books and clinics lack the medicine which was supposed to be bought with such donations. Officers and local SPDC officials use infrastructure projects as a way to make even more money; whenever road, railway, hydro-dam or other such projects begin, officers use it as an excuse to demand fees for the cost of the project. Some of this money goes into the pockets of the local officers, while some of it is passed up to higher levels and is even reported in the state-run media as "people's contributions". The fees demanded often amount to several times the entire cost of the project, even when the regime has provided funding and building equipment. The state funding for construction costs and salaries is simply pocketed by the officers, who call the villagers out for unpaid forced labour. If bulldozers and other equipment are provided for heavy work, the officers order the villagers to do it by hand unless they pay to "hire" the bulldozer and buy the fuel. The villages are becoming increasingly impoverished and are finding it harder to pay all of these fees. It is a vicious cycle; if the villagers can't pay the fees they have to go as forced labour and no longer have enough time to work their fields, making it impossible for them to get money to pay the next round of fees. Villagers who own livestock are better off because they can sell it to pay the fees, but in the end many people find themselves with no money, no food, and little option but to flee the village or face arrest. The officers in the local units only keep a percentage of this money, with the rest being kicked upstairs to their superior officers, who presumably take their cut and then pass it on.

While sergeants are sometimes included to keep their loyalty, the officers view this as their right as officers and do not usually allow the NCO's and privates to do this. Soldiers who do take porter fees or bribes and keep them for themselves are seen by the officers as stealing and are severely punished.

“Each person got two bowls of rice, two tins of milk, 25 kyat tha [400 grams/14 ounces] of salt and 25 kyat tha of fish paste per week. He forced us to keep it in his house. Sometimes we were working in the fields and we didn’t have anything to eat day or night. We were hungry. When we cooked, sometimes we didn’t have enough rice. Before the beginning of the next month [when rations would be issued], the rice was gone. He said that we stole and sold the rice. He scolded and beat us.” - “Saw Tha Ku” (M, 21), Private from Infantry Battalion #19, Papun District (Interview #3, 3/2000)

Another form of corruption are the business projects set up by the various battalions. Most of these projects are agricultural, but there are also brick baking, gem mining and other projects. One soldier interviewed after being stationed in Papun District stated that on his assignment to his battalion the new recruits were asked who among them was a farmer, and after indicating that he was, he was sent to work on the battalion farm for the two years he was there. He made bricks in the hot season, grew paddy in the wet season and round beans in the dry season. Some of the produce grown is for the consumption of the soldiers and their families, particularly since the severe cuts in their rations in 1998, but most is sold by the officers. Other agricultural projects like rubber plantations, fish farms and fruit orchards are almost exclusively for the profit of the officers. Projects such as brick making and gem mining are also almost exclusively for the profit of the officers. In the rear area camps there is not much soldiering, as the soldiers are almost all put to work on the officers’ money generating projects. The labour of the local villagers is also a central component in most of these schemes. Villagers are ordered to come to the local Army camps to work in the fields, to get firewood for the brick kilns, to cut timber for the officers to sell. Villagers have been ordered to dig fish ponds for Army units who then sell the fish. Their bullock carts are commandeered to carry bricks, logs and planks to be sold. None of this labour is paid for. The agricultural projects are located on land which was originally confiscated from the local villagers and often it is the best land. These same villagers are then forced to work that land under the supervision of the Army. The seed used in these fields also usually comes from the villagers. When the crop is unsuccessful, it is the villagers who are blamed and forced to compensate the Army, either in seed, in rice or monetarily.

“When I arrived at IB 19, they didn’t send me to the frontline. They let us rest for two nights at the IB 19 camp to get used to it. Then they took us to the parade ground, and they asked the new recruits, ‘Is anyone a farmer, or knows how to work a field?’ I am a farmer, so I told them I could. Then they separated me out and told me, ‘We will send you to the agriculture section’. Other soldiers went to the frontline, but I was with the agriculture section for over 2 years. In the hot season they kept me at that place making bricks, and in the rainy season they sent me to plough the fields. We planted paddy in the rainy season, and round beans in the dry season.” - “Saw Tha Ku” (M, 21), Private from Infantry Battalion #19, Papun District (Interview #3, 3/2000)

“Then we each had to do Pa Take [‘practice’, a term used for soldiers’ forced labour]. We had to bake bricks, to cut trees and carry them, and to cut bamboo and carry them. We had to build the buildings in the battalion camp.” - “Tin Aung Win” (M, 17), Private from Light Infantry Battalion #549, Pa’an District (Interview #1, 12/2000)

“To plough the fields in the battalion camp, they called and forced the villagers and bulls to plough the fields. They forced the Karen mothers and uncles to plant the paddy. When the paddy was not good, they told the villagers who had come to plant the paddy, ‘The seed that you planted was not good.’ So the villagers had to repay the soldiers with one or two baskets of seed.” - “Tin Aung Win” (M, 17), Private from Light Infantry Battalion #549, Pa’an District (Interview #1, 12/2000)

The following is a translation of an order demanding teak from a village in Thaton District which will be cut and sold by the officers in the camp. This particular village constantly receives demands from the same officer for several tons of logs or planks at a time. *[A copy of the original of this order can be seen on page 121.]*

Mother [Village] Head
xxxx village

Writing a letter to inform Mother Head that the wood which Mother sent is small [diameter] and crooked. If [we] cut it at the mill we will only get scraps. Send 2 tons more of teak which is bigger. There are over 80 houses in Mother’s village, ask one piece of wood from each house and if you gather it you can get one ton of teak planks. If you have a problem sending logs, send one ton of teak planks. Reply by letter today what Mother will send.

If Mother wants the wood back that you already sent, you can have it.

[Sd.]
Capt. xxxx
xxxx Camp Commander
xx-10-2000

The local officers keep most of the profits from these projects, with none given to the privates or the villagers. These corrupt money-making enterprises have become an integral part of the system in Burma. Officers have come to see it as their right as officers to take money from the villagers and to force the privates and villagers to work for them. The sergeants are sometimes included in order to ensure their loyalty, which is needed to control and keep an eye on the lower NCO’s and the privates. The profits made are enormous, and many of the officers rotate out of the frontlines with sizeable fortunes in the millions or even tens of millions of Kyat. The profits only grow as officers reach higher levels, with the lower officers ‘donating’ money to them to gain favour and to secure promotions. The corruption has permeated every area of the Tatmadaw. An officer who did not participate in it would be seen as non-conformist and a threat and would not likely see promotion. It is this conformity to the system which is the measure of the loyalty of many of the officers. Because the junior officers see making money as their right for serving in dangerous frontline areas, any scaling down of the corruption or orders to end the use of forced labour would result in a crisis of loyalty among the officer corps, who would see their ability to make their fortunes severely curtailed. This could generate the split in the Army which the SPDC leadership is so afraid of - which explains why they never take real action against corruption or forced labour.

“The unit which demanded the most money was #48 [IB], Htun Kyaw Pyu’s unit. Htun Kyaw Pyu took over 600,000 Kyat from the villagers and he took 200,000 or 300,000 Kyat of that for himself. ... When the soldiers rotated back recently, the xxxx villagers gave them 20,000 Kyat, xxxx village gave them 9,000 Kyat, and xxxx and xxxx villages gave them 20,000 Kyat. The soldiers demanded the money for their support.” - “Saw Wah” (M), KHRG field researcher [Excerpted from “Peace Villages and Hiding Villages: Roads, Relocations and the Campaign for Control in Toungoo District” (KHRG 2000-5, 15/10/2000), Interview #2, 12/99]

“When one of the operations commanders comes, we have to pay for his pillow and curry. We also have to pay for beer for them. When the operations commanders go back, they demand money. Sometimes they demand as much as 100,000 to 200,000 Kyat, so when they go back their wives and children are happy.” - “Saw Ghay Hser” (M, xx), Kler Lah village, Toungoo District [Excerpted from “Peace Villages and Hiding Villages: Roads, Relocations and the Campaign for Control in Toungoo District” (KHRG 2000-5, 15/10/2000), Interview #12]

Salaries

The soldiers and officers of the Tatmadaw as well as other civil servants received a pay raise on April 1st 2000. For the Tatmadaw, the increase was five times what the pay had been before, but for the civil service only three times. Previously, the salaries of the military and the civil servants had lagged far behind the rampant inflation. This move was aimed at both bringing government salaries on a par with the higher cost of living and ensuring the loyalty of the military and civil service. However, the SPDC funded the salary increases simply by printing more currency, which has caused even more rapid inflation than before and has led to the plunge of the Kyat from its former level of about 300 to the US dollar down to 500 to the dollar, making the increase insufficient to really help those receiving it while also bringing much greater hardship on the majority of the population. The following is a breakdown of current reported gross monthly salaries. This list is based on testimonies of rank and file soldiers so it is not complete and may not be entirely accurate.

Private	3,000 Kyat
Private with 4 years service	4,700 Kyat
Lance Corporal	5,300 Kyat
Sergeant	6,000+ Kyat
2 nd Lieutenant	9,000 Kyat
Lieutenant	12,000 Kyat
Captain	12-13,000 Kyat
Major	15-16,000 Kyat
General	150,000 Kyat

These figures do not give the whole picture, as the officers are able to supplement their salaries through the payment of porter fees, extortion money and bribes by villagers under their control, while Privates have most of their salary stolen by the officers. The officers are also able to further supplement their income through the sales of bricks, wood and produce from battalion projects [see above under ‘**Corruption and Battalion Businesses**’]. The NCO’s (Corporals and Sergeants) are also able to supplement their salaries through demanding money and goods from villagers, but this has to be done secretly because the officers see this as their preserve. It is probable that the sergeants are cut in on some of the officers’ schemes in order to keep their loyalty.

“The battalion commander received over 10,000 Kyat per month. The officers received 12,000 Kyat. The company commander [a captain] gets 12,000 or 13,000 Kyat. The higher officers received 14,000 or 15,000 Kyat. U K--- is the major who controlled the whole battalion camp, so I think he got 15,000 or 16,000 Kyat. The sergeants receive over 6,000 Kyat. Lance corporals get 5,300 Kyat. He is a lance corporal [indicating his friend]. I was a private for four years, but he was in the Army for five years. We privates are starting from the basic military training and if we do a good job, they will increase our rank. If they don’t want to give [promotions], they don’t give. This is the opinion of the leaders. I worked for four years in the Army, so I got 4,700 Kyat. The new soldiers receive about 3,000 Kyat. ... When I started they hadn’t increased the salary yet, I got only 650 Kyat per month. After six or seven months during the Papun operation, they increased the salary [this salary increase was given on April 1st 2000].” - “Tin Aung Win” (M, 17), Private from Light Infantry Battalion #549, Pa’an District (Interview #1, 12/2000)

Another source of income for the officers is their own soldiers. The soldiers see much of their salaries disappear through deductions taken out by the officers. The soldiers have the cost of their military equipment taken out of their salaries when they first join the battalion. One deserter told KHRG he had to purchase a dress uniform, jungle boots, slippers, black collar badge, gold collar badge, and gold and black hat badges. Later, they must also buy additional uniforms to replace the one given by the Army each year which is of poor quality and wears out quickly. At LIB #549’s camp in Pa’an District, the officers deduct the cost of haircuts, which the soldiers must get in the barber shop owned by the officers, from the soldiers’ salaries. ‘Support money’ is also taken out for various things such as the officers’ offerings at temples, support for schools, donations for parties or funerals, building of new pagodas, support of a library, donations, and fees for official documents which the soldiers need. Money is taken out for soldiers wounded by landmines and for the families of soldiers who stay in the camp. Most of the deductions are not official, and are simply stolen by the officers rather than being used as their names would indicate. The soldiers are told when they receive their pay what deductions were taken out and how much, but no reasons are given. If soldiers complain about their salaries, they are beaten by the officers. A deserter from LIB #549 said the officers claimed to set up bank accounts for the soldiers for which they deducted 1,000 Kyat each month and deposited it. This scam was discovered when the soldiers went to withdraw some of their money after four or five months before they went on an operation and found there was only one month’s worth of money in the accounts. When they went to inquire, they had to grovel to each of the officers while the officers just shuffled them from desk to desk. In the end, no bank statements were given, they were not told where the money had gone and the soldiers gave up. After all of the money has been deducted, the soldiers are left with half or less than half of their total salary, sometimes with as little as 200 Kyat.

“They gave me a monthly salary of 4,700 Kyat. I had to buy military equipment when I arrived at the battalion. I had to buy jungle boots. One boot is over 300 Kyat. I had to buy slippers, a black collar badge, a gold collar badge, and a gold and black colour badge for my hat. I also had to buy and wear a good uniform [dress uniform]. They gave us only one uniform each year. In the area of our military operations it was very rough. When we were running and climbing the mountains, it was hooked on thorns. Sometimes it was scraped by tree branches and it had become ragged. For a new one we had to buy it. I also bought a chest for putting clothes and other things in. They also took out support money. I couldn’t spend this monthly salary for myself at all.” - “Tin Aung Win” (M, 17), Private from Light Infantry Battalion #549, Pa’an District (Interview #1, 12/2000)

“They took out 400 Kyat for support money. The battalion support money is for the children’s nursery school. They took out money for the middle school and the high school. Then they told us that to save money for later [on behalf of the soldiers] they took out 1,000 Kyat for that. In addition, money is taken out for parties and funerals. If people die in the Army camp, they take out 40 or 50 Kyat [for the funeral]. They take 500 Kyat for building a pagoda. When it has all been taken out, we received only 200 Kyat of our salary. They cut it every month. They show this reason and that reason and then cut it. Then they don’t explain themselves. They write a letter and say that they cut it for this reason and then give the salary to us. The soldiers who can’t read came to show the letter to us and we read it to them. We told them, ‘Don’t go to ask them [the officers]. If you go to ask them, you will be punched and your cheeks slapped by them.’” - “Tin Aung Win” (M, 17), Private from Light Infantry Battalion #549, Pa’an District (Interview #1, 12/2000)

“It was 5,300 Kyat, but I didn’t get it all. I got about 3,000 Kyat. They cut off some for the library. They also opened a barbershop there and took out the price for a haircut when we got our salary [this is the officers’ own barber shop, so the money goes directly back to their pockets]. There were also donations and the price for documents. They also deducted money for a bank account [for each of the soldiers to save their money in]. After four or five months when we went to ask them for the money from the bank account, there was only one month’s worth of money in there. We don’t know where the money disappeared to for the other months. They hadn’t saved it, it wasn’t there. They had only put in enough for one month. They didn’t show or give us a bank account statement. We knew about it later, because when the soldiers were about to go to the front, they wanted to take out the money that they saved. When they went to get it, it was like they had to worship this person and then go worship that person. Then the soldiers didn’t ask again and came back. They didn’t take out their money.” - “Aung Zaw Moe” (M, 19), Lance Corporal from Light Infantry Battalion #549, Pa’an District (Interview #2, 12/2000); his salary is higher because he is a corporal.

“They gave me a salary, 650 Kyat per month. However, I didn’t get a full salary. The higher officers took some of it, so I only ended up with 550 or 560. The highest I ever got was 580 Kyat. They said it [the deductions] was for soldiers who had been injured by landmines at the frontline, and for the families of soldiers who stayed at the battalion camp. Everyone had to do this. [In practice many of these deductions are simply stolen by the officers.]” - “Saw Tha Ku” (M, 21), Private from Infantry Battalion #19, Papun District (Interview #3, 3/2000)

VII. Relations with the Villagers

Tatmadaw and the people in eternal unity, anyone attempting to divide them is our enemy.
– Tatmadaw slogan

“I have seen them force the civilians to build roads, bridges and do everything for the battalion camp and do Pa Take [soldiers’ term meaning forced labour at the Army camp]. I even had to force the mothers [in Burmese, older women are referred to as mothers]. When the mothers were tired and if I gave them a chance to rest, the officers asked me why they had to rest. I told them, ‘Bo Gyi [captain], it is like this; they are tired so I asked them to rest.’ He asked me, ‘Don’t you want to force the civilians? Why don’t you want to force them?’ I told him, ‘Bo Gyi, they work and are tired so I asked them to rest.’ I told them [the officers], but they didn’t excuse me at all. They didn’t say anything to the villagers. They called me away and slapped my face. I felt distressed that time also.” - “Tin Aung Win” (M, 17), Private from Light Infantry Battalion #549, Pa’an District (Interview #1, 12/2000)

Prior to the pro-democracy uprising of 1988, the Army was at least somewhat respected by many of the ethnic Burmans in central Burma, who saw it as their defender against Communism and the protector of their racial dominance over the non-Burman peoples. However, while perfectly willing to accept and even support the oppression of other races, they were unwilling to be oppressed themselves, and the 1988 uprising was the result. The brutal crushing of that uprising and the Army’s role in it made even the Burmans realise how far the Army would go to remain in power. While the Burmans were shocked by what they suffered for a few months in 1988, it was nothing new to the non-Burmans throughout the country who had been suffering much worse for over 30 years already. Non-Burman villagers have been attacked and oppressed by the Army since shortly after Burma’s independence, and things became much worse in the early 1970’s when the Army began forcefully implementing the *Pya Lay Pya*, or Four Cuts campaign. This campaign aims to cut off food, funds, intelligence and recruits to the resistance groups by systematically attacking, displacing and forcing into destitution the civilian populations who are blamed for supporting them. These campaigns used to be localised, but since the expansion of the Army the programme has also expanded, and in the last 5 years alone it has been directly responsible for the destruction of several thousand villages and the killing of several thousand villagers throughout vast areas of Shan State, parts of Pegu Division and Mon State and almost all of Karen State, Karenni State and Tenasserim Division. Almost all of the contact which villagers have with the Burmese Army’s soldiers in the ‘brown’ and ‘black’ areas of Burma is negative. The Army behaves more as an occupation force than as a unifier for the villagers to rally behind. Culturally different and often not able to understand Burmese, the ethnically non-Burman villagers are treated as the enemy whether they support the resistance or not. No attempts are made to understand the villagers, speak their languages, or organise them.

In the areas not under SPDC control soldiers are ordered to loot the villagers’ houses, burn their fields and paddy barns, and to shoot villagers on sight. This includes areas where there is extensive resistance activity, remote hill regions where the SPDC has few Army camps, and in some regions all villages which are any more than one or two hours’ walk from the nearest Army camp or vehicle road. Soldiers interviewed for this report have seen villagers in these ‘free-fire’ areas shot dead. The officers say that by still being in the free-fire areas, the villagers are giving the soldiers the chance to kill them. They have also been ordered by their officers to burn the villagers’ paddy barns. The officers tell the soldiers that the paddy barns are those of the rebels,

and whether the soldiers convince themselves that this is true or simply don't know any better, they burn them down. Entire villages in these areas are also burned down. The order translated below was issued in Papun District and gives an example of the dangers villagers must face simply to live in their village [*the Burmese original of this order is on page 126; also published as Order #1 in "SPDC & DKBA Orders to Villages: Set 2000-A" (KHRG #2000-01, 29/2/00)*].

<u>Stamp:</u>	
Frontline #xx Infantry Battalion Column x Headquarters	Frontline #xx Infantry Battalion Column x Headquarters Letter Number: xxx / Col. x / Oo x Date: 1999 September xx
To: Village Head xxxx village	
Subject: <u>To inform all villagers who live in the villages</u>	
<p>1) We the Army Column are searching out and fighting the Nga Pway [<i>'ringworms', derogatory SPDC slang for KNU/KNLA</i>] in the jungle, in the mountains, in the rivers and the valleys by day and night. We the Army have mistakenly shot the villagers.</p> <p>2) We the Army do not want to shoot innocent villagers. We inform the villagers as follows so that this will not occur again:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">(a) Do not hunt or beat the bush [<i>to flush out game</i>] with guns in the jungle.(b) Do not run away when you see the Army. If you run away we will consider you to be Nga Pway and you will be shot.(c) Do not go from one village to another at night. If it is an emergency matter, go along the path using a lamp or firebrand. Do not use a flashlight. If the lamp suddenly goes dark, you must continue on by singing a song. <p>3) We inform you that action will be taken against villagers and villages who do not follow the above.</p>	
	<p><i>[Sd.]</i> Column Commander Column x Headquarters Frontline #xx Infantry Battalion</p>

Afraid of being killed or captured for forced labour, villagers flee from the SPDC soldiers whenever they can. Constant flight and fear of Burmese patrols leaves the villagers with little or no chance to plant or take care of their crops. The villagers hiding in these free-fire areas are suffering from malnutrition bordering on starvation. Many villages are ordered to relocate to sites under firmer SPDC control, usually along roads or near Army camps. The usual procedure is to order the village to move, sometimes with a few days' warning and sometimes with none. The villagers either flee into the jungle or take whatever they can and move to the new site. Neither food nor building materials are provided at these sites and the villagers just have to make do with what they have. Most of the relocation sites are very near to Army camps. Because of their close proximity to the camps, the villagers are called more often for forced labour and many of these sites have turned into *de facto* labour camps for various road projects and agriculture ventures.

"They didn't call any meetings. I didn't hear of them talking to the villagers. They just do things and demand things from the villagers." - "Aung Zaw Moe" (M, 19), Lance Corporal from Light Infantry Battalion #549, Pa'an District (Interview #2, 12/2000)

“In the resistance areas they were going into the jungle. When they were moving, they saw paddy barns. They [the soldiers] didn’t know that they belonged to civilians [the paddy barns all belong to civilians]. The officers said they were the paddy barns of the Nga Pway [Ringworm, i.e. KNLA], then they burned them. When they saw the paddy barns they burned them. They ate what they could and what they could not eat they burned. Sometimes when they saw villagers in the jungle area far from the [SPDC] area of control, they shot them dead. When they saw villagers in the areas that they controlled they called them Nyein Chan Yay [‘Peace’ villagers]. In the place where they shot people dead, they didn’t let anything happen. When they saw villages, they burned them down. When they saw the people, they killed them. They said that those people are giving them the chance to kill them [by remaining in the area, the villagers are inviting the soldiers to shoot them]. I have seen this.” - “Soe Tint” (M, 18), Lance Corporal from Light Infantry Battalion #10, Papun District (Interview #4, 11/2000)

“If they captured them, they tortured them. Even if they were not KNLA soldiers, when the soldiers went to the front line and saw women, men, or children, they arrested them all. After they arrested them, they said that the villagers were their enemies because they didn’t stay under government control. They asked them, for example, ‘Where is the place where they [KNLA] shoot and plant landmines? Where are they living?’ When the villagers didn’t answer or didn’t know about whatever they asked, the soldiers took that to mean that the villagers are the same nationality as the KNLA so they are covering their guilt and hiding information. They say the villagers are on the enemy’s side, and kill them.” - “Saw Tha Ku” (M, 21), Private from Infantry Battalion #19, Papun District (Interview #3, 3/2000)

Villages which are under strong SPDC control are often called *Nyein Chan Yay* (‘Peace’) villages by the officers. These people are not shot on sight, nor are their villages burned down, as long as they give promises to do whatever the soldiers demand, provide regular reports on the resistance in the area, and do not help the resistance in any way. There are no attempts made by the Army to win these villagers’ hearts and minds, but instead they are treated as a conquered people. Most of these villages are under dusk-to-dawn curfews and villagers must obtain, and often pay for, Army passes every time they want to leave their village to go to their fields or other villages; anyone caught without a pass is usually detained and beaten. Officers summon the village heads and demand food, money and people from them. The villagers have to comply or the Army arrests and tortures village elders, storms the village to loot and capture people, and/or burns down their houses. When the columns pass through villages, chickens and pigs are demanded from the villagers and sometimes the soldiers are given free reign to loot whatever the villagers have. Forced labourers are also demanded from the villages to work in the camps and on the battalion farms. They are also forced to work on infrastructure projects such as roads to expand the Army’s control over the region, to provide sentries for these roads and at the Army camps. Villagers who don’t want to go are fined chickens, pigs and money. Sometimes extortion money is simply demanded from the villages under the euphemism of ‘porter fees’. The money goes straight into the officers’ bank accounts [*see ‘Corruption and Battalion Businesses’ above*]. Villagers suspected of aiding the resistance materially or with intelligence are tortured and even extrajudicially executed. This is routine whenever there is a battle or a landmine explosion near a village; the village head is accused of not telling the Burmese unit beforehand and tortured, the village is fined heavily to compensate the Army unit for any losses, and the village might be burned and ordered to relocate. Officers also regularly demand that villagers find guns and radios to hand over, so that the officer can hand them to his superiors and report that he ‘captured them in battle’ in order to get decorations and promotions. The following is a translation of an order which makes it very clear that military action will be taken if the village fails to comply with demands for forced labour or if battles occur or landmines explode

near the village. The threat in paragraph #3 to ‘shoot with big weapons’ means they will shell the village with mortars or artillery. [A copy of the original of this order can be seen on page 122.]

21-11-2000

To:

xxxx [village] Head Daw aaaa / come with the schoolteacher
to arrive on the 22nd

- 1) No one came in accordance with the call for servants when the Strategic Command went back [rotated out of the area], so the Head yourself must come to clear [the matter]. If [you] don't come, [we] will call you with the Mobile Column.
- 2) Every time [we] call for servants from the Village Head, [you] give many excuses and avoid it. In future, if battles or landmines occur concerned with your village, the village will be destroyed.
- 3) The troops from above the Head's village have suffered from landmines, so [we] are not happy at all. If the camp/activities [meaning of the preceding phrase unclear, even in Burmese] such as a battle occurs, we will shoot with big weapons. Letting you know in advance, you are informed.

[Sd.]

Captain xxxx
Camp Commander

“They called the villagers to do Loh Ah Pay [forced labour]. They forced them to cut down the forest, dig out the roots and stumps of trees, and then burn or carry away the branches. They usually called 18, 19, or 20 villagers from each village, big or small. They called them once or twice a month, for 3 or 4 days each time.” - “Saw Tha Ku” (M, 21), Private from Infantry Battalion #19, Papun District (Interview #3, 3/2000)

When the Army needs operations porters money cannot be paid to get out of it. Orders will be sent to the village for everyone to remain in the village. A deserter interviewed for this report related that a company will next be sent to the village to get the porters. Sentries will be posted under the houses and a sergeant will go up into the house to take any male found in the house to be a porter. Occasionally the sergeant can be given money on the spot, which the sergeant will pocket and declare the house empty and move to the next one. Those who can't pay are taken, sometimes for months. If an officer orders a unit to round up 30 or 50 porters from a village, the soldiers must return with at least the specified number or they will be physically punished; however, when they reach the villages they often find that all the men have fled and only women, children and the elderly remain. In their desperation, they often beat and abuse the villagers and round up whomever they can get, leading a file of women, children and old people back to the camp just to meet the specified quota.

“When we are going on a far journey for an operation to Papun or someplace, they ordered the villagers to stay until midnight. At 12 or 1 a.m. a group of 10 or 15 soldiers from a company went to the village. The Saya Gyi [sergeants] went up into the houses and arrested people. We had to stand sentry underneath. When they saw a Maung Kyaw [uncle, a person older than the speaker], that man would give them money. They didn’t want people when they received money. They put the money in a bag and said, ‘I searched but I couldn’t find this Maung Kyaw. Come, we are going to search another house.’ They continued to search the other houses. They took money from the people who could pay money, but from the people who couldn’t pay they took the people.” - “Tin Aung Win” (M, 17), Private from Light Infantry Battalion #549, Pa’an District (Interview #1, 12/2000)

“They captured porters there. They called it Army wontan [‘servants’], but it was portering. They called one villager from each house to carry rations. Some villagers didn’t come because they didn’t have enough food, they had to work and weren’t free to go. They arrested the villagers who were hiding [from forced labour; in this context ‘arrested’ means captured them and forced them to go]. When they didn’t arrest them, they fined them. Some villagers couldn’t go, so they forced them to pay 1,000 Kyat per day. They called both men and women. ... I heard my friends say that after the porters carried, they slept at night with the soldiers. They slept and ate together with the soldiers. When they were tired and couldn’t walk, they gave them time to rest. Then they gave them some encouragement and continued on. As for the people who got sick, if they brought medicine, they treated them. It depends on whether the leader is good or not. For example, if the person who is leading the column is good, then they got medicine. But some commanders didn’t feed them, they fed only the soldiers.” - “Saw Tha Ku” (M, 21), Private from Infantry Battalion #19, Papun District (Interview #3, 3/2000)

Conditions while portering vary and deserters have said that it really depends on the officer in charge whether the porters will get decent food and medicine. Medicine is sometimes slipped to the porters by sympathetic medics. More often than not the conditions are very bad. Whatever rations are given for the porters by the higher officers are eaten by the lower officers or sold by them for a personal profit. Porters who are slow or unable to carry their loads are beaten and kicked by the soldiers, because the officers and NCOs will punish the soldiers if their unit arrives late or if their part of the column is lagging behind. Sometimes when an officer or NCO passes, the rank and file soldiers make a point of beating the porters so that the officer or NCO will see their dedication to duty. On the other hand, the soldiers are often punished if the officers see them showing any sympathy to porters or other civilian forced labourers; but some soldiers take the risk and secretly slip the porters some extra food, water or medicine, or give them a chance to rest when no officers are around. Beatings of porters and other forced labourers are often administered under the orders of the officers, but the officers also do it themselves. These beatings sometimes result in the deaths of the porters. Porters who can no longer carry due to exhaustion or sickness are usually left on the path to an almost certain death. Sometimes they are kicked down the side of the hills and left in the jungle. Porters taken from the various prisons in Burma and sent to the frontline for difficult operations were regarded by the deserters as being treated the worst. They were beaten more because they were convicts, and some died on the paths from lack of energy. Generally porters have to march with soldiers both in front of and behind them to minimise the chance of escape, but in areas which are known to be mined, the officers often force some porters to walk ahead as human minesweepers. Deserters have seen villagers step on mines due to this practice, with most of them bleeding to death before they can be sent to help. In the past, villagers have also told KHRG of being forced to change shirts with soldiers while portering, so that they will draw enemy fire during ambushes instead of the soldiers.

“There are four or five soldiers in one section. We soldiers went in front of them. We kept them behind us. If we make a mistake in direction, the porters show us. We went like that. Sometimes, in the places where there were landmines, I saw that they made the porters go in front. ... They beat them with their guns, punched their cheeks and kicked them with their feet. I saw that. I saw them beat the porters when they couldn’t follow with my own eyes. I never beat them. ... The rations for the wontan [‘servants’, i.e. porters], which the higher officers gave, the lower officers ate. The officers are selling it and putting the money in their bags. I saw it myself. ... When we went on the rough military operations, they gave us prisoner servants [convict porters]. Some of the prisoner servants didn’t have enough energy and couldn’t keep up. Some died on the path because they lost energy.” - “Tin Aung Win” (M, 17), Private from Light Infantry Battalion #549, Pa’an District (Interview #1, 12/2000)

“I saw it and I also did it myself. When the porters said that the load was too much and heavy, we said, ‘We called you to porter. After you fulfil your time, we will release you.’ Then we ordered them to carry. The porters couldn’t follow. When they couldn’t carry, the soldiers said that they were slow and beat and kicked them. ... They forced the porters to go between the soldiers and also to go in front. Now they force them to go in front because of the many landmines planted on this side. If someone stepped on a landmine, it would be a villager who stepped on it. They forced the porters to go a little farther ahead and then the soldiers followed behind. ... They stepped on the landmines, but I didn’t see any die. Recently, when they stepped on them, they were sometimes given medicine. The soldiers ordered the [other] villagers to carry them to the hospital, but they bled to death on the way. I have seen that. I forgot the name of the village. He was a villager from this side [a Karen villager].” - “Aung Zaw Moe” (M, 19), Lance Corporal from LIB #549, Pa’an District (Interview #2, 12/2000)

“There were a lot of wontan [‘servants’; i.e. porters]. They carried rice and rations and bullets. It was about 20 ah kyein [32.66 kgs. / 70 lbs.]. ... After a while, they couldn’t carry any longer and the soldiers kicked them and slapped their faces. It was so they can keep up with their friends [so they won’t fall behind because of the slowness of the porters].” - “Aung Myint Win” (M, 15), Private from LIB #504, Papun District (Interview #6, 3/2001)

“There were also two or three people who couldn’t carry. They kicked them down the side of the hill. They shot them and then they kicked them. I saw it with my own eyes in #66 [Division]. I didn’t know their names, but one was over 20 years old and another was 40 years old. One of our soldiers fled together with a wontan [servant, i.e. porter]. He was also killed by #66. The name of that soldier was Than Lwin Oo. He was from Company #3 [he doesn’t say which battalion], from Ta Ma [Division] #66.” - “Soe Tint” (M, 18), Lance Corporal from Light Infantry Battalion #10, Papun District (Interview #4, 11/2000)

“I saw it one time when I went to Kya In Seik Gyi. There were 20 convicts. They ordered the convicts to carry everything; baskets, bamboo and rice. They also beat them. They did it more to them because they had called them from the prison. They even beat them when they were working in the prison, but the Army did it more to them. I did not beat them, but I have beaten the villagers sometimes.” - “Aung Zaw Moe” (M, 19), Lance Corporal from Light Infantry Battalion #549, Pa’an District (Interview #2, 12/2000)

Much of the abuse done by the soldiers is ordered by the officers. It is the officers who write the orders calling the village heads and demanding things from them. They are the ones who notify the heads that the villagers will not be able to stay in their village if they don’t come for forced labour. They are also the ones who determine how much money or how many pigs or chickens

the village will have to pay to get out of the forced labour. The chickens, rice, money and other things demanded by the officers are sent by the villagers to the Company or Battalion offices where the officers stay. The officers keep the good things for themselves, and only give things they don't want to their soldiers. When interviewed one deserter protested that after his officer demanded and received many things from a village headwoman, all he passed on to his soldiers was 7 potatoes. The soldiers sometimes complain but get no response from the officers. The soldiers are only told that it is the orders of the Army that the soldiers must do what the officers order and take what the officers give. NCOs frequently send letters demanding things from villagers, particularly when the NCO is in command of an outpost or is gathering things for his officers, but privates can never make such formal demands. The privates can only go to the villages and demand fruit and vegetables, but their poverty and near-starvation often drives them to steal livestock and loot houses, taking the villagers' best clothing as well as machetes, cookpots, plates and spoons. Villagers often tell of the soldiers taking their utensils and then trying to sell them in other villages, or express wonder that frontline soldiers steal women's clothing. Often this is done at night because the soldiers are ashamed of having to resort to this. Some villagers manage to scare them off just by scolding or shouting at them. Some of the soldiers end up robbing the villagers because their monthly wage is so small that they can't support their wives and children. Villagers have described some of the soldiers as mere scarecrows and say they feel pity for them. Occasionally the privates are punished at the camp or jailed for their thieving, but only if it is a breach of discipline or intrudes on the turf of the officers rather than out of any concern for the villagers or the law. Some of the soldiers who get drunk and rape village girls have also been arrested. Arrests usually only happen in rear area camps. When the soldiers are out in the frontline camps or on operations with the columns in the jungle, they are given free reign. Very few are punished for thefts, rapes or murders, even when the villagers report them to the higher authorities. Much of this depends on the officers in charge and how much discipline there is in the unit. The officers who punish their soldiers for rape are often rapists themselves, but punish the privates for daring to usurp the privileges which are supposed to be for officers only. In units with very little discipline and officers and sergeants who encourage this behaviour, the desperate privates take out their frustrations on the villagers.

“They called the A’Moe [‘mother’; Burmese term often used for older women and for the village headwomen] village headwoman to the camp. Then they told the headwoman that they needed this and that. How much bamboo from each house? If they [the officers] say 3 bamboo, the villagers have to give 3 bamboo and if they say 4 bamboo, they have to give 4 bamboo. A household can’t stay [in the village] without complying. If the villagers don’t go [for forced labour] they are fined chickens, pigs and money. For this, only the officers know about it, because they are doing this thing. We small people aren’t involved in this.” - “Tin Aung Win” (M, 17), Private from LIB #549, Pa’an District (Interview #1, 12/2000)

“I have seen the families of the soldiers. The men did it because their living situation is no good. The SPDC gives them a small monthly salary to use for their families, but they have a wife and two children, so it is not enough for them to live on. It is for their wives and children that they robbed the villagers. Some were imprisoned for it. Some of the single soldiers were drunk with alcohol and went up into the villagers’ houses and pulled the girls’ hands and raped them. Then they were imprisoned, I have seen it [the imprisonment of soldiers for these offences is rare; most are given some form of light punishment, if any at all].” - “Tin Aung Win” (M, 17), Private from Light Infantry Battalion #549, Pa’an District (Interview #1, 12/2000)

“Yes, the officers and company commanders demanded chickens and pigs. I also demanded food to eat. I demanded to eat fruit and vegetables. I couldn’t ask for chickens.” - “Aung Zaw Moe” (M, 19), Lance Corporal from LIB #549, Pa’an District (Interview #2, 12/2000)

“The officers come and demand money. They take the money and they can eat. The soldiers do not act the same as the officers. The soldiers say, ‘The officers can demand money and they can eat. We can’t do that, so we are going to steal [from the villagers].’ The soldiers are stealing crazily. One unit came and behaved like that and when they went back they told #59 [Infantry Battalion], so now #59 is doing the same.” - “Tha Muh Htoo” (M, 45), a village headman in Toungoo District [Excerpted from ***“Peace Villages and Hiding Villages: Roads, Relocations and the Campaign for Control in Toungoo District”*** (KHRG 2000-5, 15/10/2000), Interview #4, 10/99]

The soldiers are aware of how the villagers view them and many are ashamed of it. Many of the soldiers never wanted to be in the Army anyway. The privates are ordered by the officers to force the villagers to work, but most soldiers do not like doing it. They do it because it is an order and out of fear of what would happen to them if they disobeyed that order. One deserter said that he would have been killed if he hadn’t obeyed. They tend to feel especially uncomfortable ordering people who are old enough to be their parents, because all cultures in Burma have strong traditions of respect for parents and elders. The racist propaganda of the SPDC makes it easier for the Burman soldiers to abuse non-Burman villagers, but even in these cases most of them see their actions as wrong. The scale of the abuse is such that even the racial and cultural barriers lose their meaning and the soldiers see the villagers simply as people who should not be treated this way, Burman or not. This is especially the case among Burmese Army soldiers of Karen or other non-Burman origins. Many of these soldiers are themselves abused by their officers and sergeants because they are from a non-Burman ethnic group. One deserter [see Interview #3] related how he was called out by his sergeant at evening roll call, not by name but as *Kayin* (Burmese word for Karen, seen as somewhat derogatory depending on the context). He was then beaten and verbally abused by the sergeant who shouted at him “I fuck the mothers of Karens!” This soldier believed that as a soldier of the Burmese Army he should be treated as one, and not singled out by his ethnicity.

“They [the officers] ordered me to, so I have forced them. I forced them, but in my head I had to do it because of an order. I was doing it, but it was not because I wanted to do it. When they told me to do this job, I had to do it. If I didn’t do it, action would have been taken against me. I would have been killed by them. I had to force the people who were older than me and the people who were the same age as my parents, but I felt I shouldn’t force them.” - “Tin Aung Win” (M, 17), Private from LIB #549, Pa’an District (Interview #1, 12/2000)

“They called the civilians to do Loh Ah Pay [forced labour] without asking their opinion and they demanded paddy, chickens and pigs. I saw it with my own eyes. I wanted to complain about it, but if I told my officers, they wouldn’t agree with me. They replied, ‘You don’t understand this matter.’ When I thought back on this, I saw that the officers were acting without laws. I was tormented and on November 8th, in the evening, I fled with my brother [his friend].” - “Tin Aung Win” (M, 17), Private from LIB #549 (Interview #1, 12/2000)

Soldiers who try to go easily on the villagers are scorned or abused by their officers if caught, and are asked questions like, “Don’t you want to force the civilians?” or “Is this your mother or father?” Soldiers who protest against the officers ordering the villagers back to work are slapped. Soldiers are also discouraged from helping the porters. Any caught doing so are abused

themselves, for example by being forced to carry loads much heavier than those of the porters, which they are unable to do. They are scolded by the officers and NCO's and told that it is the 'custom' of the Army to make the porters carry things and that the soldiers cannot do what the villagers want them to do. Much of the beating and reviling of the porters by the soldiers is to please the officers so that the soldiers themselves won't be beaten or reviled. Some soldiers say that they feel the officers are deliberately making the villagers hate the soldiers by forcing the soldiers to beat the villagers and demand things from them, while the officers speak to the villagers politely and with a smile. One soldier felt that the villagers and the village heads are more afraid of the soldiers than the officers. Over time the soldiers learn the feelings of the villagers, sometimes even being told directly by the villagers how much they are hated, and this only increases their feeling of isolation and their tendency to see the situation as 'us' (the soldiers) versus 'them' (the officers on one side, and the villagers on the other).

“Some Maung Kyaw [uncles; a person older than the speaker] couldn't carry and got fevers, so I told them [the villagers taken as porters] to change when we arrived at a village and hire a Maung Kyaw who is working a flat field [to hire another villager to continue on for them]. I told them. The Saya Gyi [Sergeant], however, scolded me, 'You have a small brain and little knowledge. You can't do like this. The soldiers can't do as they [the villagers] want. If they get fever, they still have to carry. This is the custom of the Army.' He told me like that. I felt pity when I looked on that person.” - “Tin Aung Win” (M, 17), Private from Light Infantry Battalion #549, Pa'an District (Interview #1, 12/2000)

“I couldn't endure it any longer. The salary they gave me was not enough to buy clothes to wear. I couldn't eat. They were also oppressing the civilians. They gave us money and forced us. They forced us and we had to do it. When we did it, the civilians didn't respect us. We pitied them [the civilians], but if we didn't order them to work or allowed them to take a rest, when we came back [to the camp] the officers asked us why we didn't order the civilians to work. Sometimes they slapped our cheeks. It was the battalion commander, the other officers and all the sergeants. ... It is not right. They did things to make the villagers hate the soldiers. The villagers didn't hate the officers too much. The village headwomen were afraid of us, but the commanders dealt with them with a smile. They [the officers] didn't care about us. They forced us to beat people and demand things.” - “Aung Zaw Moe” (M, 19), Lance Corporal from Light Infantry Battalion #549, Pa'an District (Interview #2, 12/2000)

“There was a small girl. She was the same age as my cousin. They were forcibly ordering her to carry things. I pitied that girl, but I also had to carry a backpack. I said to her, 'Sister, give it to me. I will carry it for you.' Then one of the Saya [NCOs] told me, 'Hey kaung [this pronoun is usually only used when talking to animals], what are you doing?' I said, 'No, don't do an injustice. This girl has to climb the mountain. You have put a lot of rice in her basket, that is why I am helping her and carrying for her.' He took me and said to me, 'If you want to carry, come.' He ordered me to carry 2,000 bullets for the MA [MA is a series of assault rifles and machine guns made in Burma to Chinese designs; 7.62mm bullets]. I couldn't carry it. When I couldn't carry it, an officer came and asked, 'What is happening?' I said, 'Bo Gyi [Captain] think about it, they forced a small girl to carry a rice sack so I helped and carried it for her. For that, he [the corporal] ordered me to carry these 2,000 bullets. I can't carry it.' The officer said, 'The order was from the Army. It was only one order. You must do the order.' I carried it a little bit further and threw it away. It fell down the side of the mountain into the valley. The officer ordered me to go and pick it up. Then he ordered another porter to carry it.” - “Thein Htay” (M, 26), Private from LIB #340, Papun District (Interview #5, 11/2000)

VIII. Feelings on Political and Social Change

The Tatmadaw shall never betray the national cause.
- Tatmadaw slogan

“We saw it with our own eyes that the SPDC military dictatorship is governing the civilians unjustly, and we are not satisfied. For that reason I want to say that I don’t want them taking and forcing people to do Loh Ah Pay [forced labour], to build roads and to build Army camps without consulting their opinion.” - “Tin Aung Win” (M, 17), Private from Light Infantry Battalion #549, Pa’an District (Interview #1, 12/2000)

The soldiers of the Burmese Army are purposely information starved. They are only allowed to read those books and newspapers allowed by the SPDC. Listening to the radio is confined to music cassettes. Listening to foreign shortwave news broadcasts such as those of the BBC (British Broadcasting Corporation), VOA (Voice of America), RFA (Radio Free Asia) and DVB (Democratic Voice of Burma) is prohibited. Even letters to and from home are destroyed. The purpose of this is to keep from the soldiers any news of what is happening outside of the Army, prevent them from expressing or hearing any criticism of the Army or the SPDC, and limit their contact with the civilian population. Propaganda dehumanising the civilian population and placing all civilians under suspicion is combined with policies of forcing the soldiers to abuse the civilians and rotating them regularly, all in order to prevent the soldiers from developing any affinity with the civilians; one of the most repeated Army slogans states that for soldiers, the Army is both mother and father, and that they should trust no one but this ‘family’. The SPDC has not forgotten that some soldiers and officers did cross over and join the pro-democracy protesters in 1988 and that the men of the Tatmadaw voted overwhelmingly in favour of the National League for Democracy in the elections of 1990, and a split in the Army is the junta’s greatest fear.

“I didn’t know anything yet when they captured me [to become a soldier], so I attended the training and arrived at #10 [LIB]. My aunt searched for me and found me. When she came she said, ‘Your father was killed in the uprising [the 1988 student-led democracy uprising]. He was a leader in the uprising. They were going to make a demonstration in Taung Botaya, Thayet Chaung [in Tenasserim Division]. The SLORC shot him dead.’ My father was dead, but they couldn’t find his corpse. We only knew that he was dead. She told me that my brother was with the student group or the Karen Army. At that time I was a soldier, but I wasn’t satisfied with it, so I was looking for a way out. In the past I thought that I would flee when I was in the Battalion #10 rear area, but it wasn’t easy, so I fled when I came to the frontline. ... I didn’t want to endure it anymore. So I had to run to here and work for the resistance in place of my father. It was because my father died. The people at Win Maung told me, ‘You SPDC people are no good.’ My Auntie also told me the SPDC killed my father. I wasn’t satisfied and ran to this side. When I ran here I met with the organisation from here and I explained to them how my father died...” - “Soe Tint” (M, 18), Lance Corporal from Light Infantry Battalion #10, Papun District (Interview #4, 11/2000)

To a large degree the SPDC approach has worked. Deserters interviewed for this report said they had little idea of what is happening in Burma. One of them said that after four years in the Army he still has no idea. For some of the soldiers this has made them wonder what it is that the SPDC is hiding. The disastrous state of education, social services and the economy in Burma have helped the SPDC in this sense by making it extremely difficult for most children to get to finish primary school, and the majority of Burma's children now only get 2 or 3 years of schooling. As a result, most of the privates are poorly educated young men and boys with very little political or social awareness, but they are not blind to what is going on around them. The soldiers have seen with their own eyes the taking of civilians for forced labour, the torture of villagers, the burning of crops, and the corruption of the officer corps, and they themselves have been the targets of some of this abuse. They know what the Army is doing is wrong, but are unable to change it. The soldiers want to be able to gather together and meet to talk about their problems. They want to be free to think, but they are afraid to do anything. The officers and sometimes the sergeants do talk about it, but not with the privates or lower NCO's. The privates do sometimes speak about it, but secretly. They are usually kept so busy that they don't have enough time to have serious discussions about it. One deserter said they do not dare talk about politics and did not even dare to think about it. They do not dare to speak or think about Aung San Suu Kyi or democracy. The soldiers feel that if they got together to discuss anything, the officers would think they were plotting against them. They believe the officers would kill them for it. Military Intelligence has built up an extensive network of informants even within the Army itself, with at least one Military Intelligence informer in every Company-sized unit, and some soldiers will sell out their friends to win favour and promotions from the officers. Throughout Burma in recent years, soldiers as well as officers have been arrested and sometimes killed after meeting together, whether to hatch plots against their superiors or to discuss problems or political ideas like democracy. Many officers manage to covertly listen to foreign shortwave broadcasts in Burmese, but for rank and file soldiers the first news that they get about what is happening in Burma beyond their own unit often comes only when they desert and meet the resistance forces, or make it to Thailand and are able to talk with others or listen to the radio.

“They want to gather and tell about their feelings, but if we gathered and talked about it, the officers would have thought we were plotting against them. They thought the officers would kill them. That is why they didn't even dare to think. They want to think, but they don't want to do anything [which might get them in trouble with the officers]. I have seen that even the sergeants and corporals and the other soldiers who have high ranks have fled [he means senior NCO's, not senior officers].” - “Tin Aung Win” (M, 17), Private from Light Infantry Battalion #549, Pa'an District (Interview #1, 12/2000)

“I stayed in the Army for four years and I didn't know what was happening in Burma at all. I knew about it when I arrived on this side [of the conflict] and one of the KNU uncles told me about it. ... I am not satisfied that the SPDC military dictatorship in Burma is forcing the civilians to do Loh Ah Pay [forced labour]. One day, I plan to avenge them. I will work. If I don't work, I will work in the resistance with the student group [All-Burma Students' Democratic Front].” - “Tin Aung Win” (M, 17), Private from Light Infantry Battalion #549, Pa'an District (Interview #1, 12/2000)

The privates do not even have a real grasp of who the ‘enemy’ is and why they have to fight him. In Karen State, they are only told by the officers that the ‘enemy’ is the *Nga Pway* [*‘Ringworm’, a derogatory term used by the SPDC to refer to the KNU and KNLA*] and the *Nga Pway* are the enemy because they want to fight the Burmese Army. One of the deserters didn’t even clearly know what the meaning of *Nga Pway* was when asked, other than knowing that it refers to the ‘*Kaw Thoo Lei*’ (the Karen name for the Karen homeland, also the official name of Karen State on old Burmese maps, now used as slang for the KNU/KNLA as well). Another said he didn’t know what the KNU was, he knew only that a sergeant had told him they were the enemy. One of the soldiers was even told that the DKBA (Democratic Karen Buddhist Army, which is allied with the SPDC) was the enemy, but that they had surrendered. It can be assumed that this same situation exists in the units operating in the other resistance areas. The ethnic resistance movements are not covered in Burmese textbooks, and in the SPDC-controlled news their activities are only described as the isolated acts of local bands of ‘bandits’ or ‘terrorists’. In order to prevent desertion or contact with the enemy, SPDC officers regularly tell their soldiers that the ‘*Nga Pway*’ are vicious barbarians who will cut them into pieces or slit their throats with a sharpened piece of bamboo if they catch them. To this they add propaganda that the villagers are all ‘*Nga Pway*’ in disguise, so that the soldiers will feel justified in abusing or executing them. When the soldiers actually meet the resistance groups after they desert it is often a revelation for them.

“When I was a new soldier, I didn’t know that the KNU are Tha Bone [rebels]. I didn’t know what it was at all. After four years, why don’t they allow us to read the newspapers or listen to the radio? Are they worried that we will understand something? Are they worried that we will be confused? I thought about this and I left the Army camp with my brother and put down my weapon [surrendered].” - “Tin Aung Win” (M, 17), Private from Light Infantry Battalion #549, Pa’an District (Interview #1, 12/2000)

“When I was a soldier I thought they were the Nga Pway [‘ringworm’] and they were the enemy who would fight us. The officers told us that, and we didn’t know about it because we were soldiers. ... I don’t know it [the meaning of ‘Nga Pway’]. The officers said it was Kaw Thoo Lei [Karen name for their land; also a term used for KNU and KNLA]. We called Kaw Thoo Lei ‘Nga Pway’. We thought they were the enemy.” - “Aung Zaw Moe” (M, 19), Lance Corporal from Light Infantry Battalion #549, Pa’an District (Interview #2, 12/2000)

IX. Desertion

Don't let the Union disintegrate because of you.

- SPDC/Tatmadaw slogan

“When I first joined, I thought they were good. Later, slowly, we knew that it is no good. They were forcing the villagers and demanding things from them. We saw them beat the villagers and we had to do it ourselves. We didn't want to do it. If we complained to them, they slapped our cheeks. We couldn't suffer that so we fled.” - “Aung Zaw Moe” (M, 19), Lance Corporal from Light Infantry Battalion #549, Pa'an District (Interview #2, 12/2000)

While the Tatmadaw may be expanding and receiving newer and better weapons, morale in most of the units is very low. Soldiers are only allowed to leave the Army if they can bring in five to ten new recruits, are too severely wounded, or die. Even amputees are sometimes kept on the battalion rolls. In 1997, KHRG interviewed two soldiers who had been in the Tatmadaw for 12 and 19 years respectively, both of whom testified that even after a full term, no one was allowed to leave their unit without bringing in 5 new recruits to replace themselves. Both of these men lost a leg as soldiers but continued serving in the Army for an additional 8-10 years before finally being discharged; they were only exempted from bringing in the recruits because they were amputees with long service records. After several years the Army would not even replace their prostheses without payment of a large bribe, so they had to stand sentry on prosthetic legs held together with coat-hanger wire and string. Other soldiers have reported that in their unit they were required to bring in 10 new recruits before they could be discharged, even after their terms had expired. In general, it appears that the Battalion officers have a great deal of power to dictate whether or not a soldier can leave when his term is finished; so depending on the officers, a discharge may require a large bribe, some number of new recruits, or simply being on good terms with the officer. One thing that becomes clear in talking to former soldiers is that once in the Tatmadaw, getting out is not an easy thing to do. Some soldiers have committed suicide after being abused by the officers and seeing no other way out. Judging from the accounts of deserters, it appears that the suicide rate has rapidly increased over the past several years, particularly among child recruits, though it is difficult to get figures or solid data regarding this. The desertion rate in the Army is very high and also appears to be increasing. Sergeants and even Sergeant Majors have been reported as deserting, but usually it is the Corporals and privates. Officers do occasionally desert, but it is rare as they are able to live comfortably and do not have as much reason to leave.

“When I first entered the army, I enjoyed the work. However, after 1 or 2 years, I was not enjoying it anymore. I saw soldiers flee and escape before me. Some committed suicide by shooting themselves. Some shot themselves to get an injury like a broken leg. I saw these events. That is why I didn't enjoy staying there. ... Then a Sergeant Major 2 fled the Army, and I thought, ‘Even the higher officers [actually higher NCO's] flee, and I am just a [private] soldier, so can I keep suffering this? I also can't stay any longer.’ Every soldier felt like I did, but they couldn't escape the control of the Army so most of them are still there.” - “Saw Tha Ku” (M, 21), Private from Infantry Battalion #19, Papun District (Interview #3, 3/2000)

“Some of the soldiers were depressed because they suffered from being punched by the officers. Their parents had given birth to them and yet had never slapped their faces. They were angry and shot themselves dead. I saw three people do that.” - “Tin Aung Win” (M, 17), Private from Light Infantry Battalion #549, Pa’an District (Interview #1, 12/2000)

“The officers do not run. They are staying comfortably. They don’t need to do anything. Sometimes the corporals and sergeants run. Mostly, it is the corporals and the privates.” - “Aung Zaw Moe” (M, 19), Lance Corporal, LIB #549, Pa’an District (Interview #2, 12/2000)

Desertion is not an option which the soldiers take lightly. They know the punishments are heavy, up to and including execution, and in frontline areas their officers regularly tell them that the villagers or the resistance forces will cut them apart or slit their throats with a sharpened piece of bamboo; in fact, this story of the “sharpened piece of bamboo” is so widely used that one wonders whether the officers learn it in Officer’s Training School. If soldiers desert from rear area camps, they are usually put in prison for six years, especially if they take a gun with them. Sometimes they are held in cells at the battalion camp first and ordered to work. Eventually they are asked by the battalion commander if they would like to be soldiers again or go to prison. Some do opt for the prison, because when they are released they are released as civilians. However, on their release many of them are promptly re-arrested and put back in the Army. One of the deserters interviewed said that there were men in his training who had earlier deserted from the Army. Soldiers serving prison sentences for desertion are often among those brought to the frontline as convict porters.

“[I]f they fled into town with a gun, they were imprisoned for six years. That is the law for soldiers who are imprisoned. That is why I dared not flee back into town.” - “Soe Tint” (M, 18), Lance Corporal from Light Infantry Battalion #10, Papun District (Interview #4, 11/2000)

“Some left before us. Some were imprisoned [in the camp jail] and left. Some were recaptured. They were kept for two or three months [in the camp jail] and the battalion commander called them and ordered them to work. They were kept in jail cells. They were ordered to do Pa Take [forced labour] and then put back in the cells in the evening. They weren’t handcuffed, but sentries guarded them with guns. When the battalion commander had free time, they were taken to his office and he would ask them, ‘Will you serve again? Why did you flee?’ They answered that they fled because they were feeling depressed. Some said that they would rather be imprisoned and would leave the Army [after they served their prison sentences they would be released as civilians]. Some said they would serve again.” - “Aung Zaw Moe” (M, 19), Lance Corporal, LIB #549, Pa’an District (Interview #2, 12/2000)

Soldiers who desert in frontline areas and are recaptured are dealt with more harshly, they are usually executed. This occurs especially if their commander is angry or doesn’t like them. The recapture of deserters is considered so important that the elders of nearby villages which they may have passed through are routinely detained and tortured, villagers are murdered, and houses are burned, all with the intent of ensuring that villagers will not assist deserters in the future. Multiple battalions are sometimes involved in the manhunt. In April 2000 two soldiers from Infantry Battalion #39 deserted with three guns in Tantabin township of Toungoo district and triggered a manhunt which involved the troops of four battalions. Villagers in the area were tortured for information and the two soldiers were eventually recaptured and executed. The three guns, however, were never recovered, so all the villages in the Swa Loh area of eastern Tantabin township were forcibly relocated [see *“Peace Villages and Hiding Villages”* (KHRG #2000-05, 15/10/2000)].

The following is a translation of an order issued in Pa'an district showing how seriously the officers regard the issue, and the difficult position the villagers find themselves in. By ordering the villagers to beat the deserter to death and even offering a reward for doing so, this particular battalion takes the usual brutal policy a few steps further. [A copy of the original of this order can be seen on page 123. This order was also published as Order #10 in "SPDC & DKBA Orders to Villages: Set 2000-B" (KHRG #2000-04, 12/10/00)]:

<u>Stamp:</u>	Frontline #xxx Light Infantry Battalion
Frontline #xxx Light Infantry Battalion	xxxx [camp]
Column x	Letter number xxxx / yyy / Oo x
	Date: Year 2000, March
To: Chairperson	
xxxx village	
Subject: <u>Informing to let you know</u>	
1) If one or two of our Army people run away from the Column Company and arrive at the village, reassure them and coax them nicely, then when they aren't looking beat them until they lose consciousness. Then give their weapons to the nearest Column. When you are doing this, if the soldier dies, we won't take action and we will even give you a reward.	
2) If you do not follow and carry out as specified above, we will designate the village as being in contact with rebels and take serious action under articles of the law. Moreover, we will take action up to and including the destruction and relocation of the village. Letting you know and informing you.	
<i>[Sd. 'xxxx'] xx/3</i> (for) Acting Battalion Commander Intelligence Officer #xxx Light Infantry Battalion	
Copies to: #12 Military Operations Control Headquarters #1 Tactical Command, Military Operations Control Group	

"Some soldiers fled. When they were able to recapture them, they killed them. If they recaptured them at the frontline, they shot them dead at the frontline. However, if the battalion commander didn't allow killing, they sent the deserter back [to jail]. If the order came on the radio, 'Do him', that person must die." - "Soe Tint" (M, 18), Lance Corporal from Light Infantry Battalion #10, Papun District (Interview #4, 11/2000)

"They told us often that if we ran to the KNU, they would arrest us and torture us by beating and pounding us and slicing us with a length of bamboo. After that they would kill us. I was afraid." - "Aung Zaw Moe" (M, 19), Lance Corporal from Light Infantry Battalion #549, Pa'an District (Interview #2, 12/2000)

“If we fled forwards [into central Burma], we would escape but one day they would recapture us and we would suffer in the Army again. That’s why I’d decided to flee into the jungle instead, but I couldn’t tell him that. I couldn’t trust him because he’s a Burman and he had been in the Army longer than me, so I was afraid he would go and report to the officers.” - “Saw Tha Ku” (M, 21), Private from Infantry Battalion #19, Papun District (Interview #3, 3/2000)

Even if the soldiers make it to safety, they are no longer able to go back and live in SPDC-controlled Burma. Yet even with all these deterrents, many soldiers are still willing to try. Some of them wait years before attempting it. Some leave because they see that what the SPDC is doing to them and the civilians is not right, but most desert because they don’t see any way their lives will improve. Most of the soldiers run into the mountains or all the way to Thailand or other neighbouring countries. Even married soldiers have run into the mountains with their wives. Others take Karen girlfriends and flee with them into the mountains. Those who choose to run back into central Burma are almost always recaptured. Those who make it to neighbouring countries must pretend to be village refugees, because otherwise they are usually arrested and handed back to the SPDC for imprisonment or execution in the interest of ‘good bilateral relations’. The families of deserters are not generally punished, but after a soldier deserts, SPDC Military Intelligence puts his family under surveillance so they can catch him if he returns home, and in some cases interrogates family members and orders them to call the deserter back. However, most families are not notified of the desertion. Several soldiers interviewed believed that if they are not caught within a year or so, the Army will probably send a letter to their parents saying they were killed in battle or by a landmine - and that during that year, their officers will probably continue collecting their pay.

“Some have run with their wives into the mountains. Some have Karen girlfriends and took them to the mountains. Many soldiers thought that there will be no change if they stayed in the Army camp. Most have run to Thailand, but some have run into Burma. The soldiers who ran into Burma were recaptured.” “Aung Zaw Moe” (M, 19), Lance Corporal from Light Infantry Battalion #549, Pa’an District (Interview #2, 12/2000)

“I don’t know. I don’t think they will send the information to her yet. They will keep it for one year. Then they will send a letter to my mother that I died in the fighting or stepped on a landmine.” - “Tin Aung Win” (M, 17), Private from Light Infantry Battalion #549, Pa’an District (Interview #1, 12/2000)

“The SPDC will send a letter that I was killed, that I fled and the KNU captured me. They will go to my house and tell them that the KNU killed me.” - “Aung Zaw Moe” (M, 19), Lance Corporal from Light Infantry Battalion #549, Pa’an District (Interview #2, 12/2000)

“I decided to leave last year [1999] in the rainy season, because when I stayed there, even the Burman soldiers couldn’t endure it. They didn’t respect their leaders and escaped and fled. I thought, I am Karen, when they spoke to me before, I believed them and followed them, however, things didn’t happen as they said. I thought this is no different than before. If I have to stay far from my parents, I can, and if I must stay together with my nationality, I am satisfied. I decided this in my heart.” - “Saw Tha Ku” (M, 21), Private from Infantry Battalion #19, Papun District (Interview #3, 3/2000)

When the fighting is finished, there will be no name for me...

“When harvest time came, the people were called from Section x of xxxx village, in yyyy village group, for Loh Ah Pay *[forced labour harvesting the Army’s crop]*. Only Karen people were staying there and they came to do Loh Ah Pay there. A--- divided up the area and I had to go to the section x group. I went to stay there, but I didn’t force the people to work hard. A--- gave very strong orders. He said, ‘Don’t pity them, look after them, think of them as your siblings or love the villagers. You are a soldier and you have to force them like a soldier.’ Because of this, I ordered and forced the villagers to work. Later, one old woman who led the section x group as their village headwoman spoke to a teacher about this. She said, ‘This Burmese soldier is not even a corporal, but he forces us like a leader. If we go and complain to his leader, will he live or not?’ When she said that, I was pretending I didn’t hear what she was saying, but I knew what she said because I understand the Karen language. After that, I told her, ‘Grandmother, don’t speak about me like that. I understand what you are saying.’ She said, ‘Oh, you understand. I thought you were a Burman because you are a Burmese soldier.’ Then she knew that I am Karen like her, and we were all sitting and talking.

The other group led by A--- was almost finished harvesting, but my group still had a lot to do. That is why he didn’t talk to me when we ate lunch in the afternoon. One day when we arrived back in the evening and stood in line *[for evening roll-call]*, the big Thra *[‘Teacher’]* A--- called me out of line. He didn’t call my name. He called me ‘Kayin’ *[the word for Karen in Burmese, but here used derogatorily to single him out from the ethnic Burmans]*. He said, ‘Kayin! Come out in front.’ Then he punched me two times and asked me, ‘Do you know your mistake?’ I said I didn’t know. He said, ‘You go. We asked you to lead the civilians at work, but you go and stay with them like they are your parents and siblings, so the civilians are staying happily.’ I said, ‘Big Thra, when we ask them to work, we only have to ask them a little. I am a soldier, but they are human the same as me. I pity them.’ He screwed up his face at me and shouted, ‘Nga loh ma Kayin!’ *[‘I fuck the mothers of Karens!’]*. Since then, whenever he scolded me, he said, ‘Nga loh ma Kayin!’ or ‘Nga loh ma Kayin a’myo!’ *[‘I fuck the mothers of the Karen nationality!’]* That is why I hate him. If I am not good, then call my name and revile me. I am a soldier. I am a Burmese soldier. When he scolded the Burman soldiers, he called their names and scolded them. But for me, he called my nationality and reviled my people. I began thinking that when I was staying in my village, I was staying with Karen, with Pwo Karen. I couldn’t tolerate it when the Burmese tormented the Karen. I don’t have any belongings or education. I get knowledge from other people by watching them. That is why when I arrived in the Karen area I behaved as a Burmese soldier. Now I was the one who was bad. When A--- spoke to me, it was as though to the whole Karen nationality, including my parents, my friends and siblings. I was thinking to myself, I am working for this and one day when the fighting is finished, there will be no name for me. If they achieve victory and call the country a name, they will call it Burmese country, and there will be no name for me *[everyone will be ‘Burmese’ and he will no longer be able to call himself Karen]*. That is why I decided that if I have to stay far from my parents I can. I will leave and find my people. It was decided. Later, one of the Burmans wanted to follow me. He said, ‘Brother-in-law, I will follow you. If you go, call me also.’”

- “Saw Tha Ku” (M, 21), Private from Infantry Battalion #19, Papun District (Interview #3, 3/2000)

X. The DKBA

If anyone among our battalions, companies and soldiers speaks about our organisation, we must take timely action. ... Now our work is not showing improvement.

- Speech to the troops by DKBA Battalion Commander Maung Chit Thu, May 1999¹

The sections below give a summary of life in the DKBA and the group's relations with the villagers, the SPDC and the KNU taken mostly through the eyes of DKBA soldiers. More information on the DKBA's operations in specific regions and the villagers' views on them can be found in many KHRG reports, such as the following: "*Beyond All Endurance*" (KHRG #99-08, 20/12/99), "*Uncertainty, Fear and Flight*" (KHRG #98-08, 18/11/98), "*Attacks on Karen Refugee Camps: 1998*" (KHRG #98-04, 29/5/98), "*Inside the DKBA*" (KHRG #96-14, 31/3/96), and other related reports.

The Headquarters at Myaing Gyi Ngu

"The leaders, every one of them, built very big houses, but they don't give anything to us. If it is like that, we don't want to be soldiers." - "Pa Deh Wah" (M, 19), Private from #555 Brigade DKBA, Papun District (Interview #8, 2/2001)

Since its establishment in late 1994 by Buddhist monk U Thuzana, the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA) has spread to Pa'an, Thaton, Papun and northern Dooplaya districts. It has also now established a couple of camps in Nyaunglebin district. Most of its activity and its troops are concentrated in Pa'an and Thaton districts. The headquarters for the DKBA is the village of Myaing Gyi Ngu (known in Karen as Khaw Taw) in Pa'an District, on the southern bank of the Salween River just downstream from Ka Ma Maung. U Thuzana originally established the headquarters there with SLORC support, and declared it to be a refuge where people would not have to work on forced labour projects for the SLORC or do anything for the KNU either (prior to November 1997 the SPDC was called the SLORC, so we will use SLORC when referring to events before that time). This was largely just a way of gaining supporters and soldiers for the DKBA, which was subsequently used by the SLORC to attack the KNU, and to pull civilian supporters away from the KNU. Families who moved to Myaing Gyi Ngu were not allowed to farm but were given SLORC-supplied food, and had to live a vegetarian lifestyle in keeping with U Thuzana's principles. As families moved to Myaing Gyi Ngu, the town expanded rapidly until by 1996-1997 there were thousands of families living there. Families were pressured to provide recruits to the DKBA, and in the beginning families who provided recruits received better rations and DKBA soldiers were paid cash salaries by the SLORC. Families at Myaing Gyi Ngu have to do forced labour on pagodas, roads and other DKBA projects, but the conditions are generally better than on SLORC/SPDC forced labour and there are fewer beatings and other forms of abuse.

At its peak, Myaing Gyi Ngu was reportedly home to 3,000 to 5,000 households, many of which had supplied at least one family member to become a DKBA soldier. However, in 1996 the SLORC stopped paying cash salaries to DKBA soldiers, and after that gradually cut back on the

¹ Excerpted from a DKBA circular distributed in 1999; full text published as Order #253 in "*SPDC and DKBA Orders to Villages: Set 2000-B*" (KHRG #2000-04, 12/10/2000)

food supplies to both DKBA and non-DKBA families. As a result, the population has dwindled since 1998; some who have been there estimate that last year it had dwindled to 600 or 700 households. In recent months, many of these remaining families have left Myaing Gyi Ngu and headed north into Papun District, and these people claim that most of the civilians are now leaving or have left Myaing Gyi Ngu. These people say the main reason is that civilians in the refuge no longer receive any food support whatsoever from the DKBA or SPDC, so most people are trying to head back to their home villages and districts. They say that many of those who still remain in Myaing Gyi Ngu only do so because they have caused problems for villagers or the KNU in the past, and do not dare to go back to their home areas. While the DKBA leaders in Myaing Gyi Ngu still eat well, the villagers there are reportedly surviving on boiled rice soup, a last resort used by villagers to make their rice last longer by eating the rice together with the water it was boiled in.

According to Myaing Gyi Ngu visitors and residents, U Thuzana has spent little or no time there since about 1997, travelling around Burma to be involved in pagoda-building projects instead. It has become common belief among Karen people that he no longer believes in the DKBA and is keeping his distance from it. DKBA General Kyaw Than, who is the military leader of the DKBA, is now living in Rangoon. The two monks who have been left in charge at Myaing Gyi Ngu are reportedly Pu Kya and Pu Ya Thit.

“There are 600 or 700 houses in Myaing Gyi Ngu. There are not so many civilians. There are about 7,000 or 8,000 soldiers at most. The families of the leaders eat well. As for civilians, they don’t have enough food. Some civilians have to eat boiled rice soup. One or two years ago, the Myaing Gyi Ngu monk [DKBA founder U Thuzana] fed them. Since then the monk hasn’t fed them. One or two years ago the Myaing Gyi Ngu monk stayed at Khaw Taw [Karen name for the village at Myaing Gyi Ngu], but now he doesn’t anymore. They are building many pagodas there. ... Kyaw Than is living in Rangoon. The ones they call Pu Kya and Pu Ya Thit are the big monks who are in charge at Myaing Gyi Ngu.” - “Saw Po Kyu” (M, xx), Private from #777 Brigade DKBA, Papun District (Interview #7, 12/99); 7,000 - 8,000 is a gross overestimate, real figures are probably around 1,500 - 2,000.

Structure and Strength

“They sent me to Brigade #777, Company #x. A few months after the training I went back to stay at the Company #x offices in Ohn Daw. Then I went to stay at Shwegyin, Noh Ler Plaw, Noh Aw Lah, and Meh K’Naw Tee. Then I went to stay for a month at Myawaddy. Later I came and stayed at Papun for 5 months. ... The DKBA has many camps. I was at Shwegyin for a while.” - “Saw Po Kyu” (M, xx), Private from #777 Brigade DKBA, Papun District (Interview #7, 12/99)

Although the DKBA has a headquarters at Myaing Gyi Ngu and a organisational structure on paper, in reality there is very little centralisation of power and the chain of command is very weak. A deserter interviewed for this report estimated the strength of the DKBA at 7,000-8,000 soldiers. This much higher than most estimates, a more likely number being around 1,500-2,500. The DKBA is organised into four brigades, #333 in Thaton district, #555 in northern Pa’an district, #777 in Papun district and #999 in southern Pa’an district. Each of these brigades are composed of about three battalions of varying size. Some battalions have only 30 soldiers while others have a few hundred. The brigades are really only administrative in nature as individual officers, sometimes as low as the platoon level [*about 30 soldiers*], often act as petty warlords in

their own areas without really answering to anyone at a higher level. The brigade areas overlap and some of the soldiers move around a lot. In the Hlaing Bwe area where #555 Brigade is supposed to operate, soldiers from #333 and #999 brigades are also present. During the three years that one deserter from #777 Brigade was in the DKBA, he was stationed in Nyaunglebin, Thaton, Pa'an and Papun districts, although #777 Brigade's headquarters is in Papun District. In its written orders, the DKBA goes by several names; many bear a rubber stamp translating as "Karen Buddhist Army / D.K.B.A." (with D.K.B.A. in English characters), while many also bear an inscription which translates as "Progressive Karen National Buddhist Army"; in the text, the officers often write Burmese characters which are pronounced "Dee Kay Bee Ay", which actually has no meaning in Karen or Burmese.

DKBA units spend some of their time acting as guides and support troops for SPDC units and supervising forced labour for the SPDC; much of the rest of their time is spent seeking goods and money to support themselves in various ways. They also force villagers, both Buddhists and others, to do work on pagodas, and spend time seeking out and arresting those who help the KNLA. They practice intimidation and threats against the families of known KNU members in the villages, and when they arrest villagers whom they suspect of directly supporting the KNLA they often torture them and demand ransom. Sometimes the local SPDC unit, on hearing that the DKBA is holding such people, demands that they hand them over for further interrogation and torture, and the DKBA almost always complies. Engagements between the DKBA and the KNLA occur regularly, with both sides actively seeking each other out. The fighting is mostly guerrilla in nature and usually consists of small ambushes, although occasionally the KNLA stages larger scale attacks on DKBA bases and has on a few occasions even attacked Myaing Gyi Ngu itself. Both the KNLA and the DKBA are active in laying landmines; in February 1999, DKBA #999 Brigade even issued an order announcing to villagers in Pa'an District that they would begin planting landmines throughout the area, using the logic that "*As the KNU can do it, mothers, fathers, siblings in the villages, we inform you that we have the right to do it too. We are full of love for you but we cannot take care of all.*" [Excerpted from "SLORC Orders to Villages: Set 99-C" (KHRG #99-03, 19/4/99), Order#P1]

"They have 3, 5, 7, and 9 Brigades. 7 Brigade means Khun Thon Lon [#777]. Bo Kyaw Heh [is the commander]. #999 is Bo Chit Thu. I don't know the others [commanders]. Bo Kyaw Heh is about 50 or 60 years old. He didn't pass any standards [grades in school; he has no education]." - "Saw Po Kyu" (M, xx), Private from #777 Brigade DKBA, Papun District (Interview #7, 12/99)

"In just the Nga Thon Lon [#555 Brigade] area there are about three battalions. I don't know how many people are in one battalion, maybe a lot of people." - "Pa Deh Wah" (M, 19), Private from #555 Brigade DKBA, Papun District (Interview #8, 2/2001)

"I didn't know, but the commander told us sometimes. He said, 'Be careful, the KNLA has come down.' He didn't tell us to go and shoot. If there were a few of us, we had to flee and hide, but if there were many people, we could stay in the village. If only a few of them came, then we stayed. ... [W]e fought three times. Twice in Kwih Lay. One time was around midday and another time in the afternoon. The KNU came to shoot us one time and another time we met each other on the way. It was K'Tee's group. Nobody was hurt because we shot at each other from far away. I also fought them at Meh Paw Hta. I don't know how many of them died. They shot about 100 bullets. It was in the nighttime. I don't know which group shot at us at Meh Paw Hta. ... They ordered me to shoot. When we were walking and if we met each other, we shot at each other, so I also shot together with the rest of them." - "Pa Deh Wah" (M, 19), Private from #555 Brigade DKBA, Papun District (Interview #8, 2/2001)

Recruitment and Training

“I came back from my Uncle’s place in xxxx and the Burmese SPDC arrested me. My Uncle is in the resistance, so they arrested and interrogated me. They beat me a little, then I told them that I’d come back to become a DKBA soldier. Therefore they sent me to Myaing Gyi Ngu [DKBA headquarters]. It is close to Ka Ma Maung; it is only 30 minutes by boat. Many people live there. Then I joined the soldiers.” - “Pa Deh Wah” (M, 19), Private from #555 Brigade DKBA, Papun District (Interview #8, 2/2001)

Most of the KNLA and KNDO soldiers who formed the original bulk of the DKBA have left, either to rejoin the KNLA or to become civilians. Most of them left one by one as they realised that the DKBA was being used by the SLORC/SPDC, that the regime was never going to give control of Karen State to the DKBA as promised, and that the DKBA was not helping the situation of the villagers. Very few villagers want to join the DKBA. Many of its recruits are men who join so they can wield power over the other villagers and make money, and villagers who feel that by joining their families will be spared some of the forced labour and extortion of the SPDC. DKBA units try to get recruits with some soldiering experience by going after former KNLA soldiers in their home villages or KNLA soldiers on leave; they typically corner them when they are defenceless and offer them a choice of execution or joining the DKBA. Predictably, these forced recruits often flee the DKBA as soon as they get a chance. In addition, some units have resorted to conscripting villagers on a village quota system. A deserter interviewed for this report said that he joined after a DKBA officer came to his house and asked him to join. He said they didn’t force him and offered him a 500 Kyat per month salary, which he was only given once in the three years he was in the DKBA. Some Karen villagers have also joined the DKBA as a way of not going to jail. One of the DKBA deserters interviewed for this report joined in this manner. In the past two to three years there have been very few reports of DKBA units actively seeking many recruits; this may be partly because they have realised that forced recruits often run away, and partly because the SPDC no longer supplies them with sufficient weapons or ammunition. Length of enlistment seems to be based on the unit. One deserter reported signing a contract stipulating how many years he was enlisted for and that the soldiers were allowed to leave when their enlistment was up, but another said that he couldn’t resign even if he wanted to.

“Right now they don’t organise people anymore because people already know about them [they don’t have much support in the civilian population]. At the time when I joined there were a lot of people joining too. There were some from Kwih Lay and some from Tee Meh Ko. I don’t know their names. Last month or the month before someone joined. I don’t know why, maybe they recruited him.” - “Pa Deh Wah” (M, 19), Private from #555 Brigade DKBA, Papun District (Interview #8, 2/2001)

“Two of them came to get me. One man is named Pa T---. He is a 2nd lieutenant with one star. He lives in xxxx. ... I said nothing to him. He said to go, they would give me a salary. It was 500 Kyat a month. He didn’t force me, he just recruits people. I alone went. I had to go unwillingly because I was a child. ... My mother and my brother and sister were there. They forbade me to go. I wanted to go, so I went. My mother cried. I didn’t scold her, I just stayed for a while and then I went. She didn’t like it. I just went off by myself.” - “Pa Deh Wah” (M, 19), Private from #555 Brigade DKBA, Papun District (Interview #8, 2/2001); he was 16 years old at the time.

“He has already left the Ko Per Baw [DKBA]. He did not want to be a soldier anymore because he had been a soldier for three or four years already. The contract that he had signed was already finished so he could leave. ... We didn’t have to join. We went to join to get ID cards. I had to get an ID card.” - “Saw Lin Yone” (M, 17), Private from DKBA, Pa’an District (Interview #9, 6/2000)

Training for the soldiers appears to depend on the unit. A DKBA soldier who deserted in Pa’an district reported that he received no training; he was given an AK47 assault rifle and 100 bullets, but no training in how to actually fire it. A deserter from Papun district gave a similar story, although he did say that his officer taught him how to take care of the gun and how to fire it. Another deserter from Papun said that he received six months’ training at Myaing Gyi Ngu. Even the training that is given seems to be sporadic with no fixed schedule. The training was given in the mornings, but many times the trainees did not have time to go. Of the 40 trainees in one of the training courses, sometimes only 10 or 20 would show up. One soldier described the training as ‘not very strenuous’. The trainees were taught to unite their Karen nationality and to stay in harmony with the civilians, but there was no human rights training given. After the training, the soldiers serve in those units which gave them the training.

“[T]hey didn’t give any training. They just show us the gun. I can shoot. Pa T--- showed me how to shoot. He also showed me how to clean the gun. I didn’t attend any training, I just had direct practice. ... I didn’t attend political training. ... [T]hey never told us how to organise the villagers.” - “Pa Deh Wah” (M, 19), Private from #555 Brigade DKBA, Papun District (Interview #8, 2/2001)

“They did not give us military training. ... They gave me an AK [AK 47 assault rifle]. I know how to shoot an AK. It is easy to learn that.” - “Saw Lin Yone” (M, 17), Private from DKBA, Pa’an District (Interview #9, 6/2000)

“I attended an Army training. I don’t remember the name of the trainer. They were doing a 6 month training course, but we stayed at the house of the #x Company Commander, Bo K---, and we didn’t go to the whole training. There were 40 of us attending the training. ... I came back to eat at the company commander’s house. I didn’t eat or sleep at the training ground. On the mornings when we had time, we went to the training. There were 40 trainees, but some mornings we only had 10 or 20 people. It wasn’t on a regular schedule. No one got sick from the training because it wasn’t so strenuous. At the training they gave me an AR [a version of the M16 assault rifle] and 200 bullets. ... They told us to unite our nationality. They told us we would be staying together with the civilians. They didn’t tell us anything unusual.” - “Saw Po Kyu” (M, xx), Private from #777 Brigade DKBA, Papun District (Interview #7, 12/99)

Life of the DKBA Soldiers

“I just carried a gun, an AK [AK47 assault rifle]. I was only given an AR a short time ago. The Burmese gave the AK to the DKBA when they went to the frontline. The gun they gave me was no good anymore, it was already ruined.” - “Pa Deh Wah” (M, 19), Private from #555 Brigade DKBA, Papun District (Interview #8, 2/2001)

The DKBA receives all of its arms, ammunition and supplies from the SPDC. Although almost all of the weapons and ammunition and much of the equipment come from the SPDC, some units are better equipped than others. A deserter interviewed for this report commented that his NCO went and got the weapons and bullets from the nearby camp of SPDC Light Infantry Battalion #548. Most soldiers carry M16 or AK47 assault rifles or M1 carbine rifles, but in some units there are more soldiers than weapons. The weapons which the SPDC gives to the DKBA are reportedly not good and one deserter said that his AR (a type of M16 assault rifle) was already broken when he received it. There is also reportedly not enough ammunition. Relations between the DKBA and SPDC have never been particularly smooth and have always been characterised by distrust, and it appears that the SPDC deliberately keeps the DKBA short of weapons and ammunition in order to ensure that they will not be able to effectively turn against the SPDC in the future.

“There are 25 bullets in one magazine. We put 25 bullets in the magazine and carried 100. The Burmese provided us with the bullets. They were from #548 [Light Infantry Battalion]. Battalion #548 is close to xxxx village. I don’t know the Burmese soldiers. Our Thara [NCO’s; Non Commissioned Officers] got the weapons for us.” - “Saw Lin Yone” (M, 17), Private from DKBA, Pa’an District (Interview #9, 6/2000)

The wives and children of the DKBA soldiers are allowed to stay in the camps with them and in many cases, the soldiers are based in the regions they are originally from. Their families are usually exempt from having to pay taxes or go for forced labour for either the DKBA or the SPDC. When the DKBA was first formed the SLORC provided the soldiers and their families with full rations, but from 1995 to the present these have been progressively cut back. During a particularly tense time in SPDC-DKBA relations in early 1998, the SPDC threatened that all rations would be cut off at the end of 1998; but though they were further cut back, they were not entirely cut off. One deserter reported that he received 4 bowls of rice [about 8 kg/18 lb] and 2 tins of condensed milk every month, and 1 pack of sugar every 15 days. The few units at Myaing Gyi Ngu are also still receiving rations from the SPDC. Many units, however, even though they cooperate with the SPDC, no longer get any rations at all. Most of the units must find their own food, and DKBA soldiers sometimes complain that while the officers can eat quite well on food taken from the villagers, the soldiers have trouble getting enough to eat. The soldiers must find ways to grow their own food, ask the villagers for it, or simply take it from the villagers. Some officers make this difficult by demanding things of the villagers while simultaneously telling their soldiers not to do so.

“When I was a Ko Per Baw soldier I had to cut logs and make fences. It was not only me, I went to do it with my friends. There were three of us. The villagers also went, but they were from the lower villages [the villages in the plains rather than on the mountain].” - “Saw Lin Yone” (M, 17), Private from DKBA, Pa’an District (Interview #9, 6/2000)

While the DKBA leadership claims that the DKBA is vegetarian, which seems to be mostly true at the headquarters in Myaing Gyi Ngu, many of the soldiers and officers do eat meat secretly away from Myaing Gyi Ngu. Villagers who have confronted DKBA soldiers about this when ordered to hand over their livestock have been given various answers; in one case, a DKBA officer said he could eat meat as long as he didn't eat the 'living parts' (the organs), while another group of villagers was told "Two legs good, four legs bad", meaning that chicken meat is acceptable but not beef or pork. One soldier said that they can eat meat because the leaders are very far away in Myaing Gyi Ngu and cannot see them at the frontline. Sometimes the soldiers just shoot the villagers' pigs and chickens, cook them and eat them.

"[W]e couldn't eat. We just asked for it here and there from the women. We had to ask. We just asked for chillies and salt to eat. They gave it to us. We didn't threaten them, we just asked. If they told us there was no more, it was finished. I just ate vegetarian. The Ko Per Baw don't eat meat. ... we just ate meat secretly. We didn't eat vegetarian. They didn't know when I ate it secretly. I bought food or found it in the river or bombed it [he threw a grenade in the river and caught the fish when they floated to the top after dying from the concussion]. They didn't know when I did that. I did it when I came up to the Thu Mweh Nee [the Moei River bank]." - "Pa Deh Wah" (M, 19), Private from #555 Brigade DKBA, Papun District (Interview #8, 2/2001)

In the beginning, the SLORC provided all uniforms for the DKBA, but these are no longer provided. Some of the DKBA commanders issue them if the unit has money, and sometimes the soldiers buy them themselves. The ones which the soldiers buy themselves are reportedly of better quality than what the officers give them. Some of the soldiers and officers just wear civilian clothing. The DKBA also reportedly suffers from a shortage of medicine. Soldiers who become sick or wounded in battle are simply sent home to recover.

"I didn't get a salary. The Burmese gave us a ration. They gave us 4 bowls [about 8 kg/18 lb] of rice, 2 tins of milk, and one pack of sugar for 15 days. The Burmese do not give them uniforms. Some of the [DKBA] commanders issue them, and some DKBA soldiers buy them themselves. The soldiers who wear nice ones have bought them themselves." - "Saw Po Kyu" (M, xx), Private from #777 Brigade DKBA, Papun District (Interview #7, 12/99)

"I walked around as an ordinary person [in civilian clothes], but they did give me two uniforms. They were made of Det Tret [a kind of cloth]. It wasn't camouflage [it was the standard olive drab]. ... I just wore it for a while and it was already torn. They didn't issue any more to us. Our commander just walked as a normal person [in civilian clothes]." - "Pa Deh Wah" (M, 19), Private from #555 Brigade DKBA, Papun District (Interview #8, 2/2001)

"There is no doctor. If anyone gets sick they have to go home and treat themselves at their house. The DKBA doesn't give them money. They have to go and ask for money from their parents. If anyone is injured by bullets, they send them home." - "Pa Deh Wah" (M, 19), Private from #555 Brigade DKBA, Papun District (Interview #8, 2/2001)

Until 1996 the SLORC paid cash salaries to DKBA soldiers and officers, but these were then cut off; one deserter from Pa'an District interviewed for this report said that he received 300-400 Kyat per month, but this more likely came from DKBA money than from the SPDC. The DKBA, independently of the SPDC, have the power to tax the villagers in their area, demand forced labour including porters, arrest, detain and even execute suspected KNU, and create businesses. DKBA soldiers spend much of their time involved in these activities. Most of these actions are

not directed from Myaing Gyi Ngu and the money made from the taxes and business projects are kept by the local unit. DKBA units are heavily involved in logging, selling logs and concessions to both Burmese and Thai logging companies, and they also make money by setting up checkpoints along roads and demanding money from every vehicle which passes. (See also below under *'DKBA Businesses'*.)

"We got 300 or 400 Kyat per month." - "Saw Lin Yone" (M, 17), Private from DKBA, Pa'an District (Interview #9, 6/2000)

"No they didn't give me a salary. They gave it to me just one time. They gave me 500 Kyat. I couldn't buy anything. Maybe my friends didn't get it also. They gave me money sometimes when they went to Thu Mweh Nee [the Moei River; when they went to the Thai border]." - "Pa Deh Wah" (M, 19), Private from #555 Brigade DKBA, Papun District (Interview #8, 2/2001)

In general, discipline is much more lax than in the Tatmadaw and the soldiers are not treated so brutally by their officers. The soldiers are allowed to read and listen to the radio. One deserter reported that the soldiers in his unit were given leave twice a year for a week at a time. They were not allowed to take their guns when they went on leave and were scolded if they came back late. Soldiers often go on leave and don't return, or simply run away. There are many soldiers who would like to desert but are afraid, due to propaganda from their officers of what the KNU would do to them if they try to go back to their villages. They also face the danger of DKBA retaliation against their families, because their families usually live in the same region in which they serve.

"Some DKBA soldiers read newspapers and listen to the radio. Some commanders listen at their houses." - "Saw Po Kyu" (M, xx), Private from #777 Brigade DKBA, Papun District (Interview #7, 12/99)

"As I see it, many of my friends will flee too. Some of them want to come, but they don't dare. Some are afraid that the KNU will torture them if they come here. The [DKBA] commanders frighten the new soldiers and they are afraid. They tell them that people who have left won't find it easy if they try to go back [to their villages]. That's why they are afraid that if they leave, they will be killed." - "Saw Po Kyu" (M, xx), Private from #777 Brigade DKBA, Papun District (Interview #7, 12/99)

DKBA Businesses

"They don't come to fight the KNU. They just do their economic business and if they meet with the KNU, they shoot. If they hear that people have helped or joined the KNU, they arrest them. Other than that, they just do their business. I think that they have no other aim." - "Saw Po Kyu" (M, xx), private from #777 Brigade DKBA, Papun District (Interview #7, 12/99)

The DKBA has become very involved in businesses, including logging, cattle trading and others. Some of the DKBA camps and offices have been set up only to conduct business. A deserter commented that he felt that although the DKBA does fight the KNU if they meet, they really are just about doing business and have no other aim. He went on to say that he felt the DKBA was more concerned with business than with improving the situation of the Karen people.

DKBA units are heavily involved in logging, selling logs and concessions to both Burmese and Thai logging companies. Most of this logging is in eastern Karen State in areas near the border with Thailand. In some areas the DKBA prohibits the villagers from cutting trees for themselves, while simultaneously ordering them to cut logs for use by the local DKBA units. Villagers are ordered to cut down trees and transport them on their bullock carts. The DKBA soldiers sometimes work alongside the villagers. They also accept money from Thai logging companies wishing to come in and take logs out to Thailand. As some of these areas are not strongly controlled by any particular group, some of these companies end up paying concession fees and taxes to two or more of the SPDC, DKBA and KNU at the same time; for example, a company may be paying both the SPDC and the DKBA for permission to extract the logs, and taxes to the KNU to allow safe passage of the logs to the border. Both villagers and Thai businessmen own sawmills in Burma, and must pay taxes for these to the DKBA, SPDC and KNU as well. Sometimes this results in turf battles between the DKBA and the KNLA, or localised offensives by SPDC troops aimed at shutting down the KNU/KNLA's source of income. The DKBA has its own sawmills which cut the logs and sometimes even process them into furniture before being sold in Pa'an and Thaton, or to Thai logging companies. Profits from the wood sales go directly to the DKBA. It is unclear how much of these profits are passed to the higher levels of the DKBA; a good portion of the money from the major deals with Thai loggers probably goes to the Brigade and higher levels, but not from the local operations when DKBA officers order villagers to cut logs for them.

“They do it a lot, and so does the SPDC. Teak. I know that the DKBA sells it at Pa’an and Thaton. They sell it to anyone who will buy it - Burmans, Karens, Indians - many people are buying it. I don’t know if they sell it to other countries. ... We were just there to sell the logs that their people sent to us. We had no other purpose. They come and get the logs from the mountains and then cut them in Myaing Gyi Ngu. Then they sell them wherever they can. For one ton of teak they can get 60,000, sometimes 70,000 Kyat in Shwegyin. They just sell logs and do business. They also work in the cattle and buffalo black market.” - “Saw Po Kyu” (M, xx), Private from #777 Brigade DKBA, Papun District (Interview #7, 12/99)

Many DKBA units make money by setting up checkpoints along roads and demanding money from every vehicle which passes. They even run a passenger truck service along some of these main roads, and passengers on their trucks are the only ones who don't have to pay at the checkpoints. The DKBA are also involved in the black market cattle and buffalo trade with Thailand. Another sideline of some units is stealing motorcycles and pickup trucks in border regions of Thailand, then rafting them across the shallow Moei River into Burma, driving them to a town and selling them.

The order translated on the following page shows an example of the DKBA trying to make money by forcing villagers to sell all of their seasonal cash crops through DKBA officials, forcing all traders to buy this produce from their units, and threatening punishments for any who fail to comply. For most villagers these crops are their only means of making money to supplement their subsistence rice crop. The area covered by this order includes almost all of southern Papun District. *[A copy of the original of this order, which was written in Burmese, can be seen on page 124.]*

Stamp:
Karen Buddhist Army
D.K.B.A.

Democratic Karen Buddhist Association

Date: Year 2000, August 21st

Subject: Notification of the local agricultural products purchasing project

- 1) Regarding the above subject, to find funding for Maw Tha Roh Noh District organising committee and Ka Hsaw Wah Battalion, the funds collection committee will take control of seasonal agricultural produce such as cardamom, [illegible] from villages in Maw Tha Roh Noh District.
- 2) To purchase the produce systematically and successfully, one area will be assigned to each committee.
 - (a) Major Dtah Dtee and Lieutenant Soe Myint Oo of Maw Tha Roh Noh District Organising Committee are responsible for Meh Tha Loh, Dta Gone Dtine, Way Mone, Way Hsan, Ku Seik, Ma Dtaw, etc. village tracts.
 - (b) Captain Du Dtee / Sergeant Saw Kyu are responsible for Pyin Ma Myin, Dta Byay Dta Paw Pa, Maw Law Ko, and Daw [illegible] village tracts.
 - (c) Lieutenant Aung Htun and group are responsible for Tee Law Thay Hta, Tee Theh Lay, Kyaun Ywa, etc. village tracts.
 - (d) Saw Chit Thu and group are responsible for Day Law village tract and Shwe Palah village tract.
 - (e) Secretary-2 Saw Pah Dah and group are responsible for the village tracts from Meh Bpa area.
 - (f) ~~Secretary~~ Deputy Warrant Officer Thuang Win and group are responsible for the village tracts in Meh Wain [Meh Way] area. These were the assignments.
- 3) Independent purchasers who would like to buy the agricultural products mentioned above must contact the assigned local person in charge. Purchase and transport of the produce will be done by their arrangement.
- 4) Actions including seizure [of the produce] will be taken if the related persons in charge are not informed, if they [the traders or farmers] buy and transport it themselves.
- 5) Be informed to explain to the local people from the areas assigned so they will understand the process. These duties must be performed exactly so that the plan will be implemented properly.

Copies to:

- 1) Military Chief of Staff's Office
- 2) Commander in Chief's Office
- 3) Patron Abbot (U Kay Mi Ka)
- 4) Brigade 333 Commander
- 5) Chairperson - Thi Ha District
- 6) Chairperson - Maw Tha Roh Noh District
- 7) Battalion Commander (Ka Hsaw Wah Battalion)
- 8) Area Chiefs (Thi Tha Kayan)
- 9) Ward & Village Tract Chairpersons
- 10) Office

[Sd.]
(for) Chairperson
Ka Hsaw Wah Battalion
Kyaw Heh

There are also suspicions that some units of the DKBA may be getting involved in the methamphetamine trade. According to KNU, Thai and other sources, in 1999 the SPDC brought representatives of the United Wa State Army and the Kokang group, two of the major producers of heroin and amphetamines, to the Myawaddy area of Karen State and introduced them to the local DKBA, possibly with the aim of setting up amphetamine factories to be operated by members of the DKBA. As yet this remains unconfirmed, though Thai anti-narcotics officials have voiced alarm at what they say is a new flow of methamphetamines coming across the border via Myawaddy. If the DKBA is involved in this, the SPDC would try to use it to turn both Thai and international opinion against the KNU and the Karen people as a whole by lumping them together with the DKBA as 'drug traffickers'. The SPDC has already succeeded in doing this to both the Shan and the Wa people, the vast majority of whom have nothing to do with the drug trade.

Relations with the SPDC and the KNU

“When I stayed with the DKBA I thought that it had no meaning for me. That’s why I came up here. I saw that in the future it would not be easy for the DKBA. The SPDC is watching them and their situation. If they misstep, it will be difficult for them. A couple of years ago, the SPDC gave them priority [supported them strongly], but now they do not give priority to them. Some [DKBA troops] just have to follow the SPDC wherever they go. They don’t feed them. They just call and order them to follow.” - “Saw Po Kyu” (M, xx), Private from #777 Brigade DKBA, Papun District (Interview #7, 12/99)

The DKBA was initially formed with the support and encouragement of the SLORC, possibly even at the instigation of the SLORC, because the regime saw it as a way of dividing the Karen people and crushing the KNU. The first DKBA soldiers said that the SLORC had promised to withdraw from Karen State and give it to them, as soon as they helped to defeat the KNU. These promises were never sincere, but the uneducated DKBA rank and file saw them as a ray of hope. Within a year many of them saw that they had been used, and the wave of DKBA desertions began; this is also when the DKBA began to lose its sense of political direction.

“We soldiers can’t fight with the DKBA. They [the SPDC] are worried that the opinions of the DKBA are going to change. If we fight with them, they [the SPDC] take action against us. Nothing happens to the DKBA.” - “Tin Aung Win” (M, 17), Private from Light Infantry Battalion #549, Pa’an District (Interview #1, 12/2000)

The actions of the SPDC have made it apparent that they do not trust the DKBA. DKBA units usually travel with Burmese Army units and often their camps have an SPDC camp nearby. The SPDC would probably disarm the DKBA if they weren’t so useful. The SPDC is able to carry out cross-border raids into Thailand and blame them on the DKBA. They also use the DKBA to gather villagers for forced labour, to provide intelligence about the villagers and to point the finger at those who have connections with the KNU/KNLA. However, SPDC officers and NCOs tell their soldiers not to trust the DKBA and to not be too friendly with them. Some have even described them as the enemy, but an enemy which has ‘surrendered’. For their part, the DKBA have no love for the SPDC. Firefights have been reported between DKBA and SPDC units, and in some cases DKBA officers who were known as being particularly anti-SPDC have been ‘accidentally’ shot dead by Tatmadaw troops. To keep incidents like this from happening and to keep the DKBA happy, higher SPDC officers have forbidden their soldiers to fight, with fists or otherwise, with the DKBA. They are worried that the DKBA may turn against them or negotiate an alliance with the KNU. Whenever there are fights, the SPDC officers punish their soldiers,

but nothing happens to the DKBA soldiers involved. One deserter said that some DKBA soldiers overheard officers from SPDC Light Infantry Battalion LIB #547 speaking about attacking the DKBA, and thereupon the DKBA soldiers immediately deserted to the KNU. Some SPDC soldiers feel that they are being patient with the DKBA and will attack them someday, while some DKBA soldiers feel the same way about the SPDC. At the moment it appears that both sides see the other as intensely undesirable yet intensely useful.

“We usually walk with only Karen [DKBA] soldiers, but sometimes we walk together with the Burmese part of the way. I don’t know the number of the battalion or the commanders’ name because I can’t speak Burmese.” - “Pa Deh Wah” (M, 19), Private from #555 Brigade DKBA, Papun District (Interview #8, 2/2001)

“We didn’t think the DKBA was our enemy. We soldiers didn’t dare fight with them. Now, the SPDC is giving them a chance. The senior leaders are giving them a chance so we don’t dare fight with them. They are proud and they are included in everything. We soldiers dared not do anything to them. If we fought with them, the commanders put us in a jail cell. If they didn’t put us in a jail cell, they would put us in prison. They did like that.” - “Aung Zaw Moe” (M, 19), Lance Corporal from Light Infantry Battalion #549, Pa’an District (Interview #2, 12/2000)

“He didn’t like me to be friendly with the Ko Per Baw [DKBA]. He warned the soldiers about this. He said, ‘It is because they are Karen and stay in the mountains. In the past, they were our enemies, but they have come back to work with us, so we can’t trust them. That is why. Don’t fraternise with the DKBA. If you have relations with them, they will be friendly with you and call you into the jungle. They will take your gun.’ They don’t like it that we are friendly with the DKBA, however, some soldiers still meet each other secretly.” - “Saw Tha Ku” (M, 21), Private from Infantry Battalion #19, Papun District (Interview #3, 3/2000)

“We have had misunderstandings and fought the DKBA. We shot them because we thought they were the enemy. The officers in LIB #547 had a problem that they were not satisfied with the DKBA. They are staying in the Nabu area. Some of the officers talked about fighting the DKBA. Some of the DKBA heard them and rebelled. They returned to the KNU...” - “Tin Aung Win” (M, 17), Private from Light Infantry Battalion #549, Pa’an District (Interview #1, 12/2000)

While relations between the DKBA and the SPDC remain very tense, the DKBA and the KNU are still at war with each other. Over the years there have been elements on both sides, usually among junior officers, who have sought to bring the two groups together in talks aimed at a reunification or at least a peace agreement, but these have been blocked by the leadership. Many DKBA soldiers and officers have in the past stated that they would like to ally themselves with the KNU or in some cases even rejoin the KNU, but not under what they saw as the dictatorial and nepotistic rule of KNU General Saw Bo Mya. In return, while some junior KNU/KNLA officers wanted open talks on an equal footing, the official line of the KNU leadership was that DKBA members were welcome to ‘come back’ and ‘rejoin the fold’ of the KNU, which ruled out any possibility of constructive talks by viewing the DKBA as an renegade group. The election of Saw Ba Thin Ba Sein to replace Saw Bo Mya as KNU President in 2000 opened a possibility to break this stalemate, but the new President appears to be retaining the same KNU approach to the DKBA so no talks have occurred as yet, at least not in the open. Another factor complicating the issue is how the SPDC would react to any sign of an agreement between the two groups; it is likely that the regime would immediately cease supplying the DKBA, and may directly attack them to wipe them out of existence.

Relations with the Villagers

“If the villagers have faults, they arrest them. They demanded money. If they didn’t have money, they [the DKBA] put them in the stocks.” - “Pa Deh Wah” (M, 19), Private from #555 Brigade DKBA, Papun District (Interview #8, 2/2001)

In the beginning, many Buddhist villagers supported the DKBA in the hope that the organisation could bring about an improvement in the situation. However, before long the DKBA started losing its political objectives and becoming little more than another Army living off of the civilian population. As DKBA units behaved more and more like SPDC units, they lost their civilian support, until by the late 1990’s they had little civilian support at all, with the possible exception of the villagers still in Myaing Gyi Ngu. Villagers in many areas even refer to them as “the Burmese”, lumping them together with the local SPDC troops.

Due to the weak command structure and general lack of discipline, the relations of local DKBA units with the villagers are largely dependent on the nature of the local commander. Some DKBA officers still see it as their duty to unify and support the Karen people, while others behave as warlords ruling over their fiefdoms. Unfortunately, the latter tend to be more common. In eastern Dooplaya District DKBA units have been known to protect the villagers against forced labour, attacks on villages and other SPDC abuses. In Nyaunglebin District, some villagers fleeing the SPDC’s *Sa Thon Lon* execution squads have found shelter with DKBA units - but when the *Sa Thon Lon* requested them by name, they were handed over [see ***“Death Squads and Displacement”*** (KHRG #99-04, 24/5/99)]. In Papun, Pa’an and Thaton Districts, most DKBA commanders are known for destroying villages, killing villagers or handing them over to the SPDC, and demanding forced labour and extortion money.

“They didn’t ask porters to follow them when they travelled, but if they were going together with SPDC soldiers, they did.” - “Saw Po Kyu” (M, xx), Private from #777 Brigade DKBA, Papun District (Interview #7, 12/99)

“We do not have to give anyone for portering, but we had to give paddy according to our religion [Buddhists have to give some paddy as a donation to the monastery]. ... For the Ko Per Baw the people had to donate money and build bridges. People can stay without going because it is a donation or an offering. ... They collected a tax on machines for milling paddy. They collected it once a year. Each house had to give 2,000 Kyat. All the villages in that area had to give. They are the villages of Nai K’Loh, Ko Tha Hsu, Thone Aye, Ko Kler, Puh Day Chay, Noh T’Kaw, Ko Der, Noh Li, Wah Klu, K’Ma Naing, Taw Kyo, Ko Ploh, Ko Wih, Kaw T’Kait, Ko Thaw, Ko Pa Duh, Noh Pa Duh and Yah Thee. All of the villages have to give money, but the people who joined the Ko Per Baw do not have to give. ... They [the DKBA] said they donated the money to the monks.” - “Saw Lin Yone” (M, 17), Private from DKBA, Pa’an District (Interview #9, 6/2000)

“I saw it once in Papun. They demanded money from villagers who grow cardamom. They demanded 100 Kyat for each viss [1.6 kg/3.5 lb] of cardamom the villagers came to sell. I saw it. They were Saw Pi Ter’s and Major Hla Maung’s soldiers.” - “Saw Po Kyu” (M, xx), Private from #777 Brigade DKBA, Papun District (Interview #7, 12/99)

Many of the DKBA's soldiers have only joined for the power and money making opportunities which it provides, and some of them have become particularly known for their brutality towards the villagers. One commander who has taken the name 'Moe Kyo', which means lightning, is well known in northern Pa'an and Papun districts for burning villages and torturing the villagers and has been named many times in testimony given to KHRG by villagers [see the KHRG report *"Beyond All Endurance: The Breakup of Karen Villages in Southeastern Pa'an District"* (KHRG #99-08, 20/12/99)]. Between February 10th and 14th 1999, a DKBA group commanded by Moe Kyo burned 56 houses in the 4 villages of Tee Bper, Dta Wih Ko, Dta Greh Ni and Tee Pa Leh in Dta Greh township, Pa'an District, after accusing the villagers there of being 'relatives of KNU'. In January 2001, refugees from Dta Greh township of Pa'an District cited the imminent arrival of Moe Kyo and the fear of his cruelty as one of the reasons why they fled their village and came to Thailand. In southeastern Pa'an district, an officer of #999 Brigade, Lt. Colonel Maung Chit Thu, has gained a reputation for being unpredictable; he makes speeches about Karen unity while also signing orders demanding forced labour and threatening village elders. His troops also combined forces with SPDC units to cross the Thai border and attack and burn Huay Kaloke (Wang Kha) and Huay Bone (Don Pa Kiang) refugee camps in 1997 and Huay Kaloke refugee camp again in 1998.

"[W]e went to Hsaw Th'Ray Po Kee. They shot chickens when they saw them and also pigs. They ate them. My commander allowed me to eat them and he also ate them. ... The 2nd Lieutenant [Pa T---] did. He ordered people to carry things. If they didn't go he scolded them. He called people's names and scolded them. I didn't see him beat any of the villagers. If they had to walk far, they ordered me to capture people to carry. ... They carried pots and bullets. It wasn't very heavy. It was about 10 viss [16kgs / 35 lbs]. They were men. We released them when they finished. They had to carry for three days. ... we never hurt them. We didn't hurt the villagers who came to carry for us, but I can't tell about the other units. There was no torturing. If they couldn't carry it, we reduced the load for them. ... They didn't give them money, they just released them." - "Pa Deh Wah" (M, 19), Private from #555 Brigade DKBA, Papun District (Interview #8, 2/2001)

"Moe Kyo said there were soldiers sleeping in the hut. A lot of people went to shoot them. I also shot. They shot some soldiers in the hut, but they fled and just the villagers were injured. There were two villagers. The other one was a villager also, but they put pants on him and gave him a gun [they made him look like a soldier before killing him]. Moe Kyo got the gun, it was an AK. Moe Kyo said nothing, he just burned the dead people in the hut. He burned it himself. There were three dead villagers in the hut that they had shot. They burned them all. They were a husband and a wife and another man. I knew one of them, he was from Tee Tha Blu Hta. His name was Pa Bo Loh, he was the husband. I didn't know his wife and they hadn't had children yet. After they burned it they went up to the mountain." - "Pa Deh Wah" (M, 19), Private from #555 Brigade DKBA, Papun District (Interview #8, 2/2001)

Very little development is done for the villagers. On the contrary, taxes in both money and rice are demanded from the villagers and forced labour is called for portering, labour around the camps, and to provide logs, building materials and other things for the DKBA units. The villagers have to maintain roads and build bridges and pagodas for the DKBA; in Pa'an District, the SPDC previously assigned the DKBA to construct several roads using forced labour, including a road along the Salween River to Myaing Gyi Ngu. The villagers also have to pay taxes on crops such as cardamom; in southern Papun District, the DKBA has even ordered all villagers to sell all of their seasonal cash crops through DKBA units [see the order in *'DKBA Businesses'* above]. In southeastern Pa'an district a 2,000 Kyat tax is collected on rice-milling

machines once a year, although people who have family members in the DKBA do not have to pay. The DKBA claims that the money is given to the monks. The following translated order is a typical example of the offhand manner in which DKBA officers routinely demand the forced labour of villagers. The work and materials will not be paid for. *[A copy of the original of this order, written in Sgaw Karen, can be seen on page 125. The order came in an envelope bearing the stamp “Karen Buddhist Army / DKBA” and dated 9/2/2000.]*

To: xxxx [village] Head

Writing to let you know like this:

Tomorrow, ask one villager from each house to come and roof my house. If you don't come you can't stay *[in your village]*. Everybody, please.

Company #x Commander
Bo xxxx

Villagers are arrested by the DKBA if they hear that the villagers have had contact with or joined the KNU. Villagers who are known to be close or distant relatives of KNU members are generally harassed with threats and other types of abuse and intimidation, which usually causes them to flee their village in the end. One deserter reported that in his area of southeastern Pa'an district, DKBA soldiers have been ordered to kill not only KNLA, but also people who are unable to pay their DKBA 'taxes'. The villagers are given until the end of the month to pay their debts and then they are arrested, interrogated and then have their throats slit with daggers. The soldiers sometimes get drunk first to work up the courage. The soldier explained that they obeyed the order because they feared that if they didn't dare to kill someone, their officers would kill them. People have also reportedly been killed for getting drunk on full moon and new moon nights. An SPDC deserter who was interviewed for this report commented that he thought the DKBA treated the villagers badly. Christians were occasionally targeted by the DKBA in the organisation's early days, but Christians and Animists are now not usually persecuted by the DKBA, though they are forced to build pagodas along with the Buddhist villagers. Some Christians and Animists have even joined the DKBA and some live near Myaing Gyi Ngu

“He ordered his soldiers to kill the soldiers [KNLA] and the people who couldn't pay their debts. They killed them, but I don't know their names. I saw it though. They killed them with daggers. They slit their necks rudely. I saw three people killed this way. There were two men and one married woman. There was one Burman, an Indian and one Christian Karen. ... They interrogated the people who can't pay their debts. If they can't give money, they [the DKBA] waited until the end of the month. If they still couldn't give it to them, they killed them. They beat and kicked them. The soldiers who did not dare to do it, drank to get drunk first. They killed them right away. They never used cells. If you did not dare to kill them, the Ko Per Baw [DKBA] would kill you instead. They threatened me like that.” - “Saw Lin Yone” (M, 17), Private from DKBA, Pa'an District (Interview #9, 6/2000)

“When I was with my commanders, they said nothing when they saw Christians and Roman Catholics. They went on their way and didn't talk with them.” - “Saw Po Kyu” (M, xx), Private from #777 Brigade DKBA, Papun District (Interview #7, 12/99)

“I see that the KNU is working for their nationality, while the DKBA is working for their economic benefit. If they could make money day by day, that was enough. I don’t think they have any aims. It is enough for them if they can feed themselves. They do not look out for their nationality. If they have to torture their own nationality, they do it. They are friendly with the civilians from the Myaing Gyi Ngu area. But when they go outside, they do as they want. They tortured some people. I don’t see what they are doing for the civilians. I see the DKBA calling themselves ‘K’Nyaw Bah Thawka Thu Mu Doh’ [‘Karen Buddhist Army’] and they are protecting their religion, only Buddhism, not others. I saw the DKBA doing things that were not good. They work enough to get enough for themselves. They don’t care about civilians. It’s enough for them when they can feed their wives and children. Their families are staying everywhere, some in Myaing Gyi Ngu. The families of DKBA commanders are fed well, but the soldiers are not able to feed their families well.” - “Saw Po Kyu” (M, xx), Private from #777 Brigade DKBA, Papun District (Interview #7, 12/99)

XI. Future of the Tatmadaw and the SPDC

Never submitting but resisting colonialism, we shall crush all its minions.
- SPDC slogan

“To get peace in our country, together with our civilians, we will ask to stop the fighting if we can. I think that it will be good if we can live in Burma together with our people, in our towns and with our jobs.” - “Aung Zaw Moe” (M, 19), Lance Corporal from Light Infantry Battalion #549, Pa’an District (Interview #2, 12/2000)

The SPDC has shown no signs of downsizing the Tatmadaw, but instead has shown every intention of maintaining its size and continuing to expand it. Weapons modernisation plans are continuing and arms purchases are still being made from several countries throughout the world. The officer training schools have been pumping out officers with college-level degrees and a loyalty to the Tatmadaw. However, these improvements are quantitative and not qualitative. The SPDC is increasing militarisation throughout the whole country and creating hundreds of new battalions, but as was pointed out by the deserters in this report, these battalions are operating at less than half-strength. The weapons being purchased or constructed are for the most part low-grade and often break down, yet the SPDC is short of the parts and expertise to repair and maintain them. And the officers being trained show a great deal of expertise at corruption, extortion and thuggery against elderly village headwomen, but few or no skills as professional soldiers.

The men at the top of the SPDC have no experience outside the military, and they believe that the military hierarchy should apply to society as a whole; with the civilians under the orders of the military, and the military under the orders of its officers. The officers have created for themselves a class in society which feels it has the right to exploit the civilians as well as the rank and file soldiers. Army officers in the field see the civilian population as a source of personal profit; Camp, Company, Column and Battalion commanders posted to rural areas literally make millions, even tens of millions, of Kyat per year from forced labour schemes using villagers for their own profit and from fees paid by civilians to avoid forced labour. For most of them, their loyalty to the SPDC only derives from the profits and personal power of their positions, not from any political ideology. This is why the SPDC is not willing to follow the recommendations of the International Labour Organisation (ILO) to put a stop to forced labour in the country and to punish those who use it; if the junta began telling officers not to use forced labour (thereby taking away most of the profit incentive of being posted in the countryside), and especially if they went even further and began punishing those who demand forced labour (thereby taking away their very important impunity for the first time ever), then they would very quickly have a very restless officer corps wondering where all this is leading to - and a split in the Army is the SPDC’s greatest fear of all. The SPDC would see this as risking suicide, so the forced labour and the officers’ impunity continue.

“I only know a little bit about Burma, but I don’t like what the leaders are doing at all. The SPDC said they won’t call Wontan [‘servants’, meaning porters] after November [2000], but it isn’t true. They call Wontan [porters] and Loh Ah Pay [other forced labour]. They forced the civilians to dig toilets. They forced them to dig the earth, to build the road and forced them to weave baskets for the porters. They force them to do everything. They force them to send firewood for charcoal and firewood for the brick kilns [brick kilns owned by the Army. The bricks made there are sold by the officers for personal profit]. After the villagers cut the wood they have to send it by bullock cart. Later, they don’t want to do it anymore. They are tired of it. ... I heard that the senior leaders ordered it. But they didn’t stop it. They still call people to go.” - “Aung Zaw Moe” (M, 19), Lance Corporal from Light Infantry Battalion #549, Pa’an District (Interview #2, 12/2000); November 2000 was when the ILO placed *de facto* ‘sanctions’ on the SPDC for its use of forced labour.

The SPDC may be making a grave mistake, though, by allowing the officers to rob, exploit and abuse their own rank and file soldiers to such an extent. The divide between the officers and the common soldiers is growing. Most SPDC soldiers have been either conscripted or coerced into the Army and have no loyalty whatsoever to the SPDC; in many cases they even despise the regime. Poverty and school closures have kept many young men from getting a proper education and there are many in the ranks who can’t even read their pay stubs. All of the deserters interviewed for this report indicated that while they had little or no political or social awareness before they joined the Tatmadaw, their experiences have opened their eyes. The soldiers may be uneducated, but they see themselves brutally abused by the officers and sergeants, their pay stolen by the officers, their rations cut to starvation levels, ordered to fight an elusive enemy who can ambush them at any time, and to force villagers older than their parents to work for them under horrible conditions. All the while they are aware of the hatred and disgust with which the civilian population views them; some of them even say that their own families disowned them or distanced themselves after they became soldiers. Having been forced into the Army from civilian life, they often think of themselves as being closer to the civilians than to the officers above them. At the same time they see the officers getting richer and their indifference to the plight of the privates. The results are suicide and desertion among rank and file soldiers at rates higher than ever before, rates which continue to increase. The SPDC does its best to hide this reality by covering up the numbers, failing to notify the families, and reporting suicides and desertions as deaths in combat, but the reality remains. Every deserter interviewed by KHRG over the past several years has said that half or more of the men in his unit would like to run away given the chance. The commanders manage to stem the flow by convincing the men that if they run they will be killed by landmines, the resistance, or their own unit, and that their families will also suffer punishments. Many soldiers answer this by committing suicide rather than fleeing. Of the rest, it appears that half or more of the SPDC’s Army would like to desert, which is not a very promising statistic for a regime which bases its entire rule on the strength of its Army. The SPDC is terribly afraid of a split within the Army, yet fails to see that this split has already occurred.

“People told us the KNU was bad, no good, and that they abused the people, until I believed it. When I stayed on their side, the Burmese soldiers were very bad. They raped the women. Some of them went to the front line and the people sent them food, but then the soldiers abused and raped them. This I heard and saw. That is why I thought, I am Karen, even they [his commanders] also tell me that I am Karen. I started thinking that the Karen are not as bad as they say. Either way in that situation, I thought the Karen must be better than the Burmese. Since I have arrived here, I have been working in the resistance.” - “Saw Tha Ku” (M, 21), Private from Infantry Battalion #19, Papun District (Interview #3, 3/2000)

“When we first arrived here, we were facing an organisation who were holding guns in front of us and we didn’t know the situation, so we were afraid. But later we saw that the [KNLA] officers here do not stay separate like in the Burmese Army, they sit and laugh together [with the rank and file] like brothers. Then I was happy to be with the KNU. If you love comfort, you won’t be happy staying here in the jungle. But even before I fled, I decided that even if my body wouldn’t be happy, hopefully my heart would be happy to be working together with my fellow Karens. Right now I don’t want to go back to my village, but if someone from my village arrived here, I’d like to send a letter to my family - that is my goal.” - “Saw Tha Ku” (M, 21), Private from Infantry Battalion #19, Papun District (Interview #3, 3/2000)

At the same time, corruption within the Tatmadaw has reached such levels that officers battle each other for control of lucrative turf, send false reports to their superiors regarding military operations which they did not conduct, and Army rations are even sold to resistance forces while Tatmadaw soldiers go hungry. The culture of both the Tatmadaw and the SPDC civilian authorities at all levels has become ‘every man for himself’, and the only reason this power structure can continue to hold down the civilian population is that most civilians are too hungry to look up from their daily struggle to survive and cannot find any centre around which to organise, particularly in the agrarian rural areas where the vast majority of Burma’s population lives. The corruption, overtaxation and the needs of an overextended Army have led to endemic shortages in basic foods and other commodities throughout the country, spiralling inflation and a plummeting currency. Thus far most of the undernourished population manages to survive, but it is questionable how much longer this can continue under the current unsustainable system. Change may finally come only when people begin dying in hundreds from the effects of malnutrition throughout the country, but it would be change born out of desperation, and such changes almost always involve suffering on a horrific scale.

“As I see it, the SPDC can gather together many soldiers, but their soldiers have very low morale. Most of them do not want to be soldiers, and many are fleeing. Many are also dying in battle. When I saw this, I felt that they won’t be able to control their troops for much longer. Only the soldiers who stay beside the highest officers, feeding them, are happy. If they hear people complaining, they report it and the high officers put you in the prison cell and beat you. I’ve seen and experienced that. But in the Battalion I heard Corporals and Sergeants talking, and they said that the officers had told them that if the government leaders change this year, in 2000, that there will be a suicidal battle for the country’s freedom. They said that if this happens, they will join the resistance and fight the Army. They said, ‘You are making us suffer. You don’t allow us to go home and visit our parents. You don’t even tell us when our parents have died. When the time comes, we will destroy your soldiers and escape.’ I hope it will happen, and I believe it. You will ask, why do I believe it? Because the soldiers in the Tatmadaw, under the control of the SPDC, they are not happy. The days and nights go by. I believe what they said because I felt that way myself. One day it will all explode, and the soldiers will resist the Army, and what they are hoping for will come.” - “Saw Tha Ku” (M, 21), Private from Infantry Battalion #19, Papun District (Interview #3, 3/2000)

**Undivided, united we shall always be withstanding divisive acts of anyone
(Nationalities and Tatmadaw).**

- Tatmadaw slogan

Index of Interviews

This index summarises the interviews quoted within this report, using the numbers which also appear in the quote captions. All names of those interviewed have been changed. In the summaries below, **LIB** = Light Infantry Battalion, **IB** = Infantry Battalion, **Bgd.** = Brigade, **L. Corp.** = Lance Corporal, **SSY** = Su Saung Yay, **TC** = Training Camp, **FL** = Forced Labour, Under ‘**Nat.**’ (Nationality), **K** = Karen, **B** = Burman, **C/B** = Chin/Burman

Interviews with SPDC Deserters

#	Date	Name	Sex	Age	Nat.	Rank	Unit	Summary
1	12/00	“Tin Aung Win”	M	17	C/B	Private	LIB #549	Forced enlistment, SSY conditions, training, TC conditions, soldier labour, equipment, Army corruption, abuse of soldiers, child soldiers, camp conditions, attitude of officers, FL, human minesweepers, extortion, demands for food, soldiers’ inability to protest, torture & execution of suspected KNLA, landmines, politics in Army, desertion, leave, salary & deductions, relations with DKBA, contact with outside, situation in home village
2	12/00	“Aung Zaw Moe”	M	19	B	L. Corp.	LIB #549	Reasons for volunteering, SSY conditions, training, TC conditions, soldier labour, Army corruption, desertion, child soldiers, equipment, camp conditions, politics in Army, relations with DKBA, attitude of officers, contact with outside, abuse of soldiers, FL, beating of villagers, human minesweepers, convict porters, salary, punishment for desertion, frontline conditions, situation in home village
3	3/00	“Saw Tha Ku”	M	21	K	Private	IB #19	“shanghaied”, SSY conditions, training, TC conditions, Army corruption, abuse of soldiers, frontline camp conditions, battalion businesses, relations with DKBA, salary, equipment, leave, contact with outside, FL, killing of villagers’ livestock, discrimination in Army, situation in home village
4	11/00	“Soe Tint”	M	18	B	L. Corp.	LIB #10	Forced enlistment, recruitment methods, recruitment of children, training, frontline conditions, punishment for deserters, child soldiers, burning paddy barns, shooting of villagers, rear area situation, abuse of soldiers, salary, porters
5	11/00	“Thein Htay”	M	26	B	Private	LIB #340	Tricked into enlisting, training, TC conditions, punishment of deserters, porters, frontline conditions, attitude of officers, abuse of soldiers
6	3/01	“Aung Myint Win”	M	15	B	Private	LIB #504	Child soldier, training, abuse by officers and NCO’s, salary, porters, punishment of deserters, contact with outside, conditions at home

Interviews with DKBA Deserters

7	12/99	“Saw Po Kyu”	M	?	K	Private	#777 Bgd.	Reason for joining, DKBA structure, training, salary, SPDC assistance, Myaing Gyi Ngu situation, logging, DKBA businesses, religious tolerance, demands from villagers, attitude of DKBA
8	2/01	“Pa Deh Wah”	M	19	K	Private	#555 Bgd.	Situation in home village, reason for joining, lack of training, DKBA military structure, equipment, salary, SPDC assistance, lack of food, health, fighting with KNLA, portering for DKBA, abuse of villagers, demands for food, killing and burning of villagers suspected of being KNLA, relations with SPDC
9	6/00	“Saw Lin Yone”	M	17	K	Private		Situation in home village, rationale for going to work in Thailand, reason for joining, lack of training, labour for DKBA, salary, FL for SPDC, DKBA taxes, SPDC taxes, killing of villagers by DKBA, SPDC assistance

Appendix I. Tatmadaw Military Units

Regional Commands

Command	Area of Responsibility	Headquarters
Southeastern Command	Mon and Karen States	Moulmein
Coastal Command	Tenasserim Division	Tavoy
Southern Command	Pegu and Magwe Divisions	Toungoo
Southwestern Command	Irrawaddy Division	Bassein
Rangoon Command	Rangoon Division	Mingaladon
Central Command	Mandalay Division	Mandalay
Western Command	Arakan State	Sittwe
Northwestern Command	Chin State and Sagaing Division	Monywa
Eastern Command	Southern Shan State	Taunggyi
Golden Triangle Command	Southeastern Shan State	Kengtung
Northeastern Command	Northern Shan State	Lashio
Northern Command	Kachin State	Myitkyina

Light Infantry Divisions

Light Infantry Division	Headquarters
Light Infantry Division 11	Hlegu, Rangoon Division
Light Infantry Division 22	Pa'an, Karen State
Light Infantry Division 33	Sagaing, Sagaing Division
Light Infantry Division 44	Thaton, Mon State
Light Infantry Division 55	Aung Ban, Shan State
Light Infantry Division 66	Prome, Pegu Division
Light Infantry Division 77	Pegu, Pegu Division
Light Infantry Division 88	Magwe, Magwe Division
Light Infantry Division 99	Meiktila, Mandalay Division
Light Infantry Division 101	Pakokku, Magwe Division

Sa Ka Ka [Military Operations Commands]

<i>Sa Ka Ka [Military Operations Command]</i>	Headquarters	Regional Command
<i>Sa Ka Ka 1</i>	Kyaukme	Northeastern Command
<i>Sa Ka Ka 2</i>	Loilem	Eastern Command
<i>Sa Ka Ka 3</i>	Moe Kaung	Northern Command
<i>Sa Ka Ka 4</i>	Phughyi	Rangoon Command
<i>Sa Ka Ka 5</i>	Ahn	Western Command
<i>Sa Ka Ka 6</i>	Pyinmana	Central Command
<i>Sa Ka Ka 7</i>	Pekhone	Eastern Command
<i>Sa Ka Ka 8</i>	Tavoy	Coastal Command
<i>Sa Ka Ka 9</i>	Kyauktaw	Western Command
<i>Sa Ka Ka 10</i>	Kalay	Northwestern Command
<i>Sa Ka Ka 11</i>	unknown	unknown
<i>Sa Ka Ka 12</i>	Kawkareik	Southeastern Command
<i>Sa Ka Ka 13</i>	Boke Pyin	Coastal Command

Appendix 2. Tatmadaw Military Ranks

Officers

Senior General	One, Senior General Than Shwe, SPDC Chairman, Armed Forces Commander-in-Chief
General	Army Commander-in-Chief, Deputy Armed Forces Commander-in-Chief
Lieutenant General	Director of Directorate of Defence Services Intelligence, 2 Commanders of Special Operations, Adjutant General, Quartermaster General
Major General	Regional Commander / Chairman of State/Division PDC, Army Chief of Staff
Brigadier General	Regional Commander / Chairman of State/Division PDC, Sa Ka Ka or LID commander
Colonel	LID commander, Sa Ka Ka commander
Lieutenant Colonel	Battalion commander
Major	Battalion second in command, column commander, sometimes battalion commander
Captain with a Major's Salary	Captain given responsibilities of deputy battalion commander (a major's position), but not senior enough to be promoted to major, so given a major's salary
Captain	Company commander
Lieutenant	Company second in command
2 nd Lieutenant	Platoon commander

Non-Commissioned Officers

Warrant Officer	Sometimes translated as 'Sergeant Major'; responsible for day to day admin., family affairs, rations, equipment, etc. for a battalion
Deputy Warrant Officer	Sometimes translated as 'Sergeant Major 2' or Warrant Officer 2; responsible for day to day admin., family affairs, rations, equipment, etc. for a company
Sergeant	Platoon second in command
Corporal	Section commander
Lance Corporal	Section second in command
Private	Lowest ranking soldier, rifleman, artillery man

Appendix 3. Tatmadaw Organisational Structure

Section	10-11 soldiers, basic unit
Platoon	3 sections, 30+ men
Company	3 platoons, temporary headquarters, 100+ soldiers and officers
Battalion	About 500 battalions total, divided into Infantry Battalions and Light Infantry Battalions; each battalion has 4 rifle companies, an intelligence section, a signals platoon, a heavy weapons company, a support company and a headquarters; 777 soldiers, but operate with usually 150-500 soldiers
Infantry Battalion (IB)	About 200 battalions; for garrison duty, sometimes used in offensive operations
Light Infantry Battalion (LIB)	About 300 battalions; for offensive operations, sometimes in garrison
Camp	Vary in size from small jungle outposts to battalion camps; depending on camp size, the commander can be a Corporal through Major; responsible for logistics
Column	Combination of companies and sometimes battalions; moves, camps, fights; 200-600 soldiers
Tactical Operations Command (TOC)	In LID's and Sa Ka Ka's; 3-4 battalions and a headquarters, for offensive operations – similar to a brigade in other armies
Strategic Operations Command (SOC)	In Regional Commands, 3-4 battalions and a headquarters, covers an area for defensive operations – similar to a brigade in other armies
Light Infantry Division (LID)	The 10 LID's have 10 battalions each in 3 TOC's, an HQ and support units; for offensive operations, can be deployed anywhere, receive orders from Ministry of Defence
Military Operations Command (Sa Ka Ka)	The 13 Sa Ka Ka's have 10 battalions each in 3 TOC's, an HQ and support units; for offensive operations, deployed anywhere, subordinate to Regional Commands
Regional Command	The 12 Regional Commands are responsible for security in each of one or two of the 7 States and 7 Divisions; 12-25 battalions in 3-4 SOC's
Army	Called the Tatmadaw in Burmese, headquartered in Rangoon

* Note: the number of soldiers in each unit is the official number on paper, but most SPDC units currently operate at only about 30% strength.