



Karen Human Rights Group

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

News Bulletin

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Papun Interview: Saw T---, December 2011

This report contains the full transcript of an interview conducted during December 2011 in Bu Tho Township, Papun District by a community member trained by KHRG to monitor human rights conditions. The community member interviewed a 40-year-old Buddhist monk, Saw T---, who is a former member of the Karen National Defence Organisation (KNDO), Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA) and the Border Guard, who described activities pertaining to Border Guard Battalion #1013 based at K'Hsaw Wah, Papun District. Saw T--- described human rights abuses including the forced conscription of child soldiers, or the forcing to hire someone in their place, costing 1,500,000 Kyat (US \$1833.74). This report also describes the use of landmines by the Border Guard, and how villagers are forced to carry them while acting as porters. Also mentioned, is the on-going theft of villagers money and livestock by the Border Guard, as well as the forced labour of villagers in order to build army camps and the transportation of materials to the camps; the stealing of villagers' livestock after failing to provide villagers to serve as forced labour, is also mentioned. Saw T--- provides information on the day-to-day life of a soldier in the Border Guard, describing how villagers are forcibly conscripted into the ranks of the Border Guard, do not receive treatment when they are sick, are not allowed to visit their families, nor allowed to resign voluntarily. Saw T--- described how, on one occasion a deserter's elderly father was forced to fill his position until the soldier returned. Saw T--- also mentions the hierarchical payment structure, the use of drugs within the border guard and the training, which he underwent before joining the Border Guard. Concerns are also raised by Saw T--- to the community member who wrote this report, about his own safety and his fear of returning to his home in Papun, as he feels he will be killed, having become a deserter himself as of October 2nd 2011.

Interview | Saw T---, (male, 40), M--- village, Bu Tho Township, Papun District (December 2011)

The following interview was conducted by a community member in Papun District, and is presented below translated exactly as it was received, save for minor edits for clarity and

security.¹ This interview was received along with other information from Papun District, including 12 other interviews, two situation updates, and 325 photographs.²

Ethnicity: Karen

Religion: Buddhist

Marital Status: Married

Occupation: Border Guard deserter



What is your name?

My name is Saw T---.

T---?

Yes.

How old are you?

I'm 40-years-old.

Where do you live? What is the name of the village where you live?

I live in H--- village.

Which village tract is H--- village in?

H--- is in Kaw Law Htah village tract.

Do you know which township Kaw Law Htah village [tract] is in?

Kaw Law Htah is in Lu Thaw Township.

What is your religion?

¹ KHRG trains community members 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, community members 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.

² In order to increase the transparency of KHRG methodology and more directly communicate the experiences and perspectives of villagers in eastern Burma, KHRG aims to make all field information received available on the KHRG website once it has been processed and translated, subject only to security considerations. As companion to this, a redesigned website will be released in 2012. In the meantime, KHRG's most recently-published field information from Papun District can be found in the Report, "Photo Set: Villagers register concerns about proposed Hatgyi Dam," KHRG, June 2012.

I'm a Buddhist.

What is your occupation?

In the past I worked as a hill field farmer.

Are you married?

Yes, I'm married.

How many children do you have?

I have two children.

How old is your eldest child?

My eldest child is 20 years old.

How about your youngest child?

My youngest child is seven years old.

What are your parent's occupations?

My parents are also hill field farmers.

What grade did you finish school?

I finished after second grade.

Have you ever been a soldier?

I used to be a KNDO [Karen National Defence Organisation soldier].³

How about the DKBA [Democratic Karen Buddhist Army]?⁴

I was a DKBA soldier for four years.

³ The Karen National Defence Organisation (KNDO) is the former name of the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA). The KNDO is a militia force of local volunteers trained and equipped by the KNLA and incorporated into its battalion and command structure; its members wear uniforms and typically commit to two-year terms of service.

⁴ The DKBA was formed in December 1994, led by monk U Thuzana and with the help and support of the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC), which was the name of the military government in Burma at that time. For more information on the formation of the DKBA, see "Inside the DKBA," KHRG, 1996.

Which battalion were you in when you were a DKBA soldier?

I was in battalion #777.

Which company was it?

I was in company #1.

What was your position when you were a DKBA soldier?

I was just a soldier.

Did you have a personal number when you were a soldier?

They [the DKBA] didn't give me my personal number.

Were you a DKBA soldier first or Border Guard soldier first?⁵

I became a DKBA soldier in 1995 when the DKBA was formed.

Which month was it?

I cannot remember the month.

Was it during summer, the monsoon season, or in winter?

It was after people planted the paddy. I think it was June or July.

Can you explain to me why you became a DKBA soldier?

I became a DKBA soldier because some of my friends were recruited as DKBA soldiers and I too was recruited to be a soldier.

Before you were a DKBA soldier, you were a KNDO soldier, is that right?

⁵ While Tatmadaw and DKBA units have for years operated together, this operational hierarchy became formalised with the DKBA's transformation into a 'Border Guard Force' under control of the Tatmadaw and containing a fixed number quota of Tatmadaw officers. This transformation dates to at least May 2009, when commanding officers stated in high-level meeting of DKBA officers that the DKBA would transform itself into a 'Border Guard Force.' Leaked minutes from the May 2009 meeting are retained by KHRG on file. Ceremonies attended by Tatmadaw commanders officially announced the transformation of large portions of the DKBA into Border Guard Forces in September 2010; see, for example: "Border Guard Forces of South-East Command formed in Paingkyon of Kayin State," *New Light of Myanmar*, August 22nd 2010; and "Border Guard Force formed at winkwinkalay region, Myawaddy Township, Kayin State," *New Light of Myanmar*, August 25th 2010

I did serve as a KNDO soldier, and then I resigned.

You had already resigned?

Yes, I resigned and then worked as a cultivator. But when my friends were recruited [into the DKBA], I was also persuaded to join the army.

Didn't you want to join the army?

No, I personally didn't want to join the army.

How many villagers in your village were recruited?

Saw B--- and Saw H--- [were recruited].

Only two people?

No, there were more. Saw W--- and Saw P---.

Only four people?

Yes, only four people.

Were any of them under 18 years old? Or above 19 years old?

None of them were under 18 years old. All of them were over 19 years old.

Were any of them under 15 years old?

No. None of them were under 15-years-old.

How many soldiers were in your battalion?

There were 300 soldiers when I first joined the army.

Who was the battalion commander?

The battalion commander's name was *Bo* [Major] Aye Shwe.

Where were you active?

We were active in Mah Htaw village.

Is it in Papun [District] area?

Yes, it was in the Papun area.

Did you ever hear of monk U Thuzana⁶ when you were a DKBA soldier?

Yes, I heard about him.

Do you know about his activities?

I don't know about U Thuzana's activities. Sometimes, our battalion commander went to meet with him, and then returned, telling us about what he had said and ordered. So, I don't know much about him.

Did the battalion commander call the soldiers when he was going to meet with U Thuzana?

No, he didn't call us to go with him.

Who was in charge of transportation in your battalion?

[Major] Aye Shwe was in charge of that.

How many months and years ago did you desert?

I deserted from [the Border Guard] on October 2nd 2011.

Why did you desert?

I resigned after four years as a DKBA soldier. That was when my first wife died and I had to raise my children on my own, so they let me resign. After that I re-married. After six years, I became a Buddhist monk and they came and persuaded me to return to my position again because they [the DKBA] were going to form the Border Guard.

Did you return as a soldier in the Border Guard?

Yes, I returned as a Border Guard soldier.

Which month and year did you return?

When they first called me it was August 10th.

⁶ U Thuzana is an influential Buddhist monk based in Myaing Gyi Ngu who was instrumental in the formation of the DKBA in 1994; see "Inside the DKBA," KHRG, March 1996.

How long have you been working as a Border Guard soldier?

I think it has been over a year and a half.

So, you returned in 2010?

Yes, 2010.

Did you get paid when you were a DKBA soldier?

No, I didn't get paid when I was a DKBA soldier.

How about the food?

They gave my family rice.

How about oil, yellow bean, fish paste and sweet powder?

We didn't get those.

How much did you get paid when you worked as a Border Guard soldier?

They gave us a salary.

How much did a soldier get paid each month?

We got 34,000 Kyat⁷ (US \$41.56) each month.

How much did a company commander get?

A company commander got 130,000 Kyat (US \$158.92) per month.

How about a battalion commander?

I think for a battalion commander, it will be 300,000 kyat (US \$366.74) per month.

How about a section commander?

For a section commander, the salary will be 45,000 Kyat (US \$55) per month.

⁷ As of June 29th 2012, all conversion estimates for the Kyat in this report are based on the official market rate of 818 Kyat to the US \$1. This reflects new measures taken by Burma's central bank on April 2nd 2012 to initiate a managed float of the Kyat, thus replacing the previous fixed rate of 6.5 Kyat to US

How about the vice section commander?

For the deputy vice commander, the salary is 39,000 Kyat (US \$47.67) per month.

How much does a sergeant Major get per month?

A sergeant major gets 75,000 kyat (US \$91.6) a month.

How many times have you received your salary?

They said that they would pay me my salary on August 18th.

Which battalion were you in when you were a Border Guard soldier?

I was in K'Hsaw Wah battalion [White Elephant].⁸

Do they have a battalion number?

No, they don't have one.

They really don't have a battalion number?

I remember now; I think the battalion number is #1013.

Who is the battalion commander?

The battalion commander is *Bo* [Major] Hla Kyaing.

How many soldiers does he have?

I think around 200 soldiers.

How many companies do they have in battalion #1013?

They have three companies.

Which company were you in?

I was in Company #1.

⁸ Saw T--- has responded to the question by stating the name of the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA) battalion, K'Hsaw Wah 'White Elephant' Special Battalion #777. From Saw T---'s description of his time with the DKBA earlier in the interview it is clear that he was operating with K'Hsaw Wah Battalion, and it is likely that, in response to the question posed he was referring to his time with the DKBA as he clearly states that while he was operating with the Border Guard, his battalion's number was #1013.

Who is the company commander?

The company commander is *Bo Bah Yoh*.

What is the vice company commander's name?

The vice company commander's name is *Bo Tun Hta*.

Did he give you any other job role when you joined the Border Guard?

I was just a soldier.

Did they give you a personal number?

Yes, they did, but I had not been given mine by the time I left.

Who controls the Border Guard?

The Burmese [Burma] government controls them.

What is the responsibility of the Border Guard?

The Commanders said that the Border Guard has to live in and check the Border areas.

You were a Border Guard soldier for one year is that right? Where were you active?

Yes. I was in Ta Ree Hta [village], and sometimes I went back to K--- [village].

How many soldiers were in Company #1?

I think about 50 soldiers, and we were divided in three platoons.

Which platoon were you in?

I was in platoon #3.

Did a battle ever happen while you were a Border Guard soldier?

No. A battle never happened while I was a Border Guard soldier.

Did your platoon have good relations with villagers when you went to their villages?

The commander's didn't have good relations with the villagers.

And the [Border Guard] soldiers, did you have good relations with the villagers?

Yes, but we also had to follow orders given by the commanders. Sometimes, we saw the commanders looting the villagers' properties but we couldn't do anything to help them. Even though we sympathized with the villagers, we didn't dare to say anything to the commanders because we were just soldiers.

Does the Border Guard have a close relationship with Burmese [Tatmadaw] soldiers?

When I was a Border Guard soldier, they did have a close relationship with Burmese soldiers. Most of the Border Guard recognized themselves as Burmese soldiers, although, some didn't recognize themselves as Burmese soldiers.

When you were active in your platoon, did you have any contact with KNLA [Karen National Liberation Army]?

From what I know, I only saw the commander contact the KNLA once.

Did they hold hands [work together]?

Yes, they held hands and they even visited each other personally, to discuss work.

Was your platoon commander a good-minded man?

My platoon commander didn't really have a good mind.

What was your platoon commander's name?

My platoon commander's name was Pah Meh Kyee.

How was the company commander's leadership? Did he lead his fellow soldiers in the right way?

He didn't really lead his fellow soldiers in the right way.

In what way didn't he lead his fellow soldiers in the right way?

Because he used his position to create a dictatorship.

Was it because he wanted to control everyone?

Yes, he wanted to control everyone and wanted everyone to listen to him.

Have you seen any soldiers who are under 18 years old in the Border Guard?

I have seen many soldiers who are under 18 years old because they are forced to join the army. If they don't want to join the army they have to hire a person to go on their behalf.

How much do you have to pay the person you are hiring if you don't want to join the army?

You will have to pay 1,500,000 Kyat (US \$1833.74) to a person who you want to hire.

Have you ever seen any soldiers in your platoon die in battle?

No, I have never seen any soldiers die in my platoon.

Can you guess what the youngest-aged soldier is?

I guess the youngest age of a soldier was 17-years-old.

Was there anyone who was 15-years-old?

No, the youngest age was 17-years-old.

How old was the eldest soldier?

I think around 50-years-old, and some were even 60-years-old.

When you were in your platoon or company, did the Tatmadaw ever combine with your platoon, meaning you would have been active together?

No, we were never active with the Tatmadaw.

Did you ever come to Hkoh Nee Hkoh [Salween River bank]⁹ on the border?

We were based there once. I think we stayed there for around a month and a half.

Did you ever see a battle happen there?

No.

How was the food when you lived with your platoon in the army camp?

⁹ Hkoh Nee Hkoh translates as, "Salween River bank." The Salween River marks Papun's Eastern border with Thailand.

The food was really not good.

Did you also get enough cooking oil?

No, sometimes we didn't even have cooking oil.

They paid you a salary, but did they also support you with food?

No, they gave us a salary but they didn't give food to us.

Did they give food to your family?

No, they didn't. They gave only rice to my family.

How many sacks of rice did they give to your family?

Because my wife only lived with my one child, they only gave them one sack of rice.

Where did your wife and child stay when you were in the Border Guard?

They stayed in Papun town.

How about when you were on the front line, did you get enough food?

We didn't really get enough food.

What kind of curry did you eat the most?

We only ate vegetable soup, and we had to find the vegetables by ourselves.

Did they also give you yellow beans and dried fish to eat?

No, they didn't give this to us.

Is the Border Guard vegetarian?

No, they aren't vegetarian.

Did you dare to go to the Tatmadaw area when you were a Border Guard soldier?

We didn't really dare to go because we were just soldiers.

Did the Border Guard commander take care of you while you were sick? Did you have medicine?

We didn't get enough medicine.

Did you see any other soldiers who were sick?

Yes.

Did they give them vitamins?

No, they didn't. Once, one of my friends who was in the same platoon with me got seriously sick, but they didn't come to take care of him or give him medicine.

When you were a Border Guard soldier, were you allowed to visit your family?

I wasn't allowed to visit my family, so I didn't have a chance to visit them.

Were you able to contact your family?

Yes. I wrote to them and my wife came and visited me.

When you were in the army camp, were you allowed to relax and leave the army camp?

No, we could only stay around the army camp. We were not allowed to go out of the army camp.

Weren't you even allowed to go a short distance from your army camp?

Yes, we were allowed to go a small distance from our army camp.

Was there a contract for a Border Guard soldier?

No, there was no contract.

Did they allow you to resign when you didn't want to be a Border Guard soldier anymore?

No, we weren't allowed to resign whenever we wanted.

So they didn't make a contract because they wanted you forever?

Yes. If they know that we deserted, then they would come and arrest us and make us be soldiers again.

Did you ever see your friends in the same platoon desert?

Yes, I have seen many people desert.

Did they go and harm their family?

Yes, they harmed the deserter's family.

How did they harm them?

There was a soldier who was in the same platoon as me, and deserted at the same time. When the commanders found out about this, they went and found the soldier's parents and forced his father to join the army on behalf of his son.

Did they force the father to replace his son?

Yes, after his father served in the army for a while and he couldn't do it anymore, his mother called his son to rejoin the army. When the son returned to the army, his father was able to go home again.

Did they hit him when he returned to the army?

No, they didn't.

Were you really just a simple soldier?

Yes, I was just a soldier.

Did you enjoy being a soldier?

Even though I didn't like being a soldier, I had no other choice. They forced me to join the army.

Had you ever met with the KNLA?

No, we never met them.

How about DKBA?

We didn't meet with them because we weren't allowed to leave.

Did the Border Guard have any relations with DKBA?

Yes, at first there were good relations, but later the Border Guard said they would defend themselves if the DKBA shot at them.

Did they ever shoot each other?

No, they didn't.

Did you ever see any KNLA soldiers arrested when you were with the Border Guard?

I never saw this when I was in my platoon.

How about in the company?

I heard that they arrested a KNLA soldier in another company.

What did they do to the KNLA soldier?

I heard that they killed him.

Did you hear this from other people or did you see it?

I didn't see it; I heard it from other people.

Did Border Guard [soldiers] plant landmines when you were with them?

I saw them carry landmines but I'm not sure whether they were planted or not.

Did the Burmese soldiers give them the landmines or did they make them by themselves?

They made the landmines by themselves.

Did they also give landmines to the soldiers?

No, they didn't give landmines to the soldiers. Only the battalion commander had the landmines. Whenever they go anywhere, he is in charge of the landmines.

Did someone have to carry the landmines for him?

Yes, he always called a porter to carry the landmines for him.

Did they pay the porter?

No, they didn't pay him.

Did they provide food for him?

Yes, he had a chance to eat rice, the same as the soldiers.

How many porters were enlisted to carry the landmines when you were going somewhere?

It depended on the amount of bags that they had to carry. If they needed three people, then they would call three people to porter. But there was someone who was hired to be a special porter. He always had to porter every time we went anywhere. The whole village had to pay that person.

How much did that porter get paid?

Some people said that he got 600,000 Kyat (US \$733.49) a year and some people said that he only got 300,000 Kyat (US \$366.74) a year.

Didn't the commander pay the porter?

No, he didn't pay the porter. The villagers had to hire him, people from one village, or sometimes two villages.

How long did the special porter have to work for?

He had to porter for the whole year and after that they would change to someone else. But during the special service or if they needed more people to carry the stuff they will call other villagers to help. If they need one person, they will call one villager and if they need two people, they will call two villagers.

Have you ever planted any landmines?

No, I don't know how to plant them.

Did you ever see any of your friends get injured by landmines?

I have seen many soldiers in the battalion get injured.

Did they take care of them?

Yes, they took care of them.

Which hospital did they go to?

Some people went to Pa'an [Town] Hospital, but soldiers who were seriously injured were sent to a different hospital. I don't know where it was.

Were there any other restrictions put upon villagers?

Yes, there were. For example, the villagers were asked not to allow any other armed groups access to their village.

Did they restrict the villagers from travelling?

No, they didn't.

Did the Border Guard soldiers also steal the villagers' property?

Some soldiers stole the villagers' property.

What did they steal?

They stole chickens from the villagers.

Have you ever stolen?

No, I have never done that.

If the villagers gave something to you, did you accept it?

Yes, if they gave it to us, we ate it.

Do you think that they treated the villagers in the right way?

No, they didn't.

Why do you think that? Can you explain it to me?

When the villagers were asked for food but could not provide it, they would be punished for not giving it to them. They always forced the villagers to do things. I don't think that is the right way.

Did any of the soldiers also steal the villagers' gold or other properties?

I don't know about that, but I guess some of them might have done that, but I don't know because there were lots of soldiers.

Did they ever arrest the villagers?

Yes, when they wanted to recruit soldiers, they would arrest anyone they saw. Then, they would force them to follow.

Did they ask the permission of the village head?

Yes, they asked.

Did you ever hear about your fellow soldiers raping women?

Yes, I have heard that some soldiers have done this.

Did the commander punish the soldiers for that?

Yes, they punished them.

What did they do after they raped a woman?

In the case I saw, the soldier had a wife who he cheated on with another woman. He paid the woman money to sleep with her. So, when his wife found out about this, she told the commander and the soldier was punished.

Why did he have to pay the woman money?

He paid the woman money because she didn't have a husband; she was charging men [money] who wanted to sleep with her.

Where does she live?

She lives in K--- [village].

Do you know the soldier's name who raped¹⁰ the woman?

I forgot his name.

Did they ever force the villagers to relocate to another place while you were a soldier?

While I was a soldier, I never saw that.

Did you ever see the Border Guard burn the villagers' houses or entire villages?

¹⁰ Although the interviewer is asking the deserter whether or not he has seen Border Guard soldiers engaging in the raping of women, and seems to be accepting that this situation was an instance of un-consensual sex, it is likely that this is an instance of prostitution.

While I was with the army, it didn't happen.

Did they also destroy the villagers' food like rice or even the villagers' flat field?

I have also never seen that.

Did they do anything to the villagers when they saw them in the forest?

They didn't do anything to the villagers, but they asked the villagers to follow them.

Have the Border Guard [soldiers] ever ordered the villagers to do forced labour?

They asked the villagers to do forced labour a lot.

Did they pay any money to the villagers for their work?

No, they didn't pay anything to the villagers.

What kind of jobs did they ask the villagers to do?

They asked villagers to send bamboo poles and thatch so they could build their camp; they will always ask for these. They also asked the villagers to fence their army camp.

Did they give the villagers food when they forced them to do labour?

Yes, they gave the villagers food.

What did they do to the villagers when they ordered them to do something that the villagers refused to do?

If the villagers didn't follow what was ordered, they would either punish them or ask for compensation.

What kind of punishments or compensation did they give to the villagers?

If the villagers didn't come, they would ask for a pig or chickens from the village as compensation or punishment.

Do you think what they did was correct?

No, it was not correct.

Did your commander explain to you about the Border Guard's political view?

No, they didn't tell us about that.

Were you trained before you joined the army?

Yes, I had training once, in Thaton [District].

What kind of training did you attend?

They just asked us to attend and listen to what the trainer said.

How many trainees were there?

There were so many trainees because they called the trainees from seven different Border Guard battalions.

Who were the trainers?

The trainers were Burmese [Tatmadaw].

What were the trainers' names?

I forgot their names.

What were their ranks?

All of them were commanders. Some were company sergeant majors and one was a company commander.

What kind of training did they give you?

They taught us the stand to attention process and how to load and fire guns.

Did they teach in the Burmese language?

Yes, they taught in the Burmese language.

Did they teach you what to do when a battle is happening?

Yes, they taught us this. They also showed us what to do when we hear a whistle.

Did they also teach you anything else that a soldier should know?

Not really. They didn't teach us anything else. They just taught us to stand to attention and stuff.

Did they also teach you how to treat the villagers when you are in their villages?

They didn't give us training for this.

Did they teach you what to do when you see an enemy?

No, they didn't teach us this. They just told us after we finished our training, that we would have to stay at the Thai/Burmese border.

Did you attend the training together with the commanders?

No, the commanders had a different training. The commanders attended training in the office. The soldiers had to attend training outside, on the ground.

How many months did the training take?

It took one month.

Did you get enough food while you were in the training period?

We had two meals a day during the training period.

What curry did you get to eat?

We got fish curry. They also prepared food for the vegetarians.

Were you a vegetarian?

Yes, I was a vegetarian back then.

How about now?

No, I'm not a vegetarian anymore.

Was the place that you attended the training inside or outside Thaton city?

It is not really in the city but it's also not outside the city.

Was the ground that you were trained on a wide space of land?

Yes, the ground was really wide.

Can you guess how many acres it was?

I think it was more than ten acres.

Was the ground that the training took place on private or public land?

The soldiers training ground was on private land.

Are there any buildings beside the ground?

Yes, it was surrounded by army buildings.

Which battalion is based in Thaton?

I think it is LID [Light Infantry Division] #22.

Do you know the LID commander's name?

I don't know.

Did you have a farewell party after you finished the training?

No we didn't.

How about the training opening ceremony?

No, we also didn't have a party.

While you were trained, were other outside people allowed to go and watch?

No, no one was allowed to go and watch when we were trained. Even the soldiers' families were not allowed to go and watch them.

Were you ever punished while you were training?

No, I wasn't.

Did anyone get punished?

There were punishments during the training period.

Did you have to wake up very early in the morning?

We had to wake up at 5:00 am in the morning.

How many trainers gave the training?

I think there were 20 trainers.

Did you have training everyday during that week?

They let us rest twice a week on Saturday and Sunday.

What did you do on the weekend?

At the weekend, we could go to the pagoda that was close to where we live. We were not allowed to go very far from where we lived.

Were you allowed to carry a gun when you went out?

No, we were not allowed.

Did they give you a gun?

In the first two weeks of the training, they didn't give us a gun. But later they gave us a gun. The guns were old.

Did everyone understand Burmese? Because the trainers gave the training in Burmese, is that correct?

There were lots of soldiers who didn't understand Burmese.

Did the trainers beat them when they didn't understand what they said?

No, they didn't.

Do you know how many battalions the Border Guard have right now?

I only knew the people who I attended the training with, which were [Border Guard] Battalions #61, #62, #63 and #69. That's all I know.

You said there were lots of people who attended the training, is that right?

Yes, in our battalion alone there were 150 soldiers.

Why did you desert from the Border Guard?

It was because I didn't want to be a soldier anymore.

Did they allow you to resign?

They didn't allow me to resign, so I deserted.

When did you desert?

I deserted on October 2nd 2011.

Where did you desert to?

I deserted to L--- village.

Which village tract is it?

I don't know about the village tract.

Can you explain to me how and where you deserted?

I didn't plan to desert. When I was on the boat to somewhere on my holiday, I saw some people I knew, so I went together with them.

So, you didn't desert on purpose?

No, I didn't. I decided to desert when I was on holiday.

How many other soldiers came together with you?

Only two soldiers, including me.

Is he married or single?

He is married.

Did you bring any weapons?

No, I didn't bring any weapons.

How about the other person?

He brought one but he didn't dare to tell anyone.

What did he bring?

He brought an AR [assault rifle], but I'm not sure because I didn't see it.

He was on the same boat with you right?

Yes, but he hid the AR, so I didn't see.

How many days did it take you to come here?

It took many days but I can't remember.

Have you met with your family already?

Yes, my wife came to meet me and then we came back here together.

How did your wife know about this? Did anyone contact her?

My friend's wife went and told her.

Did the Border Guard harm your wife?

Yes, at first they wanted to harm my wife. They didn't want my wife to come and get me. But my wife told them that she needed to. They [tried to] prohibit my wife from coming to get me, but my wife came anyway.

Did you bring any clothes or other things when you deserted?

No, I didn't bring anything because I didn't plan to desert.

Is the Border Guard always under the control of the Tatmadaw?

Yes.

Have you ever heard anything about the KNLA while you were in the Border Guard?

Yes, I was always told to think of the KNLA as our enemy.

So, what have you decided you are going to do from now on?

I'll follow what the KNLA commander tells me to do. I'll follow their arrangements [for me].

Did you decide to go back to the Border Guard or join the KNLA, or just stay in the village as a villager?

I decided not to go back to the Border Guard again. I didn't dare to go back to them.

What do you think they would do to you if they arrest you again?

I think they would probably kill me.

Do you dare to go back and stay in your house in Papun?

No, I don't dare to go back and stay there yet.

How will you contact your parents?

Both of my parents passed away. I only have my younger sibling.

Where is your younger sibling?

My younger sibling is in the camp.

Did you decide yourself to get in contact and stay with your younger sibling?

Yes, I thought it is better for me to go and hide there for one or two years. Later, I'll follow what the KNLA arrange for me.

Do you think the Border Guard will last long [as an armed group]?

I don't think they will last for long.

What about the situation with the Border Guard?

Their situation isn't good.

Is there anything that you want to report personally? Anything that I haven't asked you, that you want to report?

I don't know what to say. I think I don't have anything.

Have you ever seen the Border Guard trading in drugs?

Yes.

Did the soldiers in the battalion do this?

Yes, they traded drugs and they also used drugs.

Did they use opium?

Yes.

Where did they get opium from? Did Burmese soldiers give it to them?

I don't know where they bought it.

Did you ever use opium?

No, I didn't.

Did they allow you not to use opium?

Yes.

Did they force you to use opium?

No, they didn't force us because they bought it with their own money and it is expensive. Opium is 5,000 Kyat (US \$6.11). If you want to use opium, you have to buy it with your own money.

Is it true that they bought the opium from Shan State?

I don't know about that. I only saw when they brought it here and sold it to other soldiers.

Did they use the drug when they were in the army camp?

Yes, they used it when they were in the army camp.

How about when they travel?

They also used it then.

Does the Tatmadaw also use opium?

I didn't see them use it.

Do the leaders of the Border Guard use it?

Yes, they also use it. Even the battalion deputy commander uses it.

What is the battalion deputy commander's name?

His name is Kyaw Win.

Have you ever been to Shan¹¹ or Wa¹² army group places?

¹¹ The Shan people are an ethnic minority hailing from Shan State in North East Burma. The Shan State Army (SSA) is divided into the Shan State Army North and Shan State Army South. It was formed on April 24th 1964 when the Shan State Independence Army (SSIA) and the Shan National United Front (SNUF) merged together under the leadership of Sao Hearn Hkam, Mahadevi of Yawngghwe, and the First Lady of the Union of Burma (1948-52) see, "Shan Army Holds Anniversary" *Burma News International* 25th April 2012

No, I have never been there.

Have you ever been told about them?

I have only heard about the Wa army group.

Have you ever been to their places?

No.

Is there a shop in the army camp that sells drugs?

I don't know about that.

What kind of opium do they use? Is it small or big?

The opium that they use is very small.

Is it a red colour or a white colour?

It was a yellow colour.

Did they sell it secretly or openly to each other?

They just sold it openly to each other.

Did they tell you that they will tie you up if they see you using drugs?

No, they didn't.

Have you ever met a group from the Border Guard that went to make a ceasefire with the Tatmadaw?

No.

Is there anything that you want to report?

No, nothing else.

¹² The United Wa State Army (UWSA) is the military wing of the United Wa State Party (UWSP). Formed in 1989 after the collapse of the Communist Party of Burma (CPB) it has an estimated 30,000 troops and is regarded as the strongest ethnic army operating in Burma. They control large areas of land on the Chinese-Burma border, see "Burma blocks Wa army-linked airline," *Democratic Voice of Burma* 26th November 2010 and "Myanmar's Wa: Likely Losers in the Opium War," *Asia Times* January 24th 2004.

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

- “Photo Set: Villagers register concerns about proposed Hatgyi Dam,” (June 2012)
- “Papun Situation Update: Bu Tho Township, received April 2012,” (June 2012)
- “Sustained Tatmadaw resupply operations in Thaton, Nyaunglebin and Papun during ceasefire,” (May 2012)
- “Incident Report: Killings in Papun District, March 2012,” (May 2012)
- “Papun Situation Update: Dweh Loh Township, January to March 2012,” (May 2012)
- “Incident Report: Papun District, June 2011,” (May 2012)
- “Papun Interview Transcript: Naw P---, November 2011,” (April 2011)

