



**Karen Human Rights Group**

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

---

**News Bulletin**

September 2, 2011 / KHRG #2011-B28

---

## **Papun Interview: Maung Y---, February 2011**

---

*This report contains the full transcript of an interview conducted in February 2011 in Dweh Loh Township, Papun District, by a villager trained by KHRG to monitor human rights conditions. The villager interviewed Maung Y---, a 32 year-old married hill field farmer, who described an incident that occurred on February 5<sup>th</sup> 2011, in which he and eight other villagers were arrested at gunpoint by Tatmadaw Border Guard Battalion #1013 soldiers and arbitrarily detained. During this time, Maung Y--- reported that they were forced to porter military rations and sweep for landmines using basic tools. He described how one villager was denied access to medical treatment and forced to porter despite serious illness, and reported that families of the detained villagers were forced to pay arbitrary amounts of money to the Battalion #1013 troops in order to secure their release. Maung Y--- also reported that, after this incident, his village was ordered by Battalion #1013 to produce and deliver 7,000 thatch shingles, as well as to provide four more villagers to serve as porters. In response to this, Maung Y--- reported that villagers had, at the time of interview, refused to comply with these forced labour demands.*

---

### **Interview | Maung Y--- (male, 32), T--- village, Dweh Loh Township, Papun District (February 2011)**

*The following interview was conducted by a villager in Papun District who has been trained by KHRG to monitor human rights conditions. It is presented below translated exactly as it was received, save for minor edits for clarity and security.<sup>1</sup> This interview was received along with other information from Papun District, including two other interviews, one situation update and 384 photographs.<sup>2</sup>*

**Ethnicity:** Karen

**Religion:** Buddhist

**Marital Status:** Married

**Occupation:** Hill field farmer

**How many children do you have?**

---

<sup>1</sup> KHRG trains villagers in eastern Burma to document individual human rights abuses using a standardised reporting format; conduct interviews with other villagers; and write general updates on the situation in areas with which they are familiar. When conducting interviews, villagers are trained to use loose question guidelines, but also to encourage interviewees to speak freely about recent events, raise issues that they consider to be important and share their opinions or perspectives on abuse and other local dynamics.

<sup>2</sup> When these documents have been processed and translated by KHRG and when sufficient information has been compiled and analysed, a full Field Report on the situation in Papun District will be available on the KHRG website. Until then, KHRG's most recent analysis of the situation in Papun District, and more specifically, in Dweh Loh Township, can be found in the recent Field Reports, "Southern Papun District: Abuse and the expansion of military control," KHRG, August 2010; and "Southwestern Papun District: Transitions to DKBA control along the Bilin River," KHRG, August 2010.

I have two children.

**How old is the oldest one?**

Six years old.

**How about the youngest one?**

Two years old.

**Do you have any [special] duties in the village?**

No, I'm a villager.

**As you are a T--- villager, have you ever faced forced labour or arrest?**

Yes, the [Tatmadaw] Border Guard soldiers came and arrested us.

**When did the Border Guard soldiers arrest you?**

On February 5<sup>th</sup> 2011.

**What was the [battalion] number of the Border Guard soldiers?**

[Battalion] #1013.

**Where were they from?**

They were from K'Hter Htee [army camp].

**Did they come with a lot of soldiers?**

They came with over 30 soldiers.

**Who was their leader?**

Their leaders were Lieutenants Maung Soe, Khoh Htoo and Gkloh Meh.

**Can you tell me about how they arrested you?**

They told villagers [to come and work], but the villagers didn't [all come], so they came and arrested people by themselves.<sup>3</sup>

**Did they ask the village head?**



This photo, taken in February 2011, shows Maung Y---, 32, a married hill field farmer and resident of T--- village, in K'Hter Htee village tract. Maung Y--- told KHRG that he was arrested at gunpoint by soldiers from Border Guard Battalion #1013 and detained for fifteen days, during which time he was forced to porter military rations and sweep for landmines. [Photo: KHRG]

---

<sup>3</sup> A local villager trained by KHRG to document the human rights situation also reported that in February 2011 Tatmadaw Border Guard Battalion #1013 soldiers arrested villagers in southern Dweh Loh Township to serve as porters, after local community leaders were unable to meet a demand for porters issued by Battalion #1013. The villager reported that Battalion #1013 demanded at least 45 porters from at least 10 villages in the Baw Kyoh River valley. See: "Papun Situation Update: Dweh Loh Township, May 2011," KHRG, August 2011.

First they asked the village head [to send villagers to work], but we couldn't help so they said they'd arrest the villagers by themselves.

**Where were you when they arrested you?**

When they arrested me I was at home, working. I was taking rice to put it in a rice barn and then when I stepped out of my house they called me [to go with them].

**Did they show [point] their guns when they called you [to go with them]?**

They pointed their guns at me and said: '*Don't run. If you run, we'll kill you.*' And then we had to go with them.

**Did other people run or did they kill anyone?**

They didn't kill anyone, but they said they saw people run. They said to the people who were left: '*If you run, we really will shoot you.*'

**Where did they take you?**

They took us to K'Hter Htee and in the morning we portered loads and went to Mae Bpa [in Bu Tho Township].

**Can you [describe what happened] step by step, from the time the Border Guard soldiers arrested you until you came back?**

We went [to K'Hter Htee] and they told us: '*You were very disobedient, so we had to go and arrest you.*' They also called us the people of Lieutenant Steel. We had to clear the landmines that Lieutenant Steel placed.<sup>4</sup> When we came back we each had to pay 31,000 kyat (US \$42)<sup>5</sup> [to be released].

**Where did you have to start portering loads, and to where?**

We started to porter loads from K'Hter Htee to Mae Bpa.

**How many days did it take from K'Hter Htee to Mae Bpa?**

It took two days.

**What kind of loads did you have to carry?**

We had to carry oil, chilli, onion, salt, and sweet powder [MSG].

---

<sup>4</sup> The interviewee did not provide any further information about 'Lieutenant Steel.' In November 2010, the Mizzima News Agency reported that former DKBA Battalion #909 Commander Lieutenant Saw Steel, who had previously been active in Dooplaya District, had defected to KNLA Battalion #101, which operates in Dooplaya and Pa'an Districts; see: "38 DKBA splinter troops rejoin KNU," *Mizzima News*, November 19<sup>th</sup> 2010. It is unclear from the interviewee's testimony, however, whether the Battalion #1013 soldiers were referring to the former DKBA Battalion #909 Commander, another specific individual, or making general reference to a Karen armed group such as the DKBA or KNLA.

<sup>5</sup> All conversion estimates for the Kyat in this interview are based on the fluctuating informal exchange rate rather than the government's official fixed rate of 6.5 kyat to US \$1. As of August 31<sup>st</sup> 2011, this unofficial rate of exchange was US \$1 = 737 kyat. These figures are used for all calculations above.

**Did the loads include bullets?**

No, they didn't.

**How heavy was one load?**

One load weighed ten viss (16 kg / 35.2 lbs).

**Did they give you food while you were portering?**

Yes, they gave us food.

**How about water?**

Yes, we drank water.

**How about a place to sleep?**

The sleeping place was a little hard. We had to sleep under the huts and on the ground.

**While you were portering, if you became sick suddenly, did they take care of you?**

We were nine people and one of us had elephantiasis [*lymphatic filariasis*]. He asked permission to go back and we went to plead for them to let him go. We thought that they would give him medicine, but they didn't give him medicine and they also didn't let him go. A T--- villager [and Battalion #1013 soldier] whose name is Saw B--- let him go secretly and he went back to T--- village secretly. For medicine, they didn't give us any because none of us was sick.

**Did they punch or hit or beat you and your friends?**

We were not friendly with them and we stayed away. If they told us [to do something], we did it. We didn't question anything they said, so they couldn't [beat us].

**Did they hurt you?**

We didn't get hurt in our group.

**When you carried loads did anyone get killed or step on a landmine?**

No one was killed in our porter group.

**When the Border Guard soldiers came and arrested you, how many people were arrested with you?**

Me and eight friends. Altogether nine people.

**How many days did the portering take?**

It took [around] 15 days.

**While you were away, what did your family do?**

They could do nothing. They were just looking for us. They couldn't work and they were looking for us. Our wives and women went and paid money for us [to be released].

**How much did they have to pay? And if they didn't pay, would they [the soldiers] have set you free?**

31,000 kyat (US \$42) [per person], and if our wives hadn't paid we wouldn't have been freed.

**How did people do this if they didn't have the money?**

They borrowed from their friends.

**How did they pay back their friends?**

We sold rice and paid them back.

**While you were away, who looked after your family, like if they were sick?**

They had to look after themselves because no one looked after them.

**What were the names of your friends that were with you?**

My friends were Saw C---, Saw D---, Saw E---, Saw F---, Saw G---, Saw H--- and Saw I---.

**Did all those people come back and did they all have to pay money?**

Yes, they all came back.

**Did the Border Guard soldiers only arrest people from your village? How about other villages? Did they arrest people from other villages also?**

In Pya War, they didn't arrest villagers because the villagers lived near them. So, they ordered them to go [to porter] and they [the villagers] went. They had to go for five days each time.

**How did they let you go?**

Starting from K'Hter Htee, we had to go [to Mae Bpa] on our own and they didn't go with us. When we arrived back [to K'Ter Htee camp] we had to clear landmines.

**How did you clear landmines? Can you explain it to us?**

They said: '*The KNU placed the landmines, so you have to clear them.*' After that, they gave us a rake and we started to clear landmines.

**Did you get hurt?**

No, no one got hurt.

**How many days did it take to clear the landmines?**

We started from Mae Kae Kyaw in Kho Wah Lay and cleared [mines] to T'Ray Pa Baw. It took two days.

**How many people had to go [each] day?**

They didn't tell people [to go]. We stayed near them, so we had to [were forced to] go.

**Did their soldiers have to clear mines?**

Yes, their soldiers had to clear mines.

**What would they [Battalion #1013 soldiers] have done if you hadn't gone?**

They didn't tell us anything. They ordered us to go with their soldiers, so we went. We had to rake for landmines, and we raked. Furthermore, we also had to cut and sweep [trees and brush] to maintain [clear] a road.

**After you had cleared the way, what did they do with the road?**

They used it to transport their food [rations] to T'Ray Pa Baw, and then they would cross the river to Noh Day.

**While you were clearing the landmines, did anyone get injured by a landmine?**

In our group, no one got injured by a landmine, neither villagers nor Border Guard soldiers.

**Now, have they already sent their food?**

I don't know. When we came back they hadn't sent it yet.

**After you came back, did they come and arrest you again?**

They said they would come and ask for people. They demanded four villagers [for forced labour] and 7,000 thatch shingles.

**Have the villagers already sent the villagers and shingles?**

No, we haven't given them yet. We refused to give them [the villagers and shingles], so they said they would come and take them by themselves.

**What will happen if you don't give them to them?**

This, I didn't ask the village head. We just went and listened at the meeting. We don't know if they will give us problems or not.

**[They demanded] 7,000 thatch shingles from the whole village, so how much did you have to give from each house?**

They said 50 thatch shingles from each house.

**Where do you have to send the thatch shingles?**

We have to send them to Baw Kyoh Leh.

**What would they [the soldiers] use them for?**

They said they would build houses for their families.

**Did they pay for the work?**

They didn't pay us anything.

**How often do they ask you for thatch shingles?**

Once a year.

**Now, have the villagers or village head had any problems because you haven't sent them yet?**

They said the village head had to come to [meet] them because we didn't send the thatch shingles for them. The village head has to go without fail. If the village head goes, I think they will tell him to do something [about the villagers and shingles demanded by Battalion #1013]. Now, they haven't done anything to us yet.

**Was it only the Border Guard soldiers that asked or forced you to work? How about the [regular] SPDC Army [Tatmadaw]?<sup>6</sup>**

Now, we don't hear anything from the SPDC Army, but in the past they asked us. We had to carry water or other things along the K'Hter Htee river bank.

**Do the Border Guard soldiers work closely with the SPDC soldiers?**

Now, they say they are brothers and work together.

**In your point of view, are the Border Guard soldiers becoming the SPDC?**

In my point of view, the Border Guards and the SPDC are the same group.

**Does the SPDC give them a salary?**

Yes, the SPDC gives them a salary.

**Is the salary they get enough?**

I don't know for an officer. We asked their soldiers, and they said they get 35,000 kyat (US \$48) a month.

**Does that include a food budget?**

For their food budget, I also don't know. We went and portered with the soldiers. We don't know if they were single or married. They said '*Now we get government money for free, 35,000 kyat per month.*' We heard it, but we didn't care.

**Did you suffer [forced labour] yourself or did you see [witness] others suffering?**

I suffered it myself. I suffered it with eight other people in my village and other villagers.

**Have you suffered only forced labour and demands? How about other things?**

We don't see everything, so we can't say. We can only say what we've suffered. For other things [abuses or incidents], if other villagers have [experienced those], our village head hasn't told us yet. Or maybe he will tell us later.

**Do you face any problems working on [flat field] farms or hill fields?**

---

<sup>6</sup> The State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) was officially 'dissolved' on March 30<sup>th</sup> 2011; see: "Mission Accomplished as SPDC 'dissolved'," Myanmar Times, April 4-10 2011. The term 'SPDC' was used by both the interviewer and interviewee, and is therefore retained in the translation of this interview.

We face problems with our paddy plants [rotting].

**Are you a [flat field] farmer or a hill field farmer?**

I'm a farmer.

**Do you get enough food?**

This year, we didn't get enough rice because some of our paddy became rotten, because of the weather.

**Does only your family have to face this problem? How about other people?**

Other people also [face this problem], not only me.

**Do you get enough food in your village? Do villagers have to find other food?**

They have to find other food, I think. For us, every year we harvest 40 baskets of rice (1280 kg. / 2816 lb.) but this year we only harvested 20 baskets of rice (640 kg. / 1408 lb.). So maybe at the end of the year [before the next harvest] we'll have to find food. Or not. I don't know.

**If you have to find food, how will you find it?**

We'll look for people who have bigger farms and ask if they have extra [rice] or not. If they do, we'll buy it or we'll borrow it.

Further background on the situation in southern Papun District can be found in the following KHRG reports:

- "Papun Situation Update: Bu Tho Township, April 2011," (September 2011)
- "Papun Situation Update: Dweh Loh Township, May 2011," (September 2011)
- "Papun Incident Reports: November 2010 to January 2011," (August 2011)
- "Southern Papun District: Abuse and expansion of military control," (August 2010)
- "Central Papun District: Village-level decision-making and strategic displacement," (August 2010)
- "Central Papun District: Abuse and the maintenance of military control," (August 2010)
- "Southwestern Papun District: Transitions to DKBA control along the Bilin River," (August 2010)

Recent photos from the area are presented in *KHRG Photo Gallery 2010* and *KHRG Photo Gallery 2010-B*. These and other KHRG reports and maps of the region can be found on the KHRG web site at <http://www.khrq.org>.

