



News Bulletin

August 9, 2006 / KHRG #2006-B10

SPDC military begins pincer movement, adds new camps in Papun district

August 9, 2006

Northern Papun District, Karen State

Two large multi-battalion columns operating under SPDC Military Operations Command #15 have begun a pincer movement to force all villagers out of the hills west of the Yunzalin River (Bway Loh Kloh) in northern Papun district of Karen State. Tactical Operations Command #2 has pushed north from Naw Yo Hta and has now set up a new base at Baw Kaw Plaw, just north of Kay Pu; while Tactical Operations Command #3 has approached the same area from the north, coming down from Bu Sah Kee and establishing themselves at a new camp at Si Day. This pincer movement and the establishment of these two new Army camps ensure that the hill villagers in the northern tip of Papun district will remain displaced for the coming months and will lose their entire rice harvest, creating serious concerns about their food security and survival over the coming year.

Throughout June and July KHRG has documented the movements of SPDC Military Operations Commands (MOC) #10 and #15, which have been shelling and destroying villages in northern Papun district as part of the SPDC's effort to depopulate the Karen hills.¹ Throughout June and July MOC #10 troops have been shelling villages from a 120-millimetre mortar emplacement near Ler Mu Plaw, while ground forces from Ler Mu Plaw have attacked, looted and burned undefended villages, destroyed food supplies and landmined farmfields from Ler Mu Plaw northeast as far as Naw Yo Hta, and are now based at a new camp at Twee Mi Kyo just north of Naw Yo Hta (see **map**). Since the end of June they have been supported in these activities by the four battalions of Tactical Operations Command (TOC) #2 of MOC #15, which destroyed villages along the upper Bilin River throughout most of June² and then headed north from their base at Pwa Ghaw to join MOC #10 in its attacks. The other three battalions of MOC #15 based at Pwa Ghaw,³ which make up Tactical Operations Command (TOC) #3, also took part in the Bilin River operation in June, but in July they headed west and then north all the way up to Toungoo district, where they resupplied and then headed to Bu Sah Kee to launch a push southward back into Papun district.⁴

¹ See *Forced labour, extortion and abuses in Papun District* (KHRG #2006-F7, 29/7/06), and *New SPDC military moves force more villagers to flee* (KHRG #2006-B9, 4/7/06).

² See *Offensive columns shell and burn villages, round up villagers in northern Papun and Toungoo districts* (KHRG #2006-B7, 7/6/06), and *SPDC troops commence full offensive in Papun district* (KHRG #2006-B6, 1/6/06).

³ The seven battalions of MOC #15 in Papun district are SPDC Light Infantry Battalions #352, 353, 535, 537, 552, 564, and 565, each consisting of 120-150 men.

⁴ All of these movements have been documented in detail in *Forced labour, extortion and abuses in Papun District* (KHRG #2006-F7, 29/7/06), and *New SPDC military moves force more villagers to flee* (KHRG #2006-B9, 4/7/06).

In the past week, the expected pincer movement has become a reality, with MOC #15 TOC #2 pushing northward from Naw Yo Hta to Kay Pu, while MOC #15 TOC #3 has pushed southeastward from Bu Sah Kee down into Papun district from the north. Rainy season conditions make all of these moves slow and difficult, so rather than continue in a rapid sweep both columns have set up new camps along their way. The TOC #2 column coming from the south has established a camp at Baw Kaw Plaw, an area of flat irrigated ricefields just north of Kay Pu in the hills west of the Yunzalin River (Bway Loh Kloh). The TOC #3 column coming from the north has set up a new camp at Si Day, about halfway between Bu Sah Kee and Kay Pu (see **map**). These two columns are expected to connect with each other in the coming months and possibly to establish a new base at Kay Pu for further attacks against villages after the rains end in October.

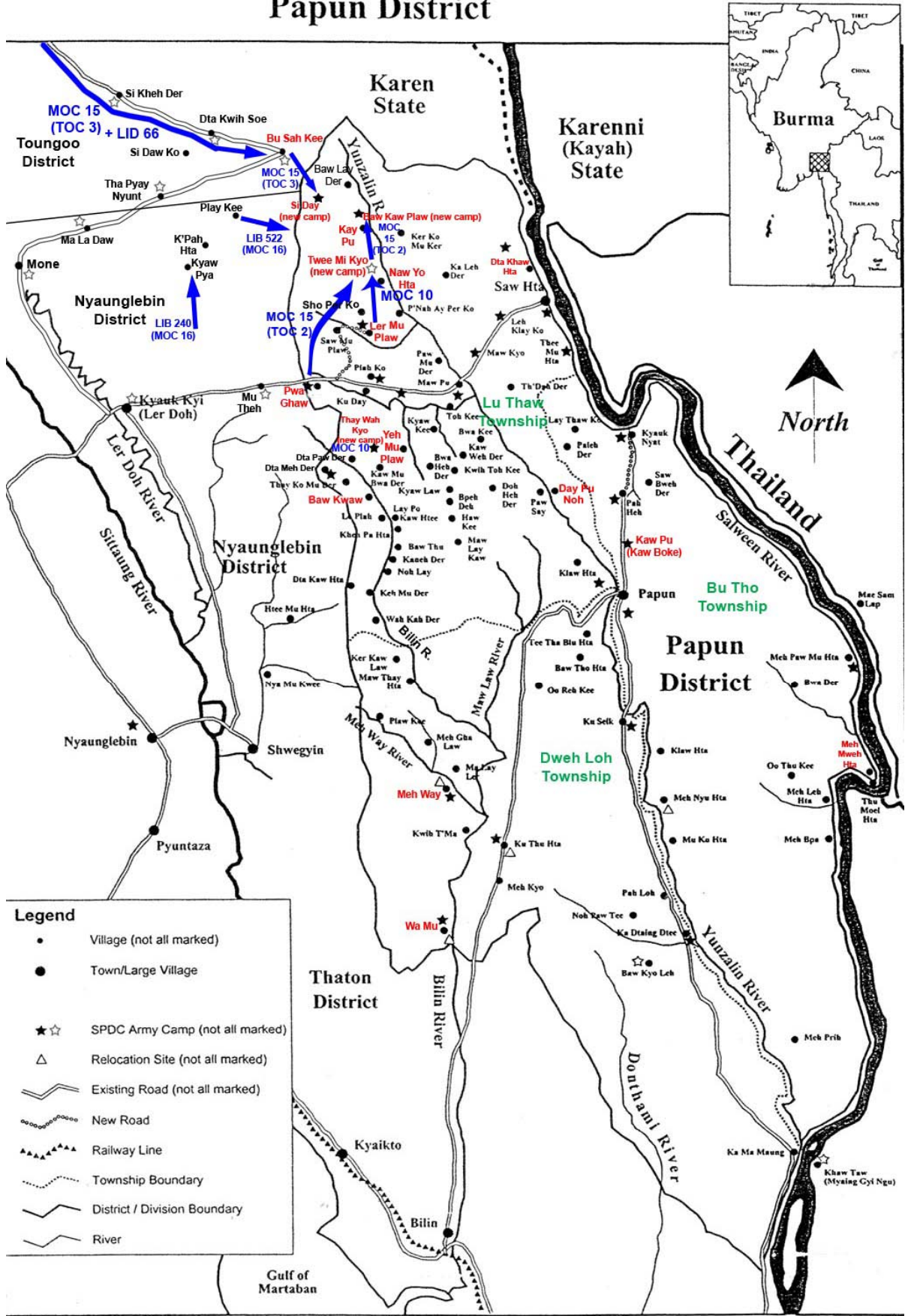
All villagers west of the Yunzalin River from the Ler Mu Plaw / B'Na Aye Per Ko area and upstream as far north as Baw Lay Der and the southern edge of Toungoo district have fled their villages and fields to avoid being captured or shot on sight by these SPDC troops. Hill fields and irrigated flat fields which were planted with paddy in June have all been abandoned. The establishment of new SPDC camps thus far at Twee Mi Kyo, Baw Kaw Plaw and Si Day make it clear that the troops will not be withdrawing soon, forcing the villagers to abandon hope of being able to harvest these fields later this year. Even if they were able to covertly return to fields not directly overlooked by the Army, most of the pathways and the fields themselves have probably already been landmined by MOC #10 and MOC #15 to prevent any attempt at a covert harvest, because destroying the harvest is one of their main tactics in depopulating the hills. KHRG has not yet been able to obtain accurate figures on the number of people displaced by the ongoing SPDC operation in this area, but it is probably at least 1,500 or 2,000. Many have had to cross the Yunzalin to the hills east of the river, where they can attempt to monitor the SPDC's continued presence with the help of information from Karen National Liberation Army forces. By crossing the Yunzalin they have been separated from the hidden food supplies they keep in the forests near their villages and fields, so most have only whatever food, clothing and belongings they have been able to carry with them. Food sharing and other mutual support efforts will help many of them to survive, but living on the ground in leaf shelters without access to medical care raises the risk of death by illness, and the probable loss of their entire rice harvest for the year is likely to force many of them to attempt to flee to Thailand.

For further background see the following reports:

- *Forced labour, extortion and abuses in Papun district* (KHRG #2006-F7, July 2006)
- *New SPDC military moves force more villagers to flee* (KHRG #2006-B9, July 2006)
- *Offensive columns shell and burn villages, round up villagers in northern Papun and Toungoo districts* (KHRG #2006-B7, June 2006)
- *SPDC troops commence full offensive in Papun District* (KHRG #2006-B6, June 2006)
- *Villagers displaced as SPDC offensive expands into Papun district* (KHRG #2006-B4, May 2006)
- *Abuses in SPDC-controlled areas of Papun district* (KHRG #2006-F3, April 2006)
- *Attempted rapes and other abuses in northern Karen districts* (KHRG #2006-B2, March 2006)
- *SPDC road construction plans creating problems for civilians* (KHRG #2006-B1, January 2006)
- *Flight, Hunger and Survival: Repression and Displacement in the Villages of Papun and Nyaunglebin Districts* (October 2001).

Photos from Papun and all neighbouring districts are presented in **KHRG Photo Gallery: 2005** (April 2006) and **KHRG Photo Set 2005A** (May 2005). These and other reports are available on the KHRG web site at www.khrg.org.

Papun District



Scale: 1 cm to 7.5 km

Map by KHRG, Karen Human Rights Group

Karen State (Kawthoolei)



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