

ATTACKS ON KAREN REFUGEE CAMPS: 1998

An Independent Report by the Karen Human Rights Group
May 29, 1998 / KHRG #98-04

In March 1998, three Karen refugee camps in Thailand were attacked by heavily armed forces that crossed the border from Burma. Huay Kaloke camp was burned and almost completely destroyed, killing four refugees and wounding many more; 50 houses and a monastery were burned in Maw Ker camp, and 14 were wounded; and Beh Klaw camp was shelled, though the attackers were repelled. The attacks were carried out by the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA), backed by troops and support of the State Peace & Development Council (SPDC) military junta currently ruling Burma.

This report analyses the attacks and their results, and presents the refugees' own descriptions of their experiences during the attacks and their feelings afterwards. The report consists of two main parts: first, a summary of the attacks themselves and analysis of related issues, supported by quotes from refugees; and secondly, the full text of interviews with witnesses to the attacks.

The names of those interviewed have been changed and some details omitted where necessary to protect them. False names are shown in quotes. The names used for the refugee camps are those used most commonly by the refugees, though the Thai authorities use different names for them. The camp referred to here as Huay Kaloke is also known as Wangka; Beh Klaw is also known as Mae La; and Noh Po is also known as Ban Nu Po.

Abbreviations

SPDC	State Peace & Development Council, military junta ruling Burma
SLORC	State Law & Order Restoration Council, former name of the SPDC until Nov. 1997
KNU	Karen National Union, main Karen opposition group
KNLA	Karen National Liberation Army, army of the KNU
DKBA	Democratic Karen Buddhist Army, Karen group allied with SLORC/SPDC
KPA	Karen Peace Army, SPDC 'proxy army' set up in Dooplaya in 1997
Kaw Thoo Lei	The Karen homeland, also often used to mean KNU/KNLA/KNDO people
Nga pway	"Ringworm"; derogatory SLORC/SPDC name for Karen soldiers
Ko Per Baw	"Yellow Headbands", common name for the DKBA
Kyat	Burmese currency; US\$1=6 Kyat at official rate, 300 Kyat at current market rate
Baht	Thai currency; US\$1 = approximately 36 Baht at time of printing

Weapons Abbreviations

M16, AK47	Assault rifles commonly used by opposition forces, rarely by SPDC
AR	Smaller version of the M16, also commonly used by opposition forces
G3, G4	Standard SPDC Army assault rifles, very rarely used by opposition forces
M79	Shoulder-firing grenade launcher, looks like a sawed-off rifle with a wide mouth

RPG
2½-inch
different

Rocket-propelled grenade, shoulder-fired from a bazooka-sized weapon
Small mortar shell, also sometimes described as 60mm, though slightly

Table of Contents

Preface	1
Abbreviations	1
Weapons Abbreviations	1
Table of Contents	2
Background	3
1998 Attacks	4
Huay Kaloke	5
Beh Klaw	8
Maw Ker	9
Fears at Noh Po	11
SPDC Involvement	11
Thai Policy and Response	12
Current Status of the Camps	14
Index of Interviews	16
Interviews: Huay Kaloke	18
Maw Ker	
36	
Map	49

Background

Karen refugee camps in Thailand were first formed in 1984, when the Burmese Army changed its approach in Karen areas from attack-and-withdraw to attack-and-hold. Thousands of villagers found that they could no longer return to their villages without facing systematic human rights abuses by Burmese troops, and if there was no place for them in Karen-held territory then they had to flee to Thailand. Refugee camps were formed but Thai authorities insisted they remain unofficial, not recognising the Karen as refugees and not allowing United Nations agencies to be involved in the camps. A consortium of foreign Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) was formed to provide aid to the camps, but this aid was tightly restricted by the Thai Government to the bare minimum required for survival: rice, salt, fishpaste and basic clothing. This 'unofficial' approach in the camps allowed the refugees some freedom of movement in and out of the camps, so they could forage for food or find underpaid day labour to augment their diet. It provided them with no international protection, but the refugee camps were very peaceful places, run by the refugees themselves, and no protection appeared to be necessary. However, everything changed in 1995 after the formation of the DKBA.

The DKBA (Democratic Karen Buddhist Army) was formed in December 1994 by Buddhist monk U Thuzana, who had travelled Karen areas and refugee camps telling Karen people they should no longer support the Karen National Union (KNU). He attracted rank-and-file Karen soldiers, most of whom are Buddhist, who were sick of being undersupplied at the front line while defending Manerplaw, where KNU leaders lived reasonably well, and who were disgruntled at the lack of opportunity for the Buddhist majority under the strongly Christian KNU leadership. He also attracted villagers who were tired of the deadlocked political situation and the constant Four Cuts retaliatory abuses they had to face from SLORC. Though on the surface the formation of the DKBA was presented (particularly by SLORC) as a Buddhist-Christian split, it was not; most Buddhists remained with the KNU, while some Christians went to the DKBA (and there are still Christians in the DKBA today).

SLORC supported and supplied the DKBA from its formation, and immediately used the new Army to help them capture Manerplaw and Kawmoora, promising that in return for their help SLORC would withdraw its troops from Karen State and give power to the DKBA. Of course, the promises were never kept. Since then, almost all of the former KNLA soldiers have left, and now most DKBA soldiers are villagers who joined at one point or another because of the inducements offered, such as cash salaries provided by SLORC and freedom from SLORC forced labour for their families. The DKBA probably still numbers around 1-2,000 troops, but it no longer has any sense of political direction, the command structure is weak or nonexistent in most areas, and it has almost no support anymore from the civilian population, who are more disgruntled than ever with the KNU but now view the DKBA simply as an SPDC militia. The DKBA operates primarily as small local units attached to the local SPDC battalion. They collect money from villages and passenger cars on the roads, and they act as guides for SPDC patrols, helping to round up food, money and forced labourers for the SPDC soldiers and pointing out suspected KNU collaborators. In Pa'an District, the SLORC/SPDC has even put them in charge of supervising forced labour on construction of some roads.

Since its formation, the DKBA has viewed the refugee camps in Thailand as bastions of KNU support and has vowed to wipe them out and to force the refugees back into Burma, where they could then be used to support the DKBA. The SLORC encouraged this, because they had always wanted to wipe out the refugee camps in Thailand but couldn't risk ruining their relations with Thailand by flagrantly violating the border. The DKBA provided a good front for whatever

cross-border operations the SLORC wished to carry out. Despite the fact that the DKBA has always received all of its material support from SLORC/SPDC, the regime still claims it has no control over DKBA operations.

The first cross-border attacks came in February 1995, just after Manerplaw had fallen and thousands of new refugees had fled across the border into Thailand. The DKBA immediately started attacking Thailand, kidnapping or killing refugees and burning their houses in attempts to frighten them into returning to Burma. Refugees were ambushed and gunned down at Huay Heng, refugee leaders were kidnapped at Mae Kong Kha and Ber Lu Ko, and part of the new Mae Ra Mo Kloh refugee camp was burned. As 1995 continued the DKBA began targetting long-established refugee camps. In late April, Baw Noh and Kamaw Lay Ko camps were completely destroyed and had to be consolidated into other existing camps. As tension increased and other camps were threatened, refugees were moved and camps such as Gray Hta (Mae Salit) and Kler Ko were closed before they could be attacked. However, only a small minority of refugees returned to Burma; for most refugees, the attacks only strengthened their resolve not to return to live under soldiers who conduct such atrocities.

From 1995 to the present, there have been hundreds of incursions into Thailand by DKBA and SLORC/SPDC troops to conduct attacks. Most have been small-scale attacks by local DKBA units to loot Thai shops and villages, or to kidnap or kill KNU officials. In the process, even Thai villages have been attacked and many Thai civilians have been killed in armed robberies by cross-border attackers. The major attacks on refugee camps also continue to occur every year, usually between January and April. Some of these attacks have included over a hundred DKBA and SLORC troops, in some cases with clear evidence of SLORC support such as mortar barrages from SLORC Army positions across the border. In January 1997, Huay Kaloke and Huay Bone camps were attacked and almost completely destroyed, and attackers also assaulted but failed to destroy Beh Klaw camp. Huay Bone camp was subsequently closed and the refugees moved to Huay Kaloke and Beh Klaw, while Huay Kaloke was rebuilt on the same site. After each wave of major attacks, especially those in 1997, Thai Army leaders have said it will never be allowed to happen again. But every year it does. *[For details on past cross-border attacks see the following reports: “SLORC’s Northern Karen Offensive” (KHRG #95-10, 29/3/95), “New Attacks on Karen Refugee Camps” (KHRG #95-16, 5/5/95), “DKBA/SLORC Cross-Border Attacks” (KHRG #96-31, 1/8/96), “Attacks on Karen Refugee Camps” (KHRG #97-05, 18/3/97), and “A Question of Security” (Images Asia & Borderline Video, May 1998).]*

1998 Attacks

Thus far in 1998, three major refugee camp attacks have occurred: on the night of March 10-11 Huay Kaloke refugee camp was attacked and almost completely burned down, Beh Klaw camp was attacked for several days over the following week but not destroyed, and on the night of 22-23 March Maw Ker camp was attacked and 50 houses were burned down. All three attacks had civilian casualties. Subsequent to these attacks tensions in other camps also increased and there were fears of imminent attack, particularly in Noh Po camp.

Huay Kaloke

Huay Kaloke refugee camp is 3 kilometres from the Moei River, which forms the border with Burma. It is home to almost 9,000 Karen refugees. There is a paved road from the Thai village of Ban Wan Kaew, right on the border, to the main gate of the camp. This road then goes through the Thai village of Huay Kaloke, going around the camp to the south, and continues eastward to join with the main north-south highway 5 kilometres further east. On 10 March 1998 just before midnight, a jeep and several motorbikes drove into the refugee camp through the main gate on the west side of the camp. Thai soldiers supposed to guard the gate had left. The vehicles drove through the camp with their headlights off, dropped off some people and then left. Witnesses state that the jeep was full of soldiers on the way in and almost empty on the way out, while each motorbike had 3 people on the way in but only one or two people on the way out. Then at 12:30 a.m. another group of attackers were dropped off from trucks in a field on the opposite side of the camp. This side of the camp faces east, so if the trucks had come from Burma they had driven along the paved road all the way around the outside of the camp, then across the fields to arrive on the camp's east side.

“The soldiers arrived on the other bank of the stream but they did not start to shoot yet; they were lining up and they were setting up their mortar. When I saw them, we started to run and then they saw us and they fired their guns. They fired guns first and then shells of big weapons started to land. Then the soldiers separated themselves in two groups in front of my house. There were more than ten soldiers in each group. They started to burn the houses as soon as they entered the camp. I told my family, ‘Don’t take anything, we will run’. I ran with my wife and my child. My wife could not put her slippers on, nor could my mother-in-law. I couldn’t carry anything, not even my blankets. ... My mother was also wounded. She was wounded in the back by a shell. I think it was a shell from a mortar, a 2½ inch shell. They fired the mortar from near the mango tree. Now she is in the hospital but she can talk...”
- “Saw Lah Po” (M, 25) from Section 1 of Huay Kaloke camp, who saw the main attack force enter the camp (Interview #H2)

This main group of attackers entered Section 1 of the camp from the east, firing M79 grenades and rocket-propelled grenades ahead of them, firing assault rifles, and then setting fire to each house as they passed. Most refugees estimate that there were about 50 attackers, but they divided into at least two groups and it is hard to be exact. They marauded through the entire camp, burning 84% (about 1,300) of the houses and shooting up the entire camp before leaving. The houses are all built of bamboo with leaf or thatch roofing, and burn very quickly giving off extreme heat. Upon hearing the shots and explosions, most refugees attempted to flee. There are no bunkers in the camp, so most people tried to flee to the surrounding farmfields. In 1997 the attackers had come from the west side, so many refugees tried to flee eastward (away from the border), only to find that the main attack was coming from that direction, so people panicked and fled in all directions, trying to carry their children. Most had no time to save any of their belongings.

“We heard explosions from section one and section four, we were afraid and we ran. They fired big weapons and guns. ... When we ran into the field a shell landed in front of us and we ran quickly. We shouted, ‘Run, run!’ Some were shouting, some were running, some were crying, some were running but they had no sarong.” - “Naw Eh” (F, 38), Huay Kaloke camp (Interview #H3)

“I heard the explosions and I ran to the toilets [the school toilets, which are made of concrete]. They saw me and they fired their guns near the toilets. ... I stayed in the toilets until the fire went out. I didn’t see them because I dared not get out. I dared not lift my head up to look outside. They shot nonstop. The shell of a big weapon landed near me so I dared not lift up my head. But I heard them going and swearing in Burmese when they came and shot up the school’s library.” - “Pu K’Mwee Htoo” (M, 58), Huay Kaloke camp (Interview #H11)

“...my brother was in our house trying to gather our clothing, food and blankets. He was hurrying to follow us, but luckily while he was grabbing the bottle of my children’s milk powder in his frightened hands, he dropped the bottle. Just as he bent to pick up the bottle a 2½-inch shell exploded behind my house. That shell wounded 6 people behind my house.” - “Naw Eh Moo” (F, 24), Huay Kaloke camp (Interview #H1)

While fleeing, some people were fired on by the attackers and some came face to face with them. The attackers spoke Karen and the general consensus appears to be that most or all of the attackers in the camp were Karen from the DKBA, though there is some confusion about what they were wearing. Most witnesses say that most of them were wearing camouflage uniforms while others were in plain olive uniforms, and they were wearing a mixture of Burmese Army hats and military-style baseball caps. Witnesses consistently state that the attackers were clearly drugged or drunk; they were hyperaggressive, their eyes were glazed and they were unaware of exactly what they were doing. When they encountered refugees they stole personal bags, watches and jewellery, and usually asked “Are you Buddhist or Christian?” Most refugees answered “Buddhist” regardless of their religion; the attackers often then said they would kill all the Christians, or asked the Buddhists why they haven’t yet returned to Burma. Some attackers told refugees they would return 3 days later to kill all refugees who still remained in the camp.

“They told us, ‘Don’t run, we will shoot you and kill you all’. They asked, ‘Have you seen any Kaw Thoo Lei [KNLA soldiers]?’ One man said, ‘There is no Kaw Thoo Lei’. They touched me with their guns. They were M1 [carbine] and M16. I dared not move. ... They grabbed two bags and some watches from the people. ... Then they asked, ‘Are you Buddhist or Christian?’ We said, ‘We are Buddhists’, and they said, ‘If you are Christian, we will kill all of you. Tomorrow you must go back to Myaing Gyi Ngu [DKBA headquarters in Pa’an District]. If you don’t go back, in three days we will come back again.’ Then they went away and they started to fire their guns in the direction of the camp.” - “Saw Po Gyi” (M, 38), Huay Kaloke camp (Interview #H7)

“They looked like drunkards. They had taken the medicine. They looked like fools. When they take the medicine they don’t know anything and we are afraid that they will kill us. We dare not go near them. We are afraid of the DKBA and of the Burmese. The Burmese are friendly to the DKBA, but what they will do one day to the DKBA we don’t know.” - “Naw Eh” (F, 38), Huay Kaloke camp; DKBA attackers are usually on ‘myin say’, an amphetamine-type drug common in Burma and Thailand which makes people aggressive and stupid (Interview #H3)

At the beginning of the attack one group of attackers surrounded camp leader Naw Mary On’s house and stormed the house, grabbing a teenage girl and asking for the camp leader. However, just a few minutes earlier a young boy had shouted to Naw Mary that the camp was under attack and she had managed to flee out the back of her house. It is possible that the small attack group which had entered the camp first through the front gate had been assigned to capture or kill her.

36 refugees were wounded by bullets, shell fragments and burns (see list given by “Naw Eh Moo” in Interview #H1). A 36-year-old woman named Ma Pein (a.k.a. Daw Pein) was shot and then burned to death beside her house; she had 2 children and was pregnant with her third. A 7-year-old boy named Pa Lah Ghay was hit in the head by shrapnel and died on the way to hospital. His elder brother was also wounded and is still in hospital. One entire family tried to hide from the shooting in a concrete well behind their house, but the intense heat from the burning houses turned the well into an oven and they were all very severely burned by the time they got out. Their 15-year-old daughter Naw Thweh Ghay Say Paw died of her burns 3 days later. Several weeks later, her 17-year-old sister Naw Sheh Wah Paw also died in hospital of her burns.

“The first shell hurt a teacher and a boy. Then they shelled nonstop with M79 and 2½ inch. So many children were hurt by the shells. Girls and boys were wounded. They had bad injuries. A pregnant woman was shot and then burned to death in Section 2 behind camp leader Mary On’s house. Her daughter was hurt as well, by a shell fragment in her hip. Her daughter is only 9 years old. There were 4 members of a family who were terribly burned, and the youngest daughter died 3 days later. ... Another sleeping family was also injured [by shell fragments] - the mother was hit in her left breast. Her 9 year old daughter was hit in the left side of her head. Her 7 year old son was hit in his right shoulder and his left hand.” - “Naw Eh Moo” (F, 24), Karen human rights monitor living in Huay Kalohe camp (Interview #H1)

There was no resistance by Thai forces, who abandoned their checkpoints and withdrew from the camp well before the attack, just as they have done before almost every refugee camp attack since 1995. In fact, in this attack many refugees believe they recognised the vehicles which brought the attackers as Thai Army vehicles. The refugees fled to the camp monastery, which wasn’t burned, and the fields surrounding the camp. Between 2 and 3 a.m. the Thai soldiers reappeared and wandered through the field, telling the refugees to sit still and beating six people who could not understand Thai, including one 70-year-old woman whom a Thai soldier kicked in the back with his Army boots. Later the Thai soldiers ordered all the refugees to go back and stay in the ashes of the camp.

“I wanted to save my things, but the Thai soldiers wanted us to sit down in the fields. ... I decided to go back and went to ask whether we could go or not, but I didn’t get to ask anything because one Thai soldier kicked me, while one of his friends sat and looked at me. ... When the Thai soldier kicked me the first time I passed urine, and then when I turned around he beat me with his gun. That happened at 3 a.m. He told me to go back and sit with my friends. Some of my friends were kicked as well. ... The left side of my back swelled up. It was very painful on both sides when I coughed. ... There are no visible wounds but I’m still on medicine and it is still painful inside my body. ... First they only beat me, and then they beat some other people. They beat Maung N--- and A—’s mother. They also beat some women.” - “Saw Klaw Wah” (M, 47), Huay Kalohe camp (Interview #H14)

Three days after the attack Thai soldiers went around the fields and the Thai village, again ordering all the refugees to go back and stay in the ashes of the camp, telling them that if they didn’t obey then the Thai Army would burn the makeshift shelters they’d put up and push them back to Burma at gunpoint. The refugees were afraid to do so, because during the attack DKBA soldiers had told refugees that they would come back after 3 days and kill anyone who remained in the camp. That night a jeep once again entered and toured the camp, leading some refugees to believe that the Thai Army was bringing the SPDC or DKBA to inspect the results of their work.

Now most refugees have been living in tiny straw shelters on the ashes of the camp, sleeping on the ground for over 2 months already. The site is baking hot in the daytime, and the monsoon rains are already beginning. A large proportion of them still carry their most important belongings out of the camp every night to sleep in the fields or the adjacent Thai village.

“At night time we sleep here but we are afraid. The Thai soldiers don’t stay anywhere near where we are staying. We have to look out for ourselves, and if we see anything strange we have to get ready to run. We dare not stay here.” - “Saw Lah Po” (M, 25), Huay Kaloke camp (Interview #H2)

Beh Klaw

Beh Klaw (Mae La) refugee camp is fifty kilometres north of Huay Kaloke. Up to 1995 it housed about 5,000 Karen refugees, but when other camps were destroyed or closed many of them were ordered to move to Beh Klaw by Thai authorities. The latest population moved to Beh Klaw consisted of most of the 10,000 refugees at Sho Kloh, which was closed in February 1998 as part of the Thai plan to consolidate camps. By March 1998 Beh Klaw had a population of over 30,000 refugees, making it the largest refugee camp on the Burma/Thai border. In January 1997 the DKBA tried to attack Beh Klaw but were driven back by Karen camp security and Thai forces. This year, fears of an attack began when a small group of DKBA troops crossed the border on 15 February and tried to fire M79 grenades into the camp. The grenades fell short and the soldiers went back, but from then on refugees in the camp were extremely tense. In early March there were reports that they may be about to be attacked, and many people started leaving the camp every night to sleep in the forested hills to the east, on the other side of the main north-south highway. On 10 March there were reports that an SPDC or DKBA force had crossed into Thailand, were looking for ways to attack Beh Klaw and were laying landmines on Thai soil. This force entrenched itself in Thailand until 16 March. Most refugees in the camp began digging bunkers.

On the nights of March 11, 12, and 13, Thai soldiers based outside the camp and further south at the Maw Pa Thu turnoff fired some flares and mortar shells toward Burma, though witnesses claim the mortar shells were either blank or not aimed at Burmese or DKBA positions. On 14 March, the DKBA based at Maw Pa Thu fired 3 mortar shells at the Thai post at the Maw Pa Thu turnoff. Only 2 of the shells exploded. They also fired shells at the Thai village of Nya Mu Kloh, setting fire to some houses. The DKBA captured a cliff in Burma from the KNLA, putting the camp and the Thai positions in easy shelling range. On the morning of 15 March, these troops fired 8 mortar shells into an area southwest of Beh Klaw, hoping to drive out the Karen camp security force which was blocking the SPDC/DKBA force in Thailand from reaching the camp. At about noon, they fired seven 105 mm artillery shells at the camp itself. Three shells landed inside the camp, wounding Pa Kyot Klot, a middle-aged man.

By this time many more Thai troops had been moved into the area, and they began firing shells at the SPDC/DKBA position across the border. The Thai Army claimed to have killed many DKBA, but this is unlikely. Another Burmese force crossed into Thailand, kidnapped 5 Thai citizens from Nya Mu Kloh village and mined the area around the village. The villagers were later released, but 3 Thai soldiers were wounded when their vehicle hit a mine along the road near the village. More Thai troops were sent in, and armoured personnel carriers were patrolling the roads. At the same time, fighting was continuing on the Burma side of the border between KNLA and SPDC/DKBA forces. By 16 March, small groups of SPDC and DKBA troops were

still in Thailand trying to find ways to attack the camp, but they failed and eventually went back across the border. *[Information for this section of the report provided by Borderline Video/Karen Community Information Service.]*

Maw Ker

The night of the 22nd of March, a combined DKBA/SPDC force crossed the border and attacked Maw Ker refugee camp, 49 km. south of Mae Sot and home to about 8,400 Karen refugees. The attack force first positioned itself at the main Karen Buddhist monastery in the camp, Wah Lay monastery. One group remained at the monastery and fired 2½-inch mortars and M79 grenades into the camp while at least 2 other small groups of four to eight attackers headed into sections 6 and 7, firing small arms and setting houses alight. It is not known how many attackers stayed beside the monastery, but most of the refugees believe they were SPDC troops while the groups burning the houses were Karen DKBA troops. Several witnesses saw the Karen troops cursing the Burmese, shouting “Motherfuckers! We are in front of you, why are you shelling us?” The attackers burning the houses appeared quite disorganised, arguing with each other over whether or not to shoot and whether or not to burn the houses, and asking each other for lighters to start the fires. On encountering refugees, the attackers didn’t hurt them but usually asked “Where are the Muslims?” There is a sizable Muslim population in Maw Ker, but the attackers never reached that part of the camp. Some witnesses say that some of the attackers were young boys in uniform, and most of the refugees who encountered them say the attackers were confused and afraid. It appears they were too afraid to stay long in the camp, as they left within an hour having burned only 50 houses (45 in Section 6 and 5 in Section 7), the small Burman Buddhist monastery, and a community hall (the camp’s main Karen Buddhist monastery was not burned). No houses were burned in other sections of the camp, though some refugees were wounded in Sections 1 and 3.

“They came into the camp at half past one. They came on foot, by the path beside the monastery. First four soldiers came and they spoke Karen, they said, ‘Taw, taw, taw!’ [‘Go on, go on, go on!’ in Karen]. After that Burmese soldiers came also; they said, ‘Dteh! Dteh! Dteh!’ [‘Go on! Go on! Go on!’ in Burmese]. They shot at us with 79’s [M79 grenades] and 2½-inch [mortars]. They shot with heavy weapons and they fired small guns. ... An M79 shell landed near us. It didn’t hit me but my friend Kyaw Wah got injured. ... I ran back home and I called out to everyone, but I couldn’t call all the people and I ran into a bunker. When I reached the bunker, the soldiers were also arriving and they were burning the houses. They shot their guns and burned the houses at the same time. They shot for nearly one hour.”
- “Saw Kaser Doh” (M, 40+) from Maw Ker camp (Interview #M1)

“I was not sleeping when I heard the heavy weapon, I was breastfeeding my child. I went down to the ground and my husband told me, ‘Don’t run, they are firing big weapons and a lot of shells are landing’. I dared not stay so I took my child and I ran outside the house. My sarong was falling down so I told my husband, ‘Carry the baby’. ... A lot of bullets landed in front of me. I covered myself like this [with her hands] and when they started firing I was wounded in my hand.” - “Daw Sein” (F, 25) from Maw Ker camp; doctors later had to amputate one of her fingers (Interview #M3)

“Women and children were hiding in the bunkers. I saw the fire and the soldiers calling, ‘Go on, go on, go on!’ I heard one soldier who was holding a walkie-talkie. He said in Karen language, ‘Don’t fire the gun, don’t fire the gun’, but his friends fired. One soldier was

shouting in Burmese, ‘Nga lo ma tha!! We are in front of you, why are you firing the gun at us?’ [‘Nga lo ma tha’ is Burmese for ‘Motherfucker’.] ... When they burned the houses they were shivering. They were shaking, their legs were also shaking. Maybe they were afraid. When they heard the bombs they sat down on the ground. What were they afraid of? The KNU is not in the camp!’ - “U Than Myint” (M, 47) from Maw Ker camp (Interview #M9)

An estimated 291 refugees were left homeless. 14 refugees were injured, including 4 who were seriously wounded. One 7-day-old baby named Tha Tha had both of his legs broken, and his mother (Nha Ma Chan, age 25, Muslim) and father were also hit by shrapnel. Moo Rah Paw, a 2-year-old girl, was hit in the lower jaw by mortar shrapnel. “Daw Sein” (not her real name), 25, was shot in her hand while trying to carry her baby away from her house, and had to have a finger amputated. No one was killed. Fortunately, most of the refugees had already dug small bunkers behind their houses in fear of such attacks, so most people ran into their bunkers and sheltered there rather than trying to flee the camp. On seeing people in their bunkers, the attackers usually just asked them where the Muslims were or what village they were from, and then left them alone. Some people were even told to get back in their bunkers.

“My daughter was wounded last night ... Her name is Moo Rah Paw. She is two years and two months old. She got injured in her lower jaw by a big shell. ... There were casualties in section one and also in section three. In section one there were my daughter and two others who got just a few fragments. The other two are in the beds over there. One is injured on her hip and the other in her leg. The one who got injured in the leg is Than Than Yi, she is 28 years old - the pieces entered her thigh. ... The baby there is only seven days old, he got injured and his father, his mother and his whole family got injured. Now there is no one to take care of him so I help him. His mother is in very bad condition, the shell fragments penetrated her lungs, all over her back and in her buttocks.” - “Saw Say Po” (M, 30+) from Maw Ker camp; when interviewed he was in hospital by his daughter’s bedside (Interview #M4)

Thai soldiers supposed to protect the camp were nowhere to be seen, and had apparently withdrawn several hours prior to the attack. Karen refugees acting as camp sentries raised the alarm, but they are unarmed so they could do little more. Up until this attack, Maw Ker camp leaders had always had an arrangement with the DKBA unit across the border to prevent the camp being attacked. Refugees heard from contacts across the border that when the SPDC ordered this attack, the DKBA unit refused to carry it out so the SPDC had to bring in a special unit of DKBA based 100 kilometres to the north in Pa’an District, led by commander Maung Chit Thu. He is a well-known DKBA commander in Pa’an District, and was the main DKBA commander in the previous week’s attempted attack on Beh Klaw camp. Despite the fact that Thai soldiers provided no resistance to the attack, on their way to or from the camp the attackers captured 4 Thai soldiers and took them back to Burma. Thai Army sources later confirmed that these Thai soldiers were executed in Burma. This may have occurred in retaliation for the Thai Army’s part in preventing Beh Klaw camp from being destroyed the week before.

Fears at Noh Po

Noh Po refugee camp lies west of the Thai town of Umphang, about 200 km. south of Mae Sot. It was created in early 1997 to shelter new refugees fleeing the SLORC offensive and subsequent occupation of Doooplaya District. It currently has a population of approximately 10,000. The camp has not yet been attacked, but after attacks on the other camps tensions were very high. Villagers from just across the border had been told by SPDC troops that if the KNLA attacked the SPDC anywhere in the region, the SPDC would retaliate by destroying Noh Po camp. In the area around the camp in the week leading up to 27 March, Thai soldiers reported that SPDC troops were entering Thailand every day to look for weaknesses in the border defences; each time, the SPDC patrols would continue into Thailand until they were seen by Thai soldiers, then withdraw. The SPDC has ordered the DKBA out of the area across the border from Noh Po, replacing them with a new 'proxy army', the Karen Peace Army (KPA), which the SPDC created in 1997 under the command of defected KNLA officer Thu Mu Heh. Therefore, if an attack comes it will have to be conducted by SPDC troops, KPA, or possibly a DKBA group brought in from elsewhere, as was the case in the attack on Maw Ker camp.

Thai soldiers in the area have admitted that they cannot effectively defend Noh Po camp, yet the refugees continue to be held in this fenced camp like prisoners, with no permission to leave or reenter. Thai authorities told the refugees in the camp to dig bunkers, and they have done so. Since the end of March, tensions have lessened somewhat as no attack has been forthcoming. However, the camp could still be attacked at any time, and it is important to note that many of the past camp attacks have come just when tensions are at their lowest and people are not expecting them.

SPDC Involvement

In all of the attacks documented in this report, refugees claim that there were SPDC troops among the attack force. In Huay Kaloke people claim to have encountered Burmese troops among those who were shooting up the camp; in Maw Ker they claim that the troops hiding behind the monastery were Burmese; at Beh Klaw, Karen camp security people claim to have encountered SPDC troops inside Thailand; and at Noh Po, Thai soldiers have reported encounters with SPDC units entering Thailand on a daily basis to seek a way to attack Noh Po camp. In spite of this, the fact remains that when the camp attacks have occurred, the majority of the attackers have been Karen DKBA troops. Given the availability of DKBA troops and the SPDC's control over them, it would be foolish for the SPDC to arrange the attacks in any other way.

"I saw all of them. About twenty or thirty came. I saw Burmese soldiers and DKBA, I saw all of them. I don't know what they were wearing, it looked like Burmese soldiers' uniforms. I dared not look anymore, I ran." - "Saw Tha Muh" (M, 20+), Maw Ker camp (Interview #M5)

"There were also some plain green uniforms. I saw badges on their uniforms, we call it the Bandoola badge [the standard red-and-white Burmese Army badge]. But I couldn't see their [Battalion] numbers, because when they saw me they said to me, 'I will kill you'. They wore baseball-style caps and some wore Burmese military hats. ... Some had a yellow scarf around their necks. The others didn't have yellow scarves because they were not DKBA. I could recognise that. I'm sure that they were Burmese soldiers. The Burmese were wearing Burmese military hats." - "Saw Hsah Hay Mu" (M, 33), Huay Kaloke camp (Interview #H9)

Regardless of whether or not its troops entered the camps, the SPDC has definitely been involved in organising and supporting these attacks. The DKBA is totally reliant on the SPDC for all of its supplies, weapons and ammunition¹, and freedom to move within Burma. There is no way they could carry out such attacks without at least tacit SPDC support. Furthermore, DKBA units along the border exist as small local groups attached to SPDC Battalions and under the direct control of those Battalions. They are even used to loot chickens from Karen villages, as messengers, and to round up and supervise forced labour on SPDC road projects. They have no opportunity to assemble for large-scale cross-border attacks unless this can be arranged by the SPDC. The SPDC has never trusted the DKBA; this is why it has replaced them with the KPA in most of Dooplaya District, and why DKBA soldiers regularly complain that the SPDC keeps them on tight ammunition rations of a few bullets each. There is no way the SPDC would allow 100 or more DKBA troops to assemble for operations which are not under its control. Nor does the DKBA have a strong enough command structure to prepare such an operation. When DKBA units do act on their own, it is in groups of 4 or 5, demanding petty extortion from local villages or crossing into Thailand to loot a Thai shop. In contrast, the attacks on refugee camps of this year and previous years have involved DKBA troops being transported several hundred kilometres through SPDC territory by truck, mortar barrages on Thailand from SPDC-held positions, and other similar support measures which require time and skill to organise effectively, as any experienced Army officer can testify. When SPDC leaders claim they have no involvement in the attacks and no control over the DKBA, this is beyond belief. When leaders of the Thai Government and the Thai Army pretend to believe it, they are most likely doing so to protect their close relationship with the SPDC and their economic interests in Burma.

Thai Policy and Response

On Sunday March 15th, Thai troops at Maw Ker camp issued an order that all refugees must be inside the camp by 4 p.m. instead of the previous curfew of 6 p.m. Maung Nyat Thein, a Karen refugee aged 31 with a wife and one child, didn't know and returned about 6 p.m. For this violation he was grabbed by Thai troops at the camp, tied up at the checkpoint, interrogated and tortured. He died of beatings during the night. Unfortunately, this is not an isolated incident. Over the past 2 years there have been many cases of beatings and torture of refugees by the Thai troops who are supposed to 'protect' them; these troops have also looted refugees' houses, regularly extorted money out of them, used them as forced labour servants, and attempted to rape them. All of these acts are carried out with impunity because they fit into the current Thai policy of 'encouraging' refugees to return to Burma by making their lives miserable. It has been called 'humane deterrence' but there is nothing humane about it. The refugees are forced to fence themselves in, then prohibited from doing anything to augment their basic food supply, which the Thai Army sometimes blocks from arriving at the camp. Refugees in some new camps have been forbidden from building houses and have been living under plastic sheets for over a year, also forbidden to build schools. Camps are consolidated into larger and larger camps because Thai authorities know that with every move, some refugees disappear back into Burma or into the illegal labour market, where they can then be arrested and deported. The refugees at Huay Kaloke have now been living on the ground among the ashes of their camp for over 2 months, in the blazing heat and now in the rain, not because there is nowhere to move them but because the Thai authorities hope that this will 'encourage' them to return to Burma.

¹ Most DKBA soldiers carry AK47 and M16 rifles, which are typical KNLA weapons, rather than Burmese Army G3 or G4; SPDC supplies them with these from stockpiles captured from the KNLA or from other international arms sources. On special missions even SPDC soldiers sometimes carry AK47's and other non-issue weapons.

“We are afraid and we go and sleep outside [the camp] every night. We are afraid of Thais, Burmese, and DKBA; everybody. ... The Thai soldiers said, ‘Don’t stay here. Gawlawwa [white foreigners] won’t look after you. Go back to Burma.’ We are afraid. The Thai soldier who talked to us was the one who stays at the checkpoint. He told us, ‘I told you to go back to Burma and you haven’t gone. Why do you trust the Gawlawwa? We are bigger than the Gawlawwa. If we block the road then the Gawlawwa’s rice won’t be able to come. If we send you, you must go back. You have a country. Why don’t you go back?’” - “Naw Eh” (F, 38), Huay Kaloke camp (Interview #H3)

To further encourage the refugees to return, the Thai Army has also been complicit in almost every major refugee camp attack. Usually this complicity took the form of withdrawing from the camps several hours before they were to be attacked, and in some cases (such as Baw Noh camp in 1995) deliberately disarming the Karen camp security force before the attack occurred. Only the refugees themselves make any effort to protect their camps, and their security forces are often armed with nothing more than slingshots. In this year’s attack on Huay Kaloke, some refugees claim that the Thai Army even helped to transport the attackers to the camp, and that they brought some of them back to the camp 3 days later to inspect the result. Whether this is true or not, they certainly did nothing to prevent the attack, and their brutality to the refugees sheltering in the fields afterwards, beating several of them and kicking a 70-year-old woman, is inexcusable.

“...they didn’t do anything. Sometimes they provide security but not regularly. That night we had only villagers as sentries and they were holding nothing but slingshots, so they dared not shoot. From looking at their behaviour, I think the Thai, the Burmese and the DKBA have joined hands and are working together.” - “Saw Eh Kler” (M, 23), Maw Ker camp, talking about Thai security at Maw Ker (Interview #M12)

“I wanted to walk quickly but I couldn’t. I fell down and after I stood up a Thai soldier talked to me in Thai. I didn’t understand and the Thai soldier kicked my back once and I fell down to the ground. It was very painful and I was crying, and my stomach was in pain. I cried in the dark.” - “Pi Ber Tha” (F, 70), Huay Kaloke camp, describing what happened after she fled the burning camp into the surrounding fields (Interview #H13)

In Maw Ker there was also no attempt to defend the camp, yet at Beh Klaw and Noh Po the Thai Army actually seemed sincere about preventing the attacks. There are several possible reasons for this. Even before the attacks Thai authorities had made clear that both Huay Kaloke and Maw Ker camps were to be closed and moved at some point in the near future, but they may have feared difficulties from the refugees; in February, Karen refugees further north in Mae Sariang had refused to be moved during a camp consolidation and had given the Thai Army a great deal of trouble and embarrassment. Thai authorities may have feared similar problems from the Huay Kaloke refugees, who had already held demonstration marches in 1997 against mistreatment by the Thai Army. In contrast, Beh Klaw and Noh Po are supposed to be maintained, and the Thai authorities had hoped to move Huay Kaloke and Maw Ker to these locations. It was clearly not in the interest of the Thai authorities to have these two camps destroyed. In addition, after Huay Kaloke was destroyed there was a great deal of international pressure on the Thai Government and Army to protect Beh Klaw. It is no secret that the Thai Army and the new Chuan Leekpai government do not get along, and the Army leadership may have felt that if it failed to protect Beh Klaw the Government could use this as an excuse for a shakeup within the Army; Prime Minister Chuan Leekpai had already made clear his intention of reigning in the Army by making himself Thailand’s first ever civilian defense minister.

“We can’t trust in Thai soldiers. They do not dare to shoot. They will never shoot, even when their duty is to shoot.” - Thai Karen villager near Noh Po refugee camp, discussing whether he believes the Thai Army will defend the border (full interview not in this report)

In the rainy season of 1997, a Thai military helicopter patrolling the border near Maw Ker crashed in Burma, apparently after being shot down by SLORC troops. SLORC refused the Thai request to send a team to search for the wreckage until weeks later, and then restricted them to only searching a certain area. No wreckage was found, but no international incident was made of it. Similarly, Thai relations with the SPDC do not seem to have suffered at all over the refugee camp attacks. Publicly, the Thai Government and Army say they accept the SPDC’s claim to having no control over the DKBA, though at the same time the Government has asked the SPDC to step in and restrain the DKBA. There seems to be much more interest among the leadership of the Thai Government and Army in keeping good economic relations with the SPDC than there is in protecting Thai sovereignty and the lives of Thai citizens. On March 23rd, the day after Maw Ker was attacked and 4 Thai soldiers were taken back to Burma to be executed, the Commander in Chief of the Thai Army, Gen. Chettha Thanajaro, was in Rangoon. He was opening the Nikko Royal Lake Hotel, a luxury hotel built entirely with US\$38 million of Thai money.

“Now we have to be afraid of the SPDC Army and the Thai Army as well. The Thai soldiers are not kind to us, because the Thai Government wants to drive us back to forced labour, portering and hunger in Burma. I believe we need a safer place for refugees. ... Then we need a UN Army to provide security for us because we cannot trust the Thais. I have many Thai soldier friends, and they’ve told me that they really won’t protect us. They don’t want to kill the SPDC Army. They are not brave in battle, they are only cruel to refugee people. I have been in Thailand for 14 years, and I know very well about the Thai spirit. They love only money. If we can pay money to them then they pretend to care for us, but when they finish spending the money they no longer pretend to care. Their faces and mouths show their hearts.” - “Naw Eh Moo” (F, 24), Huay Kaloke camp (Interview #H1)

Current Status of the Camps

For some time after the attacks, the atmosphere in all of the camps remained extremely tense. Now with the initial onset of the rains tensions have relaxed somewhat, although Thai soldiers based at Huay Kaloke have told refugees there to dig bunkers in case of further attack and most refugees have done so. Most refugees in Beh Klaw, Maw Ker and Noh Po have also made bunkers near their houses, and many refugees in Huay Kaloke still leave the camp every night at sundown to sleep in the nearby Thai village. The main concern in the minds of the refugees now, particularly in Huay Kaloke, is wondering what is to happen next to their camps.

In Maw Ker, refugees whose houses were destroyed have been trying to rebuild them. After the attack there was further discussion about moving the camp, but this appears to have been postponed for the time being. At Huay Kaloke it was made clear shortly after the attack that the camp would be moved but the Thai authorities have been acting extremely slowly, possibly in the hope that some refugees would get tired of living in tiny shelters among the ashes and return to Burma. As a result, they have now been living in those shelters for over 2 months. Entire families are crammed into lean-to’s with roofs of straw or plastic sheeting and nothing but sleeping mats for a floor. This was unbearable enough under the sun of the hot season, but now

that the rains have arrived it is completely unlivable. Under international pressure, the Thai authorities have finally located a new site for the Huay Kaloke refugees, but their move there is currently being delayed by policy disagreements between different departments of the Thai Government. As a result, at the time of printing it appears that the Huay Kaloke refugees may be ‘temporarily’ moved to Beh Klaw in the first half of June until the Thai authorities can make a final decision on the new site. Moving and building houses in rainy season, which will continue until October, would be very difficult for the refugees and could lead to problems of illness. There is also disagreement among the NGOs who care for the refugees over the wisdom of moving the refugees to the new site, which is over 60 kilometres from the Burma border. Some argue that this is the best way to prevent further attacks, while others argue that it would be impossible for new refugees to make it there without being arrested and deported on the way, and that the Thai authorities would seal off the camp and make it like an internment camp in order to prevent the refugees from ‘escaping’ into central Thailand. However, it is generally agreed that some sort of new site is urgently required for the Huay Kaloke refugees.

“I dare not go back to Burma. I will say no, and I won’t go to Beh Klaw. We need and want to stay in a new place where our lives will be safe and where we will also have good security.”
- “Saw Eh Doh Htoo” (M, 30), Huay Kaloke camp (Interview #H10)

Since the latest attacks, it appears that the Thai Government is finally prepared to allow the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) a role in the camps, though it is unclear what that role will be and the UNHCR has thus far been very secretive about its negotiations with the Thai authorities. It appears that the NGOs will continue to provide the relief aid for the refugees, while UNHCR may focus on protection and screening of refugees. Many observers are worried about the result of this, because UNHCR’s past involvement in the region indicates that they favour early repatriation, voluntary or otherwise, followed by negotiating a UNHCR presence in the country of origin, where UNHCR officials believe they can prevent or at least minimise the human rights abuses against returning refugees. This has been their behaviour in dealing with refugees from Burma in Bangladesh, as well as with the recent influx of Cambodian refugees to Thailand. In the latter case, they have also shown that where they ‘screen’ refugees they tend to screen the vast majority ‘out’ so that they can be repatriated; in other words, they declare that the vast majority of refugee claimants have no valid reason to fear persecution at home. If the UNHCR is indeed allowed the role of providing protection and screening in the camps, it will be very important for the international community to watch their activities closely and critically in order to ensure the safety of the refugees; because as many of them state clearly in this report, it is not safe for them to return to Burma yet.

“[I have been here] not even one year. ... We couldn’t stay in our village, because we were afraid of Burmese soldiers and sometimes of DKBA too. I had to go portering and sometimes I had to go as forced labour. ... I had to build the road all the time. We had to build the road very far from my village in Pa’an district, in Zar Tha Bhin. ... The DKBA forced us to work for the Burmese. The Burmese commanded the DKBA to do it, and then the DKBA forced us to work. When we stay in our village the Burmese and the DKBA force us to work. Now when we stay in the camp, they burn my house. Will our lives always be like this? I don’t know.” - “U Than Myint” (M, 47), Maw Ker camp (Interview #M9)

Index of Interviews

Note: All names of those interviewed have been changed.

<u>#</u>	<u>Pg.</u>	<u>Name</u>	<u>Sex</u>	<u>Age</u>	<u>Camp / Section</u>	<u>Subject</u>
H1	18	"Naw Eh Moo"	F	24	Huay Kaloke Section 4	Description of attack, injuries and deaths, list of wounded and those beaten by Thais, fleeing with her children, opinions on Thais
H2	20	"Saw Lah Po"	M	25	Huay Kaloke Section 1	Witnessed entry into camp of main attack force, shot at and ran, burning of houses, mother wounded by a shell
H3	21	"Naw Eh"	F	38	Huay Kaloke Section 7	Witnessed vehicles entering camp before attack, fleeing the shelling, DKBA on drugs, return of vehicles 3 days later, threats by Thai soldiers, opinions on Thai complicity, reasons for fleeing Burma
H4	24	"Saw Lah"	M	52	Huay Kaloke Section 1	Burning of their house, encounter with DKBA soldiers who threatened to kill them then robbed them, attackers threatening other refugees
		"Naw Wah"	F	43	Huay Kaloke Section 1	
H5	26	"Naw Eh Say"	F	30	Huay Kaloke Section 1	Fleeing the attack, caught and threatened at gunpoint by DKBA
H6	26	"Saw Ghay Htoo"	M	30	Huay Kaloke Section 11	Suspicious activity by Thais, avoiding shells, DKBA soldier tried to kill him, Burmese together with DKBA
H7	28	"Saw Po Gyi"	M	38	Huay Kaloke Section 11	Shelling of the camp, caught and threatened by DKBA soldiers
H8	29	"Naw K'Paw Wah"	F	45	Huay Kaloke Section 4	Fleeing with her children, trapped when returned to save belongings, burning of houses, trying to reach children, fired on, wounded by M79 grenade
H9	30	"Saw Hsah Hay Mu"	M	33	Huay Kaloke Section 1	Medic on duty night of the attack, wife hit by a bullet, fleeing with his wounded wife, surrounded and threatened by attackers, saw Burmese soldiers
H10	32	"Saw Eh Doh Htoo"	M	30	Huay Kaloke Section 1	Witnessed vehicles entering the camp, shot at by attackers, friend wounded
H11	32	"Pu K'Mwee Htoo"	M	58	Huay Kaloke Section 4	Witnessed vehicles entering the camp, fled shelling into school toilets, fired on while hiding there
H12	33	"Saw Tamla"	M	50	Huay Kaloke Section 5	Fleeing into the fields, returned to save belongings, stopped and beaten by Thai soldiers
H13	34	"Pi Ber Tha"	F	70	Huay Kaloke Section 6	Fled to the fields, witnessed others beaten by Thai soldiers, then kicked by Thai soldiers herself, still in pain days later

<u>#</u>	<u>Pg.</u>	<u>Name</u>	<u>Sex</u>	<u>Age</u>	<u>Camp / Section</u>	<u>Subject</u>
H14	34	"Saw Klaw Wah"	M	47	Huay Kaloke	Fleeing carrying youngest son, kicked and beaten with a gun by Thai soldiers in the fields, still suffering internal pain
H15	35	"Saw Lay Htoo"	M	50	Huay Kaloke Section 5	Fled to the fields, slapped and punched by Thai soldiers for not understanding Thai even though he is sick with TB
M1	36	"Saw Kaser Doh"	M	40+	Maw Ker Section 6	Saw attackers arrive, description of attack, shelling and burning of houses, Burmese soldiers, attackers asking for Muslims, Thai response to attack
M2	37	"Saw Say Muh" "Naw Paw Thu"	M F	30+ 30+	Maw Ker Section 6 Maw Ker Section 6	Shelling of the camp, confusion of soldiers, encounter with soldiers, burning of their house, Thai response to attack
M3	38	"Daw Sein"	F	25	Maw Ker	Shot in the hand while trying to flee with her baby, finger later amputated, description of other wounded, burning of houses and monastery, Burmese troops
M4	39	"Saw Say Po"	M	30+	Maw Ker Section 1	2-year-old daughter wounded by shell, description of other wounded
M5	40	"Saw Tha Muh"	M	20+	Maw Ker Section 6	Wounded in thigh by a shell, saw Burmese and DKBA troops
M6	41	"Saw Eh K'Lu"	M	24	Maw Ker Section 6	Fleeing to bunker, saw his house burned, heard DKBA commanded by Mg. Chit Thu
M7	41	"Naw Ghay Hser"	F	24	Maw Ker Section 7	Hiding in bunker, then fleeing the fire, attackers asking for Muslims
M8	42	"Pi Lah Say"	F	55	Maw Ker Section 7	Fleeing to bunker, hurt herself running, opinions on DKBA
M9	43	"U Than Myint"	M	47	Maw Ker Section 6	Shelling of the camp, confusion of soldiers, encounter with the attackers, attackers asking for Muslims, late arrival and shelling by Thais, subsequent Thai security meeting, reasons for leaving Burma
M10	45	"Pu Lay Ko"	M	59	Maw Ker Section 6	Fleeing to bunker with his daughters, saw his house burned, tried to save belongings but pulled back by daughters
M11	46	"Saw Bway"	M	25	Maw Ker Section 6	Shelling and burning of houses and monastery, drunken and frightened appearance of soldiers
M12	47	"Saw Eh Kler"	M	23	Maw Ker Section 1	Fleeing the explosions, description by witness to burning, late arrival of Thai Army, lack of Thai security, subsequent Thai security meeting, shooting down of Thai helicopter in 1997

Huay Kaloke Interviews

#H1.

NAME: "Naw Eh Moo"

SEX: F

AGE: 24

Sgaw Karen Christian teacher

FAMILY: Married, 3 children

ADDRESS: Huay Kaloke refugee camp

INTERVIEWED: 19/3/98

[The following personal notes on the situation in Huay Kaloke were written in English a week after the attack on the camp, by a human rights monitor who has lived there for over 10 years. The English has been very slightly corrected where necessary.]

19/3/98

The SPDC Army acted very wildly toward the sleeping children in the refugee camp. On the night of March 10, 1998 at 11:00 at night, the Thai soldiers allowed the SPDC Army to enter our Huay Kaloke refugee camp to kill us and burn us together with our possessions. At 12 midnight they [SPDC] started to shell with heavy weapons, M79 [grenades] and 2½ inch [mortars]. The first shell hurt a teacher and a boy. Then they shelled nonstop with M79 and 2½ inch. So many children were hurt by the shells. Girls and boys were wounded. They had bad injuries. A pregnant woman was shot and then burned to death in Section 2 behind camp leader Mary On's house. Her daughter was hurt as well, by a shell fragment in her hip. Her daughter is only 9 years old.

There were 4 members of a family who were terribly burned, and the youngest daughter died 3 days later. They were in Section 4 *[this family tried to avoid the shelling by hiding down a shallow cement well and pulling the lid overtop them, but they were all badly burned by the heat of the houses burning all around them]*. Another sleeping family was also injured *[by shell fragments]* - the mother was hit in her left breast. Her 9 year old daughter was hit in the left side of her head. Her 7 year old son was hit in his right shoulder and his left hand.

As for me, I have 3 children. My eldest son is 6, my second son is 5 and my youngest son is 2. At 12 midnight when I heard the sound of the mortars and saw the light *[of the fire]*, I carried my youngest boy and pulled along my eldest. My mother carried my second son. I had no idea where to run to, so I went under our house. My brother told us to run to the fields, but I didn't dare go because so many shells were falling in the field. Then I saw my friend, Teacher T---, and his parents pass by my house so I followed them. At that time my brother was in our house trying to gather our clothing, food and blankets. He was hurrying to follow us, but luckily while he was grabbing the bottle of my children's milk powder in his frightened hands, he dropped the bottle. Just as he bent to pick up the bottle a 2½-inch shell exploded behind my house. That shell wounded 6 people behind my house. I was about 5 minutes away from my house by then. My brother wasn't too close to the shell, but he fell on his back. He felt numbness in his body, and he also felt all hot. He thought he'd been hurt by a piece of the shell, but when

he checked his body there were no injuries. When he heard the cries of the injured people he jumped down from the house and looked for them so he could carry them.

As for me and 2 of my children, we ran straight to the Thai village and stayed in the yard of the Thai monastery until dawn. When I arrived at the Thai village it was a quarter past 12. I looked back at my refugee camp and saw many shells exploding over my camp. At 1 a.m. on March 11th, my camp was burned down. So many houses were burned. At 1:15 a.m. I still hadn't seen my mother and my second son, so I was very sad. About 50 shells were exploding in our camp. My mother ran to the Karen monastery in our camp and then came to me in the Thai village by a different way. At 2 a.m. I met my mother, my second son and my brother.

Then I found out that there was one pregnant woman who was shot and wounded, she fell beside her house and then burned to death with her house. Her name was Ma Pein. A seven year old boy named Pa Lah Ghay was shot in his head and died in an NGO car on the way to the hospital. A 15 year old girl was burned and died later on March 14th. There were also 36 people who were injured:

<u>#</u>	<u>Name</u>	<u>Sex</u>	<u>Age</u>	<u>Section</u>	<u>Remarks</u>
1	U Gyi	M	60	2	\ married
2	Daw Pyu	F	58	2	/ Pa'O
3	Kyaw Swa	M	55	4	\ 4 family
4	Mu Kyu	F	40	4	all were very
5	Shae Wah Paw	F	18	4	/ Say Paw, 15, died
6	Naw Klih Hta	F	8	2	
7	Ah Nweh	F	24	1	\ same
8	Ah Sein	M	29	1	/ family
9	Tha Sein Win	M	62	1	
10	Ner Kah Mway	M	38	2	
11	Ghay Hser	M	24	4	
12	Saw Alexander	M	24	4	
13	Paw Nay	F	58	4	
14	Ma Leh	F	36	4	
15	Keh Loh	M	42	4	
16	Ther Nu Htoo	M	7	4	
17	Aye Win	F	29	4	
18	Neh Thait	M	40	1	
19	Chit San Maung	M	14	1	Suffered a broken
20	Paw Htoo	F	39	5	

21	Ah Bu		M	41	1	
22	Lah May Paw	F	13	2		\ same
23	Ma Su		F	35	2	/ family
24	Ma Khin Lay	F	39	2		\
25	Shwe Lain		M	50	2	same family
26	Mu Naw		F	54	2	/
27	Pa Lah Heh	M	9	2		
28	Char Lah Bu	F	15	1		
29	Naw Po		F	42	4	
30	Say Wah		F	75	4	
31	Bway Htoo	F	38	1		\ Same family; Naw
32	Naw Elizabeth	F	9	1		clever student, but
33	Lay Htoo		M	7	1	/ and now
34	Naw December	F	40	1		\ Same
35	Eh Tee Kaw	M	17	1		/ family
36	Lah Gyi		M	40	1	

[The injured listed as #3, 4, 5, and 20 were burn victims; most of the others were first wounded by shell fragments and bullets, then many of them were subsequently burned.]

On March 11th between 2 a.m. and 3 a.m. the Thai soldiers beat 6 people in the field near the camp:

<u>#</u>	<u>Name</u>	<u>Sex</u>	<u>Age</u>	<u>Section</u>	<u>Remarks</u>
1	T---	M	48	5	Kicked
2	P---	M	50	5	Punched in the
3	P---	M	50	5	Punched in the
4	M---	M	40	6	Slapped in the
5	A---	F	70	6	Booted in her
6	T---	M	40	5	Beaten on the

The Thai soldiers didn't say anything to them, just beat them and told them to sit in the field.

My feeling: Now we have to be afraid of the SPDC Army and the Thai Army as well. The Thai soldiers are not kind to us, because the Thai Government wants to drive us back to forced labour, portering and hunger in Burma. I believe we need a safer place for

refugees. We need a place between Mae Ramat and Tak, near Thai Karen villages *[in the hills east of Huay Kaloke further inside Thailand; these hills are fairly sparsely populated by small Karen villages]*. It is a big land filled with plenty of water and bamboo. Then we need a UN Army to provide security for us because we cannot trust the Thais. I have many Thai soldier friends, and they've told me that they really won't protect us. They don't want to kill the SPDC Army. They are not brave in battle, they are only cruel to refugee people. I have been in Thailand for 14 years, and I know very well about the Thai spirit. They love only money. If we can pay money to them then they pretend to care for us, but when they finish spending the money they no longer pretend to care. Their faces and mouths show their hearts.

#H2.

NAME: "Saw Lah Po" **SEX:** M **AGE:** 25

Sgaw Karen Christian

FAMILY: Married, 1 child aged 2½ months

INTERVIEWED: 15/3/98

ADDRESS: Wangka village, Myawaddy township; now in Huay Kaloke refugee camp

[“Saw Lah Po”’s house is in Section 1, right on the eastern edge of the camp where the main attack force entered. This side of the camp faces Thailand, not Burma; the attackers were brought by truck all the way around the camp to the Thai side to launch their attack.]

Q: What happened that night?

A: It was March 10th at 12:30 *[at night; actually March 11th]* when they came into the camp. We heard the noise of a car but we could not see exactly. First I saw dogs barking. Then the soldiers arrived on the other bank of the stream but they didn't start to shoot yet; they were lining up and they were setting up their mortar. When I saw them, we started to run and then they saw us and they fired their guns. They fired guns first and then shells of big weapons started to land. Then the soldiers separated themselves into two groups in front of my house. There were more than ten soldiers in each group. They started to burn the houses as soon as they entered the camp. I told my family, “Don't take anything, we will run!” I ran with my wife and my child. My wife couldn't put her slippers on *[she didn't have time]* and neither could my mother-in-law. I couldn't carry anything, not even my blankets. They fired a lot with guns and then they fired big weapons. A shell landed near the hospital just in front of us, so we turned left. We ran into the streambed and we stayed there. We dared not come back so we stayed until the shooting stopped. Then we came back.

Q: Do you think they were DKBA?

A: We dared not look. We ran so we don't know, but I think the Burmese and the DKBA were mixed together.

Q: Did you see Thai soldiers?

A: This time we didn't see them, they didn't come here. That night they didn't come to our side of the camp.

Q: Did you see anyone killed or injured?

A: In section two one pregnant woman was hit by a shell so she couldn't move, and then she burned to death in the fire. Her name was Ma Pein, we called her Daw Pein, she lived in section two. She was over 30 years old. She had one child. Now the child stays with his father. She was dead but her husband didn't know if she was dead or alive. The fire burned her so badly he couldn't recognise her, but when he saw her sarong he knew that it was his wife. In section 2, two people died - the other was a child, he was wounded in the head. He died in the hospital, so we didn't see. His name was Pa Lah Ghay. I don't know exactly how old he was, maybe three or four years old [*sic: he was 7, and he died en route to hospital*].

My mother was also wounded. She was wounded in the back by a shell. It was in section 2. I think it was not a 79 [*M79 grenade*] that hit her, it was a shell from a mortar, a 2½ inch shell. They fired the mortar from near the mango tree. Now she is in the hospital but she can talk, she is not in a coma. She won't stay too long in the hospital. She will come back and stay here. My mother's name is Paw Nay. She is in her fifties.

Q: Where do you live now?

A: Now I live in the field [*the open field in the middle of the camp*] because the camp leaders told us to live in the field. At night time we sleep here but we are afraid. The Thai soldiers don't stay anywhere near where we are staying. We have to look out for ourselves, and if we see anything strange we have to get ready to run. We dare not stay here.

Q: If the Thai soldiers say that you have to move to Beh Klaw or to Burma what will you do?

A: If I must go to Burma I won't go, I dare not go. I also dare not go to Beh Klaw now, the situation there is not good.

#H3.

NAME: "Naw Eh"
Sgaw Karen Buddhist
FAMILY: Married, 3 children
INTERVIEWED: 15/3/98
ADDRESS: Kyet Paun village, Hlaing Bwe township, Pa'an district; now in Huay Kalo

[*"Naw Eh"'s house is in Section 7, beside the main gate which faces west toward Burma. The initial 'reconnaissance' group entered the camp past her house, while the main force attacked from the opposite side of the camp. Her house was in one of the few parts of the camp which were not burned.*]

Q: When and how did they come to the camp?

A: First on March 10th at ten or eleven o'clock, a Thai soldier came into the camp with a motorcycle. He wore civilian clothes with military trousers. He went to see the section leader, whose name is Pyay Kyaw. Then he went into the camp and after he came back he stopped and told us, "Stop weaving your roof because it is too dark, go to sleep." *[They were in their house making leaf shingles to repair their roof.]* Then I went to sleep with my daughter, and after a while a truck went past, between some motorcycles. There were three motorcycles in front of the truck and four behind. The car looked like a military car but it looked like an old one. It was green with stripes - you could see it because it was full moon. It was very big, it looked like a military truck. It could contain 20 people, and it was full of soldiers. They were all wearing shirts with two pockets, striped *[striped camouflage]* uniforms and they had guns. They came from the main road to Wangka *[the border]*, from the direction of the two Thai gates. They had to pass through the main gate. After that this road goes to all the sections, it goes to Section One, Section Two, sections 4, 6, and 8...

When I saw the truck I couldn't sleep, I was afraid that maybe it was DKBA or Burmese soldiers. The Thai had told the section leader that the situation was not so good, and when I went to my friend's house he'd also told me that the situation was not so good. The truck stayed in the camp about half an hour, and after I'd been asleep for just a moment it came back. Now there was only one person on each motorcycle and three people in the cab of the truck. I didn't see the others. When they came there were no lights on the truck but the motorcycles had their lights on, and there were three soldiers on each motorcycle. When they came back there was one person on each motorcycle and only the first motorcycle had its lights on. Also, they were noisy when they came but when they went back they were silent *[she demonstrated that on their way into the camp they were revving their engines, but on the way back they were idling and going slowly]*. A few minutes after they came back, the electric lights at the Thai checkpoint turned off, and after that the shooting started.

After the Thai soldiers *[on the motorcycles; she believes that they were Thai]* had been away for a while we heard the gunshots and we fled. They fired mortars and guns, all together. I couldn't do anything, I just called my daughter and told her, "Run, run, where is your father?" We couldn't do anything, I was with my daughter but my husband was on security duty that night. They have to guard, ten persons each night *[refugees have their own camp security patrols]*.

We heard explosions from section one and section four, we were afraid and we ran. They fired big weapons and guns. I heard the sound of heavy weapons over there and over there *[pointing all around]*. They fired shells across our section and they landed in the beanfield. Maybe some landed in the camp, I don't know. We were afraid. When we ran into the field a shell landed in front of us and we ran quickly. We shouted, "Run, run!" Some were shouting, some were running, some were crying, some were running but they had no sarong. We ran to the school in Section 7 and continued on to Thai Huay Kaloke *[the Thai village beside the camp]*. I fled to the Thai village and my legs were shaking.

After their guns fired for a while my husband came back home carrying his rice, he put it down on the ground and ran without it to the Thai village. When he arrived in the Thai village he said he didn't know if the shooters were Thai or Burmese. I don't know myself if they were Thai or Burmese soldiers. They were wearing striped *[camouflage]* uniforms and their hats looked like Burmese soldiers' hats.

When the camp was burning I stayed in the Thai village because there was no one going back so we dared not go back. The Burmese and the DKBA went back at 2 a.m. and we went back to the camp at 5 a.m. When the explosions stopped my husband and some people went back to the camp but I dared not go back. At five in the morning we came back home.

Q: Did you see the Thai soldiers when you ran?

A: Yes, I saw the Thai fire truck. Before the burning we didn't see the Thai soldiers in the camp, but after the burning they came in groups of ten. The other truck and the motorcycles did not come back after the soldiers had finished shooting.

Q: Do you think that when the truck first came the Thai soldiers were staying at the checkpoint?

A: I don't know, maybe they knew that the DKBA and the Burmese soldiers would come. When they were coming the Thai said to me, "The situation is not so good so don't weave your roof. It is the time to sleep, why don't you sleep?" Maybe they had an agreement with the DKBA and the Burmese soldiers. I dare not speak about that. We are afraid of the Thai soldiers.

Q: Do you think that this time the Burmese soldiers came with DKBA?

A: Yes, I think they were Burmese and DKBA. They said, "Within three days you all have to go back to Burma. If you don't go back we will come again and kill all the people". A woman who stays in Section 1 told me that. So that whole night we were afraid *[the third night after the attack]*. We were afraid, we were shaking and we thought that we would die, and that night the Thai soldiers said, "No one can go outside the camp to sleep. If you go outside the camp the Thai police will come and attack you and send you back to Burma". The Thai soldiers asked, "Why do you go to sleep outside the camp?" *[Many refugees wanted to spend the night in the fields outside the camp.]* But the *[refugee]* section leader said, "Those refugees who want to go sleep outside the camp can do so." We didn't know if the DKBA and the Burmese soldiers would come again. We were afraid of the DKBA but we were also afraid of the Thai soldiers, so we dared not go outside the camp to sleep. We fled over near the school and hid there. The mosquitoes bit us and the insects bit us, we slept like that and the cars came. Three cars came, the first had his lights on and the others had no lights. They looked like the car which came three days before. I don't know if they looked like Thai cars or Burmese cars because I have never seen a Thai car. But the car that came the first day and the cars that came three days after looked the same, and there were a lot of soldiers with big weapons. We thought maybe they had come to tell us to go back to Burma so we were ready to run, and we didn't know if they were Burmese or Thai soldiers. We were afraid.

There were all wearing striped uniforms. When I saw the cars I thought that we were all going to die. Maybe it was about midnight, I had my watch but I didn't look. We were shaking and I was together with my friends. My friends told me, "Don't say anything, we live in the Thai's country so the Thai will kill us."

Now we run every night. I don't know if they will come back, we are afraid and we go and sleep outside every night. We are afraid of Thais, Burmese, and DKBA; everybody. We are afraid and we have to run away and sleep outside. The Thai soldiers said, "Don't stay here. Gawlawaw [white foreigners] won't look after you. Go back to Burma." We are afraid. The Thai soldier who talked to us was the one who stays at the checkpoint. He told us, "I told you to go back to Burma and you haven't gone. Why do you trust the Gawlawaw? We are bigger than the Gawlawaw. If we block the road then the Gawlawaw's rice won't be able to come. If we send you, you must go back. You have a country. Why don't you go back? Why are you so happy to stay here?" We are not happy to stay here! We can't stay in Burma so we come and stay here. If we had our country why would we come and stay in their country? Why do they speak to us like that? "If we block the Gawlawaw's rice you won't be able to receive it." The section leader explained what they said to us because we can't understand Thai language. I want to hate the Thais but I dare not. I'm afraid.

Q: Do you still dare to stay here?

A: I don't know, where the people stay I will follow them. If the others go to another place I will follow, but I will never go back to Burma again. We were not happy in Burma, the Burmese made us suffer. My brothers and sisters live in Burma, but I'm afraid of the Burmese. The Burmese treated us badly and the DKBA also. When the Burmese hit us, the DKBA just watched and they didn't do anything. I had to build the road, the Burmese soldiers said that the foreigners would come and inspect the road that the Burmese wanted to show them. They said that the foreigners would come and look at Ku Baw Chaung, Du Yaw Baw Chaung, T'Nay Hsah Baw Chaung, Paung Ye Bu, and Baw Chaung. So we had to build the road and we had no time to rest. Someone from every house had to go. If we didn't go we had to pay 200 Kyats. How could we give them 200 Kyats when we had no money? I had nothing, no money, but I had to buy rice, 500 or 600 Kyats for one basket. Now it is 1,500 Kyats for one basket! We had to build the road near the mountain, and it was very stony. We built the road from my village to Daw Lan and to Thaya Gone. The Burmese soldiers stay in Daw Lan and Thaya Gone. After that we had to build the road from T'Nay Hsah to Nabu. They said the foreigners will come and that the foreigners don't like it when the roads are not good. So the soldiers told us to work. We had to build the road in the afternoon but they didn't want us to have lunch. They hit us. They kicked me. If we took a rest they also shouted at us. If we went and protested to DKBA they just said we had to work with discipline. I couldn't work, I wanted to take a rest, I was very tired and I nearly died, so I came to the camp and I have stayed here for one year already. I arrived in this camp when it had all been burned and everything was lost [after the January 1997 burning]. Nobody gave me clothes, I stayed with my cousin, I was not registered in the camp. Slowly, I started to work and I asked my friends to give me some clothes.

Q: What do you think about the DKBA?

A: The DKBA don't remember anything. They looked like drunkards. They had taken the medicine *[drugs]*. They looked like fools. When they take the medicine they don't know anything and we are afraid that they will kill us. We dare not go near them. We are afraid of the DKBA and of the Burmese. The Burmese are friendly to the DKBA, but what they will do one day to the DKBA we don't know.

#H4.

1) NAME: "Saw Lah" **SEX:** M **AGE:** 52
Sgaw Karen Christian

2) NAME: "Naw Wah" **SEX:** F **AGE:** 43
Sgaw Karen Christian

FAMILY: Married, 3 children aged 15, 17 and 20

INTERVIEWED: 16/3/98

ADDRESS: Wangka village, Myawaddy township; now in Huay Kalo

[“Saw Lah” and “Naw Wah” are husband and wife. They stay in Section 1 of the camp, where they have lived for 14 years.]

Q: Can you describe what happened?

“Saw Lah”: We decided to flee because we were afraid. I was afraid of the bullets. When the house was burning we ran. What else could we do? Everything was burning. We saw the soldiers setting fire to the houses. We were hiding and we didn't know where to run. We hid just a short time, not more than 15 minutes. We were staying under the house and when I saw the fire I ran away.

“Naw Wah”: We were under the house. If the house was not burning we would not have run. Someone had told us that if they came it wouldn't be to burn our houses, just to find people *[important people like camp leaders]*.

Q: What happened when you fled?

“Saw Lah”: They came from Section One. We saw them, they started to burn the houses, one after the other. When they came they passed in front of us, and when they were some distance away we started to run. *[At that time he was hiding beside the streambed in section 2.]* The other people had run and only the three of us were left: myself, my wife, and the woman who sells chicken in her shop. All my children had already fled. When we ran to the road in Section Two, a soldier touched me with his gun. He asked me, “Are you Buddhist or Christian?” He spoke Sgaw Karen. If I had answered that I am a Christian he would have killed me, so I answered that I was Buddhist. He didn't say anything when I said that I was Buddhist, he just took my things and then he said, “We told you to go back to Burma so why didn't you go back? I will kill you.” When he pointed his gun at me he saw my watch and he took it. He also took my wife's watch and a ring with a stone. He took everything, my bag and one camera, but there was no money in my bag. In my bag there was a Bible, but he didn't see it because he just took the whole bag. I was afraid they would see the Bible, but they didn't

do anything because the commander told them to be quick about it and they went away. He was also Sgaw Karen.

“Naw Wah”: The one who touched us with his gun spoke Sgaw Karen. Some others also spoke Sgaw Karen but they were drunk so they didn’t know what they were doing. They asked for money. I said, “I have no money”.

“Saw Lah”: After the soldiers left us we went to the stream. When we ran to the stream the soldiers came and asked some women, “Are you Christian or Buddhist?” I know these women because they stay with my sister. The women said, “We are Christians”. When the women said that, a soldier threatened them with his gun so the women said, “Oh we lied to you, we are not Christian, we are Buddhist!” and then the soldier didn’t do anything. He took the women’s watches and he asked for their money. One woman said “I have no money” so they checked her neck *[to see if she had a necklace]*. Then they went back to the other side of the stream. I heard all that because they were hiding near us.

“Naw Wah”: The soldiers told some of the women, “If you are Christian we will kill you”. Nobody dared to say that they are Christian.

Q: How many soldiers did you see?

“Saw Lah”: I saw 8 soldiers. We saw the soldiers when we ran. They didn’t seem normal but they did not smell of wine. One was holding a walkie-talkie, maybe he was a commander. The one with the walkie-talkie stood near us. The other soldiers were standing behind him. They were wearing striped shirts and their trousers were also striped, the same as the Thai soldiers, with hats. Their hats also looked like Thai soldiers’ hats. *[He indicated a baseball-cap style hat.]* The colour of the hats was dark green. I didn’t see any scarves or any number on their uniforms, I dared not look. They wore striped uniforms and jungle boots. They came in three separate groups. One group was in the middle, another on the left, and a third group was behind a tree *[a tree near the stream at the back of section one; probably their mortar support group]*. They all came on a logging truck.

“Naw Wah”: Some other people saw the car. But we ran because we were afraid.

Q: Did you see their weapons?

“Saw Lah”: AK, he touched me with an AK for sure [AK47]. I know because the AK is short. The other ones had M16, G3, and 79. The Burmese use that kind of gun, I know it. Not G4 but G3, AR, AK, and 79; the one that they shelled with was a 79 [M79 grenade launcher; G3 is the standard Burmese Army assault rifle, not generally used by opposition forces. AK47, M16 and AR are commonly used by opposition forces, occasionally also by the Burmese Army].

#H5.

NAME: “Naw Eh Say” **SEX:** F **AGE:** 30
Pwo Karen Buddhist
FAMILY: Married, 4 children aged 2-12
INTERVIEWED: 16/3/98
ADDRESS: Du Yaw village, Pa’an District; now in Huay Kaloke

[“Naw Eh Say” has lived in Huay Kaloke camp for 10 years. She now lives in Section 1.]

Q: When did you start to run?

A: When I heard gunshots I started to run. Another house had already started to burn, and I saw that my house was burning. I don’t know what time it was. I have no watch. We ran and hid in the ditch [dry streambed] together with many friends. We heard shooting, *ta-ta-ta-ta-ta!* so we dared not look. We stayed in the ditch, each on our own. Then the soldiers jumped down in the ditch, I don’t know where came from. One soldier touched all of us with his gun. We stayed quietly and he said, “Don’t anybody run away”. He spoke Sgaw Karen. He asked me, “Are you Christian or Buddhist?” I said “I’m Buddhist”. Then he asked us, “Why don’t you go back [to Burma]?” We said, “We have no money to go back”. Then he touched me with his gun and he said, “We will find your bag.” He asked me, “Did you put a gun in your bag?” We said, “No, we don’t have any guns”. We opened the bag, he looked in it and then he went away. I don’t know which way they went, I dared not look.

Q: What did the soldiers look like?

A: I saw three soldiers. They were Sgaw Karen. They wore striped [camouflage] uniforms. Their hats looked like soldiers’ hats. Their hats were striped, with scarves tied around them. Not yellow, dark green scarves. I didn’t see any badges on their uniforms. I dared not look, I was afraid that they would shoot me. I bowed to them. I bowed like we do to monks, I made them the Buddhist sign with my hands. I said that I was Buddhist. I asked them, “Don’t kill me”. I was afraid.

#H6.

NAME: “Saw Ghay Htoo” **SEX:** M **AGE:** 30
Sgaw Karen Christian

FAMILY: Single

INTERVIEWED: 16/3/98

ADDRESS: Pa'an District; now in Huay Kaloke refugee camp

["Saw Ghay Htoo" has lived in Section 11 of Huay Kaloke camp since 1996. He has only one leg and wears a simple prosthesis on the other.]

Q: Did anything happen before the night of the attack?

A: One night before, the Thai soldiers said, "You have to turn off the lights at nine o'clock". The second night *[the night of the attack]*, they came at seven o'clock and told us to switch off the lights. They said, "Don't switch on the lights". Then some motorcycles came, they were not noisy. There were three persons on each motorcycle. Then they went back and disappeared, and after 12 o'clock they *[the attackers]* entered and fired their guns.

Q: Had the Thais ever come to this part of the camp at night before?

A: Yes, they came here before but they didn't come like that. If they come they usually have their lights on, but this time there were no lights.

Q: Then what happened?

A: I heard heavy weapons, they were shooting near here [*section 10 in the camp market*]. They were firing heavy weapons from under a tree and they used the tree as cover. 2½-inch shells landed here and over there. They fired them from Ah Na Mine Gone [*in section seven near the main Thai gate*]. I saw maybe six 2½-inch shells. Three shells landed near me. Another 2½-inch shell landed near my house and six persons got injured. Three landed in the pond. One landed near me and the explosion made me jump into the pond. Then I got out because I was very cold. Another shell of a big weapon landed first, and then I saw the soldiers. They also fired their guns, so people didn't know which way to run. A lot of people ran to the other side. I didn't run yet, I watched. The fire started in section one. The houses around mine burned, and then the fire spread to my house. I stayed around here, beside the pond. After they had set fire to the houses, they came back and shot, shot, shot.... they came back in front of me and the soldier in the middle was holding a walkie-talkie. They spoke Sgaw Karen, Pwo Karen, and also Burmese, all mixed. I stayed like that. I wasn't afraid. As for me, if I die it is not a problem, I kept that in my mind. After I saw them something came into my mind - I wanted to shoot them. One soldier saw me and he was about to shoot me. I told him, "No, don't shoot me". He asked me, "Are you Thai or Sgaw Karen?" After he asked me that he tried to shoot me, but his finger slipped from the trigger so he didn't shoot me. Then he said, "Oh, I didn't shoot you" and he went away. After many houses had already burned I started to run. I ran alone. I ran this way. When I ran there were no Burmese and no DKBA. I didn't see any soldiers then, everyone had disappeared.

Q: Did you see any Thais?

A: No. I saw 21 [*DKBA/Burmese*] soldiers, I counted them. I didn't see any other soldiers. I can't run well so I was sitting and watching, so I could count only the soldiers who passed in front of me. These 21 soldiers were wearing streaked [*camouflage*] jackets and streaked trousers, and some were wearing plain green ones. They were old uniforms, not new. There were more soldiers with streaked uniforms than without. Only four or five wore plain green uniforms. Not all of them had their hats on. Two or three had hats like the Burmese military hat. Some had red scarves [*around their heads*]. Their guns were AR and AK, and one was also carrying a walkie-talkie. That one was not wearing a striped uniform [*camouflage*]. They were not normal. We knew that because they were not walking straight. The Burmese were wearing the plain green uniforms. I think I saw maybe two or three who looked Burmese.

Q: Did you see any badges on their uniforms?

A: No, I didn't look at the badges, I only counted the soldiers. Maybe they wore the Bandoola badge [*the Burmese Army badge*], but I didn't look. We also dared not look at their faces, we only counted them. I stayed squatting so they could only see my head. Maybe if they had seen my foot they would have shot me [*they would have guessed that*]

he was a former Karen soldier because of his prosthesis]. I told them, “don’t shoot”, and they didn’t shoot me.

Q: Did the soldiers ask your religion?

A: No, but they asked that of others. My friends ran to the other side [*of the camp*] and the soldiers told them, “If you are Christian we will kill you all.” But my friends are Buddhists, so the soldiers didn’t do anything to them.

Q: At the end, did the soldiers leave quickly or slowly?

A: They left quickly. They ran back. They left from Section Seven, but maybe they separated into two groups and some left through Sections 5 and 6. After they left me, I didn't go to the Thai village. I went immediately to look for my friends, because maybe someone was wounded in the refugee camp. I didn't see any soldiers there because of the smoke of the fire. I couldn't see, and after that the soldiers went back. Before they went back they fired their big gun from under the tree, but the shells did not land here. There was automatic fire, and also G3, G4, and AR. We didn't see exactly but when I heard the noise I knew which kind of gun it was [*"Saw Ghay Htoo" used to be a soldier*]. I saw one G4 [*G3 and G4 are standard Burmese Army assault weapons not commonly used by opposition forces*]. After they fired G3 and G4, 2½-inch shells came again. Then when they finished firing their guns, the fire started to go out.

#H7.

NAME: "Saw Po Gyi" **SEX:** M **AGE:** 38
Pwo Karen Buddhist
FAMILY: Married, 4 children aged 10-16
INTERVIEWED: 16/3/98
ADDRESS: Pa'an District; now in Huay Kaloke refugee camp

[*"Saw Po Gyi" has lived in Huay Kaloke camp since 1989. His house is in Section 11.*]

Q: What happened to you that night?

A: That night at 12:30, shells of heavy weapons flew. DKBA and Burmese soldiers came and shot at the camp. I started running after they fired heavy weapons. Bullets from both big and small guns were flying. The shells of heavy weapons were coming from near the Thai checkpoint. The bullets from small guns were coming from here, and also from other places. I hid. We couldn't stay in the stream because there was water in it, but we stayed beside it. They met us there when they went back. There were about 10 of us by the stream. There were three men and the others were women and children. They didn't do anything to the women, but they told us, "Don't run, we will shoot you and kill you all". They asked, "Have you seen any Kaw Thoo Lei [*KNLA soldiers*]?" One man said, "There is no Kaw Thoo Lei". They touched me with their guns. They were M1 [*carbine*] and M16. I dared not move. The soldier who touched me with his gun spoke Sgaw Karen. The soldier who spoke Pwo Karen told us, "Don't run, the shells of heavy weapons will hit you. You are not our enemy. Stay quiet, we will harm only our enemies." They grabbed two bags and some watches from the people. One was a student, she had two shirts, one skirt and 150 Baht in her bag. Then they asked us, "Are you Buddhist or Christian?" We said, "We are Buddhists", and they said, "If you are Christian, we will kill all of you. Tomorrow you must go back to Myaing Gyi Ngu [*DKBA headquarters in Pa'an District*]. If you don't go back, in three days we will come back again." Then they went away and they started to fire their guns in the direction of the camp. They fired heavy weapons, and they fired 79 [*M79 grenades*] two times. After they had shot and burned, the soldiers went away.

Q: How many soldiers did you see?

A: I saw 21 soldiers, but I didn't hear them speaking. They were the same that he saw *[see interview #H6 with "Saw Ghay Htoo"]*. They wore streaked hats, but not all of them. Some hats were different, but the moon was shining so we dared not look in their faces. Some of the soldiers wore striped uniforms, and some of the soldiers looked like Burmese soldiers. There were more than ten soldiers with streaked uniforms and four soldiers were wearing Burmese uniforms. These ones were carrying M16's but I didn't see any sign on their uniforms. We dared not look if there were any badges on the DKBA uniforms because we don't like them, they are our enemies. We don't like the way they are working, they don't work the right way. They were drunk. They looked like they had taken *myin say [the drug commonly taken by DKBA, known as Ya Ba or Ya Ma in Thai, which makes one aggressive and stupid]*.

They left this way, the same way that they came. They crossed the fields. They threw away the old things *[from what they had stolen]* and they kept only the new ones. The people found those *[old]* things later. After they left we came back to our house and looked for all our things. My house did not burn, but we kept some of our things outside and they had burned in the fire. The soldiers put them into the fire and they burned.

#H8.

NAME: "Naw K'Paw Wah" **SEX:** F **AGE:** 45
Sgaw Karen Buddhist

FAMILY: Married, 5 children aged 2-16

INTERVIEWED: 16/3/98

ADDRESS: Hlaing Bwe township, Pa'an District; now in Huay Kaloke refugee camp

["Naw K'Paw Wah" has been in Section 4 of Huay Kaloke camp for four years. Her house was right at the edge of the open field in the middle of the camp, and she was wounded in the attack.]

Q: When did you start running?

A: When we heard *ta-ta-ta-ta-ta!* *[she made the sound of automatic fire]* we ran out of my house. I had no watch but I guess it was midnight. We carried our children and ran. Then we laid down beside our house. When we heard it the second time we ran beside the monastery and to the fields, not far from the banana garden. I stayed there for quite a long time, and after that I came back home again. When I came back I saw them *[the soldiers]* coming by. I was hidden behind the toilets when they came. They came along the main road *[the camp's main thoroughfare]*, then they went to the market. They marched quickly, *chouay chouay chouay [she made the sound of rapid marching]*. They were in a group, many soldiers, you couldn't count. Maybe around 30 soldiers. They didn't see me but I saw them clearly. They were very close. The distance between me and them was the length of a house. If I had looked carefully I could have seen the badges on their arms because of the light of the fire, but I didn't look at them very carefully because of the fire. They carried guns. Some of them wore Burmese military uniforms and some of them wore streaked uniforms. Two of them wore white shirts.

Some had caps and some had Burmese military hats. I heard them speak only in Karen, Sgaw Karen.

They were coming along and burning the houses along their way. The houses burned down quickly because the roofs were made of thatch. When I came back, Section 1 had already burned down completely, and Sections 3, 4, and 5 were burning. When the soldiers arrived, three of them entered my house. They didn't see me. If they had seen me I don't know what they would have said to me. I heard some people say that when the soldiers saw people they threatened to kill them. I hid myself. My children were already in the field, hiding behind the paddy-dikes.

My husband was together with me. He told me that our children are more precious than the possessions in our house, so he asked me to go to the children. So after the soldiers had passed by, I hurried and ran to the children, while he stayed here and watched. The soldiers passed through the field here [*in the middle of the camp*], but they couldn't see me because I was behind a paddy-dike. I didn't dare to go at first because there was a big fire. Afterwards, I escaped from the fire and ran to the monastery. A monk told me to run that way but I said, "I can't go that way, my children are over there [*the other way*]". When I kept on running on the high ground, they saw me and followed me, and the bullets landed nearer and nearer to me. Many bullets and shells flew over me. When I reached a tree I heard the sound of the guns so I laid down on my belly, near the banana trees and the teak tree at the edge of the camp. The bullets flew beside me, *ta-ta-ta-ta-ta*! I laid there quietly. When the bullets stopped flying, I tried to lift up my body. As soon as I lifted up my buttocks, something hit them and knocked me back down again. I looked up in the tree to see the fruit but I saw that there was no fruit, so then I knew it was a shell that had hit me! The shell didn't penetrate my buttock, it disappeared after it hit me. I don't know where it flew. At that time there was fire everywhere. So I prayed, "Lord, please take care of me", because I thought that I would die. It was really painful and aching. I couldn't stand up. Then I called my son, "Hay Glaw! Hay Glaw!" He answered me, "Wai". I thought to myself that I wouldn't be able to go to my children, but I tried to go to my children. I could partly stand up, then I pulled my leg [*she demonstrated trying to walk doubled over, gasping and limping*]. I was bleeding. My children were in front of me, a little far from me, about 10 metres away, but when I reached the place where they were they were sitting down, looking at me sadly. I told them that I'd been wounded by a shell. Then I saw a man and I called him. "Wai, Doh Pu Sha!" [*"Hallo, friend!"*] He didn't answer anything to me, so I laid down for a while. I saw a monk. I called the monk and asked him to send me my husband. He agreed but he disappeared for a long time and I didn't see my husband coming. Then I saw a woman and called her. I asked her for some tobacco because I wanted to smoke and she gave me some. When I was smoking, everyone who walked by came to see me.

Some people told the Thai soldiers about me and the Thai soldiers came to me. At that time my husband was arriving. The Thai soldiers asked my husband to carry me. He was going to take me to the monastery but I said that there's no hospital in the camp, so I'd rather go where the Thai soldiers asked me to go. Then they sent me to the water truck [*the Thai fire truck*]. I waited for a long time. There was no hospital car coming.

The water truck started to leave, then the hospital car arrived and my husband put me in the hospital car. Inside that car the wind was blowing. I looked for the window that was open but the windows were closed. I couldn't understand how the wind could blow through the glass of the car, but the wind blew a lot and made me very cold [*she had never experienced air conditioning before*]. My husband thought that I was unconscious and he called me, "Naw, Naw" and I answered him, "It is cold". When I reached the hospital the nurse put some medicine on my wound and put me in a bed. I covered myself with a sarong, I was shivering cold. The nurses came and looked at me, then they put me in another bed with blankets. Then I was warmed up and I slept all night until the morning.

Q: What did the shell look like that hit you?

A: I don't know because I couldn't see because of the dark night. I just guess. A small shell I think. A kind of shell that has yellow colour on the top and black on the bottom. It was a little bit bigger than a banana. It hit my buttock right here [*she was very lucky, because it appears that she was hit by an M79 grenade that didn't explode*].

#H9.

NAME: "Saw Hsah Hay Mu" **SEX:** M **AGE:** 33
Sgaw Karen Christian
FAMILY: Married, 2 children aged 2 and 4
INTERVIEWED: 18/3/98
ADDRESS: Pa'an Township; now in Section 1 of Huay Kaloke refugee camp

[*"Saw Hsah Hay Mu" is a medic in Huay Kaloke camp, where he has lived since 1984.*]

Q: Can you explain what happened that night?

A: That night we were on duty. During the night we spoke together about rabies and also about the patients. We discussed a patient who had cerebral malaria. Then we talked more about malaria, because some teachers were coming to teach us how to see it in a microscope. We had to practise looking in the microscope to know how to see the parasite. We went to sleep at 10 p.m. and we slept for one or two hours. Maybe at about 12 p.m. we heard a car coming into the camp. It stopped near the hospital and then went further than the hospital, to the corner of Section 1 near the fields. Somebody saw two motorcycles in front of the car and two behind, but I didn't see the car or the motorcycles, I just heard the noise. When the car would have been nearly back to the gate, it [*the attack*] happened.

It started with small guns, then just after that big shells landed near the hospital. After I heard the guns I went to run outside with my family. Before I got outside my wife opened the door, and she got injured in front of our house. She was hit by a bullet and she started bleeding. At the beginning she was bleeding a lot, but then the bleeding decreased bit by bit so I told her, "Let's get away, you can't stay here for long. We have to run away." After that DKBA and SLORC came almost to where we were. They spoke mostly Karen. Some spoke Burmese but the others said to them, "Don't speak

Burmese, you have to speak Karen. What did the leader tell you before coming here? You have to speak Karen.” So after that they spoke only in Karen.

Q: So you saw the soldiers?

A: Yes, I saw the soldiers in the fields. We were sitting together in the fields and they came around us. A lot of people were in the fields, maybe a hundred. The other villagers came from section 2, section 3, and also from section 4. About fifteen or sixteen soldiers surrounded us. They looked at us carefully and then they said, “We will kill you all if you don’t go back to Burma.” After they had told us that, they went away. In front of us they continued to burn the houses. We went further into the fields. We couldn’t stand near where they were burning the houses because it was too hot, very hot for our families. So we had to run away. We stayed in the fields the whole time until the morning.

Q: Did you see what they were wearing?

A: Yes, I saw their uniforms very well. They were like Thai soldiers’ uniforms [*he showed a jacket with camouflage pattern as an example*]. There were also some plain green uniforms. I saw badges on their uniforms, we call it the Bandoola badge [*the standard red-and-white Burmese Army badge*]. But I couldn’t see their [*Battalion*] numbers, because when they saw me they said to me, “I will kill you”. They wore baseball-style caps and some wore Burmese military hats. Just some of them had caps. A lot had black hats this shape [*like a Burmese Army hat*], and some had round black hats this shape [*a beret*]. Some had a yellow scarf around their necks. The others didn’t have yellow scarves because they were not DKBA. I could recognise that. I’m sure that they were Burmese soldiers. The Burmese were wearing Burmese military hats.

Q: Is your wife better now?

A: My wife is cured but I could not find the bullet so it is still painful. I couldn’t see the bullet. It is still inside, but I didn’t send my wife to Mae Sot hospital. I can cure her, but maybe later it will be necessary to remove it. I can remove it if the wound disappears.

Q: What do you think they are going to do now with the camp?

A: If they move the camp it would be better for us, because if we stay here I think that the same thing will happen again. If we continue to stay here the camp will be burned again. But if we have to move to Beh Klaw, I won’t go. In Beh Klaw the security is not good either.

#H10.

NAME: “Saw Eh Doh Htoo” **SEX:** M **AGE:** 30
Sgaw Karen Christian
FAMILY: Married, 5 children aged 1-13
INTERVIEWED: 18/3/98
ADDRESS: Nyaunglebin District; now in Huay Kaloke refugee camp

[“Saw Eh Doh Htoo” has been in Huay Kaloke camp for fourteen years. He stays in Section 1.]

Q: Can you tell me what happened that night?

A: I can tell. That night at 11:46 p.m., I saw one car and six motorcycles coming. The car was a small jeep. It was an old car. I didn’t see the car’s number because it was night time and they didn’t have their lights on. I think I saw six soldiers in the car and two on each motorcycle, six motorcycles. All wore streaked [*camouflage*] uniforms and they had weapons but I didn’t see what weapons. They came from section ten, from the market. When they arrived they didn’t turn their lights on. They made a lot of noise and when they came back they also made a big noise. When they arrived at Section One they stopped for about 5 minutes near the stream, then they went further than our house so I didn’t see them. Then I saw them coming back. We didn’t see them getting out in Section One, but maybe they got out in another spot, we don’t know. They still had their lights off. After they’d been gone for about 30 or 45 minutes, the shooting started.

Q: What do you think was the nationality of the men on the motorcycles?

A: I could not distinguish them. Usually every time the Thai soldiers come they turn their lights on, and the Thai soldiers here know me, if they see me they call me. This time, they saw me but they didn’t call me.

Q: Did you see other soldiers after the beginning of the shootings?

A: I saw more than 60 soldiers in Section One. They were together. They were Burmese soldiers, they wore streaked uniforms. Some wore hats like this [*he indicated a beret*], some wore baseball caps and some wore Burmese military hats. I didn’t see any insignia on their uniforms because it was too dark and I dared not go near them. They spoke in Burmese and Karen languages. They called, “Set fire to the houses and shoot!” in Pwo Karen and they called “Run, run!” in Burmese. I was on the road and they shot at me when they met me. They also shot at the youth chairman, his name is Hla Kyi. He was wounded but I wasn’t, and I ran to my house. They were shooting with AK, AR, G3, [*M16*], and [*carbine*] rifles.

Q: What would you say if the Thais tell you to go to Burma or to Beh Klaw?

A: I dare not go back to Burma. I will say no, and I won’t go to Beh Klaw. We need and want to stay in a new place where our lives will be safe and where we will also have good security.

#H11.

NAME: “Pu K’Mwee Htoo” **SEX:** M **AGE:** 58

Sgaw Karen Buddhist

FAMILY: Married, 7 children aged 6-40

INTERVIEWED: 18/3/98

ADDRESS: Pa’an Township; now in Huay Kaloke refugee camp

[“Pu K’Mwee Htoo” lives in Section 4 of Huay Kaloke camp.]

Q: That night what happened when you saw that car?

A: I was not sleeping, I didn’t go to bed early, I didn’t sleep and I was listening. So when the car came I was not sleeping. We were afraid and we were listening. When the car came it was just a little bit noisy and they had their lights turned off. The car was an old jeep without doors driven by soldiers. I saw four motorcycles behind the car. They came from this way *[from the market and the main entrance]* and many people saw that. They stopped the car and we thought that they were going to visit the other houses. Four soldiers got out of the car. I didn’t hear them *[talking]* and I don’t know what they were wearing, maybe black or camouflage, because it was a little bit far from the house. Then the car went back and there were no soldiers in the car. I think there was only the driver left when I saw the car. If there had been other soldiers in the car we would have seen them, because there were no doors. That car comes to the camp all the time. It is black. We thought that they were just coming through like they often do. But they didn’t go further *[than the school]*, they went back. I think that they came and drove people in. There were 3 on each motorcycle, and when they went back there were 2 on each motorcycle.

Q: What did you do after that?

A: I didn’t do anything, I went to take a rest. About 20 minutes after the car had gone back, the explosions started. I heard the explosions and I ran to the toilets *[the school toilets, which are made of concrete]*. They saw me and they fired their guns near the toilets. They shot at me with small guns. Later we picked up the shell cases and they were AK[47] bullets. I stayed in the toilets until the fire went out. I didn’t see them because I dared not get out. I dared not lift my head up to look outside. They shot nonstop. The shell of a big weapon landed near me so I dared not lift up my head. But I heard them going and swearing in Burmese when they came and shot up the school’s library. I came out of the toilets when all the soldiers were gone.

#H12.

NAME: “Saw Tamla” **SEX:** M **AGE:** 50

Sgaw Karen Buddhist

FAMILY: Married, 5 children aged 15-22

INTERVIEWED: 18/3/98

ADDRESS: Pa’an District; now in Huay Kaloke refugee camp

[“Saw Tamla” stays in Section 5 of Huay Kaloke camp.]

Q: Can you tell me what happened to you that night?

A: I started by running to the field. Then bullets were flying around us, so my children and my wife didn't dare to stay in the fields, and they ran away over there - not as far as the Thai village, just to the stream. After they left, I stayed and looked after our things. A group of Thai soldiers came along and they said, "Go, go, go!" and they forced the other people and me to go to the stream in the direction they showed us. Then I went to the road and I saw the Aw Saw [*Thai volunteer militia*]. I asked them permission to go to look after my things because I was afraid that my things would be lost. They asked me, "Where are your things?" I told them my things were in the field, and the Aw Saw gave me permission to go. I went to my things and when I arrived there, Thai [*Army*] soldiers told me, "Run, why don't you run, what are you doing here?" They didn't know that I'd asked permission of the Aw Saw to come back. Then I said, "Wait, wait, I will put my slippers on". The Thai soldiers said, "You can't put your slippers on", and then they beat me on the nape of my neck and they kicked my back. I didn't fall down but the kick pushed me forward and I kept on running. I didn't see them beating other people but I dared not say anything and I ran away. I ran to the place where they'd gathered other people. I went to stay there with my friends. There were 7 or 8 [*Thai*] soldiers there, maybe more than ten. I think more than ten, some were waiting for us and some were gathering us together. They ordered us to stay there, maybe forty or fifty of us. They told us to stay together and not to go anywhere. I don't understand much Thai language. I know a few words, like "go, go", "wait, wait", or "go quickly", that's all. Later we came back [*to the camp, after the fire*].

#H13.

NAME: "Pi Ber Tha"
Sgaw Karen Buddhist
FAMILY: Married, 2 children aged 32 and 40
INTERVIEWED: 18/3/98
ADDRESS: Pa'an District; now in Huay Kaloke refugee camp

["Pi Ber Tha" stays in Section 6 of Huay Kaloke camp.]

Q: Where did you run that night?

A: I ran to the field. When the Thai soldiers came they talked in Thai language and I didn't understand. They wanted us to come back and to stay together but we didn't understand. The Thai soldiers came and hit one man, his name is U K---, some called him Maung D---; before he was a monk, and now he has a wife. He fell down and I was afraid because I saw the Thai soldiers beat him. I don't know what the soldiers told that man. They just made some noise in Thai *[she imitated the sound of Thai speech]*. Then Maung D--- and his wife went away; me too, but I walked slowly behind them. I wanted to walk quickly but I couldn't. I fell down and after I stood up a Thai soldier talked to me in Thai. I didn't understand and the Thai soldier kicked my back once and I fell down to the ground. It was very painful and I was crying, and my stomach was in pain. I cried in the dark. They wanted us to gather and to stay together but I didn't understand what he said so I was very sad. I thought that he was drunk. If we don't understand he has to show us. They are young and they are drinking all the time. It is my fate. When I stayed with my mother my mother never hit me like that. Now they hit me like that, and my stomach is still in a lot of pain.

Q: How many soldiers did you see?

A: Only one came and met me, but a lot were staying on the other side of the field. They were carrying guns. I was afraid.

#H14.

NAME: "Saw Klaw Wah"
Sgaw Karen Christian
FAMILY: Married, 4 children aged 4-14
INTERVIEWED: 17/3/98
ADDRESS: Pa'an Township; now in Huay Kaloke refugee camp

Q: When did you start to run?

A: I don't know. I slept for a few hours and suddenly woke up when I heard weapons firing, and I ran away. I carried my youngest son. I didn't know what time it was. I wanted to save my things, but the Thai soldiers wanted us to sit down in the fields. They didn't allow us to go back. I decided to go back and went to ask whether we could go or not, but I didn't get to ask anything because one Thai soldier kicked me, while one of his friends sat and looked at me. Most of the people saw me when I was kicked. He kicked me two times, once in the chest and once in the waist. I didn't fall down but I nearly did.

I couldn't breathe very well after I was kicked. When the Thai soldier kicked me the first time I passed urine, and then when I turned around he beat me with his gun. That happened at 3 a.m. He told me to go back and sit with my friends. Some of my friends were kicked as well. Then the Thai soldiers called each other and went back. The left side of my back swelled up. It was very painful on both sides when I coughed. I went to the clinic to get medicine. There are no visible wounds but I'm still on medicine and it is still painful inside my body. I feel better when I take medicine.

Q: Did the Thai soldiers beat anybody else ?

A: First they only beat me, and then they beat some other people. They beat Maung N-- - and A—'s mother. They also beat some women. In the morning people said that some had been kicked and slapped by the Thai soldiers.

Q: How long did you stay in the fields?

A: We stayed about 20 minutes and then the Aw Saw [*Thai volunteer militia*] came, so we asked them permission to go back to save our things and they let us go back. But most people stayed there and didn't ask permission.

Q: Do you want to stay here or go to Beh Klaw? Where do you want to go?

A: It depends on the [*camp*] leaders. I'll go and stay anywhere that it's possible to live, but I'm afraid to go to Beh Klaw.

#H15.

NAME: "Saw Lay Htoo" **SEX:** M **AGE:** 50

Sgaw Karen Christian

FAMILY: Married, 4 children aged 10-16

INTERVIEWED: 17/3/98

ADDRESS: Pa'an Township; now in Section 5 of Huay Kaloke refugee camp

[*"Saw Lay Htoo" was very sick and weak with tuberculosis at the time of the attack.*]

Q: When did you see the Thai soldiers?

A: I fled to the fields and I saw the Thai soldiers there. I'm sick so I couldn't carry anything, but my children carried some of my things. I saw about 17 Thai soldiers, they were carrying AR guns and wore streaked uniforms like KNU soldiers. They said, "You are Karen so come here", and then I went to them and they said, "Go and stay at the bridge". At the bridge we saw the Aw Saw [*Thai volunteer militia*]. We asked permission to go back and save our things because we were afraid that everything would burn in our houses, but then when we came back another team of soldiers saw us. They told us to quickly come to them but I told them to wait. I didn't understand Thai so the Thai soldier slapped and punched me. He hit me twice. I felt dizzy after he hit me, because I was sick. Then I saw one grandmother [*'pi', i.e. elderly woman*] who was kicked by the Thai soldier. It was about 2 or 3 a.m. when he beat me.

Q: Will you go to Beh Klaw if you have to?

A: Yes, I'll go if we have to, because we can't stay here. I will go together with other people wherever they go. It depends on the [*camp*] leaders. I just hope I can get some medicine to cure my illness.

Maw Ker Interviews

#M1.

NAME: "Saw Kaser Doh" SEX: M AGE: 40+

Karen Buddhist

FAMILY: Married, 5 children aged 5-23

INTERVIEWED: 28/3/98

ADDRESS: Kawkareik township; now in Section 6 of Maw Ker refugee camp for 5 years

Q: Why did you come to live in the camp?

A: I have been in Maw Ker for five years. I dared not stay in my village because the Burmese soldiers tortured us, so we came to stay in the camp.

Q: Can you tell me what happened that night?

A: I haven't heard anything before, but that night I saw something strange. I saw someone holding a torch light [*outside the camp*], and he turned the light on. I told the security [*Karen security*], "I saw a light over there." The security told me, "Maybe it was a Thai hunter", so we just stayed there, waiting and listening. I was staying with the sentries. There were four or five sentries. At that time it was 1 a.m. so we were sleepy. We slept less than one hour, then they shot at us and we ran. We had to run, because we had nothing [*to shoot back with*]. They came into the camp at half past one. They came on foot, by the path beside the Monastery. First four soldiers came and they spoke Karen, they said, "Taw, taw, taw!" [*"Go on, go on, go on!" in Karen*]. After that Burmese soldiers came also; they said, "Dteh! Dteh! Dteh!!" [*"Go on! Go on! Go on!!" in Burmese*]. They shot at us with 79's [*M79 grenade launchers*] and 2½-inch [*mortars*]. They shot with heavy weapons and they fired small guns. I didn't see any RPG's [*rocket-propelled grenades*]. If the soldiers had shot at us with an RPG, we would all be dead now. An M79 shell landed near us. It didn't hit me but my friend Kyaw Wah got injured.

I couldn't do anything. They shot at us, I ran back home and my friends ran to the monastery. I ran back home and I called out to everyone [*to warn them*], but I couldn't call all the people and I ran into a bunker. When I reached the bunker, the soldiers were also arriving and they were burning the houses. They shot their guns and burned the houses at the same time. They shot for nearly one hour. The first place they shot up was Section 6. Some soldiers could have been injured because they shot at each other by mistake. One group entered the camp and another group stayed behind them, so when the second group fired their guns the shells landed near their friends.

Q: Did you hear them saying anything?

A: They didn't say anything around me. They asked the people who live in Section 6 about the Muslims, they said: "Where are the Muslims' houses?" The one who asked the question spoke Karen. When they arrived in section four, their commander came to call them back and they went back. The commander talked to his soldiers in Karen.

In the dark, it looked like they were wearing streaked [*camouflage*] uniforms. Their hats looked like Burmese Army hats. I can't say what guns they were carrying. I think M16 and AK[47]. They were not drunk. I didn't hear if they will come back again. We were too much afraid. I was afraid that they would shoot at me and the bullet would hit me.

Q: Did the Thai soldiers shoot at them?

A: No, they didn't fire their guns but one group of Thai soldiers stayed near the Ler Ghaw Kee road and they fired one or two times. When the Burmese soldiers fired into the camp, the Thais fired back only one or two times.

Q: Which sections were burned down?

A: Sections 6 and 7, they didn't burn the other sections. Fifty houses were burned down and one monastery. Its name was Than Manee Monastery. They shot at it and they burned it. They also set fire to the other monastery [*Wah Lay monastery*] but the big monastery didn't burn, only the small one burned down. The fire also burned down the community hall. The fire truck came after the shooting. We also tried to put out the fire. They came to put out the fire with water just before sunrise.

Q: Since then have the Thai soldiers said anything?

A: No, they didn't say anything at first, but yesterday the Thai soldiers said, "Don't run away, we think that they will not come again". Now they come and guard the villagers all day. They said to us, "If you hear something, please tell us". But I don't understand Thai language, so I don't understand exactly what they said.

#M2.

1) NAME:	"Saw Say Muh"	SEX: M	AGE: 30+
Karen			
2) NAME:	"Naw Paw Thu"	SEX: F	AGE: 30+
Karen			
FAMILY:	Married, 2 children aged 5 and 8		
INTERVIEWED:	28/3/98		
ADDRESS:	Hlaing Bwe township; now in Section 6 of Maw Ker refugee camp only 1 month		

[“Saw Say Muh” and “Naw Paw Thu” are married, and only recently arrived in Maw Ker.]

Q: Can you tell me what happened that night?

“Saw Say Muh”: The soldiers entered the camp and burned down the houses. We heard them calling “Go on, go on!” I don't know which way they came into the camp, because when I heard the shells I ran into the bunker. They fired a lot of heavy weapons. They fired both heavy weapons and small weapons. I saw a shell from an M79. We stayed in the bunker because they were shelling us with heavy weapons. At that time they hadn't burned my house yet.

Boy: They fired [*M*/79, AK[47], M16, and rifle grenades. They started to burn the houses at 1:15 a.m.

“Naw Paw Thu”: We heard the soldiers who came up in front shouting at the soldiers who were behind them firing their guns, “*Nga lo ma tha!!* Why are you firing your guns while we are in front of you?” [*Nga lo ma tha!* is Burmese for ‘Motherfuckers!’] They talked like this. We stayed in the bunker and we heard. When we were hiding in the

bunker, the soldiers called us so we got out from the bunker. A soldier asked me, “Where is your village?” I said, “Our village is Lay Po Paw Ler”.

“Saw Say Muh”: I saw two soldiers. They asked me, “Are you a villager?” I said, “Yes, I am a villager”. The soldiers told us to get out, so we got out of the bunker and they burned down our house. One soldier carried an AK[47] and another soldier carried a Karen bag, an Esso oil bottle and a lighter. He poured the Esso oil on the house and set fire to it. Then they shot at the house and they said, “Go in the bunker”. They spoke Karen. One soldier wore a plain colour uniform and the other one wore a camouflage uniform, but I didn’t see their hats. After the soldiers had burned the other houses, they burned down the Than Manee Monastery on their way back, then they went straight to the road and left the camp.

Q: Could you save your belongings?

“Saw Say Muh”: We kept our things in my Auntie’s house, and all of them were burned.

“Naw Paw Thu”: Every night I went to sleep there, while my husband slept alone at home.

Q: What time did the Thai soldiers and the fire truck come?

“Saw Say Muh”: The Thai soldiers came just before sunrise, and they fired their heavy weapons just before sunrise. They couldn’t shoot at them *[DKBA and SPDC]* because they were already far away from the camp. They had already gone back and probably reached their camp by then. I am sure they could have reached their camp if they went straight, because the distance from here to Wah Lay is not far. When the fire truck came, the villagers had already put out the fire. It was already half past two in the morning. When the people put out the fire, our house had already burned down. There were two sections burned down, Sections 6 and 7. The other sections were not burned down. There were 45 houses in Section 6 and 5 houses in section 7 burned down. The total was 50 houses.

#M3.

NAME: “Daw Sein” **SEX:** F **AGE:** 25
Pwo Karen Buddhist
FAMILY: Married, 1 child
INTERVIEWED: 23/3/98
ADDRESS: Dooplaya District; now in Maw Ker refugee camp

[“Daw Sein” was wounded in the attack and was interviewed in hospital.]

Q: When and how were you wounded?

A: I was not sleeping when I heard the heavy weapon, I was breastfeeding my child. I went down to the ground and my husband told me, “Don’t run, they are firing big weapons and a lot of shells are landing”. I dared not stay so I took my child and I ran outside the house. My sarong was falling down so I told my husband, ‘Carry the baby’. He held it, I tied my sarong and then I told my husband, “Give me back the baby”. My husband didn’t give it to me because he didn’t want me to run. A lot of bullets landed in front of me. I covered myself like this *[with her hands]* and when they started firing I was wounded in my hand. I was wounded by small guns, not by the big ones. If they’d only fired one bullet I wouldn’t have been wounded, but many bullets were flying, it sounded like *ta-ta-ta-ta-ta-ta!* They also fired a lot of big shells in Section Six.

Q: Did many people get injured?

A: In Section 6 I’m the only one who got seriously injured. My finger’s bone was broken in pieces so they had to cut off my finger. Another was a sentry, he was wounded in his back and in his leg. Another one was wounded in the head. Both are from Section 6 but I don’t know their names. In Section 6, five people were wounded. One woman had a shell land on her house and she was injured in the elbow and on her buttock. She

didn't come to the hospital. The Gawlawas [*'white foreigners', i.e. MSF doctors*] came and took us to the hospital, me and one man. He is 22 years old but I don't know his name. He stayed in Section 6. The others didn't get serious injuries, just minor injuries, so they sent them to Maw Ker hospital. There is a clinic and a nurse there.

Q: Have you heard about the Muslims who got injured?

A: The Muslim woman here, her husband and her baby were both wounded. I don't know where she was wounded, but her baby's legs are broken [*the mother's name is Nha Ma Chan, age 25; her baby boy is seven days old, named Tha Tha*]. Now they are also staying in the hospital. I dare not look. One pregnant Muslim woman from Maw Ker was also wounded, but I don't know where. She doesn't live in Section 6 because in Section 6 there are no Muslims, so maybe she stays in Section 7 or 8.

Q: Did you see the soldiers?

A: Yes I saw them. They spoke Pwo Karen, Sgaw Karen and Burmese. The Burmese [*soldiers*] were behind the Karen soldiers. The DKBA burned the houses and they called out, "Burn, burn!" They spoke in Pwo Karen. I could hear because I stayed inside the bunker when they started to burn the houses. I was already wounded. They shouted, "Burn, burn!" The Burmese were behind them - they stayed behind the monastery, and the DKBA didn't burn the monastery. We had two monasteries; Than Manee monastery is Burmese and Wah Lay monastery is Pwo Karen. The Burmese monastery is completely burned down, and so is the hall [*beside it*], but Wah Lay monastery was not burned. The Burmese fired their guns until the DKBA called to them in Burmese language, "Don't fire, don't fire!" And then the Burmese didn't fire. When they fired it was only villagers who got injured. They sat in front of our house and they fired, so how could we run?

Q: Do you know how many soldiers came?

A: Maybe 40 or 50 soldiers came. I had to carry my baby and my fingers were wounded, so I didn't have time to look. I don't know how they came; they didn't come by car. They fired big weapons, two or three shells, and then they fired their guns. They shot a lot of bullets, and then they burned the houses. In our section over 40 houses were burned. My house was burned. My house was near the monastery. In Section 6, 44 houses were burned. No houses burned in Section 4, but some did in Sections 7 and 8. I don't know exactly because when I got injured someone brought me to the hospital and the section leader didn't come to tell us.

#M4.

NAME: "Saw Say Po" **SEX:** M **AGE:** 30+
Sgaw Karen
FAMILY: Married, children
INTERVIEWED: 23/3/98
ADDRESS: Dooplaya District; now in Section 1 of Maw Ker refugee camp

[*"Saw Say Po"'s daughter was wounded in the attack.*]

Q: When was your daughter wounded?

A: My daughter was wounded last night, at about midnight or one o'clock. Her name is Moo Rah Paw. She is two years and two months old. She got injured in her lower jaw by a big shell.

Q: I thought that in section one there were no casualties?

A: Yes, there were casualties in section one and also in section three. In section one there were my daughter and two others who got just a few fragments. The other two are in the beds over there. One is injured on her hip and the other in her leg. The one who got injured in the leg is Than Than Yi, she is 28 years old - the pieces entered her thigh. The other is Say Lway Paw, she is 26. The baby there is only seven days old, he got injured and his father, his mother and his whole family got injured. Now there is no one to take care of him so I help him. His mother is in very bad condition, the shell fragments penetrated her lungs, all over her back and in her buttocks.

Q: Did the houses burn in Section 1?

A: In section one the houses didn't burn. They [*soldiers*] entered section 6, and only in sections six and seven the houses burned. I don't know how many houses burned. When I left, the fire trucks were going into the camp. I saw many fire trucks from a distance.

Q: Do you think the attackers were Burmese, DKBA or Karen Peace Army?

A: I don't know, but I heard that it was one who joined the Burmese Army, his name is Maung Chit Thu. Burmese. I don't know if he is DKBA or KPA, we only heard that he joined the Burmese. [*Maung Chit Thu is a DKBA commander from further north in Pa'an District, who was reportedly brought in for the attack by the SPDC because the local DKBA did not want to attack the camp.*] I didn't see the soldiers, but some people in Section 6 said they saw them. They said that they were young, just children.

#M5.

NAME: "Saw Tha Muh" **SEX:** M **AGE:** 20+
Pwo Karen

FAMILY: Single

INTERVIEWED: 23/3/98

ADDRESS: Dooplaya District; now in Section 6 of Maw Ker refugee camp

[*"Saw Tha Muh" was wounded during the attack.*]

Q: Are there any pieces of the shell left in your thigh?

A: I don't know. I don't know if I was wounded by big weapons or by guns. I was the sentry at the gate, I was sleeping and I ran very quickly.

Q: Did you see the soldiers?

A: Yes, I saw all of them. About twenty or thirty came. I saw Burmese soldiers and DKBA, I saw all of them. I don't know what they were wearing, it looked like Burmese soldiers' uniforms. I dared not look anymore, I ran. They didn't come by car, they just came. In the evening we saw people with lights going along the other road [*not the road near the gate*]. That night we had to be careful because the situation was not good. And after one or two hours I told the other [*refugee*] security that I would sleep for a while and I slept on the ground.

Q: Did they fire big weapons?

A: I don't know if it was the Burmese or the Thais firing big weapons. A lot of Thai soldiers came and many people were mixed together. We saw the Burmese and the DKBA coming from behind the monastery, they called "Dteh! Dteh! Dteh!!" [*"Go on! Go on! Go on!!" in Burmese*]. After they went back, Thai soldiers came to the camp and put out the fire but they didn't fire any guns, they only came and looked around. Many houses burned in Section 6 and I can't tell how many people were injured there.

Q: Did you hear them [*the attackers*] say that they will come again?

A: No, I didn't hear them say that.

Q: Did you come here [*to hospital*] with any friends?

A: Yes, that boy there stays in the camp. He got injured like me. He didn't see the soldiers, he was sleeping with his wife in his house. There is also this woman who is laying down there, but I don't know her name. The other patients are in the [*Thai*] hospital.

#M6.

NAME: “Saw Eh K’Lu” **SEX:** M **AGE:** 24
Karen Buddhist

FAMILY: Married, 1 child aged 18 months

INTERVIEWED: 28/3/98

ADDRESS: Pa’an District; now in Section 6 of Maw Ker refugee camp for 3 years

Q: What did you see the night of the attack?

A: I don’t know how many soldiers entered the camp, maybe more than 30 or 40 soldiers. We woke up when they started to fire big guns. I had no watch and I wouldn’t have thought to look at a watch anyway. Then the soldiers came to my house. I didn’t know that they were coming. When I heard the explosions, they reached the house and I ran down to the bunker. Then I looked at them. I saw just three or four soldiers. They were all wearing the same Burmese uniform, a black uniform. They also wore yellow scarves. I saw yellow on their shoulders but I dared not look closely. They were holding guns. I saw one RPG [*rocket-propelled grenade launcher*]. They spoke Sgaw Karen. They didn’t say anything to me, because I was in the bunker. I heard them asking where the Muslims’ houses were. I heard some soldiers speaking Burmese, they were staying near the monastery. I heard them but we didn’t see the soldiers who stayed behind the monastery. Then the soldiers said, “Burn this house”. My house was the first they burned down, it was house number xxx. Everything was burned except my child’s clothes. It took them about five minutes to burn the houses nearby. Then they moved near the monastery.

Another man: They entered separately, they entered in three groups. One group went straight to his house, the second group went to Section 7, and the third group stayed behind the monastery. After they burned the houses they all went near the monastery and then left the camp. We heard that it was not the DKBA who live here [*just across the border from Maw Ker*], they were from further away and the name of their chief is Chit Thu [*Maung Chit Thu, a DKBA commander in Pa’an District further north*].

Q: Can you build a new house?

A: We have some plastic sheeting. What we will do depends on the authorities. If they give the order, we will build a new house.

#M7.

NAME: “Naw Ghay Hser” **SEX:** F **AGE:** 24
Sgaw Karen Christian

FAMILY: Married, 2 children aged 1 and 3

INTERVIEWED: 28/3/98

ADDRESS: Dooplaya District; now in Section 7 of Maw Ker refugee camp

Q: For how long have you been living in Maw Ker?

A: We have been staying in Maw Ker for a long time. When the situation was good we went back and stayed beside the river [*in Burma*]. Then when the situation there got too bad we came back here, and we've been staying here for 3 years since then.

Q: Can you tell me what happened that night?

A: During the night we were sleeping, but we dared not sleep in our bunker so we ran to another bunker. They shot for a short time, not even an hour. We heard the soldiers calling, "Go on! Go on! Go on!" in Karen, and one asked his friend for a lighter. Another soldier said, "Don't burn, please don't burn", but they set fire to the houses. After they had finished setting fire to the houses, all the men [*in the bunker*] stood up and looked around. They saw the fire burning down the houses, so we got out and started to run. I was afraid and I took my children away. I looked at my watch and it was half past one. We ran directly to the main road of the camp. I don't know what happened after that because I had already run away, but others who stayed behind said they heard the soldiers asking, "Where are the Muslims' houses?" and they answered, "Sections 7 and 8". Some people saw the soldiers. They were Karen and they were wearing short pants. We didn't see the soldiers, we just heard them. When they entered, they met a man with his wife. That man and his wife were afraid of them so they said to the soldiers, "Don't kill us, don't kill us". The soldiers said: "We won't kill you. Many soldiers are coming. Go in the bunker." After that they burned down the houses. They didn't do anything to the people because they had no weapons in their hands. They only burned down the houses, they didn't hurt people because we are all Karen, we don't want to hurt each other. But the Burmese soldiers were staying behind, and they fired shells into the camp.

Q: Do you know how many families are now homeless?

A: Fifty houses burned down. About five houses burned down in Section 7, and many houses burned down in Section 6.

#M8.

NAME: "Pi Lah Say" **SEX:** F **AGE:** 55
Karen Buddhist
FAMILY: Married, 6 children aged 13-30
INTERVIEWED: 28/3/98
ADDRESS: Dooplaya District; now in Section 7 of Maw Ker refugee camp for 2 years

Q: Can you tell me what happened that night?

A: They fired their guns first, they didn't burn the camp first. They burned down the camp after they had stopped shooting for quite a long time. They fired big bombs and I also heard the sound of small guns. When they were shooting I tried to carry my children but I could only grab my child by the legs [*because she was panicking*]. Then we were hiding in the bunker. We saw two people coming and burning the houses. When the fire started to get bigger we ran away and I fell down on the way. I cut up my legs so badly that I didn't dare to look at my wounded legs.

Other people saw the soldiers but I was afraid. I didn't dare lift my head up to look, so I didn't see. The people from that house said they saw two soldiers. The Section 5 leader saw them too because the fire was burning brightly. That was when my house burned down. Two soldiers came and set fire to the houses. They were saying, "We will burn, we will burn". They spoke in Sgaw Karen. They didn't burn the monastery, but the Burmese soldiers' bomb fell on it.

Q: Do you think that the DKBA is good for Buddhists?

Another woman: I don't think that they are good for all Buddhists - it depends on the luck of the Buddhist who meets the DKBA. The DKBA came and shouted: "Where are the Muslims?" Maybe they hate the Muslims.

A: Yes they really did that, they asked everyone, "Where are the Muslims?"

Q: Do you think you'll rebuild your house here, or will you move?

A: If we can live here we will live here, if we can't live here we won't. I will follow the others. If they dare to live here then I will live here too, but if not then I also won't dare to stay.

#M9.

NAME: "U Than Myint"
Karen Buddhist farmer
FAMILY: Married, 4 children aged 20-23
INTERVIEWED: 28/3/98
ADDRESS: Hlaing Bwe township; now in Section 6 of Maw Ker refugee camp

Q: Can you tell me what happened that night?

A: They entered, fired their guns and burned down the houses. When they came I didn't know it, we just heard the explosions at 1:15 a.m. on the 23rd of March. The shells landed nearby and we all woke up. At first I thought that the Thai soldiers had fired something. I kept listening. I was not running yet. I had to find my family.

The soldiers came straight to the Monastery. They came straight and they shouted, "Go on, go on!" and they set fires. Women and children were hiding in the bunkers. I saw the fire and the soldiers calling, "Go on, go on, go on!" I heard one soldier who was holding a walkie-talkie. He said in Karen language, "Don't fire the gun, don't fire the gun", but his friends fired. One soldier was shouting in Burmese, "*Nga lo ma tha!!* We are in front of you, why are you firing the gun at us?" [*'Nga lo ma tha' is Burmese for 'Motherfucker'.*] When the soldiers went to one place, the other soldiers shot at that place. If it was me I would be angry against the Burmese soldiers [*who were firing from behind*]. I would have turned my gun against them and shot at them. I heard one soldier speaking Pwo Karen. I thought he must be DKBA and I dared not go out.

First they fired big weapons and then they fired small guns. After they were shooting for about ten minutes we couldn't see them anymore. They went to section seven and I didn't see which way they were going out of the camp. They burned down the monastery as they were on their way out. I don't know how they burned it, you'd have to ask the monks. They didn't burn the community hall [*a community hall for religious use, associated with the monastery*], but when they fired heavy weapons the shells hit it and burned it. They didn't burn all the houses, they only burned some houses and then the fire spread to all the houses. I saw four of them, and the others were over there. I saw them when the fire started. Some were DKBA and some were Burmese. The Burmese soldiers were shooting guns and the DKBA burned the houses. I could not stay for long, the fire was too hot.

Q: What language did they speak?

A: They spoke Karen language, not Burmese. The soldiers who spoke Burmese stayed behind the monastery. They were the ones who were shelling with heavy weapons. It was mostly Burmese soldiers shooting the heavy weapons, two mortars and M79 [*grenades*].

I saw four soldiers coming this way and the others were over there; they were not too young. The ones who came over here were carrying guns, and one soldier was carrying a big bag. One soldier didn't have a gun and the other three soldiers were holding guns; AK[47], [M]16. They were wearing military uniforms. I also saw one soldier with a

yellow scarf but I didn't see their hats. Some soldiers were wearing a plain uniform and one soldier was wearing a camouflage uniform. The soldier who wore the camouflage uniform said, "Don't touch me, don't touch me!" I dared not touch him. He was holding a gun. He thought that I would hit him.

They shot at my house. They shot six times or seven times. I saw pieces of shells. When they shot at my house, I looked out the top of the bunker and I looked at them. They looked down into the bunker before they burned down my house, and they asked, "Are you a villager or what?" I said, "Yes I am a villager, we are not soldiers". They didn't ask me my religion, they asked me, "Where is your village?" I said "Paw Law Lay village, Hlaing Bwe township". After that we ran away because we were afraid. Then they burned my house down.

Q: Did they look drunk or as if they had used medicines?

A: I don't know, I dared not look. They would shoot me if I looked directly at them. I can't tell you. When they burned the houses they were shivering. They were shaking, their legs were also shaking. Maybe they were afraid. When they heard the bombs they sat down on the ground. What were they afraid of? The KNU is not in the camp!

Q: Could you save any of your things?

A: I dared not carry anything, I dared not go into the house. My pots, plates and clothes, everything burned. Now I have only the clothes on my body.

Q: Did they ask for the Muslims?

A: The DKBA asked us: "Where is the Muslims' section?" They asked but they never arrived there. When the fire was blazing they left the camp, they didn't dare to stay. They were worried that someone would shoot at them. After they had been gone for quite a while, the Thai soldiers started to fire their guns. They fired their guns in the morning, before sunrise. They fired four shells at the same time. One shell landed near where the Burmese soldiers stay, near Wah Lay monastery [*Wah Lay on the Burma side of the border, not in the refugee camp*], and another shell landed in the Thai village.

We got out of the bunker when the people put out the fire. It was about half past two a.m. Then the Thai soldiers came. The fire trucks came just before sunrise; when the Thai soldiers and the fire trucks came to the camp it was already half past four in the morning and the fire was already put out. Fifty houses were burned down in the camp: five houses in Section 7 and forty-five houses in Section 6. Including the monastery and the hall it would be fifty-two. Altogether there are over 300 houses in Section 6.

Q: Do you think that they will come again?

A: I can't tell, I didn't hear anything. But since that happened, we run away to sleep [*outside the camp*] every night.

Q: Do the Thai soldiers still come?

A: Yes, they come to arrange security for us. Now they stay behind the monastery. Yesterday they came to hold a meeting. They didn't call all the villagers, they called

only the men. They said, "Do you dare to shoot the Burmese?" The villagers answered, "Yes, we dare. If you call us [*to fight*], many people will go." They asked how many people have been soldiers and the ones who have been soldiers before stood up. Then they asked, "How many people can speak Thai?" The villagers who could speak Thai stood up. Then, "How many Buddhists, Christians, and Muslims are in the camp?" After that they told us, "Don't be afraid. You must live peacefully. You must join with the Thai. If we ask you for your support, you must give us your support." We promised to help them. They asked another question: "If you had guns, would you dare to shoot the enemy?" We said, "We dare to shoot". I didn't hear them say that they would give us guns, but they told us that we must obey the Thais because we are in Thailand. They said, "Don't be afraid, but you have to be careful, you have to dig a good bunker." I didn't hear that we have to move, but they were speaking in Thai so I couldn't understand everything.

Q: How long have you been in this camp?

A: Not even one year. It will be one year this Water Festival [mid-April 1998]. We couldn't stay in our village, because we were afraid of Burmese soldiers and sometimes of DKBA too. I had to go portering and sometimes I had to go as forced labour. I had to go portering for three days at a time, and if I couldn't go we had to pay 1,000 Kyats. We had a lot of difficulty finding 1,000 Kyats. And forced labour! I had to build the road all the time. We had to build the road very far from my village in Pa'an district, in Zar Tha Bhin. We started to build the road from Hlaing Bwe to Pa'an, and all the other roads too. We had to take food for ourselves. The DKBA forced us to work for the Burmese. The Burmese commanded the DKBA to do it, and then the DKBA forced us to work. When we stay in our village the Burmese and the DKBA force us to work. Now when we stay in the camp, they burn my house. Will our lives always be like this? I don't know.

#M10.

NAME: "Pu Lay Ko" **SEX:** M **AGE:** 59
Karen

FAMILY: Married, 6 children aged 16-30

INTERVIEWED: 28/3/98

ADDRESS: Hlaing Bwe township; now in Section 6 of Maw Ker refugee camp

Q: Can you tell me what happened that night?

A: The soldiers came to the camp at 1:15 a.m. I was staying in the house. At that time we were already asleep. I have six children, but that night only three of us were at home because my other children had gone to M--- with my wife. I was sleeping in one room with my two daughters and a friend was sleeping in the other room with her daughter. There were a lot of explosions but at first we didn't wake up. We woke up when a shell landed in the toilets. When I heard that they were shooting I jumped down from the house. My daughters are old enough to run by themselves, but I couldn't carry my belongings. Then we stayed in the bunker. After we had been in the bunker for a while, my daughter told me, "Our house is burning". I lifted up my head [*above the lip of the bunker*], looked outside and saw that they were burning my house. I wanted to go back home to get my belongings, but my daughters pulled me back because the house was already burning, so I went back into the bunker. I couldn't save anything. We just looked at the house burning.

I didn't see the soldiers who burned our house. I thought that they must have gone to burn other houses, so we stayed in the bunker. They went straight over that way, and then they went back at about 2:30 a.m.

His daughter: Pa, you stayed in the bunker and you didn't see, why are you talking as though you had seen everything?

"Pu Lay Ko": I'm just guessing. I dared not look. I didn't see when they were leaving. I don't know which way they went back. I stayed with my daughters. I can't guess.

Q: Did you hear them talking?

A: No, I didn't hear. They didn't ask me anything because they couldn't see me. We didn't see anything. My daughter pulled me back when I stood up and looked outside. My daughter told me, "Leave it in the fire Pa, let the house burn in the fire". I couldn't do anything. Nobody dared to look, everybody stayed in the bunker. We didn't sleep, we just sat quietly and listened. We waited until all the houses had burned down and then we got out of the bunker, we looked around and we didn't see anything. I looked at the sky and I saw the stars. It was already almost morning. At that time the fire had already been put out. The section leader came to find out how many houses were burned down, he wrote it down in his notebook and went back.

His daughter: We got out when the people were warming themselves near the embers of the burned houses.

Q: How long have you been staying here in Maw Ker?

A: I've been around here for 14 years, since before the refugee camp. First we left our village and stayed in Thay Baw Boe [*just across the border in Burma*]. In those days there was no problem.

NAME: "Saw Bway" **SEX:** M **AGE:** 25
Sgaw Karen
FAMILY: Married, children
INTERVIEWED: 23/3/98
ADDRESS: Dooplaya District; now in Section 6 of Maw Ker refugee camp

[*"Saw Bway"'s house was near the Burmese monastery and was burned in the attack.*]

On the 23rd at midnight or one o'clock, SPDC and DKBA came to the camp, they fired big weapons and small guns and they burned houses. They burned Section 6 and part of Section 7. They burned more than 40 houses. 40 families are homeless. I saw some of them [*the soldiers*] wearing civilian clothes. When we ran we couldn't carry our things because they fired their weapons. If they hadn't fired we could have saved our things.

Q: Did they shoot the monastery or did they set it on fire?

A: They shot, *paung-paung-paung* [*imitating the noise of mortar shells*]. I ran to the bunker and I called my family and my children to hide in the bunker.

Q: Do you think that the DKBA would shoot the monastery deliberately?

A: I can't tell. If they were DKBA they should have had yellow scarves, but we didn't see any scarves on their heads. We could see their faces because of the fire. Maybe they put their scarves in their bags, we don't know. But the soldiers were shouting against each other, because I heard one saying in Karen, "Don't shoot, don't shoot, why are you firing your guns, it is very strange that you are firing your guns!" Only a few soldiers came. If many came they'd have no security and they'd suffer more casualties [*because the Thai soldiers would know they're coming*].

[Another refugee from Section 6, who was on duty as a sentry that night, added:] That night at ten, we saw some strangers and we didn't know exactly who they were. Some people said that they were hunters. Later I saw four soldiers going to section 7 and four to section 3. I also saw some soldiers staying behind the monastery *[they never entered further into the camp]*. One sentry who was staying under a tree got wounded. After the attack we saw a 2½-inch *[mortar]* shell and RPG shells left on the ground, but when the Thai soldiers came they took them. I think that those soldiers won't dare to come and attack again because they were drunk and looked like they were afraid. They burned the *[Burmese]* monastery and a hall *[just in front of the monastery]*. They came one way and they went back the same way.

#M12.

NAME:

“Saw Eh Kler”

SEX: M

AGE: 23

Karen student

FAMILY:

Single, 3 brothers and sisters

INTERVIEWED: 28/3/98

ADDRESS:

Doooplaya District; now in Section 1 of Maw Ker refugee camp for 5 or 6 years

[“Saw Eh Kler” is the youngest of 4 siblings and just finished high school in the refugee camp. His father is dead and his mother lives elsewhere.]

Q: Can you tell me what happened that night and when it happened?

A: I am from Section 1, but that night I went to visit my friend in Section 3. He said, “Don’t go back, it is too dark, sleep here.” So I slept there. I was already asleep when I first heard the explosion. I looked at my watch and it was 1:15 a.m. When I heard the explosion I jumped down out of the house. I hid under the house, and then I walked to Section 1. They started to fire heavy weapons, after that they fired rifle grenades [*special grenades that mount on the end of a rifle like an M1 carbine*], small mortars and other bullets. Then the shooting stopped and I walked to Section 6. I reached Section 6 when the houses were burning. One man told me, “Nephew, they left already, they came just for a while.” I asked him, “Did you see many soldiers?” He answered, “I don’t know, the soldiers came in two groups. One group of soldiers came to see me and the other group went along the road.” The soldiers spoke Karen. They asked him, “Where are the Muslims’ houses?” and he said, “They are very far from here.” That group of soldiers was followed by the Burmese. The Burmese were behind them, while it was mostly the DKBA going in front.

The man said that when they entered they started firing the big weapons, one group called “Go on, go on, go on” in Karen, and the other group called “Go on, go on, go on” in Burmese. One group asked for a lighter from the others. The other group said, “Don’t burn, don’t burn”, but the first group said, “Burn, burn!” Then one soldier asked his friend for a lighter and his friend said, “I have no lighter”. So he asked one from another friend, and he set fire to the houses. That was about 15 minutes after they’d started shooting.

The first group was running in front and the second group was running and setting fire [*to the houses*] at the same time. Another group was staying behind the monastery - they were Burmese. Each of the first two groups had 4 people. They burned the houses, they moved back and then they left the camp. That man told me, “I really saw it. They came and they burned my house. I put out the fire and they set the fire again, and I put it out again. Then they searched me and they asked, ‘Uncle, do you have any money?’ I told them I have no money and they said, ‘If you don’t have money then run, run!’” They burned his house after he had run away. When I saw him he was sitting near the fire.

Later a lot of Thai military cars came. The Thai soldiers came and talked to a man from Section 7 who was near me - his name is M---. They asked him, “Which way did they

come from?" M--- answered, " They came from that way". The *[Karen]* sentries had seen and heard them and they had shouted. The Thai soldiers didn't say anything, and they were worried that the people would think that they do not provide any security. While that was happening, the Thai soldiers went in a line near the grave and shelled four times with big weapons. Then later the Thai soldiers who were in a line near the road shelled again. They fired across the river at Wah Lay. That was before sunrise. They fired again and again until five in the morning, and the people in the camp ran away because they were worried that the SPDC and the DKBA would shoot back.

Q: Did the Thai soldiers do sentry duty to protect people before that night?

A: No, they didn't do anything. Sometimes they provide security but not regularly. That night we had only villagers as sentries and they were holding nothing but slingshots, so they dared not shoot. From looking at their behaviour, I think the Thai, the Burmese and the DKBA have joined hands and are working together.

Q: Yesterday when the Thai authorities came and made a meeting, what did they say?

A: I think that they wanted to know the population of the camp, how many Christians, Muslims and Buddhists are in the population and how many people can speak Thai. And they asked about the helicopter crash. The Thai official asked, "Did you ever see that helicopter?" The villagers answered, "Yes, we saw it." And they asked, "Did you see the place where it crashed?" We answered, "We didn't see." Then they showed money, 15,000 Baht, and they said, "If you find the pieces of the helicopter, we will give you this money". That was a Thai helicopter that crashed in the rainy season of 1997. We didn't see it crash, but we saw it flying that day. I didn't hear it crash but I heard the SPDC shooting at it. *[A Thai Army helicopter patrolling the border crashed in rainy season 1997, probably shot down by SLORC troops. SLORC refused the Thai request to send a team to search for the wreckage until several weeks later, and then would only allow them to search one specific location. No wreckage was found.]*

Q: If someone tells you that you have to go back to Burma, what will you do?

A: Why would I go back? If we go to stay in Burma we must be slaves of the Burmese. I would rather go and be a KNLA soldier and shoot at them. That would be better for me.