



## Report from the Field

November 13, 2009 / KHRG #2009-B11

### Forced recruitment, forced labour: interviews with DKBA deserters and escaped porters

*This news bulletin provides the transcripts of eight interviews conducted with six soldiers and two porters who recently fled after being conscripted by the DKBA. These interviews confirm widespread reports that the DKBA has been forcibly recruiting villagers as it attempts to increase troop strength as part of a transformation into a government Border Guard Force in advance of the 2010 elections. The interviews also offer further confirmation that the DKBA continues to use children as soldiers and porters in front-line conflict areas. Three of the victims interviewed by KHRG are teenage boys; the youngest was just 13 when he was forced to join the DKBA.*

On October 13<sup>th</sup> 2009, KHRG interviewed two teenage soldiers and two young porters that had recently escaped from the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA). A month earlier, KHRG interviewed a group of six more soldiers that deserted on September 8<sup>th</sup>. Four of these soldiers were forcibly recruited, while the two others were hired by villagers seeking to avoid serving for the DKBA by hiring a substitute.

These interviews provide first-hand confirmation of four important claims that have been previously reported by KHRG and other organisations:



This photo, taken on October 13<sup>th</sup> 2009, shows three soldiers and a porter who had recently fled to Thailand after being forcibly recruited by the DKBA. The victims are, left to right: Ah K---, age 16; Ah A---, age 20; Pah G---, age 14; Saw C---, age 17. [Photo: KHRG]

**1. The DKBA has used forced recruitment to increase its troop strength.** Two of the deserters with interviews published in this bulletin were recruited in August 2008, when KHRG first reported that the DKBA had initiated a substantial push for new recruits. At least one of the other deserters, however, was recruited as recently as August 2009, four months into an even stronger recruitment push that began in mid-May 2009. The DKBA has undertaken this second push as an explicit part of the group's plan to transform into a government-controlled Border Guard Force, a plan initiated across Burma by the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) as it prepares for elections in 2010;<sup>1</sup> according to minutes of a high level meeting of

<sup>1</sup> For more on the DKBA's planned transition into a Border Guard Force, see "Exploitation and recruitment under the DKBA in Pa'an District," KHRG, June 2009. For the most recent news report regarding this transformation, see "DKBA moves towards border guard change," *Democratic Voice of Burma*, October 2009. For a broader analysis of the changing relationships between the SPDC and Burmas armed ethnic ceasefire groups prior to the 2010

DKBA commanders at the group's headquarters in Myaing Gyi Ngu, Pa'an District, the group plans to expand from 6,000 to 9,000 soldiers. Immediately following this meeting, commanders including Maung Chit Thu, Operations Commander of DKBA Brigade #999, Brigadier Pah Nwee, commander of DKBA Brigade #999, and Maung Gyi, commander of DKBA Brigade #333 instructed subordinates in Pa'an and Thaton districts to institute troop quotas requiring villages to provide soldiers to serve the DKBA in numbers proportionate to village size.<sup>2</sup>

The four other deserters were likely recruited as part of this second recruitment push beginning in May 2009. All four hail from Pa'an District and served with Maung Chit Thu's Brigade #999. Of these, three reported being forced to join because they had been selected to serve by a local DKBA officer, their village headmen or via a village lottery. The fourth was seized by DKBA soldiers and forced to join because they knew he had already undergone military training during early service with the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA). Two other soldiers from Pa'an and Thaton districts, who deserted with this group but for whom interviews are not included in this report, were hired by villages wishing to pay substitutes rather than provide soldiers.

**2. The DKBA has forced villagers to work as porters, 'human minesweepers' and provide other support to military operations.** These villagers are made to gather firewood and perform other menial tasks at military camps, carry equipment and supplies during troop movements and walk unarmed in advance of DKBA soldiers to test for landmines and KNLA ambushes. This latter practice has been dubbed 'atrocious demining,' and poses a considerable risk to the victims; both porters cited fear of landmines among their reasons for fleeing, and one described seeing a friend wounded while being forced to test for mines. KHRG has received no reports of these porters receiving pay or being 'hired;' in the two cases here, the victims were simply seized as they attended a festival celebration in S---, Pa'an District, during July 2009. This also confirms reports that the DKBA continued to use forced porters in Pa'an District well after taking control of camps belonging to KNLA 7<sup>th</sup> Brigade near the Ler Per Her camp for internally displaced people (IDPs). Also worth noting is that four of the deserters were forcibly recruited in Dta Greh Township in the general area of the Ler Per Her IDP camp. This sort of recruitment has been one of the principle fears cited by more than 4,862 refugees who continue to reside at temporary sites in Thailand since initial flight triggered by the DKBA attacks on KNLA 7<sup>th</sup> Brigade, which began on June 2<sup>nd</sup> 2009.<sup>3</sup>

**3. The DKBA has forcibly recruited children as soldiers and seized children as porters.** Two of the deserters interviewed here are now, more than a year after they were initially forced to join the DKBA, just 14 and 16 years old; at the time of their initial recruitment they were ages 13 and 16. Similarly, one of the porters seized from S--- is just 17. Importantly, all three young victims said that their battalions contained other young boys. Pah G--- reported his battalion to be home to seven other boys his age; Saw C--- reported four; Ah K---: two or three.

**4. Rank and file DKBA soldiers and civilian porters are treated badly and poorly provided for.** The deserters interviewed here report being provided little or no salaries and limited rations. They also report being beaten for minor offences and subjected to other degrading punishments. Pah G---, for instance, reported being provided only rice, twice-weekly dispensations of fish paste and such frequent beatings that he could no longer remember their total.

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election, see Tom Kramer. *Neither War Nor Peace: The Future Of The Cease-Fire Agreements In Burma*, Transnational Institute, July 2009.

<sup>2</sup> For more on forced recruitment into the DKBA, see "Abuse in Pa'an District, Insecurity in Thailand: The dilemma for new refugees in Tha Song Yang," KHRG, September 2009; "Forced recruitment of child soldiers: An interview with two DKBA deserters," KHRG, August 2009; "Joint SPDC/DKBA attacks, recruitment and the impact on villagers in Dooplaya and Pa'an District," KHRG, May 2009.

<sup>3</sup> For more on security concerns cited by refugees from the Ler Per Her area, see "Abuse in Pa'an District, Insecurity in Thailand: The dilemma for new refugees in Tha Song Yang," KHRG, September 2009.

In the following quote, made in a written statement separate from his oral interview, one of the soldiers, Pah D---, age 18, described why he deserted and the circumstances of his flight:

*“We were camping at Ler Per Her for one week and we did not dare to go anywhere because people said there were many landmines planted around us. Then the six of us got the idea to flee from the DKBA army. We knew that we could step on a landmine if we stayed longer. So, we contacted one person on the other side of the [Moei] river [in Thailand]. We didn’t know if he was a soldier or a villager. One night we had an appointment with that person at midnight and he came and took us by boat to the other side of river and then he took us directly to A---. He prepared things and kept us at a house and only a few people were allowed to meet with us... We have to be very careful about security for ourselves... But we don’t know what will happen to our families left behind. For us, we don’t dare to go back to our villages again.”*

Below is a table containing information about the subjects of the interviews contained in this bulletin, as well as two other deserters among the group interviewed in September but who do not have interviews included here. This table and the following interviews have been heavily censored because the deserters and escaped porters are in significant danger of DKBA reprisal; some of the deserters told KHRG that their officers had warned them that captured deserters would be executed.

Name	Age	Brigade/Battalion	Position	Reason for joining DKBA	Original location
Pah G---	14	Brigade #555	Soldier	Forced to join so village could meet quota	Y--- village, Nyaunglebin District
Saw C---	17	Brigade #999, Battalion #---	Soldier	Forced to join so village could meet quota	Ht--- village, Dta Greh Township, Pa’an District
Pah D---	18	Brigade #999, Battalion #---	Soldier	Forced to join so village could meet quota	W--- village, Dta Greh Township, Pa’an District
Pah N---	29	Brigade #999, Battalion #---	Soldier	Forced to join so village could meet quota	D--- village, Dta Greh Township, Pa’an District
Pah E---	19	Brigade #999, Battalion #---	Soldier	Forced to join so village could meet quota	L--- village, Dta Greh Township, Pa’an District
Ky---	24	Brigade #999, Battalion #---	Soldier	Forced to serve because of previous military training	T village, Thaton District
Maung T---	22	Brigade #999, Battalion #---	Soldier	Hired by a neighbouring village trying to meet its quota	Ht--- village, Papun District
Pah W---	29	Brigade #999, Battalion #---	Soldier	Hired by a neighbouring village trying to meet its quota	Th--- village, T’Nay Hsah Township, Pa’an District
Ah K---	16	N/A	Porter	Kidnapped	S---, Pa’an District
Ah A---	20	Battalion #---	Porter	Kidnapped	S---, Pa’an District

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**Interview #1 | Pah G--- (male, 14), Y--- village, Nyaunglebin District (October 2009)**

**How many people are in your family?**

There are four people in my family.

**Why did you leave school?**

Because the leaders came to recruit military soldiers.

**Who were the leaders?**

DKBA leaders; Commander Bp---. He served as a battalion commander.

**Did you need to attend military training?**

Yes, they brought me to the military training centre at Myaing Gyi Ngu.<sup>4</sup> I had to attend the training for two months and then they sent me to Pw--- for a year.

**Why did you escape?**

I didn't enjoy living with the DKBA military. I was oppressed by them. They just gave orders to us. If we refused to do things for them they punished us such as by beating and punching us. I can't even remember how many times they beat me while I was staying in the military.

**What did they feed you in the military training centre?**

They fed us fish paste. They gave it to us twice a week. We had to attend the training at Myaing Gyi Ngu. At that time there were more than a thousand people attending the training, including Burmese people. For me, I had to carry an AR gun<sup>5</sup> after the training.

**Could you tell me about the areas that your commander is usually active in?**

Yes, he is usually active in Meh Gkaw Hta and Ter Ler Po Day.<sup>6</sup>

**Did he torture the villagers?**

Yes, if the villagers refused an order, they [the DKBA] beat them. They also forced villagers to be their soldiers. If the villagers dared not to go [and be soldiers], they had to pay them [the DKBA] money. The villagers had to be DKBA soldier for the rest of their life. Each person was hired for more than 100,000 [kyat; approximately US \$104]. For the people who couldn't pay, they had to go by themselves even though they were afraid.



This photo, taken on October 13<sup>th</sup> 2009, shows Pah G---, age 14, after he deserted from the DKBA in October 2009. He was forced to join the DKBA at age 13, and subsequently sent to a front line conflict area. [Photo: KHRG]

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<sup>4</sup> Myaing Gyi Ngu is the DKBA central headquarters, located in northeastern Hlaing Bwe Township, Pa'an District.

<sup>5</sup> He is likely referring to an AR-15, a type of rifle commonly used by both the DKBA and KNLA.

<sup>6</sup> These areas are just north of the Ler Per Her IDP camp, indicating that Pah G--- was sent to a front line conflict area.

**Did anyone escape during the training?**

Yes, they returned to their military camp.<sup>7</sup> The DKBA conducted this training. We had to attend the training for two months. After that we had to go back to our battalion.

**How many people escaped with you?**

There were three people that escaped with me, one was named Gky--- and another one was Gkl---.<sup>8</sup> We escaped from Brigade #555. There were around 30 people in our battalion. If we couldn't escape successfully, when they recaptured us we would be killed because the commander gave an order that if escaping soldiers were recaptured they would be punished with death.

**What is your future plan?**

I will find work [in Thailand]. Now my parents have been arrested by the DKBA military. I will save money and send it to my parents.<sup>9</sup>

**How many people the same age as you were serving in the same battalion with you?**

There were seven people around the same age as me. The other people were older than me.

**What was your responsibility while you were serving as a DKBA military soldier?**

I had to clean my commander's living compound.

**Did you get a salary?**

No, I didn't get a salary. If we had money we could buy things. After the training they provided us two pairs of our military uniforms.

**Where did your other siblings live?**

They were in Y--- village. None of them served as DKBA military soldiers. For me, I was forced to become a DKBA military soldier.

**Did you bring anything with you while you were fleeing?**

No, I had just one suit of clothes on my body. It took me more than one hour when I fled. I started fleeing at N--- and went to M--- by car. When I arrived at M--- I did daily work such as breaking corn and after that I planned do work on a peanut farm.

**Do you plan to return to your village?**

No. If I'm recaptured they will kill me.

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<sup>7</sup> DKBA soldiers are typically recruited by an individual battalion, after which they are sent to a central training camp before returning to the battalion that recruited them. In this case, Pah G--- is saying that soldiers fled the training camp to return to their original battalions.

<sup>8</sup> These men were not interviewed by KHRG; their whereabouts are currently unknown.

<sup>9</sup> Relatives of deserting soldiers are sometimes arrested and detained by the DKBA until other family members can pay for their release and/or hiring of a new soldier.

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**Interview #2 | Saw C--- (male, 17), Ht--- village, Pa'an District (October 2009)**

**How many standards of school did you complete?**

In the past I lived in Kw--- and I graduated only from grade three. After that I visited S--- and at that time there was a flood so I couldn't go back to Kw---.

**What battalion were you assigned to?**

I stayed in Battalion #---, subordinated to Brigade #999. I had to follow La---. He was a communications officer. And the battalion commander's name is Le---. I was recruited by the DKBA. One person from individual households had to be a DKBA soldier. There were 17 people who had to join the DKBA military [at the same time he did] and four people were the same age as me.

**Do you remember when you entered in the DKBA military?**

I was recruited in August last year [2008]. I served as a DKBA soldier for more than a year. If I didn't join the military, our [his family's] land would have been confiscated by them [the DKBA]. So my mother suggested I join the DKBA. She told me to escape to Thailand if I was not released after one year and six months. While I was serving as a DKBA soldier, I visited my mother two times. And if I didn't go [and serve with the DKBA] we would have had to leave S---. My Aunt is living in Kw--- so when I fled I went to stay at her home. I also had an adopted sister<sup>10</sup> living there. Before I was a DKBA soldier, I also had stayed at M--- for more than two months working selling petrol. My boss disliked me smoking cigarettes, so I left the job and returned to S---. In the military, there were seven or eight soldiers staying in a single military camp. I dared not go to the frontline. I always got beatings from them [the DKBA].

**Did you attend military training?**

No, I didn't attend military training because I was sick during the training time. When I got better I went to be with my adopted brother in Battalion #---. I was also beaten by La--- with five punches because I fell asleep while serving sentry duty. I had to carry bamboo poles all day.

**Does a permanent DKBA soldier get a salary?**

Yes, for soldiers who have a family they can get rations. For people who don't have family they don't get rations. If they need money for cigarettes, they can ask their commander. For the



This photo, taken on October 13<sup>th</sup> 2009, shows Saw C---, age 17, after he deserted from the DKBA in October 2009. He was forced to join the DKBA at 16 to stop the group from seizing his family's land. [Photo: KHRG]

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<sup>10</sup> Younger Karen and Burmese people sometimes refer to a very close friend as a "brother" or "sister" when the two parties have agreed to look after and support each other as if they are family. There is no word in Karen specifically dedicated to this relationship. In Burmese, the term in this case would be 'mway sah ama.'

soldier who has family, if he has two children he will get one big tin of rice. If he has four children he will get one sack of rice.

**How many kinds of taxes did you have to pay to the DKBA?**

There are two or three kinds of taxes. When DKBA soldiers die they collect money and also when the villagers die they collect money. If we have money we can give 50 baht [US \$1.50), if we don't have we can give 15 or 20 baht [US \$.45 or \$.60]. And they also collect money for New Year. Before I joined the DKBA I always had to do forced labour. After I joined the military no one in my household needed to do forced labour.

**Were you happy being a soldier?**

No. I'm afraid to shoot a gun. I preferred my life while I was staying with my parents.

**Why did you escape?**

They always gave us orders. At nighttime we had to serve sentry duty and in daytime they ordered us to carry water and do other things. So I escaped. Now some people who remained in the battalion, they also want to escape. I escaped during the day when my commander fell asleep. My friend and I crossed the river to the Thai side. I took my bag off my back and let the water take it away.

**What are your plans for the future?**

I will find work here while I stay with my Aunty. I will save money and ask my Aunty to send it to my mother. Now my mother knows that I'm in Thailand. I will ask my family to come and stay with me here.

**What is your opinion of the DKBA?**

They are terrible; they always order and torture people.

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**Interview #3 | Pah D--- (male, 18), W--- village, Dta Greh Township, Pa'an District (September 2009)**

**Which battalion were you with?**

Battalion #---

**What is your commander's name?**

Commander L---

**Where does he live?**

Ky---

**What was your commander's rank?**

Company commander

**Why did you flee?**

I couldn't do it [stay in the DKBA] any more because I didn't have time to sleep.

**Why couldn't you do it any more?**

I just couldn't do it any more.

**Did anyone hire you to join the DKBA?**

No. I went by myself.

**Did you join the DKBA by lottery?**

No. I was forced to join because I have many brothers and sisters in my family.

**Did you want to join the DKBA?**

No, I was forced to join. I really didn't want to join and first I fled into the jungle. DKBA. I was forced by the village head.

**What is your village head's name?**

His name is P---

**Where does he live?**

W--- village.

**Which township is W--- village in?**

Township #3.

**How many brothers and sisters do you have?**

I have five brothers and four sisters.

**Have you gotten any news from your parents?**

I've gotten no news.

**Would you like to contact you parents?**

No, I don't need to.

**How many friends did you flee with?**

Six friends



This photo, taken on September 14<sup>th</sup> 2009, shows Pah D--- on the day he was interviewed by KHRG. He said he initially tried to hide in the jungle when he heard his village head had selected him to meet a DKBA demand for recruits, but he was captured and forced to join. [Photo: KHRG]

People brought me back and then I had to join the

**Did you bring any weapons with you?**

Yes.

**How many and what kind of weapons?**

Three AK-47s, one M-79 [grenade launcher] and one M-16 machine gun

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**Interview #4 | Pah N--- (male, 29), D--- village, Dta Greh Township, Pa'an District (September 2009)**

**Why did you join the DKBA army?**

It was because of an order from the DKBA. The villagers had to vote and then I joined. The villagers had no money to pay [to hire a substitute] and nobody wanted to join either.

**You didn't join on your own?**

Nobody wanted to go, but we had no money to pay. So, the village head encouraged us to go.

**Could you tell me more about the problems that villagers have to face regarding this forced recruitment by the DKBA?**

There are many problems in the village. Some villagers have enough food. Some are starving. Some villagers have to join DKBA army even if they have a new baby in their family because of the voting and it helps the village. We can do nothing under the rule of the DKBA. The villagers don't need to pay if people join the DKBA army.

**Which part of the DKBA forced the villagers to join the military?**

It was Maung Chit Thu.

**Which battalion were you in?**

I was with Battalion #---, Brigade #999. We were led by company commander Li--- and battalion commander is commander Ky---.

**How did you decide to flee?**

We kept in mind that we came for our villages. So, we thought that it would be easy to flee. But, would it cause a problem for our villages? However, we decided to flee because many of our friends died or disappeared on the front line. We were scared and we ran.



This photo, taken on September 14<sup>th</sup> 2009, shows Pah N--- on the day he was interviewed by KHRG. He said he joined because his village could not afford to hire a substitute to fill the quota instituted by the DKBA [Photo: KHRG]

**Did you finish military training?**

Yes, I already finished training.

**What did they tell you in training?**

In training, they said, “We are soldiers. We have to do our best and follow orders. Our leaders will arrange everything best for us. Now, Brigade #999 is very famous abroad. Don't be weak and we will win. We are a group of soldiers.” They never talked about how they would work for their people. They said they are going to work for the DKBA. They encouraged us and said to do our best and the period of two years [we were required to serve] would end very soon.

**Did you hear anything about the DKBA becoming a Border Guard Force for the SPDC?**

Yes. I heard that the SPDC will pay 100,000 kyat [US \$104] salary for officers and 10,000 kyat [US \$10] per soldier per month. And they also said that later the SPDC will take care of everything the best.

**As you are a child, what is your opinion of the DKBA?<sup>11</sup>**

I think if we look at the situation now, the DKBA is not working for our people. They just work for the SPDC as they are under SPDC control.

**Are you single?**

Yes, I'm single.

**What is your opinion of the DKBA's future plans?**

We don't know their future plan. They are under the control of the SPDC. So, they'll continue taking soldiers from the villagers.

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**Interview #5 | Pah E--- (male, 19), L--- village, Dta Greh Township, Pa'an District (September 2009)**

**What is your occupation?**

DKBA soldier.

**Why did you join DKBA army?**

Because the DKBA was doing military recruitment in the villages. We all joined in the same way.

**Were you happy serving in the DKBA army?**

No, that's why we deserted.

**How long have you served in the DKBA?**

I just joined the DKBA Army in the beginning of the last rainy season [May-June, 2009].

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<sup>11</sup> It is not clear why the interviewer referred to Pah N--- as a child; Pah N--- is 29.

**Were you hired or forced?**

I was forced to join. I didn't want to join and I even cried.

**Which battalion are you in?**

Li---'s group. We are all from the same group.

**Did you have any problems when you were in the DKBA?**

I had to clean the road and walk as a sentry at nighttime among the mosquitoes.

**Did any of your friends step on landmines?**

Many people stepped on landmines.

**Did you know any of the people who stepped on landmines?**

No, we weren't familiar with each other before.



This photo, taken on September 14<sup>th</sup> 2009, shows Pah E---, age 19, on the day he was interviewed by KHRG. He said he cried the day he was forced to join the DKBA. [Photo: KHRG]

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**Interview #6 | K--- (male, 24), T--- village, Thaton District (September 2009)**

**Which battalion of the DKBA were you in?**

Battalion #---, Brigade #999 led by battalion commander Ky---.

**Were you hired or forced to join the DKBA?**

I was arrested and forced to join. I was arrested when I was working far from my village to earn money for my family. They forced me to join the DKBA because they know that I had already been in the military.

**Which military group did you serve with before?**

With the green scarves, KNLA.

**Who arrested and forced you to join the DKBA?**

Bo Ch--- and Bo Ky---.

**Which battalion were they from?**

I don't know exactly but they are from Brigade #999.

**What was your position?**

Soldier.

**How many people with rank are among you now?**

Only one, a Sergeant.

**Where were you seized?**

I was seized at S--- [Pa'an District].

**What were you doing in S---?**

I was working for wages.

**How old are you?**

I am 24 years old.

**Are you married?**

Yes.



This photo, taken on September 14<sup>th</sup> 2009, shows K---, age 24, on the day he was interviewed by KHRG. He said he was seized by soldiers while working outside his village and forced to join the DKBA. [Photo: KHRG]

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**Interview #7 | Ah K--- (male, 16), Ht--- village, Kawkareik Township, Dooplaya District (October 2009)**

**Where did your parents live?**

Both of them are already dead. I used to stay with my older sister in Gk--- village. My mother and father died when I was an eight-year-old son. But I didn't like living in Gk---, so I moved to S--- [Pa'an District].

**How were you recruited to be a porter for the DKBA?**

The DKBA came and arrested me to take me as a porter when I was visiting a festival. I was arrested during the nighttime. I didn't see the commander. On that night, I came from my hill field and entered the festival. I wasn't at my home when I was arrested.

**How many months did you have to serve as a porter?**

It was already three months. They arrested me at S--- [Pa'an District] and then I had to serve as a porter to Me---. I had to carry their rations. At that time there were more than ten porters. The soldiers were around 400. We had to sleep on the way for three or four days to reach Me---. We came there on foot. We had to start carrying the DKBA things starting from S--- to M--- and then to Me---

**Did they torture you?**

Yes, when we stayed in their military camp they ordered us to do things for them. If we refused they punished us such as by making us stand up and then sit down 50 or 100 times in a row.

### **Did you attend school?**

No, I didn't have a chance to attend school because my parents died when I was a child.

### **Why did you escape?**

We had to do everything for them [the DKBA]. We also had to clear landmines for them, so I tried to escape.

### **What is your opinion of the DKBA?**

They don't benefit the villagers.

### **How many porters were the same age as you?**

There were two or three people the same age as me. The others were more than 20 and 30 years old.

### **How many people escaped with you?**

There were two people who escaped with me. We started escaping at Me---. We swam across the river to the Thai side. We didn't bring anything with us when we fled. After we arrived to the Thai side we were brought to A--- and then we slept there for two nights. Before we came to A--- we slept on the Thai side near Me--- for two days.

### **What is your future plan?**

I will stay in Thailand and find work to get money, but now I don't have any work. I dare not go back to Burma because I'm afraid to be arrested again.



This photo, taken on October 13<sup>th</sup> 2009, shows Ah K---, age 16, on the day he was interviewed by KHRG. He was seized by DKBA soldiers while attending a festival and forced to work as a porter carrying supplies. [Photo: KHRG]

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## **Interview #8 | Ah A--- (male, 20), Y--- village, Kawkareik Township, Dooplaya District (October 2009)**

### **Do you have a family?**

Yes, I have two children – a girl and a boy. My wife is at A--- hospital [in Thailand, because she is sick].

### **When were you recruited as a porter?**

I was seized when I went to a festival with my wife at S---. I had to serve as a porter for three months. I had to follow Battalion #---. I had to carry cooking pots when we arrived at their military camp. The porters had to find firewood, carry water and cook rice.

Before I escaped I contacted my wife so now she knows where I am. But I haven't met with her yet. She is not well.

### **Why did you escape?**

I always had to do things for them so I escaped. I was afraid of landmines. I saw one of my friends get hurt by a landmine while he was cleaning weeds [for the DKBA]. When I saw him like that I went into shock.

### **Will you return to Burma?**

No, I will find work and save money first. I will stay in Thailand for three or four years and then maybe I will return. But I'm not sure.

### **Could you tell me how you escaped?**

My friend and I agreed with each other to ride a raft. When we arrived to the middle of the river we told each other to flee. We started to swim across the river. I thought that I would die because I was in water and the river was flowing so strong. Three of us escaped.

### **What do you think about the DKBA?**

They do nothing for their people. They do as they like; they torture villagers.

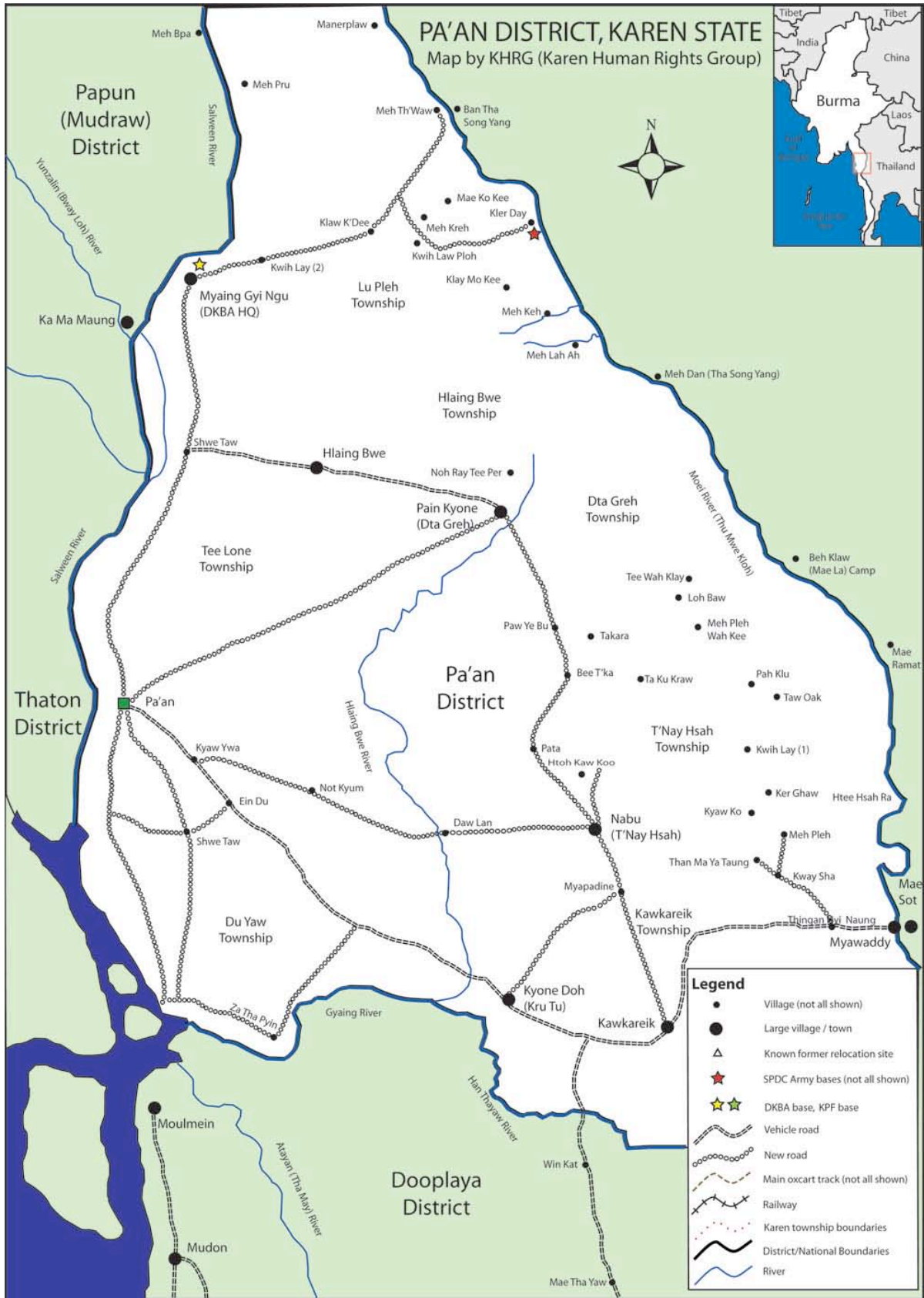


This photo, taken on October 13<sup>th</sup> 2009, shows Saw C---, age 20, on the day he was interviewed by KHRG. Saw C--- was forced to carry equipment and test for landmines in advance of DKBA patrols. He fled after seeing another porter step on a landmine. [Photo: KHRG]

\*

Further background on forced recruiting by the DKBA or other deserter interviews conducted by KHRG can be found in the following KHRG reports:

- *Forced recruitment of child soldiers: An interview with two DKBA deserters* (August 2009)
- *Exploitation and recruitment under the DKBA in Pa'an District* (June 2009)
- *Joint SPDC/DKBA attacks, recruitment and the impact on villagers in Dooplaya and Pa'an districts* (May 2009)
- *Extortion and restrictions under the DKBA in Pa'an District* (March 2009)
- *Insecurity amidst the DKBA - KNLA conflict in Dooplaya and Pa'an Districts* (February 2009)
- *Forced recruitment by DKBA forces in Pa'an District* (September 2008)
- *Forced recruitment, child soldiers and abuse in the army: Interviews with SPDC deserters* (April 2009)
- *Interview with an SPDC deserter* (July 2008)



# Karen Districts



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Scale: 1 cm to 22 km  
1 in. to 35 miles