



Interview

November 2nd, 2020 / KHRG Log # 20-3-A3-11

Mu Traw Interview: Two villagers were shot by Tatmadaw soldiers in Wa Tho Hkoh village, January 2020

This interview describes events that occurred in A--- village, Lay Hpoh Hta village tract, Dwe Lo Township, Mu Traw [Hpapun] District.

- *On January 2nd 2020, Tatmadaw soldiers trespassed into an area controlled by the Karen National Union [KNU],¹ which then led to fighting between the Karen National Liberation Army [KNLA]² and the Tatmadaw³ in A-- village. As a result of the fighting, the local school had to close down and villagers fled to Kyah Rah Hkee, Ka Ma Moh, and Wah Doo villages.*
 - *Later that day, after the initial fighting between the KNLA and Tatmadaw subsided, Saw⁴ C--- and Saw B--- were shot by Tatmadaw soldiers while attending a funeral. They were severely injured and had to be admitted to the hospital in Hpa-an. Now, Saw B---, Saw C--- and the other villagers in A--- village are living in fear.⁵*
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Interview | A--- village, Lay Hpoh Hta village tract, Dwe Lo Township, Mu Traw District (January 6th 2020)

Name: Saw H---

Gender: Male

Age: Unspecified

Religion: Buddhist

Ethnicity: Karen

Family Status: Married

Occupation: Farming

Can you tell me your name please?

My name is Saw H---

¹ The Karen National Union (KNU) is the main Karen political organisation. It was established in 1947 and has been in conflict with the Burma/Myanmar government since 1949. The KNU wields power across large areas of Southeast Myanmar and has been calling for the creation of a democratic federal system since 1976. Although it signed the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement in 2015, relations with the government remain tense.

² The Karen National Liberation Army is the armed wing of the Karen National Union.

³ Tatmadaw refers to the Myanmar military.

⁴ Saw is a S'gaw Karen male honorific title used before a person's name.

⁵ The present document is based on information received in January 2020. It was provided by a community member in Mu Traw District who has been trained by KHRG to monitor human rights conditions on the ground. The names of the victims, their photos and the exact locations are censored for security reasons. The parts in square brackets are explanations added by KHRG staff.

Are you Saw C---'s [the victim's] son-in-law?

Yes, I am.

Can you describe the incident from the beginning?

In the beginning, the KNLA soldiers opened fire at them [the Tatmadaw]. It happened a [few days] ago [on January 2nd 2020]. When my father-in-law and other villagers from the village participated in the procession of an old man's funeral, they were shot in the village [in the middle of the village as they were leaving].

When he was shot, were there Tatmadaw soldiers in the village?

Yes, there were Tatmadaw soldiers in the village.

Didn't the Tatmadaw soldiers who live in the village know the villagers were going to leave the village?

They knew about it because the village head informed them already that people [villagers] would go and attend a funeral. However, the village head could not stop them [the Tatmadaw soldiers from shooting the villagers].

Do you remember the date that he was shot by the [Tatmadaw soldiers]?

I do not remember the date he was shot. [The exact day he was shot is January 2nd 2020 at 1 pm.]⁶

Did the fighting happen in the morning?

The fighting happened between [KNLA and Tatmadaw soldiers] at 10 am. At 1 pm, when people [villagers] attended the funeral procession, the Tatmadaw soldiers went to shoot them [villagers in the procession].

Did KNLA soldiers go to shoot Tatmadaw soldiers in their army camp?

The Tatmadaw soldiers were told not to come into the village and to places controlled by KNLA soldiers. They did not obey what they were being told. Instead, they trespassed into KNLA-controlled areas. Therefore, KNLA soldiers attacked them. The Tatmadaw soldiers almost reached the KNLA army camp. That's why they were shot by the KNLA soldiers.

Were they [the Tatmadaw soldiers] warned by KNLA soldiers not to go [enter the village]?

Yes, the KNLA soldiers warned them [the Tatmadaw soldiers]. They [the Tatmadaw] had come through the village for the past three days and were told not to transport more rice. They were also told to stop by the village head's house [when they pass through]. But they did not obey [the order] and went further into the [KNLA] designated area. That is why the KNLA soldiers attacked them.

Did the attack injure any of the Tatmadaw soldiers?

Yes, two Tatmadaw soldiers were shot by the KNLA soldiers.

Were your father-in-law and Saw B--- shot at the same place where the two Tatmadaw soldiers were shot?

No, the Tatmadaw soldiers shot [my father-in-law and Saw B---] close to the village. They were shot very close to the village head's house in the middle of the village.

When villagers went to attend the funeral procession, were any of the villagers wearing military uniforms?

The villagers did not wear military uniforms. They just wore a shirt and longyi [normal clothing]. There were over 20 people who participated in the funeral procession.

⁶ KHRG, "[Mu Traw District Incident Report: Tatmadaw soldiers shot two villagers in Dwe Lo Township, January 2020](#)", March 2020.

Who passed away? Was it the grandmother or grandfather?

The one who passed away was the grandfather.

Who stopped the Tatmadaw soldiers from going into the village? Was it the KNLA soldiers or the villagers?

The KNLA soldiers stopped the Tatmadaw soldiers. The KNLA told the Tatmadaw soldiers not to trespass into KNU-controlled area. However, they trespassed. Then, KNLA soldiers attacked them.

What is the perspective of the villagers regarding who is right and who is wrong in this situation?

If KNLA soldiers attacked them first, we would say that it is the KNLA soldiers' mistake. In this situation, they [the Tatmadaw soldiers] trespassed into the KNU-controlled area. That is the Tatmadaw soldiers' mistake. The Tatmadaw soldiers were told not to transport bags of rice [rations] anymore. But they did not obey and continued sending rations.

When the Tatmadaw came, did they bring ammunition with them?

Yes, they brought rations and ammunition with them.

How many Tatmadaw soldiers do you think came?

There were around 40 Tatmadaw soldiers.

Do you know the name of the troop?

I don't know from which LID [Light Infantry Division] they were from.

Do you know the name of their commander?

I have no idea. The village head might know. As soon as my father-in-law was shot, I sent him to Hpa-an [hospital] immediately.

How many villagers were injured when your father-in-law was shot?

Two villagers were injured.

Were they [the ones injured] Saw C--- and Saw B---?

Yes, they were.

Were they shot together?

Yes. They were shot while attending the funeral procession in the middle of the village.

Did the Tatmadaw soldiers beat other villagers, aside from these two injured people?

Yes, one of the villagers was hit with the butt of a rifle by the Tatmadaw soldiers after fleeing from the armed attack. His head is still swollen from the blow.

What is the name of that person [who was beaten by the Tatmadaw soldiers]?

His name is Maung⁷ Y---.

How old do you think he is?

He is around 30 years old.

Was he beaten when the fighting happened in the morning at 10 am?

Yes, he was beaten when the villagers were scattering because of the fighting.

⁷ Maung is a Burmese male honorific title used before a person's name.

Wasn't it the same time that the Tatmadaw soldiers shot your father-in-law?

No, he [Maung Y---] was beaten during the fighting. Everyone struggled to survive for their life. [The interviewee's father-in-law was shot later, at 1 pm.]

When the fighting happened, what happened to the children who attend school in A---village?

Teachers brought all of them to K'Ma Moh.

Had these students already arrived at the school?

Teachers brought all the students who had already arrived at the school to K'Ma Moh when the fighting happened. And, students who had not yet arrived at school fled with their parents.

How many students did the teachers bring [to K'Ma Moh]?

The teachers brought six students to K'Ma Moh.

Did the school open on the day that the fighting happened?

No. The school had to close down.

Was it on the same day that the KNLA attacked those [Tatmadaw soldiers] and the Tatmadaw shot villagers?

Yes, these two incidents happened on the same day. The fighting started at 10 am. Many of the students had not yet arrived at school. The Tatmadaw shot the villagers at 1 pm.

When they [the Tatmadaw soldiers] arrived in the village, did they know that somebody died in the village? Did they know that it is the villagers' custom to hold a funeral procession after having prayed [for the dead person]?

Yes, they knew very well. The Tatmadaw soldiers come every day into the village. The village head informed them already about holding the funeral procession. However, they did not listen. They shot the villagers when they went to attend the funeral procession.

Did the Tatmadaw soldiers come to the village before or after the grandfather passed away?

The grandfather passed away at night. The next day, the Tatmadaw soldiers came into the village. They came into the village every day.

How many days passed between when the fighting occurred and when the grandfather passed away?

It was just three days.

Three days after the grandfather passed away, people attended the funeral. Is that right?

Yes. The Tatmadaw soldiers witnessed the funeral and all of the activities. The Tatmadaw told the village head that people went to attack them. The village head responded to them that the villagers [could not have attacked them because they] were attending the funeral procession. The children and women were also attending the procession. They [the Tatmadaw] came into the village every day. The KNLA [only] attacked them after they trespassed into the KNU-controlled area.

Did the Tatmadaw soldiers come to the village multiples times during the day or did they come in the morning and leave in the evening?

They came into the village in the morning and left in the evening. Then the next morning, they would come into the village again. They came every day. The KNLA soldiers would not bother them if they hadn't trespassed into KNU-controlled areas. The Tatmadaw soldiers went beyond the designated area. That is when KNLA soldiers attacked them.

KNLA soldiers shot the Tatmadaw soldiers because they were trespassing in KNU-controlled area. Did the Tatmadaw say anything regarding the shooting?

I did not hear anything about that. I think they were in wrath because two of their soldiers got shot. And then, they got angry seeing the villagers attending the funeral.

Were they [the Tatmadaw soldiers] constantly visiting the village because of an order from above [by their officers] or did they come by their own decision?

They were warned through letters that it is prohibited for them to approach KNLA [KNU]-controlled areas. The KNLA always gave them warning letters whenever the Tatmadaw soldiers approached.

Have the Tatmadaw soldiers left the village now?

They have not come to the village in two days.

Did they [the Tatmadaw soldiers] come to the school?

Yes. Yesterday, they stayed at the school the whole day.

Were BGF [Border Guard Forces]⁸ there, too?

Yes.

Did they [the Tatmadaw soldiers] say anything to the villagers or the village head after they had been attacked?

They [Tatmadaw] said that they shot at the villagers and only hit one villager. The village head responded that they actually hit two villagers. When the villagers were fleeing, the village head shouted at them [the Tatmadaw soldiers to stop shooting]. If not, they [the Tatmadaw soldiers] would have been able to shoot more villagers.

How old is your father-in-law, Saw C---? and B---?

My father in law is 60 years old. Saw B--- is 62 years old [he is actually 63 years old]⁹.

Did the Tatmadaw soldiers mention anything about helping the two victims for medicine and treatment?

They didn't mention anything about this. They didn't even consider offering their support. They even seemed happy about the situation.

Did they [the Tatmadaw soldiers] actually know that they were villagers [the ones who had been shot]?

Yes, they [the Tatmadaw soldiers] knew that they were villagers.

Who had the worst injuries among these two victims?

Saw B--- did not have the worst injuries. My father-in-law had the worst injuries. The gun shot badly wounded his shoulder. My father-in-law will have to go to Hpa-an to have his injury looked at because it is not healing well.

Is he going to Hpa-an tomorrow?

Yes, we are going to Hpa-an tomorrow.

Are the two victims going together? Or is just your father-in-law going?

⁸ Border Guard Force (BGF) battalions of the Tatmadaw were established in 2010, and they are composed mostly of soldiers from former non-state armed groups, such as older constellations of the DKBA, which have formalised ceasefire agreements with the Burma/Myanmar government and agreed to transform into battalions within the Tatmadaw.

⁹ KHRG, "[Mu Traw District Incident Report: Tatmadaw soldiers shot two villagers in Dwe Lo Township, January 2020](#)", March 2020

I have no idea. Now, he [Saw B---] is in K'Ma Moh. He is even afraid to come back to A--- village.

Is that Saw B---?

Yes, since he was discharged from the hospital, he has still not returned to the village. He just stayed in K'Ma Moh.

Have all the villagers returned to the village now?

No.

Where did the villagers flee to?

Some villagers fled to E--- and K'Ma Moh and some villagers fled to O--- village.

How many households do you think returned permanently to the village?

There are two or three households that have returned permanently to the far end of the village.

Have all of the households [at the village entrance] returned to the village?

Yes, almost every household located at the entrance of the village has returned.

Is the entrance of the village far from the exit [other end] of the village?

No, it is not far. But not all of the households situated close to the village head's house have returned yet.

Did the Tatmadaw soldiers inform villagers whether they could return to the village?

No. they did not say anything.

After they [Tatmadaw] were shot, did they go to attack the KNLA at their army camp?

Yes, they went to attack the KNLA at their army camp.

Have Kaw Thoo Lei [KNLA soldiers] returned [to their army camp] now?

Yes, they have.

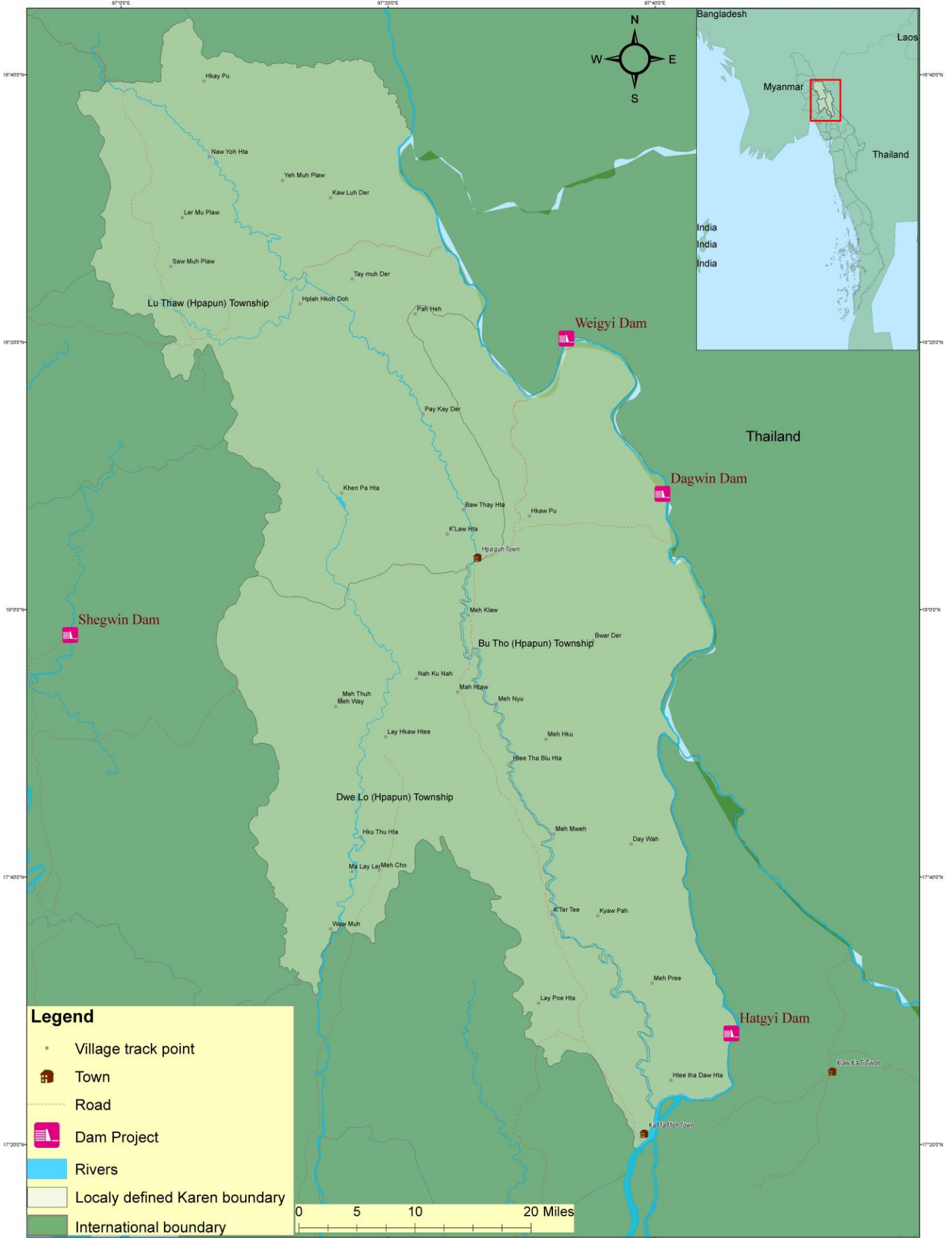
Further background reading on human rights violations committed by the Tatmadaw in Southeast Myanmar can be found in the following KHRG reports:

- ["Southeast Myanmar Field Report: COVID-19, armed conflict, landmines and sexual violence, January to June 2020"](#), (September 2020)
- ["Mutraw District Incident Report: A villager and his daughter injured by a Tatmadaw mortar shell in Dwe Lo Township, June 2020"](#), (July 2020)
- ["Mu Traw District Incident Report: Tatmadaw soldiers killed a female villager and then stole her jewellery in Dwe Lo Township, July 2020"](#), (July 2020)

About KHRG

Founded in 1992, the Karen Human Rights Group is an independent local organisation committed to improving the human rights situation in Southeast Myanmar. KHRG trains local people to document and gather evidence of human rights abuses, and publishes this information to project the voices, experiences and perspectives of local communities. More examples of our work can be seen online at www.khr.org.

Mutraw (Hpapun) District



Legend

- Village track point
- 🏠 Town
- Road
- 🏗️ Dam Project
- 🌊 Rivers
- ▭ Locally defined Karen boundary
- ▭ International boundary