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MON NATIONAL RELIEF COMMITTEE

MONTHLY REPORT

JULY

1997

The Five Points of the Aim of Mon National Relief Committee

- 1. Resettlement of the refugees who become homeless due to the oppression of Rangoon military regime.**
- 2. To help the welfare of the refugees who become jobless due to oppression of Rangoon military regime.**
- 3. To take care and look after the health of the refugees.**
- 4. To fight against illiteracy for the children in the refugee camps.**
- 5. To struggle for human rights.**

The Organization of Mon National Relief Committee

- | | |
|------------------------------|---------------------------|
| 1. Phra Wongsala Pala | - Chairman |
| 2. Nai Shwe Thein | - Vice Chairman |
| 3. Nai Kasau Mon | - Acting Secretary |
| 4. Nai Dung Htaw | - Member |
| 5. Nai Chit Nyunt | - Member |
| 6. Phra Tay Jae | - Member |

Monthly Report of the Mon National Relief Committee

(July 1997)

The Situation at Halockhani and Supply Transportation

Although the Halockhani camp was created and administered by MNRC especially to provide safe shelter and necessary food for Mon refugees who escaped to the border because of the civil war, it welcomes with sympathy other ethnic refugees similarly displaced. Since the beginning of 1997 thousands of Karen villagers have become homeless because of the large scale military offensive launched by SLORC against the Karen armed forces (KNU). Some of the Karen refugees camps have been relocated by Thai authorities and ended up situated in side the Burmese border. They were subsequently occupied by SLORC causing many families to flee back into Thai territory.

They have ended up at a campsite site nearby the Halockhani camp seeking safety. The new arrivals fled from Kya_Inn_Seikyi Township and the Three Pagoda Pass area. They have asked the Mon that they be allowed to take refuge near Halockhani because of the relative safety there. There had been a Karen village near to the Halockhani site and from time to time its inhabitants would seek assistance from the Mon when they had farming difficulties with insects, poor yield and the like. Those Karen who had been displaced because of the war fled to the location of that village and naturally asked the MNRC to allow their settlement and to help them with food. The MNRC has agreed and is coordinating with international aid agencies to provide food, education and health assistance to these unfortunate people.

The SLORC military activities were continuous during the May/June period and the accompanying human rights violations have increased and been particularly brutal. Several Karen villages have abandoned their native homes and fled to the border seeking safe haven. The Karen population section at Halockhani has grown constantly and the new arrivals are always in urgent need of food and medical care.

SLORC has changed its strategy when dealing with areas formerly held by ethnic groups. In the areas mentioned here, the KNU had been in control of the land for some years but were forced to abandon their bases in the face of the SLORC offensives. The Burmese troops then entered the village with the purpose of establishing a permanent military presence to prevent the KNU from returning.

Shortly after their arrival in the village the Burmese troops confiscated all the food supplies (including rice) and maintained control of them. They arrested the villagers and established military control. Then, in return for meager portions of the food that had been taken from them, the villagers, including women and children were forced to work. The work included the building of the military encampment. Access to and from the village was blocked by the military and those attempting to flee were prevented in doing so.

Despite severe food shortages, villagers were forced into labor. Besides building the military encampment, the conscripted laborers were forced to porter for the soldiers including the carrying of ammunition and other military supplies during offensives. The is using conscripted labor as combatants in military operations. The villagers were forced to carry ammunition that the soldiers would use in offensive operations against the villagers own people. In addition the villagers were forced to accommodate (billet) the soldiers in the village and, if they had money, to hand it over to the soldiers.

In those cases where villagers had abandoned their homesites to flee for safety the villages were subsequently occupied by troops or burnt down and destroyed. This rendered them unsafe for return. A number of people in this situation sought refuge at Halockhani. The MNRC had difficulty in facing the demands that the increasing numbers of Karen refugees placed on them. This was, in part, due to the previously reported fact that the MNRC were prevented by Thai authorities from delivering supplies for a significant period during the dry season.

Because of the delay, the MNRC has been using large trucks (10 wheels) to transport supplies. This, combined with the weather which worsened daily, made transport more and more difficult as the road became increasingly unpassable. During the second week of July, the road became impassable. The remainder of supplies will most likely be sent in November since it is unlikely that the road will improve before then.

The Situation of Prachuab Refugees

Under intense pressure from Thai authorities and with assurance of UNHCR monitoring about 500 Mon refugees decided to return to their former villages in Burmese territory. This is an area where SLORC had already established a base. The repatriation was to take place in the first week of June. The villagers were nervous about their scheduled return.

Soon after reaching the village, they were promised that they could get food from SLORC and participate in several kinds of assistance from a border area development program. As it turned out, in order to get the food, the villagers have been forced to work for the military. Members of the Mon Army who had surrendered were made to force their own villagers to work in building the SLORC military encampment the local battalion was in a hurry to complete.

Forced conscription has taken place on a daily basis since the villagers were repatriated. The Mon and SLORC troops have forced even women and children to work in construction, clearing the earth, digging bunkers, building barracks, etc. Beginning in the second week of July, numerous villagers were arrested and attempted to force them to help the SLORC troops with their offensive of KNU bases situated nearby. Because of the increasingly brutal abuses, the villagers fled, yet once again, into Thai territory.

They were not, however, given protection by Thai authorities as they had been before. When they reached the Thai border area, the Thai authorities did not allow them to regroup and they were sent to a number of Thai owned plantation in the area. They were accused of being illegal immigrants and threatened with return to Burma. Most of them fled again and, seeking help from local Thai villagers, have fled deeper into Thailand seeking work. About 400 Mon refugees have reached Thailand during the period of the 12th of July through the 20th. This total is from the 500 that repatriated to Burma in the first place.

On the 18th of July a group of about 200 refugees, including women and small children, were arrested by Thai border police. The police chief involved was from the district of Non Ya Plong and former shelter area. They were not detained, but rather given three hours to gather their belongings and travel to an area in Thai territory, but right at the border line. In such a location they are readily accessible to attack from SLORC. Because of the fear this created, almost all of them have fled seeking haven deeper in Thai territory. They felt if they remained where they were, the SLORC troops would seek them out and kill them for having left in the first place.

On the 21st of July, SLORC's LIB 358 Commander Colonel Tun Wai came into Thai territory and discussed with Thai border authorities the subsequent deportation to Burma of those escapees. The Thai authorities told the SLORC commander that the escapees had been returned already to the border area. Naturally, this heightened the fear of the escapees. When, finally, on July 23rd a UNHCR official visited the area, only 20 families remained. Thai border officials misinformed the UNHCR official by saying that the refugees were from an area deeper within Burma and not the repatriation area.

After the visit the Thai officials met with the escapees and gave them three days to return voluntarily to Burma. Following that 'rest period', the Thai officials said that they would be arrested, detained for a month and then returned to Burma involuntarily back to the Chaung Chi area. All of them refused to return to Burma and they have since fled deeper into Thai territory becoming, in fact, illegal immigrants. Thus, those who accepted the offer of repatriation with assurances by SLORC and UNHCR of safety and development money, have been systematically shuffled from location to location, placed in danger, forced into conscripted labor and have given up the relative security of the original refugee camp for the uncertain and hazardous status of illegal immigrants. They will, as have others before them, be forced into hazardous, low-paying work under threat of arrest. The Bangkok Post recently reported that the fastest growing group entering the Thai sex trade business was Burmese refugees.

THE REFUGEE POPULATION OF THE FOUR CAMP ARE FOLLOW
(July, 1997)

No	Camp	Family	Adult		Children		Total
			M	F	M	F	
1	Bee Ree	415	486	543	688	772	2489
2	Tavoy	685	878	1087	989	1144	4098
3	Halockhani	1011	1324	1376	1686	1733	6119
	Total	2111	2688	3006	3363	3649	12706

Note: The population of Prachuab refugees is unclear but the MNRC continued its supply distribution program to refugees who fled into Thai territory.

THE MATERIALS RECEIVED BY THE MON NATIONAL RELIEF COMMITTEE
(July, 1997)

No	Organization	Rice (Sack)	Fish Paste (Kg)	Salt (Kg)	Bean (Kg)	Remark
1	COERR	250	1688	1125	1588	
2	Consortium	-	-	-	-	
	Total	250	1688	1125	1588	

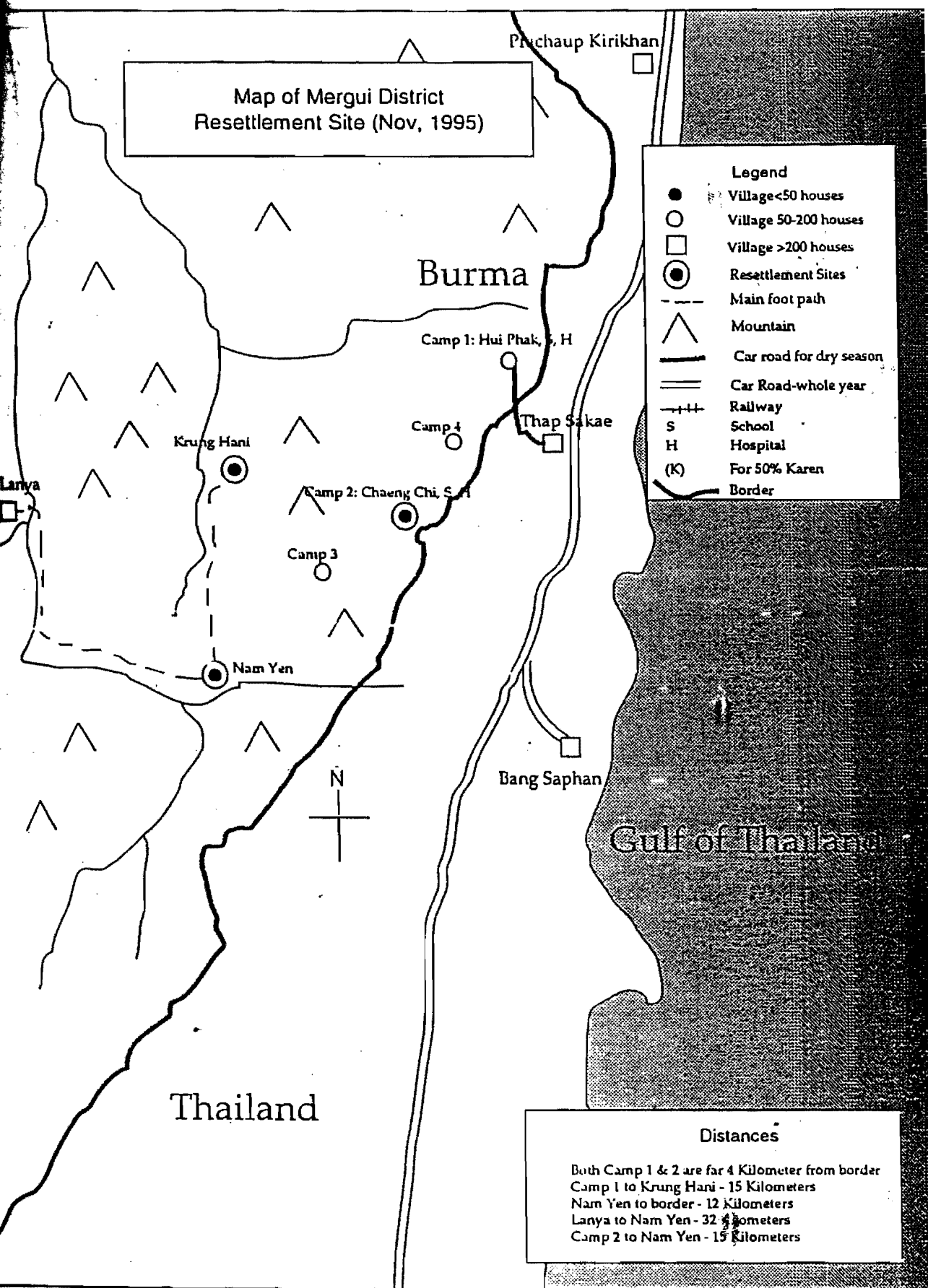
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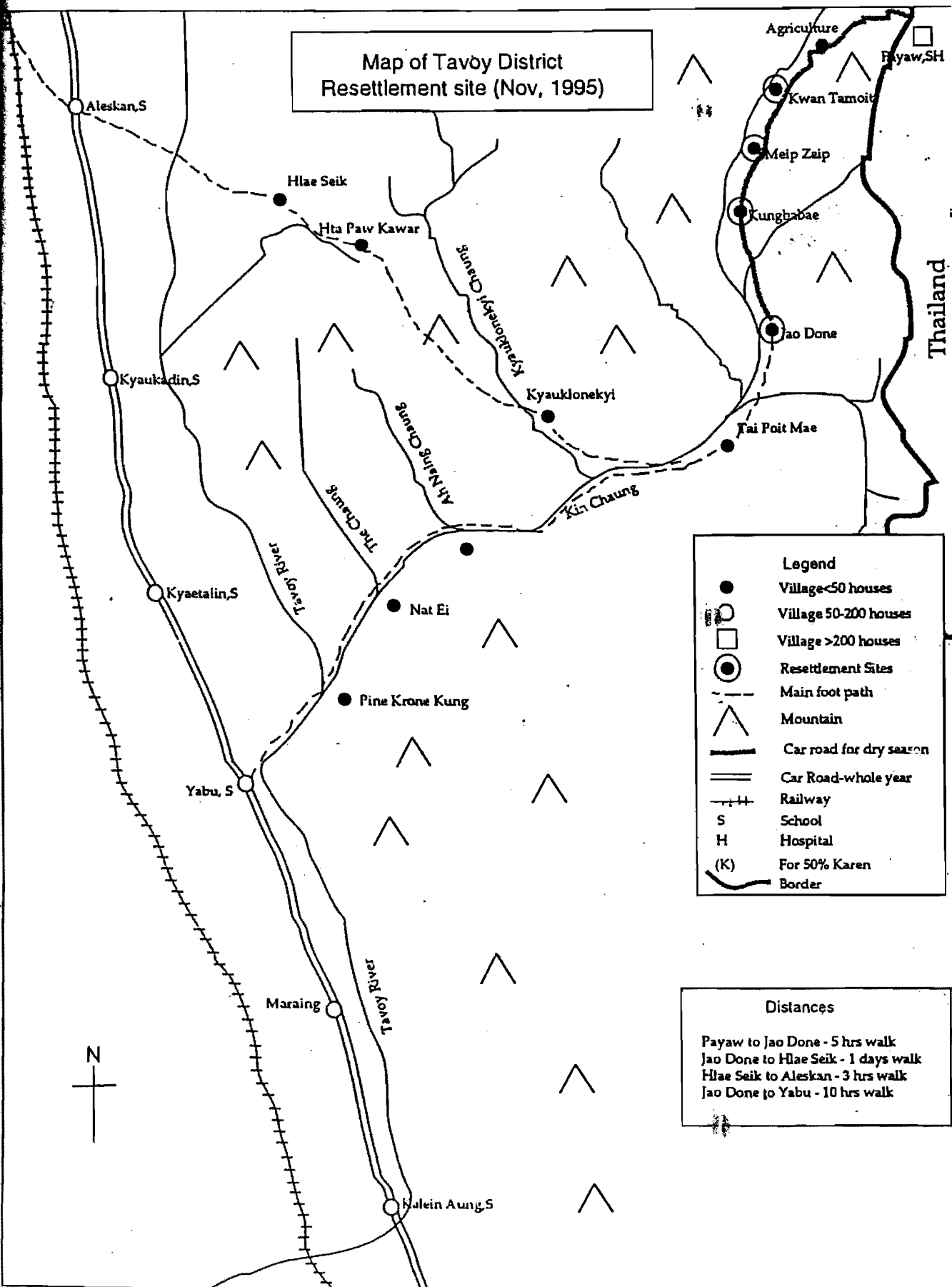
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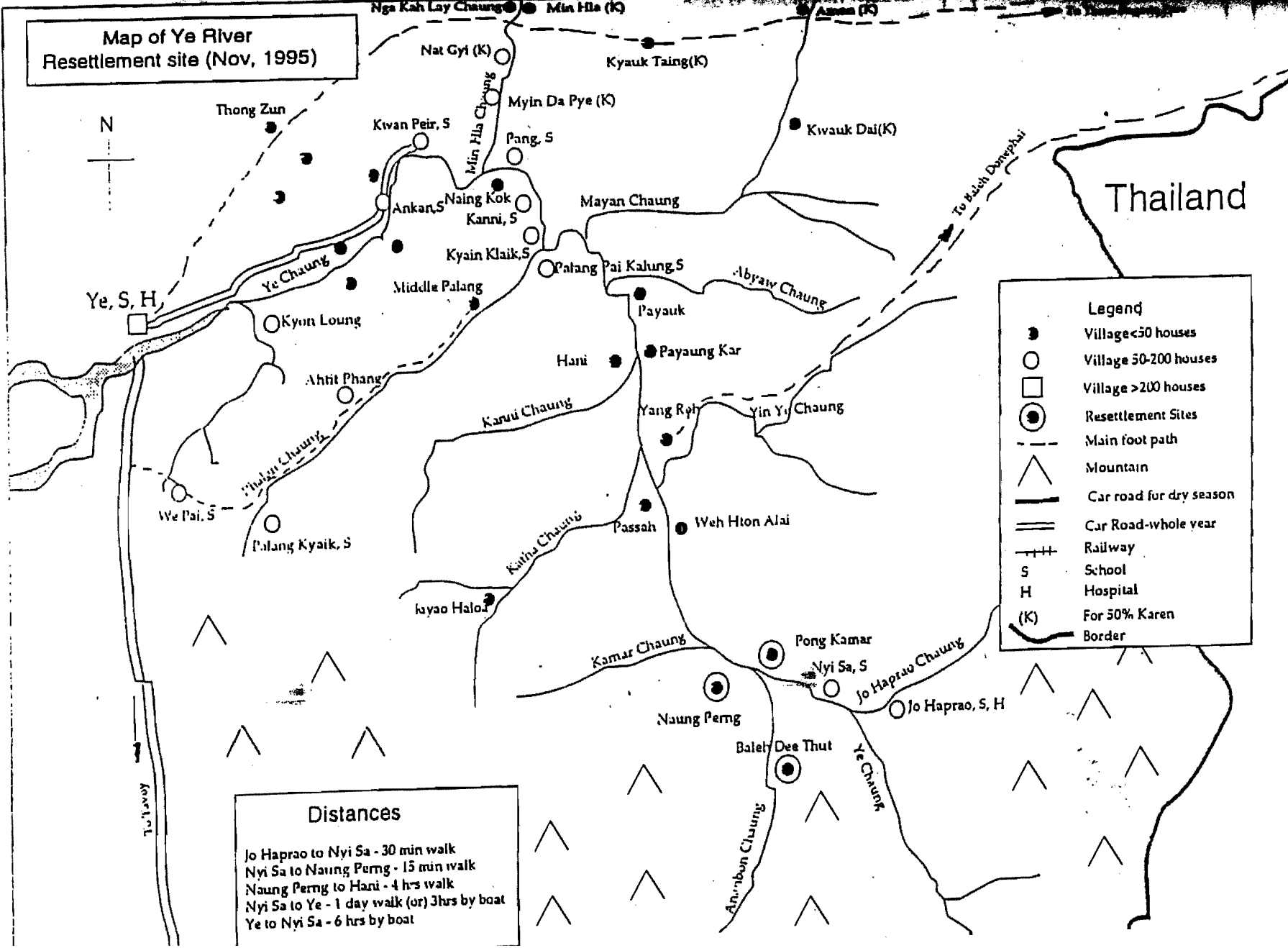
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Map of Ye River Resettlement site (Nov, 1995)



Map of Moulmein District Resettlement site (Sep, 1995)

Distances

Three Pagoda Pass to Chaung Zone - 3 hrs walk
 Baleh Donephai to Pongkatar - 6 hrs walk
 Halockhani to Baleh Donephai - 1 hr walk
 Baleh Donephai to Chedeit - 8 hrs walk

Legend

- Village <50 houses
- Village 50-200 houses
- Village >200 houses
- Resettlement Sites
- - - Main foot path
- △ Mountain
- Car road for dry season
- == Car Road-whole year
- +++ Railway
- S School
- H Hospital
- (K) For 50% Karen
- border

