From Prison to Front Line:

Analysis of convict porter testimony 2009 – 2011

KHRG
Karen Human Rights Group
Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

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The Karen Human Rights Group

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Front cover photo: A convict porter carries equipment for a unit from Tatmadaw Light Infantry Battalion #380 on January 17th 2011 in northeastern Bago Division. The previous day, the KHRG researchers who took this photo interviewed two convict porters who had escaped from Tatmadaw units in the area. One of the porters, U Chit Lwin, age 42, told KHRG: *"They ordered me to carry two backpacks. Not one. … [The soldiers] said, "We will shoot when you can't carry anymore." And they asked us, "Do you want to die here?"… How can I climb up the mountains? I was beaten… [and] I thought they would shoot me yesterday because I was slow."* U Chit Lwin's full interview can be read in Appendix 1. *[Photo: KHRG]*

Back cover photo: A group of nine convict porters pose for a photo after being interviewed by a KHRG researcher in January 2010. They had escaped from Tatmadaw units operating in northern Karen State. Their full interviews can be read in Appendix 1. *[Photo: KHRG]*

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Preface

Over the last two decades, KHRG has documented the abuse of convicts taken by the thousands from prisons across Burma and forced to serve as porters for frontline units of Burma's state army, the Tatmadaw. In the last two years alone, Tatmadaw units have used at least 1,700 convict porters during two distinct, ongoing combat operations in Karen State and eastern Bago Division; this report presents full transcripts and analysis of interviews with 59 who escaped. In interviews with KHRG, every convict porter described being forced to carry unmanageable loads over hazardous terrain with minimal rest, food and water. Most told of being used deliberately as human shields during combat; forced to walk before troops in landmine-contaminated areas; and being refused medical attention when wounded or ill. Many saw porters executed when they were unable to continue marching or when desperation drove them to attempt escape. Abuses consistently described by porters violate Burma's domestic and international legal obligations. If such abusive practices are to be halted, existing legal provisions must be enforced by measures that ensure accountability for the individuals that violate them. This report is intended to augment *Dead Men Walking: Convict Porters on the Front Lines in Eastern Burma*, a joint report released by KHRG and Human Rights Watch in July 2011.

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Terms and Abbreviations

DKBA	Democratic Karen Buddhist Army
HRW	Human Rights Watch
IB	Infantry Battalion of the Tatmadaw
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
IHL	International Humanitarian Law
ILO	International Labour Organisation
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organisation
KHRG	Karen Human Rights Group
KNLA	Karen National Liberation Army
KNU	Karen National Union
LIB	Light Infantry Battalion of the Tatmadaw
LID	Light Infantry Division of the Tatmadaw
MOC	Military Operations Command of the Tatmadaw
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
SLORC	State Law and Order Restoration Council
SPDC	State Peace and Development Council
UN	United Nations
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
USDA	Union Solidarity and Development Association
VPDC	Village Peace and Development Council

baht	Thai currency; US $1 equals (at time of writing) approx. 30 baht at market rate.
Basket	Unit of volume used to measure paddy, husked rice and seeds. One basket of paddy equals 20.9 kg. / 45.08 lb. in weight. One basket of husked rice equals 32 kg. / 70.4 lb. in weight.
big tin	Unit of volume used to measure paddy, husked rice and seeds. One big tin of paddy equals 10.45 kg. / 23.04 lb. in weight. One big tin of husked rice equals 16 kg. / 35.2 lb. in weight.
Bo Mu	'Major', referring to the rank of a Tatmadaw officer
Bo Gyi	'Captain', referring to the rank of a Tatmadaw officer
kyat	Burmese currency; US $1 equals (at time of writing) 6.4 kyat at official rate, approx. 795 kyat at market rate
milk tin	Unit of volume used to measure husked rice. One milk tin of rice equals 195 g / 6.87 oz. in weight.
sack	Unit of volume used to measure husked rice. One sack of rice equals approximately 50 kg. / 110 lb.
Tatmadaw	Burmese language name for the armed forces
Viss	Unit of weight measure; one *viss* equals 1.6 kg / 3.5 lb.
Wan saung	'Public service personnel', a term used in reference to porters
Yeh beh	Term commonly used to refer to prison labour camps

Map 1: Locally-defined Karen State

Map 2: Burma

BURMA
TIBET
TIBET
INDIA
BANGLADESH
CHINA
LAOS
THAILAND
KACHIN STATE
Myitkyina
SAGAING DIVISION
Haka
Lashio
Sagaing
Mandalay
CHIN STATE
SHAN STATE
Kengtung
MANDALAY DIVISION
MAGWE DIVISION
Taunggyi
Sittwe
Magwe
ARAKAN STATE
Loikaw
KARENNI STATE
Toungoo
PEGU DIVISION
KAREN STATE
Pegu
Bay of Bengal
RANGOON DIVISION
Thaton
IRRAWADDY DIVISION
Rangoon
Pa'an
Moulmein
Bassein
MON STATE
N
Andaman Sea
Tavoy
TENASSERIM DIVISION
Gulf of Thailand
Legend
National Capital
State/Division Capital
Other Town (not all shown)
State/Division Boundary
National Boundary
© Map by KHRG (Karen Human Rights Group), 2007
Scale 1:800,000

I. Introduction

KHRG has documented the use of convicts as forced labourers attached to combat units of Burma's state army, the Tatmadaw, since 1993.[1] The use of these convicts, mostly as porters carrying equipment for soldiers and officers, has been acknowledged by Tatmadaw and prison authorities to the International Labour Organisation (ILO),[2] which continues to call for the immediate termination of the practice.[3] The maltreatment of convict porters, and the legality of their use in frontline military operations, have also received considerable attention from international organisations including Amnesty International;[4] the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), which has denounced the persistent use of detainees as porters for the armed forces;[5] and, most recently, Human Rights Watch, which called attention to ongoing violations of humanitarian law perpetrated against convict porters.[6]

This report provides analysis, and full transcripts, of testimony from 59 former convict porters interviewed by KHRG between January 1st 2009 and January 31st 2011. This testimony and analysis is meant to serve as supporting evidence for a joint report released by KHRG and Human Rights Watch (HRW) in July 2011, which summarises findings in this report, as well as additional independent research by both KHRG and HRW.[7] KHRG and HRW's joint report focuses on the abuse of approximately 1,700 convict porters during two separate, ongoing Tatmadaw operations. Research by KHRG and HRW indicates that the Tatmadaw has been using at least 700 prisoners since January 2011 in an offensive against Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA) and Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) forces in southern Karen State. Tatmadaw units conducting operations against KNLA forces in northeastern Bago Division and northern Karen State, meanwhile, have been using another 500 porters since January 2011, augmenting an additional 500 prisoners used in the area during 2010.

Following this Introduction section, Section II of this report details the process by which porters were transferred from prisons across Burma to frontline conflict areas and includes a list of 24

[1] "Porter testimonies: The SLORC's Saw Hta Offensive," *KHRG,* January 1993. See especially *Less than Human,* KHRG, August 2006 and *Convict porters: The brutal abuse of prisoners on Burma's frontlines,* KHRG, December 2000.

[2] See the International Labour Organization report of 1992, in which the ILO liaison officer writes "*On the question of prisoners being used as porters, the L.O. ad interim stressed that this should not be seen as an acceptable alternative to the use of civilians.*" See also ILO, "Developments concerning the question of the observance by the Government of Myanmar of the Forced Labour Convention, 1930 (No. 29)," Geneva, 285th Session, GB.285/4, November 2002, para. 27, p.10. According to Richard Horsey, ILO representative to Rangoon between 2002 – 2007, "*the fact that the increased and more systematic use of prisoners as porters in 1999-2000 stemmed from a specific policy decision was confirmed by the Director-General of the Prison Service in a meeting with the ILO on 13 May 2002.*" Richard Horsey, *Ending Forced Labor in Myanmar: Engaging a Pariah Regime,* Routledge, 2011, Conclusion, p.233, footnote 2 (parentheses in original).

[3] A high-level ILO mission to Burma in February 2011 conveyed to the authorities that the use of convict porters to carry military supplies in conflict areas was "unacceptable" and should be ended. In March 2011, the ILO Governing Body reiterated the call to put an end to the practice in the conclusions adopted as part of its discussion of Burma's compliance with the Forced Labour Convention. See ILO, "Developments concerning the question of the observance by the Government of Myanmar of the Forced Labour Convention, 1930 (No. 29)," Geneva, 310th Session, GB.310/5, March 2011, para. 26, p.5; and ILO, "Decision on the fifth item on the agenda: Developments concerning the question of the observance by the Government of Myanmar of the Forced Labour Convention, 1930 (No. 29)," Geneva, 310th Session, dec-GB.310/5, March 2011, para. 5.

[4] *Crimes against humanity in eastern Myanmar,* Amnesty International, June 2008, Section 3.4, p.20

[5] "Myanmar: ICRC denounces major and repeated violations of international humanitarian law," *International Committee of the Red Cross,* June 29th 2007, News Release, 82/07

[6] "Burma: Q & A on International Commission of Inquiry," *Human Rights Watch,* March 24th 2011.

[7] Dead Men Walking: Convict Porters on the Front Lines in Eastern Burma, *Human Rights Watch and KHRG,* July 13th 2011.

prisons, from 13 government-delineated States and Divisions, that interviewees reported to have been involved in their transfer.

Section III: A then outlines the abuses porters described being perpetrated by soldiers and officers of the Tatmadaw, in violation of fundamental principles of international humanitarian law (IHL) expressed both in treaties to which Burma is party[8] and in customary IHL, which is binding on all states.[9] Fifty-seven of the 59 porters interviewed reported serious violations of international humanitarian law, including: failure to protect porters from dangers arising from military operations;[10] execution of porters;[11] refusal or failure to care for wounded or sick porters;[12] and other forms of cruel or inhuman treatment, such as corporal punishment.[13]

Section III: B details further abuses that constitute serious breaches of Burma's own domestic legal standards; these violations make clear that, while domestic legal standards are necessary, they are inadequate if the protection they purport to afford is flouted in practice. All 59 porters interviewed by KHRG reported serious mistreatment, including being denied food and water and forced to carry unmanageably heavy loads over difficult and hazardous terrain with minimal rest, food and water.

Finally, Section IV of this report outlines the conditions faced by convict porters who escaped from service on the front line. Appendix 1 provides full transcripts of all 59 interviews.

The testimony analysed for this report, coupled with 18 years of documentation by KHRG and other organisations, offers conclusive evidence that the use of convicts as forced porters by the Tatmadaw is a systematic practice involving both civilian and military officials across Burma, and that widespread abuse of porters occurs as a result this practice. Five facts support this conclusion:

(1) Prisoners reported that they came from a wide variety of prisons. Porters interviewed by KHRG were recruited and sent to conflict areas via a total of 24 different prisons or '*yeh beh'* prison labour camps, as detailed in table A.2 below. Based on this information, it is

[8] Specifically the Geneva Conventions 1949, which are directly binding on Burma as a ratifying party; of particular relevance is common Art. 3, which applies to situations of "armed conflict not of an international character occurring in the territory of one of the High Contracting Parties".

[9] For guidance, KHRG referred to the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) Customary International Humanitarian Law (IHL) database, which catalogues the 161 rules of customary international humanitarian law. http://www.icrc.org/customary-ihl/eng/docs/v1

[10] ICRC Customary IHL database, Rule 1: *The Principle of Distinction between Civilians and Combatants*; Rule 22: *Principle of Precautions against the Effects of Attacks*; Rule 24: *Removal of Civilians and Civilian Objects from the Vicinity of Military Objectives*; and Rule 97: *Human Shields*. The ICRC Customary IHL database affirms these as rules of customary international law, applicable to non-international armed conflicts.

[11] Common Art. 3(1) Geneva Conventions 1949: "… the following acts are and shall remain prohibited … (a) violence to life and person, in particular murder"; ICRC Customary IHL database, Rule 89: *Violence to life*.

[12] ICRC Customary IHL database, Rule 110: *Treatment and care of the wounded, sick and shipwrecked*. Rule 110 states that the wounded and sick '*must receive, to the fullest extent practicable and with the least possible delay, the medical care and attention required by their condition*'. Also relevant are Rule 87: *Humane Treatment*; and Rule 90: *Torture and Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment*. The ICRC Customary IHL database confirms that the principle of collecting and caring for the wounded and sick, the principle that civilians be treated humanely, and the prohibition on cruel or inhuman treatment are rules of customary international law, applicable to non-international armed conflicts.

[13] ICRC Customary IHL Database, Rule 87: *Humane Treatment*; Rule 90: *Torture and Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment*; and Rule 91: *Corporal Punishment.* The prohibition against corporal punishment is also expressed in the Fourth Geneva Convention, Article 32; the ICRC has affirmed the principle that civilians be treated humanely, the prohibition on cruel and inhuman treatment, and the prohibition against corporal punishment as norms of customary international law applicable to non-international armed conflicts.

not possible that a limited number of prison officials operating out of one or two prisons are responsible for the transfer of convicts to frontline areas.

(2) Porters reported that they came from, and were tried and imprisoned in the following 13 of the 14 government-delineated States and Divisions in Burma: Kachin State, Shan State, Sagaing Division, Chin State, Arakan State, Irrawaddy Division, Yangon Division, Mon State, Bago Division, Karen State, Karenni State, Mandalay Division and Magwe Division.[14] Based on this information, the policy of sending prisoners to frontline areas appears to be country wide, rather than regionally specific.

(3) Porters reported abuse by soldiers and officers from a total of 20 distinct Tatmadaw units, including Infantry Battalions (IB) and Light Infantry Battalions (LIB), detailed in Table A.3 below. Abusive treatment of porters while in frontline areas was not the product of isolated acts by a limited number of perpetrators, but of the actions of multiple individuals across different parts of the Tatmadaw's order of battle, operating independently of one another and in geographically distinct areas.[15] This strongly suggests that ill treatment is not isolated in scope or the result of abusive acts by only a few individuals; rather, abuse is fostered and permitted by a system that places porters in conflict areas, fails to punish perpetrators of abuse and declines to investigate the death or disappearance of prisoners who do not return from portering service.

(4) Porters reported experiences consistent with testimony gathered from other porters interviewed separately but during the same time period, as well as with previous documentation by KHRG and other organisations dating back to the early 1990s. This collectively large data set means that it is not possible that analysis has been unduly influenced by one or two egregious cases, or misled by potential biases or inaccuracies in individual porter testimony. To verify the consistency of testimony, see the full transcripts of all 59 interviews analysed for this report in Appendix 1.

(5) KHRG did not use a standard questionnaire to interview porters. Incidental consistencies in testimony thus further illustrate the widespread and systematic nature of abuses and highlight the fact that abuses perpetrated against convict porters are not the result of isolated practices of individual soldiers or commanders. For example, only ten porters who had been on the front line for more than ten days were asked directly whether they witnessed killing of porters by Tatmadaw soldiers or officers; general questions about porter's experiences in frontline areas nonetheless prompted a total of 34 interviewees to report specific incidents in which porters had been killed because they were shot during an escape attempt or executed because they were unable to carry loads anymore. In the absence of a standard questionnaire, unprompted consistencies in the testimony of porters from a wide variety of prisons and geographical regions, concerning service in a number of different battalions, should be read as strongly indicative of both

[14] Note that after the November 7th 2010 election in Burma, government-designated geographic areas previously referred to as "Divisions" were re-designated as "Regions"; see *Constitution of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar*, Chapter 2, Article 49. For the sake of consistency with previous KHRG reports, the states and divisions listed above are in some cases referred to by names that differ from current government designations; for example, "Karenni State" above refers to government-designated "Kayah State."

[15] Convicts portering for Tatmadaw units active in operations against the DKBA and KNLA in southern Karen State, for example, are under the authority of the South Eastern Command based in the capital of Mon State, Moulmein; porters with units active in northeastern Bago Division and northern Karen State are commanded by the Southern Command, based in Toungoo Town, Bago Division. Poor transport infrastructure and lack of contiguous road networks, as well as obstacles posed by a patchwork of control by different non-state armed groups in various degrees of conflict with the Tatmadaw, means that cooperation between units under the South Eastern Command in southern Karen State and those under the Southern Command in northeastern Bago and northern Karen state is logistically impossible.

the veracity of testimony, and of the widespread and systematic nature of abuse of convict porters.

Methodology

KHRG field researchers interviewed 59 former convict porters over the last two years, between January 1st 2009 and January 31st 2011. Interviews took place in militarised areas of eastern Bago Division and Karen State and, in a small number of cases, adjacent areas of Thailand. Forty-eight of these were interviewed between January 1st 2009 and March 3rd 2010 and reported that they had served Tatmadaw battalions active in upland areas of eastern Bago Division and northern Karen State. These areas correspond to locally-defined Nyaunglebin, Papun and Toungoo districts. An additional eleven porters were interviewed in January 2011; of these, two reported that they had served battalions active in locally-defined Toungoo District, while nine reported that they had served Tatmadaw battalions fighting in southern Karen State in areas that correspond to locally-defined Dooplaya District.[16]

All 59 interview transcripts are available in Appendix 1. Interviews have not been edited or otherwise modified, save for censoring of information that could put escaped porters or their families at risk. In most cases, this has entailed censoring the names of people and home villages; in cases where details of sentencing processes are sufficiently specific to identify a person, these have been censored as well. It is normal practice for KHRG to censor names and replace them with three dashes, for example “Saw Poe” changed to "Saw A---." Because this testimony is being released to supplement a joint report with Human Rights Watch, in this case real names have been replaced with pseudonyms that are consistent with those used in the Human Rights Watch report.[17]

Interviews for this report were not conducted using a standard questionnaire. KHRG trains people from Burma to monitor human rights conditions, and KHRG reporting aims to present the perspectives of individual interviewees, allowing them to raise issues that they consider to be most important and to express their individual concerns. Researchers are trained to use a basic set of interview guidelines, but do not use standard questionnaires; rather, they are given the flexibility to ask questions they feel are relevant. This means that a given question or issue may or may not be raised in every interview.

This also means it is not possible to quantify exactly how many porters witnessed or experienced a particular kind of abuse; some may have witnessed or experienced things that were not mentioned in a given interview. Wherever possible, KHRG has attempted to quantify the number of interviews in which a given issue was raised; quantitative data in sections II, III and IV of this report should not, however, be interpreted as comprehensive. Thirty-four interviewees reported the killing of porters by Tatmadaw soldiers, for example, but this does not mean the other 25 did not witness or experience similar incidents. Rather, it may mean that the issue was not discussed in their interview. In the case of the 34 porters that reported killing of porters, only six were directly asked about whether porters were killed. The other 28 interviewees who reported killing of porters chose to do so without being directly asked about such incidents, when they were asked by the interviewer to recount their general experiences or to describe how they felt about their treatment on the front line. As for the 25 porters who did not report killing of porters, a total of 18 were not asked any questions about it. Only seven porters

[16] Human Rights Watch interviewed an additional 12 convict porters that escaped from operations in Dooplaya District during February, March, and June 2011. While full transcripts of these interviews are not included in Appendix 1, selected quotes from the interviews are contained in the report *Dead men walking: Convict Porters on the Front Lines in Eastern Burma*, HRW and KHRG, July 13th 2011.

[17] To read the joint KHRG-Human Rights Watch report, see *Dead men walking: Convict Porters on the Front Lines in Eastern Burma*, July 13th 2011.

responded in the negative to a direct question about killing of porters, and three of these were on the front line for less than ten days.

This report emphasises presenting the perspectives of the individuals interviewed by KHRG researchers, rather than a focus on individual incident. As such, specific reports of particular incidents were not verified according to normal KHRG procedure. Rather, interviews were compared and, where many porters reported similar experiences, those experiences have been detailed in the sections below and, where relevant, analysed in light of relevant legal protections. The fact that separate interviews with 59 men yielded descriptions of similar experiences should indicate that their testimony can be assessed to be highly credible. While individual biases or exaggerations may be possible within the testimony of a given interviewee, the size of the data set analysed for this report should prevent undue influence or distortion of data leading to significant inaccuracies in the overall analysis and conclusions drawn from porter testimony. The consistency between testimony in this report and documentation by KHRG and other organisations over the last 18 years further supports the credibility of information provided by interviewees about their experiences as porters.

Profile of Interviewees

Fifty-five interviewees reported that they were imprisoned for crimes including: murder; the sale of drugs; the use of drugs; the transportation of drugs; burglary; assault; incitement to murder; illegal economic activity; breaking open government rice stores during the 1988 protests;[18] demonstrating during the 2007 protests; and having a girlfriend who was not of age.[19] One former convict porter did not report the crime for which he was imprisoned, while a total of three interviewees reported that they were arrested arbitrarily,[20] while waiting for the bus, while walking at night and while in the market, and that they were sent to porter within a week of their arrest and without any formal conviction or sentencing process.[21] The 55 porters who reported conviction for a crime stated that they had been serving sentences ranging from two to 45 years before they were taken to porter. A breakdown of porters' crimes and sentences, where reported, is given in Table A.1 below.

> *"They arrested me when I was waiting for the bus to get flowers to sell on the roadside. First, they told me to go with them just for a moment. After that they tied me up with rope, then they sent me to Toungoo prison. … I had to stay in there for six days. After that SPDC soldiers came and took us by trucks. … They took us to their military camp. … Their camp is in Toungoo town. They took us to IB #62 camp. The next morning they told us to go porter."*

[18] Laing Oo, 43 (January 2011, Dooplaya District). Although this is noted as a distinct crime for the purposes of this paper, Laing Oo told KHRG that he was not a political prisoner and had only been charged with burglary; he reported that he had been sentenced to serve 22 and a half years in prison.

[19] Zaw Htun, 32 (January 2010, Papun District). Zaw Htun did not specify the Section of Burma's Penal Code under which he was imprisoned. Section 375, *Rape*, defines rape as '*sexual intercourse with a woman … with or without her consent, when she is under fourteen years*'; Section 493, *Offences related to Marriage*, allows for the punishment of '*any man who by deceit causes any woman who is not lawfully married to him to believe that she is lawfully married to him, and to cohabit or have sexual intercourse with him in that belief*'.

[20] KHRG has previously reported that, under Burmese criminal law, a crime that roughly translates as 'hiding in the dark' is frequently used to arrest civilians deemed to be loitering at night. See *Less than Human: Convict Porters in the 2005-2006 Northern Karen State Offensive*, KHRG, August 2006. However, it could not be confirmed that this was the charge levelled at the three porters in question; all three reported that they were taken to porter immediately after their arrest, without any formal conviction or sentencing.

[21] Shwe Aung, 44, and Min Win, 23, reported that they were sent directly to Toungoo prison, where they stayed for six days before being sent to an army base and picked up by a Tatmadaw battalion. Hla Min, 24, reported that he was sent straight to an army base without any detention in a jail or prison.

Min Win, 23, (January 2010, Papun District)

"They put me in the prison for five years because I could not pay them money. If we could pay money, even if it was for the crime of murder, they would let us go free from the crime. The judge in Pakkoku is Ma Khin Oh Tin. We can pay her money. She looks only for money. She does not consider any laws."

Htway Thu, 28 (January 2011, Dooplaya District)

Table A.1: Interviewees

Name	Age	Reported crime	Reported sentence (yr)
Lwin Lwin	47	Murder	45
Aung Hin	29	Murder	20
Dee Zar	33	Murder	20
Matthew	27	Murder	10
Soe Win	28	Murder	10
Win Naing	27	Murder	10
Yan Kyi	35	Murder	10
Nge Nge	38	Murder	10
Kyaw Htike	31	Murder	10
Chit Lwin	48	Murder	10
Nya Aung	26	Murder	10
Myo Myit	45	Murder	7
Htun Maung	42	Murder	7
Thi Ha Soe	23	Murder	5
Win WIn Naing	17	Murder	5
Aung Zaw	28	Murder	2
Kyaw Min	n/r	Murder	n/r
Yay Kan	27	Murder	n/r
Ye Ye	29	Murder	n/r
Hla Maung	43	Sale of drugs	16
Pyo Ko Ko	25	Sale of drugs	16
Ah Si	38	Sale of drugs	16
Htike Lin	41	Sale of drugs	15
Khin Paing	28	Sale of drugs	13
Moo Thee	43	Sale of drugs	12
Htun Htun Lin	26	Sale of drugs	12
Aung Thu	20	Sale of drugs	6
Chit Kawn	37	Sale of drugs	n/r
Chan Za	22	Sale of drugs	n/r
Naing Naing	25	Sale of drugs	n/r
Thaw Shwee	30	Sale of drugs	n/r
Soe Htun	21	Use of drugs	17
Myint Aung	39	Use of drugs	17
Paing Paing	41	Use of drugs	12
Bo Bo	41	Use of drugs	12
Eh Kler	26	Use of drugs	12
Lwin Kaing	44	Use of drugs	12
Naung Soe	41	Use of drugs	n/r
Nyain Chan Oo	31	Use of drugs	n/r
Kaw Kay	41	Transportation of drugs	n/r
Kyaw Soe	35	Burglary	24
Soe Win	27	Burglary	11 ½

Thant Shin	48	Burglary	n/r
Htway Thu	28	Assault	5
Thin Paing	42	Incitement	n/r
Kyaw Htet	29	Negligence	5
Zaw Htun	32	Under-age girlfriend	20
Myint	36	Gold-mining	n/r
Twin Nge	35	Gold-mining	n/r
Khaing Khat	39	Smuggling timber	15
Than Win	35	Smuggling timber	7
Min Oo	33	Smuggling cattle	7
Laing Oo	43	Burglary of government rice stores during 1988 uprising	28 ½
Lin Lin Oo	32	Demonstrating during 2007 protests	2 ½
Htet Laing	32	Demonstrating during 2007 protests	n/r
Pyit Zon	n/r	n/r	n/r
Min Win	23	Arbitrary arrest	n/r
Shwe Aung	44	Arbitrary arrest	n/r
Hla Min	24	Arbitrary arrest	n/r

n/r = not reported

II. Transferring prisoners from civilian to military authorities

The following section details the process by which prisoners in regular civilian prisons and labour camps were transferred into military custody and, eventually, to frontline combat areas. Descriptions of the various steps prisoners underwent during their transfer were analysed for common themes. Twelve themes were isolated as indicative that a particular prison or labour camp was a part of the process by which prisoners were eventually transferred to military control at the front line. In this section, these themes, or combinations of these themes, have been used to distinguish between prisons or labour camps where porters may have been held or transferred during the course of normal penal processes, and prisons or labour camps that were directly involved in transferring prisoners to frontline areas.

This analysis yields strong evidence that officials at civilian-administered prisons and labour camps actively and knowingly release prisoners into military custody or transfer them to the front line. Investigations at prisons as to the whereabouts of individual prisoners currently serving in frontline areas, or those who have not returned from service with the Tatmadaw during years past, are crucial to establishing accountability for perpetrators and deterring future abuse of porters. Full details of these prisons are provided in Section B below, which details potential locations where investigations or monitoring via regular prison visits are necessary. The twelve themes indicating the involvement of a given prison in the recruitment or transfer of convict porters, discussed in Section A below, are:

(1) Prisoners arrived at or departed from a civilian prison or labour camp in the custody of a specific Tatmadaw battalion;
(2) Prisoners arrived at or departed from a civilian prison or labour camp in military trucks;
(3) Prisoners reported that large numbers of prisoners from many different prisons in Burma and/ or that Tatmadaw troops were gathered at a civilian prison or labour camp at the same time, immediately prior to being transferred to a frontline area;
(4) Prisoners reported that they stayed at a prison for only a short amount of time in transit to the front line;
(5) Prisoners reported transfer to a prison proximate to the front line, immediately prior to being transferred to a frontline area;
(6) Jailers read out a list of names of prisoners to be transferred, immediately prior to being transferred to a frontline area;
(7) Prisoners were told they could pay the jailers and/ or military officers to avoid transfer to a frontline area;
(8) Jailers conducted a medical check of prisoners before transfer to a frontline area;
(9) Jailers did not tell prisoners where they were being sent, told prisoners inaccurate information about where they were being sent, or told them they were being sent to porter;
(10) Prisoners were told to keep their heads down or were chained, shackled or otherwise had their movement restricted during transfer to a frontline area;
(11) Prisoners reported that the transfer to a frontline area was carried out in a manner that prevented prisoners from either observing or being observed, for example, at night or in covered trucks;
(12) Prisoners reported that blue convict porter uniforms and/ or portering equipment were distributed at the prison.

Based on analysis of these themes, KHRG has generated a list of civilian-administered prisons and labour camps involved in releasing prisoners into military custody or transferring them to the front line; see Table A.2 below.

A. Common themes in the transfer process

(1) Release of prisoners into specific military custody

A total of 27 porters reported that they arrived to or departed from civilian prisons or labour camps in the custody of a specific Tatmadaw battalion. Prisons mentioned in this context include: Kin-tha [mentioned by one interviewee]; Mandalay [one]; Mote-pa-lin [two]; Moulmein [two]; Pa'an [seven] and Toungoo [fourteen]. See also Table A.2 below.

> *"There were 350 prisoners taken from Kin-tha camp on the same day as me. In Toungoo prison, LIB #223 came to take us to porter."*
>
> Naung Soe, 41 (January 2010, Papun District)

(2) Release of prisoners into non-specific military custody

A total of 28 porters reported that they arrived to or departed from a civilian prison or labour camp in military trucks. Of these, 17 reported that they were picked up by military trucks directly from the primary prison or labour camp where they had stayed for an extended period of time; ten reported that they were accompanied by a combination of jailers, armed policemen and soldiers in these military trucks.

> *"From Pakkoku [prison], the army didn't come and call, just military trucks came with Jailer U Kyaw Tha and policemen from the district. Ten policemen were in each truck with 15 prisoners. In total, there were 25 people in a truck. We were sent from Pakkoku [prison] to Meiktila. We left from Pakkoku [prison] on Dec 30th and we arrived at Meiktila on Dec 31st. We slept one night at Meiktila. On December 1st, we went from Meiktila to Pa'an. … After Pa'an, we arrived at Kawkareik army [Tatmadaw] base where the army battalion that called us to porter was staying."*
>
> Thi Ha Soe, 23 (January 2010, Dooplaya District)

> *"The truck that carried the porters came to pick me up. The police were also included when the truck came to pick us up. The jailers did not tell us anything. They got us into the truck and we just followed."*
>
> Myint Aung, 39 (January 2010, Papun District)

(3) Large numbers of other prisoners released and/ or the presence of Tatmadaw troops

A total of 27 former porters reported that they were taken from a civilian prison or labour camp as part of a large group of as many as 800 other prisoners. A total of 11 porters reported that a large number of prisoners from many different prisons in Burma and/ or a large number of Tatmadaw troops were gathered at a civilian prison or labour camp at the same time.

> *"There were many prisoners from other prisons [at Pa'an prison]. As I know, it included [prisoners from] Tha Yet, Bago, Pa'an and from* yeh beh *[labour camps]. People have to stand and they take them out from every prison. They left behind 10 prisoners from our group [Pyay prisoners] and they took out 40 people. … There were ten soldiers there. They picked up anybody who they wanted."*
>
> Kyaw Min (January 2011, Dooplaya District)

> *"I was taken out of Kin-tha camp on December 12th 2009. … 200 people were taken out. … They sent us to Toungoo prison and we stayed there for four days. After that, SPDC soldiers came and took us by truck then I just knew that we had to go to work as SPDC military porter. … We came with [Tatmadaw LIB] #320."*
>
> Yan Kyi, 35 (January 2010, Papun District)

(4) Short prison stays during transit

A total of 49 porters reported that they were taken out of the primary prison or labour camp where they had stayed for an extended period of time, between three months to six years, and transferred to the front line via short stays of between one to four days, in as many as four, but typically one or two, other prisons.[22] The short duration of stays at these intermediate or transit prisons, in comparison to longer stays reported at the primary prisons, suggests that these were transfer or holding points for prisoners being sent to porter.

> *"I was kept in prison for three years and then sent to a convict camp called Meikathey. I was taken out by the military and slept two nights in Thaton. The next day I was sent to Myaing Gk'Lay and slept there for one night. In the morning, we came here directly by truck."*
>
> Zaw Htun, 32 (January 2010, Papun District)

> *"My experiences were, firstly, they took us out from Kyaukphyu prison and brought us to Toungoo and then they sent us to Pyay prison and then to Yangon Insein prison and then to Mawlamyine. At each location we had to sleep one night but we slept two nights in Mawlamyine prison and from there LID #44 came and took 65 of the prisoners from Kyaukphyu prison."*
>
> Min Oo, 33, (January 2009, Papun District)

(5) Prison proximate to front line

A total of 36 porters reported that they were transferred to a prison proximate to a frontline area, from which they were subsequently transferred to a Tatmadaw camp or picked up by a specific Tatmadaw army battalion; 23 reported being sent to Toungoo prison, seven to Pa'an and six to Thaton. Out of these 36 porters who reported that they were sent to a prison proximate to the front line, 18 reported that a specific army battalion picked them up from one of these three prisons in Bago Division, Karen State and Mon State, respectively; the remaining 17 reported that, from one of these prisons, they were transferred to a large Tatmadaw camp before being divided into smaller groups of porters and sent with specific battalions. For example, ten reported that they were sent to the Tatmadaw camp at Baw Hser Koh after leaving Toungoo prison; three reported that they were sent to the Tatmadaw camp at Kawkareik after leaving Pa'an prison. Other large Tatmadaw camps to which porters reported being sent from civilian prisons and labour camps were Myaing Gk'Lay, Myaing Gyi Ngu, Kyauk Kyi, Bilin and Ka Ma Maung.

> *"They didn't say that they were taking us out to be porters, they said it was for* yeh beh *[labour camp]. They sent us to Pa'an prison. … When we arrived to Pa'an, they said we were going to be porters. We were all aghast when we heard 'porter' because being a porter is very bad. They ordered us to carry their loads and we knew from there. The jailer and jail warden didn't tell us anything before about this."*
>
> Ko Kyaw Htun, 28 (January 2011, Dooplaya District)

[22] Of the remaining ten porters, four did not provide details regarding their transfer to the front line. Three reported that they were sent directly to porter without entering the judicial or prison system at all, see footnote nine above, and the other three reported that they were taken from prison almost directly after sentencing. Win Win Naing reported that he was sentenced and sent to prison on December 17th 2010 and that, on December 27th 2010, a list of names was read out and he was sent to porter. Matthew reported staying in prison only ten days before he was sent to porter. Kyaw Min reported that he was sent to porter from Pyay seven days after sentencing.

(6) List

Eight porters reported that, when they were taken out of a civilian prison or labour camp, a list of names of prisoners to be transferred was read out by the jailer.

> *"On December 30th 2010, at 4:00 pm, they called out people's names one by one. They ordered us to line up and said that we were going to porter. I didn't know what portering was. I had never heard of it. They said people who could pay money could stay [in prison] but people who couldn't pay money would be included [with prisoners sent to porter]. They took out 50 people from Pyay prison."*
>
> Kyaw Min, (January 2011, Dooplaya District)

> *"On December 29th 2010, they called out a list of names, including prison numbers. People whose names were called had to go and it included me. Me and my brother [Thi Ha Soe, another porter] and friends of mine. … You could give them money if you didn't want to come. You had to pay 200,000 kyat[23] per year if you didn't want to come. For the two of us, we don't have money and we couldn't give it, so we had to come here. … We didn't know if it was for portering or* yeh beh *[prison work camp] when we lived in prison. They wrote the name list, but we knew nothing. They called us and we followed. We didn't know where we had to go."*
>
> Win Win Naing, 17 (January 2011, Dooplaya District)

(7) Extortion related to transfer process

Eleven porters reported being told that they could pay money to the jailer in order to avoid being sent from the primary prison or *yeh beh* camp[24] to porter; these eleven porters reported amounts that varied from 30,000 kyat to 200,000 kyat, but all eleven confirmed that they had been sent to porter because they couldn't afford to pay.

> *"Yes, you could pay money. For example, if my name is on the list but I don't want to go because I am afraid, I can give them 200,000 kyat and they pick up someone instead of me."*
>
> Win Naing, 27 (January 2011, Dooplaya District)

> *"You can pay money if you don't want to go. You have to pay 30,000 kyat. You have to pay to the leader [military officer], the three-starred guy [the Sergeant]. … The jailer and jail warden also take [money]. They [the military officers] shared it with the jailer and jail warden after."*
>
> Ko Kyaw Htun, 28 (January 2011, Dooplaya District)

(8) Medical check related to transfer process

Two porters reported that a medical check had been carried out before they were sent to porter. One reported that prisoners could pay money in order to be 'rejected' by the medical check; the other reported that prisoners who were seriously ill were nonetheless passed by the medical check.

[23] As of June 29th 2011, the fluctuating unofficial conversion rate, as opposed to the government's official fixed rate of 6.5 kyat to US $1, was 795 kyat to US $1.

[24] '*Yeh beh*' is a term commonly used to refer to prison labour camps. A total of 36 porters reported spending time in one of four gravel production, or *kyauk htot lote* ['stone-breaking'] *yeh beh* camps before they were transferred to the front line to porter. The four *yeh beh* camps reported by porters were: Kin-tha in Mandalay Division; and Taung-zun, Mote-pa-lin and Meikathey in Mon State. See Table A.2 below.

"They chose 200 people but later they took just 150 people. They rejected them because they were not healthy and couldn't speak Burmese. Some people gave money. … They paid 400,000 or 500,000 kyat to the jailer."

Pyo Ko Ko, 25 (February 2010, Papun District)

"Hsa Dar was my friend. He had got tuberculosis. He had to take tuberculosis medicine for six months. He was sent to hospital. He had not finished taking medicine for six months; he just finished two months of medicine and was sent to be a porter. When the time was getting close to take porters from yeh beh*, they checked the prisoners' health. We took off our clothes and they asked, '*What disease do you have?*' They did not check properly because they just asked the questions. I said, '*I have got malaria*'. They just said, '*Nothing is happening to you, just follow'*. They disposed of their responsibility by asking questions. '*What disease do you have?*' They just asked like this about our diseases and did not cure anything."*

Pyit Zon (January 2011, Dooplaya District)

(9) Silence, inaccurate information or warnings

Sixteen porters reported that, when they were taken out of a civilian prison or labour camp, the truth about where they were being sent was obscured from the prisoners and/ or their families. Of these, seven reported that they were not told where they were being sent; an additional seven reported that they were told inaccurate information by the jailers about where they were being sent; at least one reported that the jailers had warned him to run away if he got the chance. A total of five reported that their families had not been told about their transfer or destination.

"They said they would send us to be wan saung *[public service personnel]. They didn't say anything about portering. They said they would send us to be* wan saung*. They said, '*When you arrive there, you have to work and you will get money*'. … They didn't contact our home even though we requested them to."*

Matthew, 27 (January 2011, Dooplaya District)

"The troops came and took us out from the yeh beh *camp. LIB# 707, led by the second in command officer came and took us out. They didn't say where we had to go. They just said we had to go and took us out. They just said this. … The jailers didn't say anything.* 'If you arrive there and if you have a chance to run, you run*.' They said this."*

Myo Myit, 45 (February 2010, Papun District)

(10) Movement restricted

A total of 24 porters reported that their movement was restricted in some, or several, ways during transfer. Twenty-two porters reported that they were transferred in chains, shackled in pairs or tied with rope. Seven reported that they were told to keep their heads down during transfer; at least one porter reported that he was told to do so at gunpoint.

*"The army came and picked us up from there [Pa'an prison]. The army from Zin Phyu Taung wear mottled [camouflage] uniforms. They came and picked us up with green trucks. They were more horrible. They pointed at us with guns and said '*You guys, don't try to run or move'. *They climbed up on the roof of the car and they kept us inside the car. We were afraid. We had never seen them. And they called to us and said '*Don't look around*' and '*Keep your head down*,' and we had to keep our heads down."*

Matthew, 27 (January 2011, Dooplaya District)

"I was taken out to porter in December 2009. The army came to take us. We were sent to Toungoo Prison. We were tied up with ropes in a truck and we were ordered to lift up our hands and turn down our heads. There were 200 prisoners taken out along with me from Kin-tha (1) Stone Production Camp [in Naypyidaw]."

Khaing Khat, 39 (January 2010, Papun District)

(11) Transfer at night or under cover

Eight porters reported that their transfer was carried out in a manner that prevented prisoners from observing and being observed during the transfer process; six reported that they were taken out of prison at night and two reported that they were transferred in a covered vehicle.

"On December 9th 2009, they took out 200 people. They sent us to Thandaung [prison] and the army came and took us at night. They worried that people would know if they took us out during the daytime."

Thant Shin, 48

"There were two cars. They carried 25 people in a car. There were five police included in each car. They covered the car with tarps. It can prevent the rain. It is like a military colour, green. We couldn't see anything outside. … They made a small hole in the back. Sometimes we couldn't breathe very well."

Kyaw Min (January 2011, Dooplaya District)

(12) Distribution of blue convict porter uniforms and/ or portering equipment

Two porters reported the distribution of blue convict porter uniform at civilian prisons, specifically at Pa'an and Toungoo prisons. It is important to note that, though many did not choose to mention it, all convict porters can be distinguished from regular civilians pressed into service as porters by distinctive blue uniforms.[25]

"In Toungoo Prison, we were given a plastic sheet, a cup, a thin blanket, a sweater, a long shirt, a shirt, and trousers."

Myint Aung, 39 (January 2010, Papun District)

"They gave us prisoner uniforms in Pa'an prison, blue coloured clothes: two shirts, two longgyis and a pair of trousers. We brought our own clothes, civilian clothes, but we couldn't wear them. They want to see us wearing the clothes that they gave to us. We were not allowed to change and wear other clothes because the military ordered it and we are civilians, so there was no opportunity for us to respond to [argue with] them."

Thi Ha Soe, 23 (January 2011, Dooplaya District)

[25] For more details on uniforms worn by porters, see Richard Horsey, *Ending Forced Labor in Myanmar: Engaging a Pariah Regime*, Routledge, 2011, p. 233, footnote 2. "*The use of convicts as porters was nothing new. But starting around 1999, an organized system was introduced for selecting suitable inmates (able-bodied men of working age, excluding – because of the possibilities for escape – political prisoners and violent criminals with long periods still to serve), transferring them to holding facilities around the country, and then sending them to army units in response to specific requests. Whereas in the past, convicts had continued to wear their prison uniforms while portering, under the new system they were dressed in special uniforms identifying them as (convict) porters. (The fact that the increased and more systematic use of prisoners as porters stemmed from a specific policy decision was confirmed by the Director-General of the Prison Service in a meeting with the ILO on 13 May 2002.)*" [Brackets original].

B. Involvement of civilian authorities

"We have to be in prison because we did wrong things and we will stay in prison. But now they pull us out when they need us. They give our names to the dead list. After they kill us, they report that we just got sick and died. Family and relatives know nothing."

Ko Kyaw Htun, 28 (January 2011, Dooplaya District)

"I stayed there for five months in Pakokku Prison. Then I was sent to be a porter. There, they asked all the prisoners to come out, and looked at us one by one. They chose the prisoners by themselves. Those who could afford it and paid money did not have to go to be porters. If we could bribe the jailers and jail wardens, we could leave the prison and make wax. So, those who could afford to pay money would not be in a poor situation. … There were many people who stayed in the prison longer than us who were not recruited to be porters because they could pay money. They could stay in the prison silently. For us, we were recruited to be porters."

Htway Thu, 28 (January 2011, Dooplaya District)

Based on analysis of interviews with former convict porters, KHRG has attempted to generate a list of civilian-administered prisons involved in the transfer of convict porters into military custody and/ or to the front line. The themes discussed in Section II: A above were used in the following table to evaluate the 24 prisons from which the 59 porters interviewed by KHRG reported being taken, or through which they reported being transferred, on their way to the front line. These 24 prisons are listed in the first column. The second column lists incidents falling under the 12 themes discussed above that were reported to have occurred at the prison in question. The third column, based on the presence or absence of these themes, presents an assessment of the likelihood of a particular prison's involvement in the recruitment and transfer of convict porters. Absence of themes has been labelled 'insufficient evidence', while a detailed report from one porter, describing at least one theme, has been labelled 'likely'. Where two or more themes are described by two or more porters, or where the themes described are particularly unambiguous, for example when military units pick up prisoners directly, that prison has been labelled with a 'strong likelihood' of involvement in the recruitment and transfer of convict porters. It is important to note that an evaluation of the likelihood of prison involvement was carried out by KHRG in this way because reported incarceration in a particular prison was insufficient evidence of involvement; conversely, the absence of common themes reported at a prison does not automatically preclude that prison's involvement, but means that the data set analysed contained insufficient evidence to affirm it. In either case, however, further on-site investigations remain necessary.

Table A.2: Prisons reported by interviewees

Prison	Factors indicative of involvement	Likelihood of involvement
Insein	Twelve porters reported that they were taken out of, or transferred through, this prison. Of these: • three reported that they were told they could pay to avoid being transferred; • two reported that a list of names was read out; • two reported that they spent one night here during their transfer to the front line; • one reported that he was shackled and picked up by military trucks; • one reported that Jailer U That Shin and Warden U Kyaw Kyaw did not inform prisoners that they were being sent to porter;	Evidence affirms strong likelihood

	• one reported that jailers gave prisoners inaccurate information about where they were being sent.	
Lashio	Eight porters reported that they were transferred through this prison. Of these: • one reported that he was told he could pay money to avoid transfer; the same porter reported that he was chained and that he was sent by the jail warden in a group of 100 other prisoners.	Evidence affirms strong likelihood
Kin-tha	25 porters reported that they were taken out of, or transferred through this *yeh beh* camp. Of these: • one porter reported that he was picked up directly by LIB #223; • five reported that they were picked up by military trucks; • three reported that a list of names was read out at that time; • 12 reported that they were taken out as part of large groups, ranging between 150 to 800 other prisoners.	Evidence affirms strong likelihood
Kyaukphyu	Nine porters reported that they were taken out of this prison. Of these: • two reported that they were told they could pay money to jailer U Mo Myit to avoid transfer; • three reported that they were taken as part of a group of 65 other prisoners.	Evidence affirms strong likelihood
Mandalay	Six porters reported that this was the second prison to which they were transferred. Of these: • one reported that he was picked up directly from this prison by IB #62; • one reported that he was taken out in a military truck, along with 100 other prisoners who were also transported via trucks; • three reported a stay of five nights or less during transfer to the front line.	Evidence affirms strong likelihood
Moulmein	Six porters reported that they were taken out of, or transferred through this prison. Of these; • three reported that they were picked up directly from this prison by specific Tatmadaw units LIB #219 and LID #44.	Evidence affirms strong likelihood
Meiktila	Four porters reported that they were taken out of, or transferred through, this prison. Of these: • two reported that they spent one night here but arrived and departed in military trucks, en route to the front line.	Evidence affirms strong likelihood
Meikathey [Meh Gk'Theh][26]	One porter reported that he was picked up from this *yeh beh* camp by military trucks.	Evidence affirms likelihood
Mote-pa-lin	Six porters reported that they were taken out of this *yeh beh* camp. Of these: • two reported that they were picked up directly by specific Tatmadaw battalions	Evidence affirms strong likelihood

[26] The bracketed spelling is the Karen transliteration; the interviewee did not specify the exact location of this labour camp, but said that it was in Thaton district. See the testimony of Zaw Htun, 32 (January 2010, Papun District).
[27] Myo Myit, 45 (February 2010, Papun District)

	LIB #707 and LIB #709; • three reported that they were taken with a large group of between 90 to 150 other prisoners; • one reported that the jailer did not tell him where he was being sent, but warned him to run away if he had the chance.[27]	
Myitkyina	Seven porters reported that they were taken out of, or transferred through, this prison. Of these: • one porter reported that he was transferred in a group of 100 other prisoners to the front line; • two reported that they were chained when they were taken out.	Evidence affirms likelihood
Mon Yaw	Two porters reported that they spent time in this prison after sentencing.	Insufficient evidence
Pa'an	Seven porters reported that they were transferred to this prison. Of these: • all seven reported that they were picked up from here by a specific Tatmadaw battalion: three reported that they were picked up by LIB# 231, four reported that they were picked up by LIB #208, under LID #22; • four reported that they spent only one night at this prison before the army picked them up; • three reported that a large number of prisoners were gathered here from many different prisons; of these, one estimated that 800 prisoners were present; • at least one porter reported that blue uniforms were distributed at this prison.	Evidence affirms strong likelihood
Pakkoku	Three porters reported that they were picked up from this prison by military trucks. Of these: • two reported that they were chained before being sent; • two reported that a list of names was read out by prison officials; • one reported that 30 prisoners were kept in a separate room before being sent in the trucks with an armed police escort • at least one reported being told he could pay money to avoid being sent to porter; • one specifically reported that being sent by Jailer U Kyaw Tha, along with an army Corporal and an armed police escort.	Evidence affirms strong likelihood
Pathein	One porter reported that this was the first prison to which he was sent after sentencing.	Insufficient evidence
Bago	Three porters reported transfer through this prison. • One reported that he spent one night here, arriving and departing as part of a group of 50 other chained prisoners in military trucks.	Evidence affirms likelihood
Pyay	Four porters reported that they were picked up from or transferred through this prison. Of these: • two reported that they spent only one night here during their transfer to the front line; • two reported that they were picked up from	Evidence affirms strong likelihood

	this prison by military trucks and told inaccurate information about where they were being sent. One reported that a list of names was read out and that prisoners with sentences over ten years were told to stand up, were kept in a separate room and then sent as part of a group of 50 other prisoners. The other reported being told he could pay the jail warden to avoid being transferred out of the prison.	
Taung-zun	Four porters reported that they were taken out of, or transferred through, this *yeh beh* camp. Of these: • two reported that they were picked up by military trucks; • one said that he was transferred as part of a large number of other prisoners; • one reported that prisoners knew they were being sent to porter and were told they could pay money to avoid transfer.	Evidence affirms strong likelihood
Thandaung	One porter reported that he was transferred through this prison as part of a group of 300 prisoners taken from Kin-tha *yeh beh* camp; he reported that he was taken out at night by the army from this prison.	Evidence affirms likelihood
Thaton	Six porters reported being transferred through, or taken out from, this prison. Of these: • two reported that they were both brought here and transferred onwards by Tatmadaw LIB #707 and LIB #709; • another reported that he was brought by military truck; • a total of four reported that they spent only one or two nights here.	Evidence affirms strong likelihood
Tharyawaddy	Six porters reported that they spent time in this prison; three reported long stays of between two to six years, followed by transfer to a *yeh beh* camp.	Insufficient evidence
Taunggyi	One porter reported that this was his first point of imprisonment after sentencing.	Insufficient evidence
Toungoo	26 porters reported that they were transferred through this prison. Of these: • fourteen reported that they were picked up by Tatmadaw IB #56, LIB #320, LIB #223, LIB # 377, LIB #602, LIB #237, IB #47; LIB #302 or MOC #2; • ten reported that they were picked up by military trucks; • eleven reported that a large group of between 100 to 500 other prisoners were gathered here from other prisons; • at least two reported that many Tatmadaw troops gathered here; one estimated that 700 Tatmadaw soldiers assembled at this prison[28] • nine reported that they stayed for less than a week here; • at least one reported that blue uniforms and portering equipment were distributed at this prison.	Evidence affirms strong likelihood

[28] Bo Bo, 41 (Papun District, January 2010)

Toungup	Three porters reported that they spent one night here during their transfer to the front line.	Evidence affirms strong likelihood
Yamethin	Four porters reported that this was the first prison in which they were imprisoned after sentencing. Of these: • two reported that they were taken out in a large group of between 200 to 500 other prisoners; • one reported that the jailers put them in trucks and did not tell them where they were being sent.	Evidence affirms strong likelihood

III. Tatmadaw treatment of porters in frontline areas

A. Violations of international humanitarian law

This section analyses porter testimony to identify the specific abuses commonly described by porters and which violate fundamental principles of customary international humanitarian law, binding on all states, which govern the treatment of civilians during international and non-international armed conflicts.[29] Analysis in this section focuses on abuses which contravene the customary norms of IHL that parties to a conflict must always distinguish civilians from combatants and undertake certain measures to protect civilians, and that parties must treat civilians humanely.[30] Additional rules of customary IHL that derive from one or both of these principles, and articulate specific obligations and prohibitions for parties to a conflict, are also cited in this analysis to indicate specifically how the mistreatment described by porters may amount to violations of IHL.

Sections III: A-1 to III: A-4 highlight rules of customary IHL relevant to four serious categories of abuse repeatedly cited in the testimony of former convict porters. Each section also provides details on the number of porters who mentioned each abuse, and excerpts of porter testimony describing abuses. The following types of abuse are considered in these sections:

- Direct and deliberate exposure of porters to attack and/or physical dangers arising from conflict;
- Violence to life and summary execution of porters;
- Failure or refusal to provide medical care for sick, injured, or wounded porters;
- Other forms of cruel or inhumane treatment of porters.

Section III: A-5 then highlights the customary IHL requirement that states both respect and ensure respect for international humanitarian law, and details porter testimony describing involvement of specific Tatmadaw officers in mistreatment of porters that may contravene this rule. Porter testimony indicating involvement of Tatmadaw officers in abuse of porters includes descriptions of: the direct perpetration of abuse; the issuance of orders entailing abuse; and failure to prevent, punish or report abuses by subordinate soldiers.

1. Exposure of porters to attack and/ or physical dangers arising from conflict

The principle of distinction is a foundational principle of customary international humanitarian law, binding on all states, and entails that parties to a conflict must "*at all times distinguish between the civilian population and combatants.*"[31] In addition to prohibiting attacks on civilians, the principle of distinction also requires states to take broad measures to protect civilians from the harmful effects of armed conflict. Of particular relevance to convict porters are rules requiring parties to a conflict to take all feasible precautions to protect civilians under their

[29] For guidance, KHRG referred to the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) Customary International Humanitarian Law (IHL) database, which catalogues the 161 rules of customary international humanitarian law. http://www.icrc.org/customary-ihl/eng/docs/v1

[30] Customary IHL database, Rule 1: *The Principle of Distinction between Civilians and Combatants*; and Rule 87: *Humane treatment*. The principles of distinction and humane treatment are expressed in Common Article 3 of the 1949 Geneva Conventions, which Burma has committed to uphold as a ratifying party, and which applies to situations of "armed conflict not of an international character occurring in the territory of one of the High Contracting Parties".

[31] ICRC Customary IHL database, Rule 1: *The Principle of Distinction between Civilians and Combatants*.

control from the effects of attacks[32] including by the removal of civilians under their control from the vicinity of military objectives;[33] as well as the specific prohibition on the use of human shields.[34] The ICRC has stated that a failure to adhere to each of these rules would make it difficult for a state to comply with the broader customary IHL obligation of parties to a conflict to afford civilians "*general protection against dangers arising from military operations*".[35]

In breach of these rules rooted in the principle of distinction, 22 porters interviewed by KHRG reported that porters were deliberately alternated with soldiers while walking in military columns in frontline areas, with one soldier walking in front and one soldier following behind. Notably, on January 17th 2011, KHRG researchers recorded video footage of Tatmadaw soldiers from LIB #380 forcing more than 20 porters to walked mingled amidst their column in this fashion.

> *"It was like they [the Tatmadaw soldiers] took cover behind us. … We sandwiched them. Point section [of porters] went in the front. We went after the Point section. At the front, two service personnel [porters] had to go first and we directly had to follow after them. … They sandwiched the soldiers with us. For instance, four or five service personnel would die if they shot one soldier. They were sandwiched in the middle like this."*
>
> Laing Oo, 43 (January 2011, Dooplaya District)

> *"During the trip, they did not allow us to take a rest. A porter had to walk between two soldiers."*
>
> Naung Soe, 41 (January 2010, Papun District)

Twenty-two porters also recounted incidents in which they were directly exposed to dangers arising from military operations when the soldiers for whom they were portering came under fire from heavy artillery, mortars or guns. Porters described not being allowed to seek shelter in trenches; having to stay out in the open during gunfire; being forced to return to an area the army had just vacated under fire, in order to retrieve abandoned military equipment; and having to sleep in an unsheltered open area while soldiers slept in trenches or under shelter. At least two interviewees reported that porters were injured as a result of these practices.

> *"Big battles occurred twice when we came in October and then four or five small battles happened. There was a porter who got injured the day before we fled. The bullet was still in his lung."*
>
> Nyain Chan Oo, 31 (January 2010, Papun District)

> *"The Karen army [DKBA or KNLA] shot one time at the church [in Htee Thay Kee]. They [the Tatmadaw] also shot back. I just experienced that one time. For them, they jumped down to the hole [trench] but we had to stay out in the open expanse. … We, many porters, got injured by mines and guns."*
>
> Ko Kyaw Htun, 28 (January 2011, Dooplaya District)

> *"We were on the hill and had to hide. We dared not put up our heads. The bullets were running to [being shot at] us and went over our heads but they didn't hit us. The soldiers*

[32] ICRC Customary IHL database, Rule 22: *Principle of Precautions against the Effects of Attacks*. The ICRC affirms this rule as a norm of customary international law applicable in both international and non-international armed conflicts, noting that '*the principle of distinction… inherently requires respect for this rule.*'

[33] ICRC Customary IHL database, Rule 24: *Removal of Civilians and Civilian Objects from the Vicinity of Military Objectives*. The ICRC affirms this rule as a norm of customary international law applicable in both international and non-international armed conflicts, noting that '*the principle of distinction… inherently requires respect for this rule.*'

[34] ICRC Customary IHL database, Rule 97: *Human Shields*. The ICRC affirms this rule as a norm of customary international law applicable in both international and non-international armed conflicts, noting that '*deliberately using human shields is contrary to the principle of distinction…*'

[35] ICRC Customary IHL database, Rules 22, 24, and 97.

who were kind told us how to stay low when the bullets came. … The Burmese [Tatmadaw] army marched to the front and the soldiers arrived to the top of a hill and the [DKBA] soldiers on this side shot at them and they dared not to stay on the hill anymore. They retreated and their mortars and backpacks were still left on the hill. They could only bring their guns with them. We had to carry their materials for them. They asked seven porters to go and get back their materials. They said the DKBA would not shoot wan saung *[porters]. They ordered us to go and get their materials back. They ordered us and we had to go and get them back."*

Thi Ha Soe, 23 (January 2011, Dooplaya District)

In further breach of the rules intended to protect civilians from dangers arising from military operations, porters reported that they were forced to walk with patrols in mined areas. A total of 22 porters reported landmine-related incidents, in which soldiers or porters were injured or killed by landmines, illustrating the dangers arising from military operations to which porters were routinely exposed. Only ten of these 22 porters were asked any questions about landmines; all ten of those who were directly asked affirmed that there had been incidents in which soldiers or porters had been injured by landmines or in which porters had been forced to sweep for mines. None of the 37 porters who did not report landmine incidents were asked any questions about landmines during their interviews.

"One [soldier] stepped on a landmine. He was a corporal. He marched to the front and stepped on a landmine and his right leg was blown off."

Thi Ha Soe, 23 (January 2011, Dooplaya District)

"They ordered us to walk in the front. When we went and carried water, we didn't know about mines and had never heard what guns sounded like. Actually we were supposed to follow behind them. They knew, and they were supposed to go in the front. But they ordered us to go first. They followed behind us. In their mind, if the mine explodes, the mine will hit us first. It won't hit them. They ordered us to go first with this objective."

Ko Kyaw Htun, 28 (January 2011, Dooplaya District)

As explained above, the principle of distinction, and corresponding obligation to protect civilians against dangers arising from military operations, entails a prohibition on the use of civilians to shield military objectives from attacks.[36] Contrary to this, nine porters specifically reported that they were deliberately forced to walk in front or on either side of soldiers to shield military personnel during hostile fire.

*"[Where the porters had to walk] depended on the area. If they thought it was dangerous and they dared not go, they said '*Go, go, you go first, we will follow you'*. Sometimes, where it was a place that we could run or escape, they said '*Hey, you stay in the middle, stay behind me*'.*

Kyaw Htike, 31 (February 2010, Papun District)

"When I came to carry the loads this time, we encountered fighting. I never had an experience like this. I am not a soldier and I did not have a gun either. The SPDC army ordered us and forced us to run in front of them and they followed us from behind. When I think about it, it was very dangerous for us and I feel so much pain."

Kaw Kay, 41 (January 2010, Papun District)

"When fighting happened or when they heard a gun firing, they dragged us [the porters] roughly to walk in front of them. In a dangerous situation, they let the porters die. During my time as a porter, whenever fighting occurred, the Captain and Lieutenant

[36] See ICRC Customary IHL database, Rule 97: *Human shields*.

ordered the porters to walk in front. I was forced to walk in the front. They were afraid to go, but they ordered the porters to go."

Chit Kawn, 37 (January 2010, Papun District)

In further breach of the prohibition against the use of human shields, a total of fifteen porters reported that they were forced to walk at the front of Tatmadaw columns in a mined area or in an area suspected to have been mined,[37] to strike or beat the ground with a pitchfork or pickaxe before soldiers walked on it, and to dig out landmines.

"They asked us to find landmines, starting from Papun. They asked us to find landmines by striking with a pickaxe, but we had no materials, just people and pickaxes. If we couldn't sweep landmines, there was a beating."

Myo Myit, 45 (February 2010, Papun District)

"They did not ask us to walk in the same position because sometimes we had to sweep landmines with a kind of tool that has prongs. It is like a pitchfork. We used it to scrape the ground and find the landmines. We did not know anything about landmines, but we had to scrape the ground and find landmines. We were very lucky that we were not killed by the landmines."

Htway Thu, 28 (January 2011, Dooplaya District)

*"The soldiers said '*Many of our soldiers were hit by mines. We will keep the porters at the front. If they don't go, we will shoot them in the back. We will shoot them if they don't go in the front. We will order them to clear up mines*.' We were afraid of this so we two discussed it and escaped."*

Matthew, 27 (January 2011, Dooplaya District)

A total of eight porters reported a minimum of 17 incidents in which porters were killed or injured by landmines. This number cannot be precisely defined because four of the interviewees reported that "most", "many" or "some" porters were killed or injured; in this briefer, use of the phrases "most", "many" or "some" has been minimally quantified as two.

"The point section is the porters who walk at the front. One of the people [porters] from the point section ran. He ran and stepped on a mine. … He ran and "TAW" [sound of a landmine], we heard the sound of a landmine. He shouted that he couldn't walk any more. He was not cured. They kept him like that there. There was nothing we could do for him. … In front of us, there were two boys who came together with us. They swept the road [for landmines] with us. A corporal wanted to move forward and he didn't dare step off the path [for fear of stepping on a landmine] but he ordered the boy [another convict porter] to move aside. That boy was about twenty. … The little boy was hit by the mine when he moved aside. After the boy stepped on the mine, both of his legs were blown off [by the landmine]."

Laing Oo, 43 (January 2011, Dooplaya District)

"There was a very narrow road that was only wide enough for one person to be able to walk. A service personnel [porter] stood up here, the soldiers came across to him and they did not dare to step outside of the road. They ordered that service personnel [porter] to step outside of the road. That man [the porter] moved beside them outside of the road and both of his legs were cut [blown] off. They shot him with a gun and left him like that."

Pyit Zon (January 2011, Dooplaya District)

[37] This practice is more commonly referred to as atrocity de-mining.

"Most of my friends [porters] were hit by mines and their legs were blown off. The soldiers said they would send them back and they called them behind the troops and shot and stabbed them with knives and kicked them down to the valley. Those things happened."

Ko Kyaw Htun, 28 (January 2011, Dooplaya District)

2. Violence to life and summary execution of porters

"*Violence to life and person, in particular murder of all kinds*"[38] and "*the carrying out of executions without previous judgment pronounced by a regularly constituted court*"[39] against civilians are expressly prohibited in non-international armed conflicts by Common Article 3 of the 1949 Geneva Conventions, to which Burma is a ratifying party. A specific prohibition against the murder of civilians has been affirmed as a principle of customary international law applicable in both international and non-international armed conflict by the ICRC.[40]

A total of 34 porters reported specific incidents in which Tatmadaw soldiers or officers killed porters; eighteen of the remaining 25 porters were not asked any questions about killing of porters in their interviews with KHRG. Of the seven who answered a question about killing of porters in the negative, three reported that they had served as porters for just ten days. The 34 porters who affirmed that there had been killings reported a total of 46 incidents of porters being killed. Of these, 21 killings were reported to have occurred because the porter could not carry loads anymore; 18 killings were reported to have occurred because the porter attempted to escape; and seven porters were reported to have been executed because they were injured, either from landmines or from being beaten until they could no longer walk.

*"The army shot a young boy who was a porter in front of my eyes... The boy could not carry the package because it was very heavy as he was small and thin. He carried it and we had only passed two curves when the boy told the army that he could not carry the package and '*Please, reduce a little weight from my package.*' But the army forced him to continue carrying it. When we arrived to the third curve, the boy could not carry the load anymore and sat down. He told the army '*Sa Ya, you ordered me to carry a lot of weight. I just have to die. Nothing will be different. If you want to kill me, you can kill me now.*' They tortured and beat the boy and forced him to carry it. But the boy could not carry it anymore. Then they said '*Leave your package and go wherever you want.*' They showed three or four ways for the boy to flee. When he ran away only three or four steps, the army shot him dead from behind. The bullets hit under his ear and his mouth was broken in two parts. He did not die immediately."*

Nyain Chan Oo, 31 (Janaury 2010, Papun District)

*"We went forward for a while and, in front of me, two porters from Company #4 asked permission from the Captain to take a rest. They said they couldn't walk anymore. Their legs were full of wounds and their faces became swollen because they had been beaten and struck with guns. They apologized and requested that they couldn't go and said '*Let us take a rest*'. The soldiers said '*We didn't call you here to take a rest. We called you here to work. Are you really sure that you can't go anymore?' *They said '*We can't walk anymore,' *and they apologized. They [the soldiers] said '*If that is so, put your basket down*'. And those two people put down their baskets because they thought they would be given a rest. They were called to the cliff and he sliced their necks and kicked them down to the valley. … A guy whose legs were locked together with me, his name was*

[38] Common Art. 3 (1) a, Geneva Conventions (1949)
[39] Common Art. 3 (1) d, Geneva Conventions (1949)
[40] See ICRC Customary IHL database, Rule 89: *Violence to life*.

*Aung Thu Win. He was the same as this. He couldn't climb up anymore. I wanted to go and help him. He [a soldier] said not to go. He said '*If you can carry, can you carry the whole basket?*' I couldn't carry [the whole basket] but I wanted to go and help him like this. He said, '*Don't go and help him. He will carry it by himself. You go [keep walking].*' He threatened me. That man [Aung Thu Win] couldn't climb up anymore. He was very tired. For the young boys [like him], they shoot them to death. They ordered him to go to the gorge and run. The young boy [Aung Thu Win] told them '*If I run you will shoot me.*' They said '*No, we won't kill you. You can run.*' They ordered the guy to run. Just as he walked down to the gorge, they shot him in the back. And they told us,* 'You guys see what happens. You guys also, if you can't climb up, we will kill you like this.*' We were afraid."*

Matthew, 27 (January 2011, Dooplaya District)

*"One of them [porters] ran from the front [of the column] and escaped. The second one was hit by landmines. The last one was afraid and ran back. He ran back to be arrested. The soldiers pointed at him with guns and shot at him on the mountain. They shot at him and kicked him. The one who was hit by landmines, he shouted, '*Help me, help me.*' While he was shouting beside the tree, he was stabbed with the knife which was on the point of the gun. They just left him like that."*

Pyit Zon, (January 2011, Dooplaya District)

Porters interviewed by KHRG reported that they were repeatedly threatened that they would be killed if they could not carry loads anymore, if they were injured or if they tried to escape. Out of 59 porters interviewed, 52 reported that they were told they would be shot if they tried to escape; 26 reported incidents in which porters were fired at during escape attempts; and 20 reported that they were told they would be killed if they if they were injured or couldn't carry what they were required to carry.

"I have seen the army point at us from behind with their guns. Even though we could not carry the rations, we were forced to carry them. If we did not continue to carry them, they would shoot us dead. … They pointed at us with their guns here and there. They threatened us with knives and pointed their guns at our ears. Although we could not carry the rations, we were forced to carry these. They also hit me twice with their guns after I told them that I could not continue to carry the rations because they continued walking without taking any rest. They replied "If you do not want to die, you must carry it." I was afraid of them and even though I could not carry it, I had to continue carrying it."

Nyain Chan Oo, 31 (January 2010, Papun District)

"Sometimes they shout, and say, they will shoot us to death if we can't do it. Before I thought, the army is from our Myanmar. I didn't think that they would be heartless like this. When I look at this, oh, the army is not easy. … There were many people [porters] who escaped in front of us. I heard they shot them to death. Even they [the soldiers] said they did. They said, 'If you dare to escape, you can but we will shoot and kill you'*."*

Thant Shin, 48 (February 2010, Papun District)

"There was a porter who was shot dead. He tried to run away when he went to carry bamboo, but the SPDC army saw him and shot him dead at once."

Chit Kawn, 37 (January 2010, Papun District)

3. Failure or refusal to provide medical care for sick, injured, or wounded porters

The obligation to "*collect and care for the wounded and sick*" is enshrined in the Geneva Conventions[41] and has been affirmed as custom in both international and non-international armed conflicts.[42] Other rules of customary IHL require that civilians be treated humanely, in particular the prohibition of cruel or inhuman treatment, which may be relevant where denial of medical care to sick or wounded porters causes severe physical pain or suffering.[43]

> *"The porter, he was sick and couldn't eat. The soldiers also didn't feed us what they eat. They fed us very limited food. They also didn't give medicine to sick people and soon the sick people were unable to eat. Then sick people can't carry the weight they are asked to carry and get beaten."*
>
> Thaw Shwee, 30, (March 2010, Papun District)

> *"During the trip [on patrol], whether we were sick or not and whether we would die or not, we had to carry their packages. … They forced porters who were sick to carry the rations. Although the porters who were sick could not carry, they continued carrying [packages] because they were afraid to die. … One of them [the other porters] got injured, but they [the Tatmadaw] did not carry him and asked him to walk. I thought the army would shoot him dead when he could not continue to walk. I became afraid of dying because I realised that they would shoot me dead when I could not walk anymore, too. Another patient among our porters was shot and the bullet hit him and stayed in his lung. It was bleeding. They did not carry him and cure him well. They forced him to walk at the back... His name is Kyaw Soe, a Burmese man. He was about 45 years old."*
>
> Nyain Chan Oo, 31 (January 2010, Papun District)

> *"Yes, [a porter died]. I don't know his name. He died at Point 2833. He was about 26 or 27 years old. He died because he got malaria. … Yes, [there was a doctor], but they didn't cure him. They just gave … one medicine at that time. I don't know about other prisoners. I just know about that one."*
>
> Naing Naing, 25 (March 2010, Papun District)

In breach of the obligation to care for the wounded or sick, 30 of the 59 interviewees reported that convict porters were denied basic and/ or life-saving medical treatment; that convict porters died from treatable injuries and diseases; and that porters were forced to porter loads while sick or injured; and were abandoned when injured, unable to walk or in any other way incapacitated.

> *"Many of my friends who stayed in the same prison as me didn't have footwear. For them [Tatmadaw soldiers], they wore boots. When we crossed the rocky land, our legs got abrasions. We got injured and when we couldn't walk, they beat us with the butt of the gun and stabbed prisoners' thighs with knives. The wound that they stabbed with the knife is worse than the abrasions we got from walking on the sharp rock. The prisoners were afraid and got sick at night. They didn't give them medical treatment. They let them die. You get sick and you die."*
>
> Ko Kyaw Htun, 28 (January 2011, Dooplaya District)

[41] Geneva Conventions 1949, common Art. 3 (2): "The wounded and sick shall be collected and cared for."

[42] See ICRC Customary IHL database, Rule 110: *Treatment and care of the wounded, sick and shipwrecked*. Rule 110 states that the wounded and sick '*must receive, to the fullest extent practicable and with the least possible delay, the medical care and attention required by their condition*'.

[43] See ICRC Customary IHL database, Rule 87: *Humane Treatment*; Rule 90: *Torture and Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment*.

"I saw there was a porter who got beaten and could not walk after he was beaten. Then he was left. I did not know whether he would die or not. He was a Chinese man."

Kaw Kay, 41 (January 2010, Papun District)

"They don't give treatment. They don't have medicine. I had a cough, a runny nose and a headache. I went and asked for the medicine. The medical officer was included with the army but the medicines were not included. He said 'We cure the people who get injured but we don't give medicines for diseases [illness]. We treat the people who get injured by guns.*' [There was] No medicine for fever diseases. They didn't give treatment. They wouldn't give treatment. If porters can't walk and carry, they kill them directly. They will shoot you when you get sick. They will shoot you when you can't walk anymore. We had to walk carefully so our legs were not hit by mines or injured by anything. They will kill you when your legs fold. We knew that so we walked carefully."*

Matthew, 27 (January 2011, Dooplaya District)

Only two interviewees mentioned that the prison from which they were sent conducted a medical examination before sending prisoners to porter. Furthermore, both reported that prisoners were sent to porter based on their ability or inability to pay money, rather than on the state of their health.

"Hsa Dar was my friend [another porter from the same prison]. He had got tuberculosis. He had to take tuberculosis medicine for six months. He was sent to hospital. He had not finished taking medicine for six months; he just finished two months of medicine and was sent to be a porter. When the time was getting close to take porters from yeh beh *[prison labour camp], they checked the prisoners' health. We took off our clothes and they asked,* 'What disease do you have?'*. They did not check properly because they just asked the questions. I said,* 'I have got malaria'*. They just said, '*Nothing is happening to you, just follow'*. They disposed of their responsibility by asking questions.* 'What disease do you have?' *They just asked like this about our diseases and did not cure anything.*

Pyit Zon, (January 2011, Dooplaya District)

4. Other forms of cruel or inhumane treatment of porters

Humane treatment is a fundamental guarantee enshrined in the Geneva Conventions[44] and a fundamental rule of customary international law applicable to both international and non-international armed conflict.[45] The customary IHL principle that civilians be treated humanely at all times is also linked to specific rules prohibiting cruel or inhumane treatment, and corporal punishment.[46] Contrary to these rules, 53 interviewees confirmed that porters were beaten by Tatmadaw soldiers or officers for any of the following reasons: requesting a rest; slowing down; stopping; speaking to soldiers or with other porters; or requesting a lighter load and/ or being unable to climb either up or down a mountain. Porters reported that they were insulted,

[44] Geneva Conventions 1949, common Art. 3 (1): "*Persons taking no active part in the hostilities … shall in all circumstances be treated humanely … To this end the following acts are and shall remain prohibited at any time and in any place whatsoever with respect to the above-mentioned persons: (a) violence to life and person, in particular … mutilation, cruel treatment and torture*".

[45] ICRC Customary IHL database, Rule 87: *Humane treatment*. The ICRC affirms that the detailed rules found in international humanitarian law and human rights law give full expression to the substantive and non-static meaning of humane treatment.

[46] Geneva Conventions, common Art. 3 (1); ICRC Customary IHL database, Rule 90: *Torture and Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment*; and Rule 91: *Corporal Punishment*. The ICRC affirms that these prohibitions are expressed in Common Article 3 of the 1949 Geneva Conventions, and that both rules constitute norms of customary international law applicable in both international and non-international armed conflicts.

punched, kicked with military boots, prodded forward with gun barrels, stabbed with bayonets and beaten with the butts of soldiers' guns.

> *"They treated us very rudely. We couldn't talk to them. We had to go when they called us and do what they ordered us. Just a word, we couldn't even talk back to them. We had no chance to speak. They beat, punched and swore at us. Every day, we were called '*sister/mother fucker*.' They swore and called us '*sister/mother fucker*' and then beat us. They kicked us when we were not acting how they wanted. They beat people who couldn't climb up the mountains. They beat us and ordered us to climb up. We couldn't climb down where [they told us] we had to climb down. … They kicked us down and kicked us in the back when we couldn't climb down and the porters rolled down [the mountain]."*
>
> Matthew, 27 (January 2011, Dooplaya District)

> *"They beat the prisoners when they didn't do what they ordered. They stabbed them with a knife or beat them with their gun butts in the prisoners' faces. Prisoners' faces became swollen."*
>
> Ko Kyaw Htun, 28 (January 2011, Dooplaya District)

Certain aspects of conditions under which porters were forced to work, described in the testimony of a large number of interviewees, when considered cumulatively, may also amount to mistreatment of porters that contravenes the principle of humane treatment and related rules of customary IHL explained above. These conditions and details of relevant porter testimony are analysed further in Section III: B of this briefer.

5. Officer involvement in mistreatment of porters

A key rule of customary international humanitarian law requires that states both respect and ensure respect for international humanitarian law, including specifically via the issuance of orders and instructions to their armed forces.[47] The testimony of former convict porters analysed for this report, however, describes a high degree of involvement of Tatmadaw officers in abuses of porters which may contravene norms of international humanitarian law, and therefore strongly indicates a failure of the state to adhere to the rule to respect and ensure respect for IHL. A total of 28 interviewees detailed incidents in which commanding officers[48] committed abuse or failed to prevent, punish or report abuses about which they had full awareness; many interviewees also reported the names of officers involved in these acts. Porters reported execution of convict porters by commanding officers; the issuing of orders to carry out executions; failure to punish perpetrators of violent abuses, including murder; and attempts by officers to conceal their names or ranks from the convict porters, suggesting a desire to conceal their involvement in the acts perpetrated.

In the first column of Table A.3 below, a complete list of the Tatmadaw units that porters reported serving is provided, including Infantry Battalions (IBs), Light Infantry Battalions (LIBs), and Light Infantry Divisions (LIDs) where possible; the second column quantifies the number of porters who reported serving that particular battalion;[49] the third column lists names of

[47] ICRC Customary IHL database, Rule 139: *Respect for International Humanitarian Law*. This rule is also expressed in Common Article 1 of the 1949 Geneva Conventions, to which Burma is party, in relation to the rules enumerated in that convention: "*The High Contracting Parties undertake to respect and to ensure respect for the present Convention in all circumstances.*"

[48] In interviews with KHRG, porters typically distinguished officers either by using their titles, usually *Bo Mu* [Major] and *Bo Gyi* [Captain], or with reference to the number of 'stars' or 'chevrons' on their insignia.

[49] Note that this number only represents the number of porters interviewed by KHRG who reported serving that battalion; it is in no way indicative of the total number of porters used by that battalion at any given time.

commanding officers, where reported; and the fourth provides details of abuses reported to have been perpetrated by that officer.

> *"We can distinguish them [soldiers, corporals and sergeants]. The highest officers in a section have three stars. … Here, they don't wear their badges and they took them off but as they [the soldiers] called them, we knew that the captain was the captain."*
>
> Pyit Zon (January 2011, Dooplaya District)

> *"*Bo Mu *[Major],* Bo Gyi *[Captain], the officers and the soldiers are all the same. They all abuse the convict porters. Even though* Bo Mu *and* Bo Gyi *saw their soldiers torturing the porters, they would not say anything to them. Nothing is different between* Bo Mu*,* Bo Gyi *and the soldiers. They commit abuses together."*
>
> Kaw Kay, 41 (January 2010, Papun District)

> *"Captain Kyaw Swa, his rank is three stars. And Kyaw Myo Htun, his rank is also three stars. Both of them rank three stars. They are the captains that control us. They punched and slapped our face. The privates also do it but not too much. Mostly it was the Captains."*
>
> Ko Kyaw Htun, 28 (January 2011, Dooplaya District)

Table A.3: Tatmadaw units reported by interviewees

Tatmadaw units, as reported	No. porters	Officer name(s)	Abuse reported
LID 44	four		
LID 22	one		
IB 47	two	Battalion Commander Aung Win	Soldiers in his battalion beat and shot porters.
IB 56	six	Bpyoh Cho	Executed porter.
IB 62	one		
LIB 208	four	Sergeant Shein Htun	Executed porter.
		Company Commander Pa Nya Naing; Sergeant Maung Ni Win; Captain Ye Naw; Captain Khin Maung Aye	Soldiers in this company beat soldiers with their guns and abandoned a porter who stepped on a landmine.
LIB 219	one		
LIB 223	five	Sergeant Gyi Mg	Beat porters; soldiers in his battalion executed porter.
LIB 231	three	Lance Corporal Kyaw Thu Win; Si Thu;[50] Aung Kyaw Soe;[51] Kyaw Soe Win[52]	Soldiers in this battalion beat and kicked porters.
LIB 237	two		
LIB 302	one	Ba Htain	Soldiers in his battalion tied porters so they couldn't take shelter from hostile fire.

[50]Two porters named Si Thu as an officer in LIB #231. Htway Thu, 28 reported that Si Thu was a Corporal; Win Win Naing, 17 reported that he was a Lieutenant with two stars.

[51] Thi Ha Soe, 23 reported that Aung Kyaw Soe was a Lieutenant, however he also said he was a three-starred officer; officers with three stars are Captains.

[52] Win Win Naing, 17 reported that Kyaw Soe Win was a three-starred officer.

LIB 307	one		
LIB 320	four	Hteh Lin Ko[53]; Hla Htun	Soldiers in this battalion beat porters and told them they would leave them dead on the front line.
LIB 362	one	Company Commander Thet Shwe	Soldiers in his company beat porters.
LIB 377	two	Myit Shin	Porters in this battalion had to walk at the front of the column and sweep for landmines; two porters were reported to have been seriously injured by landmines. The porter who reported this incident said he thought their injuries were fatal.[54]
LIB 387	three		
LIB 602	three		
LIB 707	two		
LIB 708	one	Nyi Nyi Aung	Porters in this battalion had to sweep for landmines using pickaxes.
LIB 709	five	Nyi Nyi Lat	Soldiers in this battalion shot dead a villager;[55] beat porters.

[53] Min Win, 23 reported that Hteh Link Ko was *Bo Gyi* [Captain] but also said he was not sure of his rank.
[54] See the testimony of Chit Lwin, 48 (January 2011, Toungoo District)
[55] This incident is reported in detail in the testimony of Eh Kler, 26 (January 2010, Papun District).

B. Working conditions and other mistreatment of convict porters

Section III: A dealt with ill treatment of convict porters that amounted to violations of international humanitarian law. However, convict porters interviewed by KHRG repeatedly chose to describe working conditions and other abuses that also cumulatively amount to serious mistreatment. Porters reported that they were:

- Not provided with adequate food and drinking water;
- Forced to carry excessively heavy loads weighing as much as 64 kg / 141 lbs in a difficult working environment, due to the nature of the roads, the steepness of the terrain and the climate;
- Forced to carry loads or perform other tasks, including digging trenches, gathering firewood and building shelters, for up to 14.5 hours without rests for many consecutive days;
- Not subject to any minimum or maximum age limitation;
- Exposed to unsanitary conditions;
- Not provided with adequate housing and clothing;
- Not compensated for labour.[56]

The consequences for porters of this mistreatment, including caloric deficiency, exhaustion, illness and despair, should not be dismissed or overshadowed by other abuses which may be viewed within IHL as more serious breaches of humanitarian law, such as those discussed in Sections III: A-1 through A-4 above. Looking beyond the most serious abuses fosters a more complete understanding of the extent to which convict porters are, without exception, systematically denied the basic necessities of survival and treated as less than human. Mistreatment outlined in this section may cumulatively amount to inhumane treatment in violation of the principle of humane treatment and related rules of customary IHL, as detailed in Section III: A-4. This mistreatment also made porters more vulnerable to other international crimes since, for example, porters who were weak or ill from lack of food were sometimes executed when they could not follow the troops or shot during escape attempts when prolonged mistreatment motivated them to attempt to flee.

> *"We couldn't do their work for a long time… we had to climb up and down from hill to hill and dig the holes, and we had to do that every day without stopping. Mostly we had to carry mortars, water pails, food and bags of rice for them. It was very difficult for us to climb up the hills with a bag of rice. We had to do this and carry this every day. Day after day, we couldn't do it anymore. Our shoulders became painful and we couldn't work anymore. The time we had to rest was short but the time we had to work was long. … The reason that I escaped is [because] the food they fed us… had no nutrients, it was just rice. We couldn't have enough water. We couldn't drink enough water to fill ourselves up so I couldn't stay anymore."*
>
> Thi Ha Soe, 23 (January 2011, Dooplaya District)

> *"I did not care whether I would die or not. I decided I would desert because I could not suffer anymore. They punched us. We were thirsty and we were not allowed to take a bath. Also we did not have enough food to eat. We were not even worth what an animal is worth."*
>
> Paing Paing, 41 (January 2010, Papun District)

[56] Despite the fact that Article 1040 of the Appendices to the Burma Jail Manual requires that remuneration for extramural convict labour must be "at rates of wages prevailing at the places concerned", not one of the 59 porters interviewed reported any form of remuneration being given.

In order to provide a more complete understanding of the extent to which porters were mistreated, the following section details specific abuses frequently reported to KHRG by porters interviewed for this report, accompanied by analysis of the relevant provisions of domestic Burmese law that currently regulate conditions for prison labourers, including the Prisons Act (1894)[57] and the Appendices to the Burma Jail Manual (1894).[58] KHRG chose to include this analysis to highlight the fact that convict porters suffer ill treatment that is already prohibited by existing domestic law, in addition to the international commitments described above. All 59 porters in the section below, as well as in Section III: A above, described abuses that fail to meet the precepts enshrined in Burma's existing domestic prison laws. This fact is important, given reports by officials from Burma's Ministry of Home Affairs that it must update the Jail Manual and submit it to review by parliament before practices involving treatment of porters can be altered.[59] An overhaul of existing domestic law or the introduction of new laws would be an inadequate means of ensuring sufficient protection if not accompanied by other measures enabling citizens to claim the protections currently afforded by existing domestic laws.

It is also important to note that Article 1029 of the Appendices to the Burma Jail Manual, which lays out the types of permissible labour that may be exacted from prisoners and classifies each type according to whether the labour involved is light, medium or hard, does not include any provisions whatsoever for portering on frontline operations.[60] This suggests that correctional authorities in Burma do not possess any formal legal authority to transfer prisoners to Tatmadaw control for use in frontline areas.

1. Inadequate supplies of food and drinking water

Article 1076 of the Appendices to the Burma Jail Manual makes detailed provision for the supply of food, specifically that "*for all labouring convicts… there shall be three meals a day, viz., an early morning meal before the prisoners start work, breakfast after the morning labour is finished and dinner in the evening before they are locked up*." Articles 1077 – 1095 then provide additional guidelines for the amount of food to be supplied to prisoners;[61] the allowance of additional food to prisoners engaged in especially laborious tasks;[62] quality control of raw and cooked food;[63] and the oversight of equitable distribution of food to prisoners.[64]

In sharp contrast to this, 52 of the 59 porters interviewed reported that they were not fed often enough or not provided with enough food to carry out the work required of them on the front line;

[57] Burma Code I: Prisons Act and Prisoners Act, 1945

[58] According to the Burma Lawyers' Council, the Appendices to the Burma Jail Manual are not binding domestic law, but are rather an administrative code of treatment guidelines created by the Ministry of Home Affairs. In recent communication with the ILO, however, the Ministry of Home Affairs has made clear that it views the Jail Manual as binding, and has asserted that it must be updated before changes in practice regarding convict porters may take effect.

[59] These reports were described to a KHRG researcher by ILO officials during April 2011. The intention to revise the Jail Manual was also conveyed by a Corrections Department official to a high-level ILO mission to Burma in February 2011: 'The representative of the Corrections Department indicated that the review of the 1894 Jail Manual, which regulates the use of prison labour, was 75 per cent complete and on completion would be submitted to Parliament for adoption. He indicated that the amendment would be in line with international standards...'. See ILO, "Developments concerning the question of the observance by the Government of Myanmar of the Forced Labour Convention, 1930 (No. 29)," Geneva, 310th Session, GB.310/5, March 2011, para. 26, p.5

[60] The use of prisoners to porter on frontline military operations is not included in this list, although the use of prisoners for "*carrying and hauling goods*", eg: "*earth, water, stone, etc.*," is included in the list and is classified as hard labour. See Article 1029, Appendices to the Burma Jail Manual

[61] Article 1077, Appendices to the Burma Jail Manual

[62] Article 1080, Appendices to the Burma Jail Manual

[63] Articles 1087 – 1089, Appendices to the Burma Jail Manual

[64] Articles 1093 and 1095, Appendices to the Burma Jail Manual

KHRG does not use a standard questionnaire in the interview process and did not ask any questions regarding the provision of food to the seven porters who did not report anything about food.[65] Some porters described going full days without being fed once, being fed only once a day or being given food only if some was left over after the soldiers had finished eating.

> *"They did not feed us enough and forced us to carry very heavy things. It was not balanced, what we had to do and what we had to eat. We could not carry the rations anymore when we were out of energy."*
>
> Myint, 36 (January 2010, Papun District)

> *"We finished eating in the morning at 8:00 am. … They did not feed us enough rice. We ate only a little bit of rice. How long did we go until we ate rice again? Until we slept at 10:30 pm at night. We could not follow. … People fell over and fell over again from hunger."*
>
> Laing Oo, 43 (January 2011, Dooplaya District)

> *"They gave us the extra [left over] food. They didn't feed us if there was no extra food."*
>
> Matthew, 27 (January 2011, Dooplaya District)

Others porters described having to share small amounts of food between three or four other porters or having to forage for food in the forest in order to try to meet basic daily calorie requirements. Many interviewees also described large disparities between what soldiers and porters ate.

> *"For the soldiers, they eat fried fish, fried fish paste, fried chilli. … They didn't do anything for porters about food. They said just people [soldiers] on the front line were important. Sometimes we ate once a day and sometimes we didn't eat for the whole day."*
>
> Thi Ha Soe, 23 (January 2011, Dooplaya District)

> *"The army ate good curry and they gave the curry that was not good to the porters. That curry was already rotten."*
>
> Chit Kawn, 37 (January 2010, Papun District)

> *"We had to cook a half milk tin (97.5 g. / 3.4 oz.) of rice for four of us to eat… So we found some things in the jungle that we could eat to fill our empty stomachs. We didn't have enough food and we still had to work. If we stayed there for longer then we would become weak and dizzy."*
>
> Zaw Htun, 32 (January 2010, Papun District)

Article 1016 of the Appendices to the Burma Jail Manual also provides that "*prisoners at work shall be supplied with as much drinking water as necessary*" and that the water should be kept as clean and cold as possible.[66] In breach of this provision, eight porters reported that they did not have ready access to water or that they were not permitted to drink a sufficient amount of water while portering. Porters reported being forced to work full days without being provided any water.

> *"We did not eat rice or drink water for many days along the journey. … On the 8th [month not specified, but most likely January 8th 2011], we did not drink water or have breakfast."*
>
> Laing Oo, 43 (January 2011, Dooplaya District)

[65] See the testimony of Paing Paing, 41 (January 2010, Papun District) and Pyit Zon (January 2011, Dooplaya District)

[66] Article 1016, Appendices to the Burma Jail Manual

"They didn't let us rest and we couldn't even drink water. We knew they had water bottles, but they didn't give us [their water bottles] when we asked for them. Even if you were thirsty, they didn't give them."

Thin Paing, 42 (February 2010, Papun District)

"We were given a bottle of water when we arrived at the village. When we take it out and drink from our water bottle, the soldiers come and drink with us. We can't ask for water from them when our water is gone. They didn't give us water and we had to stay like this. We were starving for water and rice."

Matthew, 27 (January 2011, Dooplaya District)

2. Excessively heavy loads and difficult terrain

Article 1035 of the Appendices to the Burma Jail Manual provides that "*whenever the material given to a prisoner to work upon admits of weightment, the task he is to perform in the course of the day shall be measured or weighed out to him before he begins the work*".[67] Not one of the 59 porters interviewed referred to any measurement of loads or to any limit on the weight they had to carry. Rather, 45 interviewees reported that they had to carry arbitrary and excessive amounts of weight that were not standardised or measured according to any kind of weight limit. Porters reported carrying heavy artillery ammunition, including mortars, hand grenades and bullet cartridges, as well as military supplies and rations, including rice, water and cooking oil. One porter reported carrying military files and documents,[68] while another reported carrying cooking pots.[69] Reported weights ranged from 15 *viss* (approximately 24 kg. / 53 lb.) to 40 *viss* (64 kg. / 141 lb.), with the most commonly reported weight being similar to that of a sack of rice (approximately 31 *viss* / 50 kg. / 110 lb.). Porters also reported that they had to carry Tatmadaw soldiers injured during fighting or by landmines.

"They ask me to carry loads that need two people to lift. For them (soldiers), they carry only a light load."

Moo Thee, 43 (January 2010, Papun District)

"My responsibility is I had to carry bags, 15 mortars, at least 40 viss (64 kg. / 141 lb.). I had to carry 15 mortars and rice, canned fish, sweet powder, salt, oil, chilli, onion. Each porter had to carry that amount. For the soldiers, they carried their gun and a uniform and a small backpack with a couple of their clothes. For us, we had to carry their things."

Ko Kyaw Htun, 28 (January 2011, Dooplaya District)

"One of the soldiers died directly. For the rest, their legs and hands were injured. We had to carry those three soldiers who got injured."

Thi Ha Soe, 23 (Dooplaya District, January 2011)

Nearly every porter, meanwhile, described carrying these heavy loads through extraordinarily difficult conditions, over steep terrain, along poor quality trails or roads, through heavy forestation, and in unfamiliar or extreme climates.

"When I was sick, people died everyday. I don't know if it happened because it was a hot time. In our Kachin State, it is cold but here it is hot so we couldn't deal with it."

Hla Maung, 43 (January 2010, Papun District)

[67] Article 1035, Appendices to the Burma Jail Manual
[68] Naing Naing, 25 (March 2010, Papun District)
[69] Hla Maung, 43 (January 2010, Papun District)

"The valley was very deep therefore I controlled myself a lot to go down [on the descent]. There were over 40 viss (64 kg. / 141 lb.) on my body [on his back]. I collided with the soldier in front of me because my speed was increased by the weight on my back and my knees had gotten worse. So I was stabbed [beaten] with the butt of the gun and beaten on my face."

Laing Oo, 43 (January 2011, Dooplaya District)

"They ask me to carry a patient [injured Tatmadaw soldier] and … I asked for help because the road was not good and smooth. Then, they told me 'You don't need to give us orders*.' … At the same time they started beating me and, the next morning, I knew that I would really be unable to continue carrying the patient."*

Thaw Shwee, 30 (March 2010, Papun District)

3. Excessively long workdays and indefinite durations on the front line

Article 1028 of the Appendices to the Burma Jail Manual and Article 35 (1) of the Prisons Act (1894) both stipulate that all prisoners are subject to a daily maximum nine-hour labour limitation.[70] Thirty-three of the 59 porters interviewed reported work hours in excess of a normal working day, due to having to porter at night, not being allowed to rest while portering and having to do other forms of forced labour after portering equipment during military movements. Reported working hours in one day ranged from nine hours to 14.5 hours. Many porters emphasised that they were not allowed to ask for a rest while portering and that, if they did so, they were beaten. Some porters told KHRG that they were allowed to rest only when soldiers themselves were resting; others said that a typical daily rest period was only a few minutes.

"We had to carry from the morning until it was dark at 6:00 or 7:00 pm. … The porters can't request to take a rest. They have to walk the whole day."

Matthew, 27 (January 2011, Dooplaya District)

"We had to climb up and down, mountains after mountains, and how could we do that? We couldn't take a rest when we wanted to take a rest. We had to walk in the morning at 8:00 am until 5:00pm and just one time we had a chance to take a rest. We could sit for one or two minutes and we had to stand up. That's all for one [rest] time and we had to walk until we arrived to the place they would sleep."

Ko Kyaw Htun, 28 (January 2011, Dooplaya District)

"We were not even allowed to say that we were exhausted and could not carry [any more]. I was beaten once when I said I could not climb the mountain. … I told them that I could not continue walking anymore and wanted to rest. Then, they beat me immediately."

Htway Thu, 28 (January 2011, Dooplaya District)

Even after carrying heavy loads during long days of marching, at least twelve porters reported that they were forced to do other labour beyond their portering duties, including building sleep shelters and digging trenches for Tatmadaw soldiers, burying dead Tatmadaw soldiers, clearing brush, cutting and gathering firewood, massage, cooking and sentry duty.

"They ordered us to clean the brush and cut firewood. We had to do all the tasks there. We were tired doing these tasks."

Aung Hin, 29 (January 2010, Papun District)

[70] Article 1028, Appendices to the Burma Jail Manual

"For other work, we had to dig the holes [for Tatmadaw soldiers to sleep in] and we had to cook for them. We had to do these two jobs when we weren't portering. Even when we didn't have to carry, our hands became wounded [blistered from using shovels]. We had to dig holes that had rocks in them. The holes were not shallow. We had to dig the holes as deep as our waist."

Thi Ha Soe, 23 (January 2011, Dooplaya District)

"If we didn't go and wash their dishes they called us and beat us. Then before we went to sleep, they asked us to go and massage them but if we don't want to do it because we worked all day long and we are tired of working then they called us and beat us."

Min Oo, 33 (January 2009, Papun District)

Article 1035 of the Appendices to the Burma Jail Manual also provides that "*the harder forms of labour should not be continued indefinitely without variation…".*[71] However, porters told KHRG that were expected to work every day that they were on the front line and, having served one battalion, were forced to remain on the front line to serve new battalions that rotated forward. Porters reported that they chose to escape because they believed that there was no quantifiable end point for their labour and they would be forced to stay and porter on the front line until they were killed or died from malnourishment, exhaustion or disease. Porters reported that they were told they would be allowed to go back with the battalion when it rotated off the front line, only to eventually realise that this was not true, at which point they decided to try to escape.

"I didn't want to stay with them anymore. [Between] Life and death, there is a greater chance of death when we stay with them. We didn't know when they would go back. If they go back and transfer us to another column, what can we do? Even if we don't die with them, maybe we will die with another up-coming column. We can't say for sure about that. I was lucky."

Win Naing, 27, (January 2011, Dooplaya District)

"There were many days that we did not eat or sleep. We had to go at night to carry patients and their rations. We had to travel at night. We were at the front line for over 40 days, but we did not stay well on any of these days."

Kyaw Soe, 35 (January 2010, Papun District)

"It is very difficult for us to climb up the hills with a bag of rice. We have to do this and carry this every day. Day after day, we can't do it anymore. Our shoulders become painful and we can't work anymore. The time we had to rest was short but the time we had to work was long."

Thi Ha Soe, 23 (January 2011, Dooplaya District)

While the Burma government has claimed that convicts may elect to serve as porters in order to shorten their sentences, it is not clear whether these promises are given to porters, or whether, if given, they are in fact kept. Only one porter interviewed by KHRG reported hearing such promises and told KHRG that he had not believed them. Rather, many escaped porters said that they believed they would have had to stay on the front line forever or until they were killed, and thus decided to flee out of desperation. In any case, such promises, if given, should be seen as functioning to encourage some porters to elect for a service that, rather than shorten their sentence, transforms it into something closer to capital punishment. Ultimately, even if porter service is voluntary in some cases, nothing justifies the maltreatment of porters detailed in this report.

[71] Article 1035, Appendices to the Burma Jail Manual

"Before I escaped, I was portering for LIB #237. I had to porter for other battalions too but I don't remember which ones because they rotated with each other. I only remember the most recent battalion. As we were porters, we had to do whatever they asked and stay wherever they ordered."

Myint, 36 (January 2010, Papun District)

"They told us to follow them for a year and they would send us back to the prison and reduce our imprisonment years [sentence]. We knew no one would reduce our imprisonment years just because we worked a year for them because we were criminals."

Paing Paing, 41 (January 2010, Papun District)

4. Disregard for age of porters

Article 613 of the Appendices to the Burma Jail Manual states that "*a prisoner up to the age of 18 is considered a juvenile*"[72] and Article 622 further stipulates that "*juvenile prisoners shall be exempt from hard labour*".[73] Two porters confirmed that individuals under the age of 18 were sent to porter on the front line and that there was no differentiation in duties based on the ages of convict porters. One of the former convict porters interviewed by KHRG, Win Win Naing, 17, fell into this category himself.

"That young boy [another porter], he couldn't walk since he came. He was beaten when he couldn't climb up the mountain and he was kicked down when he couldn't climb down the mountain. … He did not die. He had been prosecuted as an 18 year old but actually he was just 16 years old."

Kyaw Min (January 2011, Dooplaya District)

Although no maximum age limitation is specified for prison labour in Burma's domestic laws, fourteen porters nonetheless also chose to illustrate the degree to which porters were mistreated by informing KHRG that older men, between 50 and 60 years old, were sent to porter on the front line.

"The oldest porters were about 60 years old. These porters had to carry the same weight as other porters. They were shouted at and beaten when they could not carry it."

Khaing Khat, 39 (January 2010, Papun District)

"There were 200 porters in Battalion #47. About a third of the porters were the oldest age of porters. They were about 50 years old."

Nge Nge, 38 (January 2010, Papun District)

"A 53-year-old man was included with those sent to porter from Taung Zon and he is still there now [with the army]."

Pyit Zon (January 2011, Dooplaya District)

[72] Article 613, Appendices to the Burma Jail Manual
[73] Article 622, Appendices to the Burma Jail Manual

5. Unsanitary conditions

Articles 344 and 348 of the Appendices to the Burma Jail Manual also make specific provision for prisoners' daily bathing and washing.[74] Contrary to this, seven porters mentioned that they were not allowed to bathe or even wash their hands before eating and had to remain in extremely unhygienic and unsanitary conditions.

> *"They [Tatmadaw soldiers] change their clothes… but for us, since we left and until we escaped to here, we wore just one set of clothes… We couldn't take a bath. We hadn't taken a bath for 10 or 15 days. They take a bath every day."*
>
> Ko Kyaw Htun, 28 (January 2011, Dooplaya District)

> *"We had to sleep on the ground, as if we were dogs or pigs. … We could not take a bath for many months."*
>
> Myint, 36 (January 2010, Papun District)

> *"The ants bit us a lot at night when we slept. We were not allowed to wash our faces when we got up in the morning. We were not allowed to take a shower either. We had to eat with our very dirty hands. We were not allowed to wash our hands. We just had to eat like this. If we continued staying like this longer and longer, we would die."*
>
> Htway Thu, 28 (January 2011, Dooplaya District)

6. Inadequate housing and clothing

According to Article 33 (1) of the Prisons Act, all prisoners "*shall be supplied… with such clothing and bedding as may be necessary*."[75] Articles 1055 – 1075 of the Appendices to the Burma Jail Manual additionally make detailed provision for the supply of specific bedding and clothing to prisoners during hard labour. Among others, these articles require that a hat be provided for labour under the sun[76] and that a woollen blanket be issued during the cold months.[77] Twenty-nine of the porters interviewed by KHRG reported that they were taken to porter during December and January, which is the peak of the cold season in Burma. Twelve interviewees reported that the clothing and equipment provided to them was unsuitable, of an inferior quality or too heavy to carry. Porters specifically mentioned not being provided with a blanket at night; being given clothes of very thin, easily torn material; and not being provided with suitable footwear.

> *"The clothes they gave us were very gauzy [thin]. We had no clothes to protect our shoulders even though our shoulders were in pain. Their clothes were not useful. … We had to work and sleep in the pair of clothes that they gave to us. … We had nothing to cover our bodies [when we slept]. We had to sleep on the ground and we were caught in the rain one night."*
>
> Thi Ha Soe, 23 (January 2011, Dooplaya District)

> *"They gave us trousers of a blue colour. The trousers are not thick, very thin. A long-sleeved shirt, hat and shoes. The shoes are not suitable for walking so I didn't bring them. They hurt my legs. So I came barefoot."*
>
> Ko Kyaw Htun, 28 (January 2011, Dooplaya District)

[74] Articles 344 and 348, Appendices to the Burma Jail Manual. See also Articles 1073 – 1075 on the regular boiling and disinfecting of soiled clothing and bedding to prevent the spread of disease.
[75] Aricle 33 (1) Prisons Act (1894)
[76] Article 1060, Appendices to the Burma Jail Manual
[77] Article 1058, Appendices to the Burma Jail Manual

In cases where porters reported that they did receive such materials, many also explained that they could not carry them given their already unmanageably heavy loads.

> *"They gave us a piece of tarpaulin. We had to sleep with only a piece of tarpaulin. They gave us a blanket. It was too heavy to carry, so we did not bring it and left it behind. The things with us from the prison, some people said that you had to carry heavy things on the front line, and we left behind everything in the prison. We left it behind and they gave us a set of clothes and a piece of tarpaulin. … We did not use a mosquito net."*
>
> Laing Oo, 43 (January 2011, Dooplaya District)

As for bedding, twenty-nine interviewees confirmed that porters had to sleep in the open, separate from where the soldiers slept, with nothing save a plastic sheet to serve as bedding, roof or shelter to protect either from the elements or from attack.

> *"At night, we had to line up beside the fences and we slept. We had to put our plastic sheet that we brought with us on the ground and we slept on it. We were wet when it was raining, and cold, but we could not do anything."*
>
> Khaing Khat, 39 (January 2010, Papun District)

> *"We had to sleep beside the fence without a roof and without any cover in the army camp."*
>
> Nge Nge, 38 (January 2010, Papun District)

> *"It wasn't for me to sleep and stay in the trenches. They [soldiers] will not die when bombs explode or when the shelling happens because they stay in the trenches. For us, we had to line up and sleep in cornfields."*
>
> Htway Thu, 28 (January 2011, Dooplaya District)

IV. Circumstances for porters following escape

Forty-six porters told KHRG about obstacles they were facing after their escape. Porters reported concerns that they were very far from their homes; that they did not know where they were, how to contact their family or how to get home; that they did not speak or understand the languages spoken in the areas to which they had escaped, usually Thai or Karen; and that they did not have the necessary skills to support livelihoods in a new and unfamiliar place.

> *"Currently, I don't know what to do. I have never been to Thailand. I've just heard the name. I don't know what kind of job I will have to do. I have no person that I know. I want to work if the job is good but, if the job is not good, I want to contact my family and ask for money and go back to Burma. I know no one here. There are people who can't understand Burmese. I don't know anyone and I don't know who to ask for help. … I dare not go back to my village. I will return to Burma and stay somewhere else. … It doesn't mean I dare to go back. I have to go back if I can't stay here. Even if this country accepts us, we have a livelihood problem."*
>
> Thi Ha Soe, 23 (January 2011, Dooplaya District)

Many said that they expected to be re-arrested or have their original sentences extended if they tried to return home, because they would be recognised as escaped convicts or because they no longer had necessary identification papers to be able to travel in Burma. For some, re-arrest was less worrisome; for others, the prospect was more frightening. Because of these fears, eleven porters said that they wanted to work in Thailand, to send money home to their families, such as parents, wives or children; one said that he would like to call the rest of his family to join him in Thailand. Six were unsure what to do, but said that they did not want or dare to return home; one of these said that he wanted to stay in Karen State, to fight against the Tatmadaw.

> *"I will be arrested if I go back to Yangon. So I will work in this country. My parents are poor. I never even dreamed about this place. I have never been to Thailand. We know we will get a lot of money if we work. They said they will find us work so I will work. Instead of going back, I will work and send the money back to my parents. I think I will work and stay here."*
>
> Ko Kyaw Htun, 28 (January 2011, Dooplaya District)

> *I escaped once and I was re-arrested in Papun city. The Papun army arrested me and sent me to LIB #707 again. After they sent me back to LIB #707, about 20 people surrounded me and beat me. I got injured on my head and my legs. Even though I got injured, they didn't let me stay like this. The next morning I had to strike the roads to sweep for mines.*
>
> Kyaw Htike, 31 (Papun, February 2010)

> *"I have a plan to find a job somewhere to earn and save some money to transfer to my parents as we are a poor family. … I am not afraid to go back to my parents. But I already decided that it is better not to go back. Because, I will be arrested again if they see me when I go back and they will repeat the punishment on me again and again without any benefit to my family. My idea is to work far away from Burma and to help my family's income."*
>
> Zaw Htun, 32 (January 2010, Papun District)

Despite these obstacles, 25 porters reported that they wanted to go back home. Many requested to be sent to a familiar location, nearer to their home, from which they would be able to get home on their own. Six said they would go back home to see or gather their families but that they would not stay there; some said they wanted to go to neighbouring countries, including

Thailand and China, while others said they would move to a different city in Burma or to a remote border area in Burma.

> *"I want to go back and stay with my parents and family. If I am sent back to Pa'an city, I can get back to my village. … I would like to say that I have not seen my mother and my family for six years. If possible, I want to see my mother and my family as quickly as possible."*
>
> Aung Hin, 29 (January 2010, Papun District)

> *"For us now, we don't have any recommendation letter or ID. So, we worry that we will be arrested again on the way back home. However, my plan is to get back home and take my daughter and wife to my uncle who lives in northern Shan state and work there. After that I will continue to China when I have saved some money for my family. I don't want to stay in Burma anymore."*
>
> Min Win, 23 (January 2010, Papun District)

> *"I really want to go back home, but I do not know how to go back. I have not had communication with my family in Myitkyina for a long time."*
>
> Chan Za, 22 (January 2010, Papun District)

Ultimately, KHRG interviewed just a small fraction of the total number of convict porters subject to abuses in conflict areas of eastern Burma: those that managed to survive a successful escape attempt. The military operations that used the some 1,700 porters who did not escape over the last two years, however, are ongoing. As such, it is highly likely that in the future more prisoners will be sent to serve the Tatmadaw, augmenting the number of prisoners who, at present, continue to porter on the front line.

> *We fled… But many porters are still there… There were nine porters left in the army [unit] after we fled. One of them got injured, but they [the Tatmadaw] did not carry him and asked him to walk. I thought the army would shoot him dead when he could not continue to walk. I became afraid of dying because I realized that they would shoot me dead when I could not walk anymore, too. Another patient among our porters was shot and the bullet hit him and stayed in his lung. It was bleeding. They did not carry him and cure him well. They forced him to walk at the back until we arrived at the place where they went.*
>
> Nyain Chan Oo, 31 (January 2010, Papun)

> *Kyaw Zun [another porter] came to me and told me that he was going to escape. And I told him, '*If you escape, go to sleep early*.' I did not dare to escape but I felt sympathy for him. I did not dare to escape yet but he decided to escape by himself. For me, I would run later when I could see the way. He got up and escaped at night. I said* 'If you run, take this snack, the snack from my share [of rations]. This is for you. Take this. For water, find it by yourself. This snack and water is your life*.'*
>
> Win Naing, 27 (January 2011, Dooplaya)

Appendix 1: Testimony

2011

Interview | Matthew, 27 (January 2011, Dooplaya District)

Address prior to arrest: L--- village, Kh--- city, Chin state
Ethnicity: Chin
Religion: Christian [Roman Catholic]
Occupation prior to arrest:
Reported reason for arrest: Murder
Date of arrest: around August --- 2010
Reported sentence:
Reported date sentence began: December --- 2010
Prison(s): Pyay; Bago; Pa'an
Date sent to labour camp:
Labour camp:
Date taken to porter: December 30th 2010
Size of group taken to porter:
Area/ location portered: Zin Phyu Taung
Battalion: LIB #22 [Company 3]; under Captain Soe Pyay Oo and Sergeant Than Htun
Number of soldiers and porters (exact, not a ratio):
Date of interviewee's escape:
Number of porters escaped (not including interviewee):
Location of interviewee's escape:
Location of interview: ---
Date of interview: January 28th 2011
Future plans:

Where were you in prison?

I was in prison because of the murder. L--- village is not my village. My village is Ma---. A sister of my wife lives there [L--- village]. She told me that there is land. '*Do you want to buy land?*' I went and bought land. I lived there after I bought the land. The guy I killed was named Th---. I bought the land from an aunt of Th---. He was not satisfied and he made a problem with me. He cut my fence and challenged me. He threw stones at the roof of my house and challenged me. He found many problems with me and my family. He caused the problem and I killed him on August 2nd 2010. He didn't want to sell [the land]. His aunt sold the land but he didn't want to. He wanted the house. His aunt didn't want to give it to him. His aunt wanted to sell it to me because of her livelihood problem. His aunt sold the house to me. He wanted the house and he caused a problem with me. On August 2nd 2010, he chopped me with a machete. He chopped me with a machete and I escaped. On August 3rd, I went and informed the [village] Chairman. He [Th---] said '*why did you go and report to the chairman?*' and on August 4th 2010, he beat me with a stick. He beat me with a stick and we two messed up [beat up] each other. I took his stick and beat him once. He bled a lot and the clinic was far. The incident happened on August 4th 2010 and he arrived to the clinic on August 7th 2010. He bled too much [lost too much blood] and died. So it became murder and I had to be in prison.

Did the police come and arrest you after the murder?

I went to be arrested by myself. I went to be arrested at Kh--- city. There is a police station there. They transferred me from Kh--- city to Pyay prison.

Where and in which court were you sentenced?

The District court in Pyay city. They sentenced me to 10 years of hard labour.

Do you know the name of the judge who sentenced you?

No, I don't know. It was a man.

Did they take a bribe?

They took money. I had to pay 100,000 kyat. First they said they will sentence me for only five or seven years [if I paid 100,000 kyat] and 100,000 kyat was gone. Including hiring lawyers and giving [money] to the judge, 100,000 kyat of my money was gone. Finally, they sent me to prison for 10 years. They said your case is not murder. It was self-protection. You had a chance to protect yourself. You can't be sent to prison for 10 years, just five or seven years you can be sentenced because you came and let the police arrest you. They asked for money after they said that. We gave it to them. We didn't have any money either but we sold the land and gave them money. Finally, they sentenced me for 10 years.

How do you feel about the judgment process? Was it fair or not?

They use the law in this way, how it can be fair? Actually there are many kinds of murder. Actually I had an opportunity to protect myself. Many people in prison told me that I could be free. You will die if you don't protect yourself. We are afraid to die so we protect ourself. The witness on my side was sufficient. The witness said it is true that the guy [Th---] gave trouble to him. We saw that he [Th---] chopped the fence with a machete. My witnesses spoke but they sent me to prison for 10 years. How can it be fair? We are not satisfied in our heart but we can't say anything to them because we stay under their hands [under their control]. We do not feel good when they do this.

Which prison were you sent?

Pyay prison. I had to stay in prison as a prisoner. Four or five days after they passed judgment, they took me off directly to porter. I have never been to *yeh beh* [prison labour camp]. I was in prison for just about five months: four months in jail and about ten days in prison. They passed judgment on December --- 2010 and on December 29 or 30th, I am not sure, they took me off to come to here. On December 30th 2010, they sent me to Bago prison, one night and one night from Bago to Pa'an prison and from Pa'an to here directly. I couldn't contact my home. They didn't contact [our family] for us even we though we requested them to.

What did you have to do when you stayed in prison?

We had to work, working in the farm, like to harvest paddy, beat the paddy, cut grass and water the paddy. We had to saw [wood]. We worked from 8:00 - 11:00 am. We ate at 11:00 am. After eating, we worked until 4:00 pm. We ate at 11:00 am and went to work directly after eating.

Could you give money if you didn't want to work?

Yes, you can give. They called it *taung bpaing kyi* [prison warden]. You don't need to work if you pay money to *taung bpaing kyi*. There are people who give money like this. For us, we couldn't pay so we had to work. They paid 100,000 kyat. I don't know whether they pay for a month or a year because I was a new arrival in prison. Maybe they pay for the year. If you pay 100,000 kyat, you don't need to go porter and you don't need to work in prison. You can stay comfortably in prison.

Do they give you wages when you work in prison?

No, they don't give.

Did you have to suffer violence from the jailers or jail wardens when you stay in prison?

Yes, we suffered. We dare not look up at them when they come. We have to sit and keep our heads down when they come. We can't talk to them.

Can you explain me about your experiences when you lived in prison?

We can't smoke and eat betel nut in prison. They lock your legs with chains if you smoke and there is a kitchen room. We have to go there as a crocodile [in a single-file line]. They beat us with a stick. In eating time, they have a spoon and they scoop with the spoon and they don't care whether rice was included [in the spoon] or not. The curry is porridge. They scoop one spoon of porridge for each person. We are not full. The rice is not good. We had to eat with it with paddy grains and stones. They don't accept it if people send rice from home. We had to sleep at 9:00 pm at night. We have to line up and sit and pray at 6:00 - 7:30 pm. We had to go to bed at 9:00 pm. We can't get up. We have to line up and sleep in a big room. There were 80 or 70 people in a room. There were 100 people in some rooms. It is no good to sleep because there are too many people.

Do they give a chance for the prisoners' relatives to come and visit them?

You can ask a permission to see a prisoner but they block [separate prisoners and visitors] with two iron fences. You can see each other from outside. There is a room for the people who can pay money. They can meet in the room. People who can't pay money have to pay 200 kyat and they can see each other. Parents stay outside and we are inside. There is an iron fence in the middle. We have to talk there. The iron fence is thin and it has small holes. You can't pass any thing through it. You can just see each other. They give you 15 minutes. You can talk freely in the room if you pay 3,000 kyat. If you pay 3,000 kyat, they give you 30 minutes.

Are the prisoners allowed to read magazines, newspapers and write letters to their relatives?

No, they don't give permission. We are not allowed to keep pen and paper. We are not allowed to have those with us. We are not permitted to write. We are not allowed to read magazines. There is a TV. They don't allow us to turn on the TV. We are allowed to watch movies on CD [DVD]. We were not allowed to watch TV. We are allowed to watch a movie until 9:00pm. We can start at 7:00 or 8:30pm so we can't finish the movie in one time. We can watch it just for a while and then we all have to go to bed. They keep guards. We have to do sentry duty even inside the prison. Prisoners have to do sentry duty inside. The soldiers do sentry also outside.

Do the prisoners get treatment when they get sick or injured?

They don't provide medicine. I have been sick twice in prison. They give paracetamol and clorfenamina [antihistamine medication]. They give two or three tablets for one time. If you want an injection, you have to pay 2,000 kyat for an injection. We don't have money. If you want to have an injection, you will have to pay 2,000 kyat. We told them that we will ask for money from home but they said no, you can't. There are people who die in prison. They get sick and die. Many people get sick and die. They have to face with many troubles. I heard from people, they said, four, five or six people died. Two people died at the time I arrived and stayed in prison. I saw with my own eyes. Two people died. They were sick. They were very thin. You couldn't inject the medicine because their blood was dry. They take them outside [the prison] when the patients are about to die. I heard people tell each other to take care of their health. You are not as valuable as a dog when you arrive in this prison.

Did any outside organizations ever come and visit the prison during the time when you lived there [like the UN or the Red Cross]?

No, no organisation came and visited. The Operation Commander or Township governor visited one time.

What date did they take you out from prison [to porter]?

Day 30. December 30th 2010.

Did they [the jailers or jail warden] tell you where they will send you?

They said they will send us to be *wan saung* [public service personnel]. They didn't say anything about portering. They said they will send us to be *wan saung*. They said '*when you arrive there, you have to work and you will get money'*.

Can you give them money if you don't want to go porter?

Yes, we have to give money to the jail warden. I don't know how much they [other prisoners] had to pay. There are some people who give money and stay behind [in prison]. They choose people and keep them in a different room. We didn't know about how they give money. They chose about 70 people. They take out 50 people [to porter] from among those 70 people. The rest of the people [the other 20] gave money. With an understanding, they [the jailers and the jail warden] take bribes. I didn't know that I would have to come and porter here. They said they will send us to be *wan saung*. They didn't contact our home even though we requested them to.

How long have you been [a porter] with the army?

I don't remember exactly but it took around one month, at least over 20 days. I had to go together with them.

Do you know the army unit that you came with?

I don't know their unit. They are LIB or IB with number 22 but I am not sure. Yes, LIB #22, number 22. We were not permitted to see. When we walked on the road, we had to keep our heads down and we were not permitted to look around. If we looked around, they said we planned to escape and they beat us. When we arrived to a place or took a rest, we had to sit at the place where we were. We couldn't go around.

In the unit that you come with, do you know any their commander name?

I am sure a Commander's name was Soe Pyay Oo. They called him Captain Soe Pyay Oo. He was the Company Commander. And a Sergeant's name was Than Htun. I just know these two people. I don't know other people. I was with Company #3 [in LIB #22].

Where were you sent after you were taken out from prison?

After I was taken out from prison, I was sent to Bago prison and they sent us to Pa'an prison after Bago prison. From Pa'an prison to here, they sent us until we came to the place where the cars can't go. We saw two Karen villages. At that point, the car couldn't go any further. From there, we had to start carrying their equipment. We had to make a basket and carry their mortars, mines and other military equipment.

Where did they go after they arrived there?

I don't know the place. The places they went I just had to follow them.

Do they have army camps in the jungle?

There are army camps in the jungle. They cover them with fences and there are small tunnels that they dig. I saw army camps twice.

Do you know the name of those army camps?

I heard they said '*913*'. I heard they said they will go to Zin Phyu Taung. But we don't know where Zin Phyu is. We deserted before we arrived to Zin Phyu Taung.

How many porters were included with the army?

The group [Company] that I followed there was just only me. There were 40 people from Pyay prison who were included. They separated out 10 people from 50. 40 people came along with the battalion I was with.

Where did they send those ten people?

They have Companies (1), 2, 3 and 4. I was in Company (1). There were seven soldiers. I was the only porter. They were seven people [soldiers] and I was the only one that had to follow them [as a porter]. If there are 14 or 15 soldiers, they keep three, four or five porters. I thought there were seven porters in Kyaw Min's Company [Kyaw Min is the name of another porter].

Can you tell me about your experiences as a convict porter step by step?

In December, I don't remember the date exactly, they called us and said they will send us to be *wan saung*. They gathered people. There are cells in prison and they called us out from the cells and gathered all the people [prisoners]. After t hey gathered us, they asked the prisoners with ten-year sentences to stand up and the *yeh beh* prisoners [prisoners from prison labour camp] and the soldiers who had deserted stood up. There were many soldier deserters. They don't put them together. They separated differently. They asked people who are 50 and under to stand up, but people who were 50 to 55 years old had to stand up [to be porters] too. They chose people and locked our legs with a chain and they kept us in a different building. We couldn't talk to anybody and we had no right to talk. Even people who came and asked permission to see a prisoner, they didn't allow them to meet. The next morning, the cars arrived and we had to get directly into the car. They covered the car [so we couldn't see out or be seen from the outside]. We had to sit like this and keep our heads down. We can't put our heads up. One of our people became weak and he put his head up and was struck with the butt of a gun. We saw what they do and we dare not stand up. We can't go pee. We have to stand in the car. We are not allowed to step down from the car. We arrived at Bago prison at 11:00 pm. We slept at Bago prison. They fed us rice with Roselle acid [extract] soup to each person. Next morning, they took us out from Bago prison. Then we arrived to Pa'an prison at 2:00 pm. We slept one night at Pa'an prison. At 12:00 pm, they unlocked the chains and they took us out again from Pa'an prison. The army came and picked us up from here. The army from Zin Phyu Taung wear mottled [camouflage] uniforms. They came and pick us up with green [military trucks]. They are more horrible. They pointed at us with guns and said '*you guys, don't try to run or move*'. They climbed up on the roof of the car and they kept us inside the car. We were afraid. We had never seen them. And they called to us and said don't look around and keep your head down and we had to keep our heads down. They drove the car and we arrived at the foothill where they can't go forward anymore [by vehicle]. They stopped there. All the people were gathering there. There were many companies there. I don't know their names. We, the prisoners, were not allowed to look at each other. They separated the groups and kept us there. They slept in

hammocks but we had to sleep on the ground. Next morning, we had to climb up and down mountains. They beat people who can't climb up the mountains. They beat us and ordered us to climb up. We can't climb down where [they tell us] we have to climb down. The load is heavy and it weighs 40-50 viss. We can't stand back up when we sit down and take a rest. We have to bend down our back and take a rest. They kicked us down and kicked us in the back when we can't climb down and the porters rolled down [the mountain]. We went forward for a while and, in front of me, two porters from Company #4 asked permission from the Captain to take a rest. They said they couldn't walk anymore. Their legs were full of wounds and their faces became swollen because they had been beaten and struck with guns. They apologized and requested that they couldn't go and said '*let us take a rest*'. The soldiers said '*we didn't call you here to take a rest. We called you here to work*. *Are you really sure that you can't go anymore?'* They said '*we can't walk anymore'* and they apologized. They [the soldiers] said *'if that is so, put your basket down*'. And those two people put down their baskets because they thought they would be given a rest. They were called to the cliff and he sliced their necks and kicked them down to the valley. Then we went forward and climbed up a hill. A guy whose legs were locked together with me, his name was Aung Thu Win. He was the same as this. He couldn't climb up anymore. I wanted to go and help him. He [a soldier] said don't go. He said '*If you can carry, can you carry the whole basket?'* I couldn't carry [the whole basket] but I wanted to go and help him like this. He said, '*don't go and help him. He will carry it by himself. You go* [keep walking].' He threatened me. That man [Aung Thu Win] couldn't climb up anymore. He was very tired. For the young boys [like him], they shoot them to death. They ordered him to go to the gorge and run. The young boy [Aung Thu Win] told them '*if I run you will shoot me*.' They said '*no, we won't kill you*. *You can run*.' They ordered the guy to run. Just as he walked down to the gorge, they shot him in the back. And they told us, '*you guys see what happens*. *You guy also if you can't climb up, we will kill you like this.'* We were afraid. They discussed it when we arrived at 913 camp. Before they arrived to the camp, after they killed the porters, when they climbed down to the other side of the mountain, their soldiers stepped on mines. Three soldiers, one soldier stepped first and his leg was blown off. He shouted '*help me, help me*.' The soldier who stepped on the landmine was very friendly to me. He told me to escape. He said '*I will follow you. I am fed up with this life. I don't want to stay any more. I will escape together with you*.' He stepped on a mine there and he called '*younger brother, younger brother,* [they are not actually related, this is just a familiar term for a younger friend] *come to me*.' I dared not go. I had heard them say that if a mine was stepped on and exploded, there were also other mines around there. So I dared not go. They called BE group [the military de-mining unit]. That group passed me and walked down. They walked down and they were hit by mines again. Two of them were hit by landmines. The mines hit them and I told him [the injured soldier] 'A Ko*, I daren't to go*'. He said '*come, nothing will happen, come, come*. The soldiers behind me passed me and cleared mines. After they cleared mines, they treated him. The soldier died on my hands [in my arms]. They arrived to the camp and discussed landmines. They said '*many of our soldiers were hit by mines. We will keep the porters at the front. If they don't go, we will shoot them in the back. We will shoot them if they don't go in the front. We will order them to clear up mines*.' We were afraid of this so we two discussed it and escaped.

Who is the soldier who sliced two porters' necks with the knife? Was he an officer or a private?

He is a private. For the one who shot [Aung Thu Win], I thought he was a Sergeant. He is fat. I don't know his name.

How many soldiers were killed and injured by mines?

Just three people I saw with my own eyes get hit by landmines. Three of them are soldiers. Two died and one got injured. They sent back for the one who got injured. They sent back two people but one died on the way. One died in the camp. I had to go and bury him. They ordered us to dig the hole and bury him.

What did you have to do when you stayed with the army?

I didn't need to do other work when I followed them. I just had to carry for them. We slept at nighttime and traveled the whole day without resting. We don't need to dig holes [trenches]. We just had to dig to bury them [the dead soldiers]. For the other groups [porters], they said they have to dig the holes [trenches] because they arrived to the army base. For us, we had to go to Zin Phyu Taung. We were on the way. We hadn't arrived yet.

What did you have to carry?

They said it was mortar bombs. They called them *be de ya* bombs. Also [we had to carry] rice and other rations.

Did the army provide any equipment [clothes] to you before you came to the frontline?

They gave clothes to us at Pa'an prison: one shirt, a pair of trousers, footwear and a hat. The things that they give us were not useful. They gave us blue color clothes. They can tear up very easily. We could have brought our own clothes and we could wear those on the frontline. But they threw away our clothes. They threw away our clothes and they said we called you to come and carry our equipment, not your own things. Just a longyi and a shirt [is all I could bring]. These are the clothes that I wore in prison. I wore them at night and in the daytime. I put them on my shoulders to protect the pain [of carrying the basket]. We had to carry since the morning until it was dark at 6:00 or 7:00 pm. They walked for the whole day. They cooked rice for when they take a rest the next day. They eat it on the way when they want to eat. They gave us the extra food. They don't feed us if there is no extra food. The porters can't request to take a rest. They have to walk the whole day. They shot the people who couldn't walk. We heard a lot of news about that. We heard it when they talk to each other about where and how many porters they have shot or sliced [their throats]. They killed many porters. I saw with my own eyes that they killed three porters. They killed a few people in our group but they killed more than that. For others groups, there were at least 40 - 80 porters, maybe almost 100 people. They will kill more people [than just those three].

How do porters have to walk?

They [the soldiers] walk between the porters. But now [at the time I escaped] they said they will let porters walk in the front. Four or five porters will have to walk in the front for them [the soldiers] to avoid landmines. They discussed it and they will let [force] porters to walk in the front. Before one soldier walked between two or three porters. There were four or five of their soldiers who were hit by landmines when they were taking point in the front. So they discussed and now they said they will let [force] porters walk in the front. We heard that news and we deserted directly. They were going to let [force] us to walk in the front the next morning. I am from Company #3 and most of the time I had to take point. I saw one or two who walked in the front step on mines. I know they will send me to the front the next morning. So I escaped in the evening. I met with a guy from Company #4 or #2. I told him that I will run and he said he will follow me. I said '*If you want to escape, follow me now*.' They have a fence and we couldn't go anywhere. They also kept guards. The camp's name was 913 or something, I don't know. There was a cliff and we jumped down there.

How were prisoners fed on the frontline?

If they get two meat tins for a soldier, we get one when we took the rations from there. They gave us rations from there. But they didn't feed us. They take it back. They ordered us to boil beans and we had to boil beans for them. We had to scoop up the beans and cook for them. For us, we got the bean water and ate it with banana bulbs and jackfruit without oil or fish paste. We

had to cook with salt. They fed us like this. They gave us one milk tin of rice for two people. The food is poor. We can't have enough food and we can't walk. We were given a bottle of water when we arrived at the village. When we take it out and drink from our water bottle, the soldiers come and drink with us. We can't ask for water from them when our water is gone. They didn't give us water and we had to stay like this. We were starving for water and rice.

Was the food that soldiers ate and prisoners ate different?

No. We can't eat together with them. They ordered us to sit somewhere and we had to sit there. After they ate, they let us eat and they scooped rice onto our plates. Five milk tins of rice for 10 people. They gave us rice and we had to eat it with what we cooked with the banana tree and the bean soup. They didn't feed us together. We had to carry a lot of meat tins and *thee son* tins. They ate those things. They didn't feed us. The officers or commanders food is more different. Company #3 Commanders *Bo* [Captain] Pyay Soe, for him they have to prepare special food. They called him Captain Pyay Soe. Another one is Sergeant Than Htun. I remember his name because his name is the same as ---. I remember his name exactly.

How did the porters have to sleep at night time?

They put guards around us and we slept. They kept a guard beside us and they also had another guard. We had to line up and sleep together. They didn't lock our legs with chains when we slept. We were tired and we fell asleep directly at the first place we saw. We were tired and we didn't care where we had to sleep. We can sleep. We couldn't eat until we are full and we were very tired. Until now, we didn't even have enough strength to talk. After four, five or six days after we arrived here, we became fresh. And we can talk. In there [as porters], we were very tired.

Have you ever experienced fighting on the frontline?

Yes, one time at a church. We didn't hear the gun sounds from the other side but they said, the other side came and shot us and we shot back. They shot a lot. It lasted quite a long time. It was in the jungle. They [the Tatmadaw soldiers] didn't see them [the KNLA or DKBA soldiers]. They just shot without knowing where their enemy is at night time. They saw nothing. I don't remember the date but it would be around the 20th or 21st in January. About 8 or 9 days ago. No one got injured. We didn't hear the gun sounds from the Karen army [KNLA or DKBA]. They said they came and shot them. The Karen army [KNLA or DKBA] came and shot them and they shot back to threaten them. They shot RPG [rocket-propelled grenades] and medium-size machine guns.

Did you have any experience with landmines? Were any porters or soldiers injured by landmines?

Yes, I have seen three soldiers step on mines. I witnessed it. No porters stepped on landmines. I heard from other group and they said porters stepped on mines. I didn't see it with my own eyes. They didn't order us to find [remove] mines. They have equipment for mine finding [removal]. Soldiers do this. The soldiers clear up [remove] mines. After the soldiers stepped on mines, the two people who went to see the injured people are landmines sweepers. They [the minesweepers] were also hit. They said the rest of the people can't sweep mines. Those two people can sweep landmines in that company. The people who can sweep mines were hit, two of them were hit. One was hurt and he called '*younger brother, younger brother, come to me*.' That was the soldier who wanted to escape together with me. That soldier, he also wanted to escape. He told me he didn't want to continue to do this work. We discussed it with each other when we cooked. He said he wanted to escape and the next day he was hit by mines. He was hit and called to me '*younger brother, come to me. I will die soon.'* I dared not go. I will be hit by mines if I go. I am not too far from him. People from behind passed me and went down and they

were hit again. They called that Company 'BE'. The 'BE' Company was hit by mines. They are minesweepers. We have to inform them when we see a mine. They are minesweepers. They were hit by mines. The soldier who called to me died. I feel sympathy for him. He had a good heart. He never ordered me to work for him. For the other people, they ordered me. Every night he told me that he had a sympathetic heart for people. He never swore at me. I did not feel good when he died. I did not feel good when he was hit [by the mine]. I thought in my mind, '*it has to be [hitting] the people who order me to work instead of hitting him. He is a private and he has to go in the front. His Sergeant and Captain walk behind him. They order the privates to find the mines*.'

Do they give treatment to porters when porters get injured or sick?

They don't give treatment. They don't have medicine. I had a cough, a runny nose and a headache. I went and asked for the medicine. The medical officer was included with the army but the medicines were not included. He said we cure the people who get injured but we don't give medicines for diseases [illness]. We treat the people who get injured by guns. No medicine for fever disease. They don't give treatment. They won't give treatment. If porters can't walk and carry, they kill them directly. They will shoot you when you get sick. They will shoot you when you can't walk anymore. We have to walk carefully so our legs are not hit by mines or injured by anything. They will kill you when your legs fold. We know that so we walk carefully.

Were there any abuses committed against you or other porters by the army?

They treated us very rude. We couldn't talk to them. We had to go when they called us and do what they ordered us. Just a word, we couldn't even talk back to them. We had no chance to speak. They beat, punched and swore at us. Every day, we were called '*mother/sister fucker*.' They swore and called us '*sister/mother fucker*' and then beat us. They kicked us when we were not acting how they wanted. We couldn't do anything back to them. We just had to stay quiet. They slapped our ears when we porters gathered or talked to each other. They said you guys are discussing how to escape. They oppressed us a lot. People who do this are privates. I don't know their name.

Did you pass any villages on your trip?

We saw there were villages. We just saw villages. We didn't see any villagers. There were no villagers in the villages. They shot a buffalo at the village we arrived at, one of the villagers' buffalo. They shot it and ate it. They took villagers' rice. They burned down two villages.

How many households are in these villages?

Around 20 or 30 households or around four, five or ten houses. I don't know the villages' names. They were Karen villages. The villages are a little far from the [Moei] river. I have never been here and I don't know the place. I don't know where I arrived. I don't know whether they were east, west, north and south. I don't remember the place.

Did they burn down the whole village?

They burned down and destroyed the houses or barns that were on their way. It was about four, five or ten barns. We didn't arrive at all places, just the ones that I could see. They burned down two villages. They didn't burn down other villages. They shot one buffalo and cooked it in a curry. They also killed chicken and pigs. I saw them kill cats. I heard people say they killed dog too. I didn't see that. For the buffalo, we had a chance to eat. They fed us a little. They fed us the curry that was still left.

Did the soldiers ever threaten you not to escape? What did they tell you?

There was threatening. They said '*You guys don't escape. As you guys know, if you escape, there are a lot mines around here. You will step on a landmine, we won't save you. We will kill you. If you arrive to the other side, they are called* Ng'Bpway.[78] *The* Ng'Bpway *will slice your neck and kill you when you are in their hands. You guys don't think about trying to escape. If you run behind, there is DKBA and the DKBA will kill you. For us we won't kill you*.' But actually they do kill us. They said *Ng'Bpway* will kill us. We were afraid because we didn't know. But when we arrived to them, they didn't kill us. They took care of us and fed us. We were very happy after we saw them.'

Were there porters who escaped before you?

Yes, there were. They escaped since they started leave the place from there [walking]. They escaped. Three people escaped before. Another two people, including me, escaped and then also three people were killed.

Did they recapture those people who escaped before?

I didn't hear that news. They didn't recapture.

What will they do when they can recapture porters who tried to escape?

They will kill them when they can recapture them. They will ask them to carry more and they will kill them if that person can't walk. People said mostly they kill porters when they recapture them. People escaped in our group and they were not recaptured. There are people who escaped.

How many prisoners do you think are still left with the army?

Over 20 prisoners are still left. They separated out 40 people [at the beginning]. There are porters who escaped from other companies that I don't know. They separated them and many people escaped from there [the other Companies]. In our group [Four Companies of Battalion #22], there were about 10 people still left. Those people will escape. They want to escape.

Why did you decide to escape?

Our life was in danger. We couldn't die there. We two discussed escaping. If someone gets hit by a mine, don't leave him alone like this. Kill him. We can't in their hands. We can die by stepping on mine, starving or being killed by *Ng'Bpway* [after escaping]. But we can't die in their hands. We risked our life and escaped. We knew that we would face with trouble. But we didn't care. Just as long as we don't die in their hands it is fine. We decided and we escaped. I don't remember the date when I escaped but it was in January 2011. I don't remember the name of the camp where I escaped from. That camp is located on the top of a mountain. I escaped from that camp.

Did you plan before you escaped?

Before I escaped, I planned. I planned to escape alone. But I was not free so I couldn't escape. I was alone and they ordered me to sleep between soldiers. They had a hammock and they ordered me to sleep between them. The guard was beside me and I couldn't escape. They hadn't slept yet on the night when we escaped. They had alcohol. They drank alcohol and they were drunk. I went to the Company Command and asked permission. I told him, '*Sa Ya Gyi, I went to go to toilet*.' He told me '*you can go*.' He had a good heart that night. Actually I didn't

[78] *Ng'Bpway* means 'ringworm' in Burmese. It is a derogatory term used by the Tatmadaw to refer to KNLA soldiers and their supporters.

want to go to the toilet. I just wanted to escape. I went to the toilet earlier that day during the day time and looked for a place [to escape]. There was no way to escape. I just had to jump down to this place [from the cliff]. There were bushes under it. I met with him [the other porter who escaped] and asked do you want to follow me. He said he would follow me. He said I went to go to the toilet too and I will follow you. I told him follow me I have a torch. I told him follow me. We three people are going to escape. One dared not to escape and stayed behind. I don't know his name but he was from Pyay prison. People called him monk. He left the monkhood. He was in prison because of misuse of religion. He dared not escape and pulled me back. I pulled away from him and jumped down. He dared not jump down and stayed behind. We two people escaped.

What is your future plan?

I want to go back home but *Sa Ya* [Karen leader] told us when we arrived there that, currently, we can't go back. '*You can work here and go back later. The police don't come to my village because it located in the jungle. I can guarantee if you go back to my village. They will not arrest you again. There are soldiers and porters who deserted in my village. You can stay there. They won't go and report.'* I want to go back home if I can.

How long since you escaped until you arrived here?

It took two days. We were starving with food for two days. We met with the Karen army. First, six Karen army saved us and then another three saved us. They said follow this road. It took days on the way. We crossed the stream and climbed up on the mountain. We saw a village when we arrived on the top of the mountain. Kyaw Min, the guy [other porter] who followed with me told me, '*Matthew, we will have some food if we go to the village. We are very hungry. We will have food. They will feed us.*' We went down and said it wll be good if the people in the village can speak Burmese. We discussed and went. They pointed at us with guns and said don't move. We thought they were going to shoot us. We were afraid and our knee shook. We gave obeisance to them and they said don't do that. You don't need to give obeisance to us. We will save you. Who are you? What happened to you? They asked us. We are refugees. We are convict porters. They asked us to stand up and called us. And they asked have you eaten, we said we hadn't eaten for three days. They said don't worry and follow me and they called us. We were very happy when they told us like this. We know that we will not die. We have risked our life when we first escaped and we thought that we would step on a landmine and they would recapture us. We were not familiar with the place. We went forward and they had many soldiers. We didn't know where they were. We risked our life and escaped. We thought that we would be recaptured by their soldiers or would step on landmines. We didn't know where east and west was. We just went forward and listened to the sounds. We were very happy when we saw them. The Thai officer came and met us. They gave us 50 baht to each of us.

What is your opinion of the SPDC army?

The things they do are very rude. How can I say? The methods they use are not correct. We kill people and we have to be in prison because we are guilty. We can do with the punishment that we get. We can stay in prison until we free. Order us to mash [break] the rocks and we can do it. Now they do this [send us to be porters]. They don't include [mention] *yeh beh* and portering and death when they pass the judgment. But now the way they do is not part of the [legal] system. In my view, the way they do is not justice. They have no humanitarianism.

How do you feel about prisoners being used to porter for the army?

I thought this is not fair because punishment is punishment. I think they don't need to use prisoners as porters. If it is political action, [they should] do by themselves. They don't need to use us. We are not interested. We are guilty and we will deserve [to serve our sentence] until it

is done. If it is ten years, we will deserve to be in prison until it is complete. We don't want to go and work together with them. This is my opinion.

Are there any things still left that you want to say?

I can't speak Burmese very well and I don't have experience and I don't know how to answer.

When were you passed judgment on?

December --- 2010 under [section] 302/2 of the Act [Penal Code].

Interview | Ko Kyaw Htun, 28 (January 2011, Dooplaya District)

Address prior to arrest: A--- Township, Yangon Division
Ethnicity: Burmese
Religion: Buddhist
Occupation prior to arrest:
Reported reason for arrest: Murder
Date of arrest:
Reported sentence: 17 years
Reported date sentence began: July --- 2010
Prison(s): Insein; Pa'an
Prisoner No: 0---/-
Date sent to labour camp:
Labour camp:
Date taken to porter: January 1st 2011
Size of group taken to porter: 400 porters, 200 soldiers; **[**300 porters left when escaped]
Area/ location portered: Htee Thay Kee; Kyeh Pyaung Gone camp [Kawkareik Township]
Battalion: IB# 22 [LIB#208] under Shein Htun, Kyaw Swa and Kyaw Myo Htun
Number of soldiers and porters (exact, not a ratio): 100 soldiers and 70 porters in battalion
Date of interviewee's escape:
Number of porters escaped (not including interviewee):
Location of interviewee's escape:
Location of interview:
Date of interview: January --- 2011
Future plans: Back to Burma but stay in the cities away from home village

Why were you in prison?

Because of manslaughter. My mother was chopped with a machete. I couldn't control myself. The incident happened in the morning. They chopped my mother with a machete. My mother came back with a wound. I didn't feel satisfied. I went and stabbed mother and child, three of them. One is dead. I had to be in prison for 13 years.

Why did they chop your mother with a machete?

They were arguing about borrowing money and they chopped her with a machete. My mother borrowed money. The others [people that she borrowed from] didn't want to give and they argued and he or she chopped my mother. I knew about that and I stabbed three people, including their mother and child. One is dead. Two are not dead. I escaped after I stabbed them. The police arrested my mother and sister when I escaped. So I went back and handed myself in at the police station. I went and handed myself in at the police station and my mother and sister were released. I handed myself in and had to be in prison.

Do you know the name of police officer who came and arrested you?

I don't know. But they were from north D---. North D--- Court of Law passed judgment on me for a 13-year sentence on July --- 2010. I don't know the name of judge that passed judgment on me. She is a woman. We didn't have an opportunity to know [her name].

Did anyone judge, police, jailers or doctors ask for a bribe?

Yes, they have. They said if you pay 500,000 kyat, you will only be in prison for four years. We are poor so we couldn't pay.

Who asked the money?

Police. Actually, the request came from the judge. The judge asked for *shin beh s'yin* [from the police. They police came and asked for money. We are poor. We couldn't pay. We work one day and eat one day [if we work for a day we earn enough money to eat for that day only]. I told them we can't pay and they said we will sentence you next week. And they sentenced me to 13 years. I would have had to be in prison only for 4 years if I can pay the money.

How do you feel about the process? Was it a fair process?

It was not fair. If I paid five hundred thousand kyat, I would have had to be in prison for 4 years only. Five hundred thousand kyat is very valuable. Five hundred thousand kyat can decrease a prison sentence by 8 years. Five hundred thousand can match with 8 years. For us we could die in prison in 8 years. It is clear to me when I was included to come here [to porter] that they will shoot us with a gun when we run. We can't go back to our parents again if we are hit. There is no justice. They keep money as the most important thing. You will be put in prison only for a few years if you can give money.

Where were you put in prison?

Insein prison. They didn't transfer me to other prisons. I just had to stay in Insein prison.

What did you have to do when you stayed in prison?

I had to work on a farm. We had to start the work at 7:00 am or 8:00 am and eat at 11:30 am or 12:00 pm. We ate and returned to work at 1:00 pm. We had to return to work directly after we ate and work until 5:00 pm.

Were you paid for the work you did?

No. they didn't pay us. We had to work for them for free. If we give them money, they don't ask us to work. We can give them money if we don't want to work. But for us, we can't try [to bribe them]. We are poor and we couldn't pay.

How much would you have to pay [to avoid work]?

1,500 or 2,000 kyat for one day, 1,500 kyat for the morning and 3,000 kyat for the whole day. From 8:00 am to 12:00 pm, you pay 1,500 kyat and you don't need to work. And if you pay 1,500 kyat for 1:00 pm to 5:00 pm, you don't need to work again. You have to work if you can't pay. Some people do it. People who have money pay it.

Did you have experience about prisoners being abused by jailers?

Yes, our jailer and jail warden were the main people who demanded money. People who could give 1,000 kyat had to cut the banana trees only. They didn't have to cut [hardwood] trees. [Hardwood] trees and banana trees are different. You can stab and slice a banana tree and it is done but for the [hardwood] tree, you have to cut [each branch] one by one. It is different when they order prisoners to work. The jailer and jail warden divide the standard. Some prisoners don't need to work if they pay one or two hundred thousand kyat to the jailer and the jail warden. But we [prisoners who can't pay] have to do extra work for those people. That is what is different.

Do you know the name of the jailer and the jail warden?

The jail warden's name is U That Shin and the warden's name is U Kyaw Kyaw.

Can you tell me about your experiences in prison?

We stayed in prison. We don't need to work if we can pay money. We had to work if we couldn't pay money. They ordered us to do work. The food was not good. They fed us bean curry in the morning. The beans they cooked were not tender. They put beans on the cooker and poured warm water in and they made bean curry. No salt or sweet powder. For evening, they fed us sweet potato and leaves. They cooked it and fed us. Sometimes it included worms and slugs and insects that we can't eat. If we don't eat it and just throw it away, they beat us.

How did they let prisoners sleep at night?

They ordered us to sleep at 9:00 pm. They beat us if we talked to each other. For them they talk whenever they want. They are also some prisoners who are prisoners' officers. They have power. They slept whenever they wanted to sleep. They got up and watched football matches. We can't watch. They beat us when we talked. Those people give money to *won tan* and *won tan* bought them marijuana and other drugs. For us, we couldn't do anything. We had to do what they ordered and we have to eat what they fed us. When we slept there were hundreds of people in a room, not just ten or twenty people. The room is from here to that tree [gestures] long and the width is from here to that tree [gestures] for 120 people. We had to sleep sideways. For them, the place where they stayed there is this much [gestures further] space because they give money. People who give money can sleep in a large room. People who can't pay money have to sleep sideways. Three people can sleep in the place where people who pay money stay.

Were prisoners allowed to read books or magazines or write letters?

We had to give them coffee and we could read and write. There were magazines but if we wanted to read, we had to give them coffee. One pack of Coffeemate [brand] is 150 kyat and we had to give them three packs of coffee. For the prisoner officers, they are prisoners but they get to read for free. For us we had to pay three packs of coffee if we wanted to read. We had to pay the coffee to the jailer but the jailer didn't ask directly. He asked the prisoners' officers to ask for it from us. They, the prisoners' officers, gave it back to the jailer.

Did prisoners receive medicine when they were sick?

Yes, they received medical treatment: paracetamol and clorfenamina. Prisoners just get these two medicines. This is the medicine [*gestures*] and if you hold the tablet with your finger like this, if the medicine is white, half of the white color stays on your finger. The medicines are out of date. They give good medicine if you can give them money and then you can have an injection. You have to pay 1,000 kyat for an injection. If you don't give them any money, as I said a moment ago, you will get paracetamol and clorfenamina. The medicines are out of date and not effective for the diseases. There were many people who died because of this. They got sick and they were sent to the hospital and they died. Most people died after they arrived to the hospital. We can have good medicine when we asked [for money] from our home. You get two tablets for one time, a paracetamol and clorfenamina. But many people died.

How many people died that you saw when you live in prison?

I had stay in prison for seven months and I saw there were 30 - 40 people who died. That's my witness, in the cell where I stayed. We had to call an emergency when people got sick in prison. The *wan saung* [public service personnel] came and carried the prisoners when we called an emergency. After we called emergency, they arrived 30 - 45 minutes later. People were sick already and some people died after they arrived to the hospital. They came very late. They

didn't come as soon as we called. At a minimum, they came after 30 - 45 minutes later. Sometimes, it took one hour.

Did any outside organisations ever come to prison when you were there, like the UN or Red Cross?

I didn't know about those organizations. I know about political prisoners. The outside organisation came and visited them. The foods were special at that time. The human rights group comes and they fed good curry at that time but just for one day. For the rest of the days, as I told you, they fed us bad food. It included people who spoke English and those people can speak a lot, English and Thai, and can speak very well. They came and checked the prisoners, like were the prisoners fed good food, what was the amount of food that prisoners got and what were their beds. They prepared a large cell for prisoners to sleep in when those organisations come. They fed us good food and provided good clothes. They took the clothes back when those organisations went back. Then we can't have good food again, we had to eat what we ate before. They fed us just for the day when they organisation came. They came just for one or two hours and did their check. They treat prisoners well at that time. Not good for the rest of the time. They didn't come and interview us. They interviewed people in the hospital. They kept the patients in a good room and treated them well. But if there were no organisations visiting, as I told you, you have to pay 1,000 kyat for an injection. You can have an injection if you can pay money. They will give you bad medicine if you can't pay money. Many people who can't pay money die. People who can pay money are alive. It is that way in this kind of hospital. The people who demand money are jailers.

Where were you taken out from prison?

On January 1st 2011, I don't remember exactly but in January. But I remember it was day one [January 1st]. They didn't say that they were taking us out to be porters, they said it was for *yeh beh* [prison labour camp]. They sent us to Pa'an prison. When we arrived to Pa'an, they said we were going to be porters. We were all aghast when we heard '*porter'* because being a porter is very bad. They ordered us to carry their loads and we knew from there. The jailer and jail warder didn't tell us any thing before about this. You can pay money if you don't want to go. You have to pay 30,000 kyat. You have to pay to the leader [military officer], the three-starred guy [Sergeant].

So the jailer and jail warden didn't take anything?

The jailer and jail warden also take it [the money]. They [the military officers] shared it to the jailer and jail warden after.

How long did you stay with the army?

About one month.

Do you know the army unit that you followed with?

LIB #208.

Do you know any commander in the battalion?

I know the Sergeant's name. His name is *Sa Ya* Shein Htun. He beat and hit us with his gun butt. If porters can't climb up the mountain, he beat and stabbed them with a knife. Two of my friends died there. One of my friends, he can't walk and climb up the mountains. He is tired and he is fat. He feels tired and said 'Sa Ya*, let me take a rest for a while*.' '*Hey! You can't take a rest, climb up*.' But he couldn't stand up anymore. He was very tired. At that time he [Sergeant

Shein Htun] stabbed his chest twice with the knife and kicked him down to the valley. He kicked him down then mountain. He died directly. Another one [porter] was hit by mine and his leg was blown off. He also was kicked down to the valley. He also died, both of them. They were my friends. They were prisoners. Our BE [landmine removal unit] told us '*you guy also will be the same, you will be killed if you can't walk*.'

Where did they send you after they take you out from prison?

From Insein to Pa'an prison, they kept us on the main road in front of Pa'an prison. They gathered people. After they gathered people, they sent us to the operation grounds where they gather their troops. After that we came to here, like to Htee Thay Kee. It is a Karen village, in Karen state. From there, we came from that side. There is a church there. They sent us there and they killed our friends who couldn't carry.

From Pa'an to here, what did you come with?

We came with cars and they sent us [by cars] until Kyeh Pyaung Gone. Kyeh Pyaung Gone is their military camp.

Do you know the army unit there?

It is under the command of IB# 22, LIB#208. it is their operation camp.

How many prisoners were taken out from Insein?

There were 100 prisoners.

Were you the same as Matthew?

They were from Pyay prison. I am from Insein.

Can you tell us about your experiences as a convict porter step by step?

They fed us rice since we left the prison. The fed this amount to each person. They fed a tin of rice for two people. After we arrived at Kyeh Pyaung Gone, they fed a tin of rice for three people. They ate until they were full. They ate tinned meat and fish but for us, sometimes they fed us rice. Sometime they fed us rice gruel and fish paste. They fed us fish paste but for them they ate tinned meat and fish. We couldn't have enough food but they could have enough food. They ordered us to carry. They ordered *wan saung* [public service personnel] to carry a lot. They killed my friend who can't climb up the mountain. They beat me with the butt of the gun. As soon as we arrived at Htee Thay Kee, at the church, they boiled rice gruel for us. They ate rice but we had to eat rice gruel. We had to eat one tin of rice for three people. They could eat rice until they were full. For us, we just had to eat rice gruel. We couldn't suffer anymore. They said they will kill us. So we swam across the Moei River and arrived to a Karen village. They [the Tatmadaw] told us, the Karen rebels will kill us when they arrest us. We don't care even if the Karen rebel will kill us. When we crossed to here, the Karen people welcomed us affably. They welcomed us. They fed us rice until we were full and treated us like brothers. And they said they will find work for us. They sent us here. The food and the places to sleep are also good when we arrived to here. There, they ordered us to sleep on the ground. Here, we sleep in a house. They slept in a good place but we slept on the ground there. We had to do sentry duty. For them, they slept. They were drunk and slept. For us we had to do sentry duty.

What did you have to do when you stayed with the army?

My responsibility is I had to carry bags, 15 mortars, at least 40 viss. I had to carry 15 mortars and rice, canned fish, sweet powder, salt, oil, chili, onion. Each porter had to carry that amount. For them, they carried their gun and a uniform and a small backpack with a couple of their clothes. For us we had to carry their things. We had to climb up and down mountains after mountains and how could we do that. We couldn't take a rest when we wanted to take a rest. We had to walk in the morning at 8:00 am until 5:00pm and just one time we had a chance to take a rest. We could sit for one or two minutes and we had to stand up. That's all for one [rest] time and we had to walk until we arrived to the place they would sleep. For them, they sit whenever they are free.

What did they give to prisoners before they sent you here?

They gave us trousers of a blue color. The trousers are not thick, very thin. A long-sleeved shirt, hat and shoes. The shoes are not suitable for walking so I didn't bring them. They hurt my legs. So I came bare foot. This is the prisoners uniform. It is not the same as them. We can't bring our own clothes.

Were the clothes they give you useful?

It doesn't mean they were useless. We can wear them. They change their clothes one by one but for us, since we left and until we escaped to here, we wore just one set of clothes. We couldn't take a bath. We hadn't taken a bath for 10 or 15 days. They take a bath every day. We were not allowed to take a bath. We had to cook for them but they fed us rice gruel. With the extra rice after they eat, they cook rice gruel for us.

How did they walk in their patrolling?

They kept five porters in the front. After five porters, they kept one porter. And three porters with one soldier in the middle. We asked them '*why do you guy do it like this?'* and they said "*If they [the KNLA or DKBA soldiers] shoot, you guys will die first. We won't die*." We had to set up huts for them before they sleep. We had to carry water for them to drink. The water that we had to drink was the extra water after they drank. We had to sleep on the ground. For them, we had to set up a *ta la bah* [roof] and huts for their sleeping place. We had to dig the holes [trenches] for them to take cover. We had to sleep on the ground.

How did they feed porters on the front line?

They fed one tin of rice for three people. For them they ate until they were full. A tin of rice isn't enough for one person when they are feeling tired and hungry. They told us if you guys are not full enough with a tin of rice, make it into rice gruel. It mixes with water and there is more water than rice in the rice gruel. So [because we don't have enough rice] we have to make it into rice gruel.

Did they give curry?

They didn't give curry. They ate tinned fish and meat. They ate fish and meat tins that they brought with them. For us, we had to eat fish paste. The food soldiers ate and the food porters ate was not the same. They ate good curry and had enough food to eat. But we didn't have enough food to eat. Not good curry and three people had to eat one tin of rice. They ate rice, we ate rice gruel. It is not the same. The commanders eat even better good food.

How did they let the prisoners sleep at nighttime?

They didn't let us sleep if they heard the shooting. They jumped down in their holes and took cover. They kept us on the ground. We had to sleep after they slept. Sometimes we had to take

sentry duty with their soldiers. We had to take sentry duty when they were sleeping. They beat us when they awake and see that we are asleep and they slap our cheeks. They didn't lock our legs with chains after we left the prison.

Did you experience any fighting?

The Karen army [DKBA or KNLA] shot one time at the church [in Htee Thay Kee]. They [the Tatmadaw] also shot back. I just experienced that one time. For them, they jumped down to the hole but we had to stay out in the open expanse.

Did anyone get injured?

We, many porters, got injured by mines and guns. Prisoners got injured and the Captain Ye Naw, with three stars, stepped on a landmine and his leg was blown out. He was not the Battalion Commander. He is a Captain. Many soldiers were hit. Some were dying and some got injured in their chest and hands. Some died directly. Many soldiers died.

Can you guess how many soldiers and porters died in the battle at the church in Htee Thay Kee?

About 30 people died. Not all were soldiers, it included porters. There were about 10 soldiers and 30 - 40 porters who died. Three or four got injured. They [the Tatmadaw] killed the porters who stepped on mines. They didn't send them back.

They die because of the shooting from here or they step on mine?

No one died because of the shooting, they were hit by landmines and their legs were blown out. They [the Tatmadaw] said they would send them back but they killed them behind people's sight [behind their backs when no one was looking]. We heard the gun sound and we asked what happened. The Operation Commander was close with us and he told us that they shot game animals. But prisoners, friends of us who were behind the frontline, said they shot people, the prisoners who stepped on mines.

Do you know the Operation Commander's name?

I don't know.

Do you have any experience with landmines? Did the army use porters as landmine sweepers, like did they order porters to walk in the front?

Yes, they ordered us to walk in the front. When we went and carried water, we didn't know about mines and had never heard what guns sounded like. Actually we were supposed to follow behind them. They knew and they were supposed to go in the front. But they ordered us to go first. They followed behind us. In their mind, if the mine explodes, the mine will hit us first. It won't hit them. They ordered us to go first with this objective. But we were lucky. We were not hit by mines until we arrived here [to Htee Thay Kee]. Most of my friends were hit by mines and their legs were blown off. The soldiers said they would send them back and they called them behind the troops and shot and stabbed them with knives and kicked them down to the valley. Those things happened.

Did prisoners receive any medical treatment when they were sick or injured?

No. Many of my friends who stayed in the same prison as me didn't have footwear. For them, they wore boots. When we crossed the rocky land, our legs got abrasions. We got injured and when we couldn't walk, they beat us with the butt of the gun and stabbed prisoners' thighs with

knives. The wound that they stabbed with the knife is worse than the abrasions we got from walking on the sharp rock. The prisoners are afraid and got sick at night. They didn't give them medical treatment. They let them die. You get sick and you die.

Are there any abuses committed against the porters?

Yes, there were. They threatened us. They said they will shoot us if we run. They will kill us. When they recaptured the ones who escaped, they did kill them. I saw it with my own eyes. They stabbed my friend with a knife and kicked him down to the valley in front of me. They beat the prisoners when they didn't do what they ordered. They stabbed them with a knife or beat them with their gun butts in the prisoners' faces. Prisoners' faces become swollen. For me, I was punched when I didn't do what they ordered. It doesn't mean that we refused them [didn't obey orders]. We did as much as we could. We didn't know how to do something and they punched us. We were sworn at all the time and punched.

Who did those things, Privates or Officers?

They were officers.

Do you know any of them?

Captain Kyaw Swa. His rank is three stars. And Kyaw Myo Htun, his rank is also three stars. Both of them rank three stars. They are the captains that control us. They punched and slapped our face. The privates also do it but not too much. Mostly it was the Captains.

How did the Tatmadaw treat villagers?

I just saw *A'Moe* [Aunt]. There is a village after we passed Htee Thay Kee. There were no people in the village except *A'Moe*. They questioned and threatened *A'Moe*. *'If you don't tell us, we will shoot you*' they said. They asked, '*are there Karen rebels? Where are the Karen rebels and are they hiding? Tell us and if you don't tell us, we will shoot you*.' They swore in the Burmese language. I just saw one time because the villages that they went through, there were no villagers. Just that village, they saw *A'Moe*, she was very old, about 60 years old. She couldn't speak Burmese. They pushed *A'Moe* when they couldn't get an answer. The one who did this was Captain Kyaw Myo Htun.

Did they arrest villagers and ask them to porter?

They didn't do this because there are no villagers in the villages. They would do that if there were villagers in the villages.

Did the army threaten you before you escaped?

Yes, they did. In the morning before we escaped, we escaped at 10:00 am. In the morning before we escaped, they ordered us to carry a pack of rice for each person and sent it to the other place [camp]. We sent the rice and we came back. We were very hungry. They fed us a milk tin of rice for four people. We just got this amount of rice for each person. We told them that we were not full. They swore at us and slapped our faces. They said if you guy can't follow us later, we will kill you. We are afraid of them because they have a knife and a gun. They threatened us and we were afraid them. So we escaped. Before we escaped they slapped each prisoners face three or four times. We were afraid and we escaped. They said we will step on mines and die even if we escape. And the Karen people will kill you when you arrive in Karen villages. They said those words, but when we arrived in Karen village, the Karen people welcomed us and they were sociable. They fed us good food. And they said they will find work for us.

When did you escape?

Day time at about 10:00 am.

Did they see you when you escape?

They didn't see. If they saw, they would have shot us. They didn't see when we escaped. We escaped when they didn't know. We three people escaped. They were here. Me and another one were there and another one went to the clinic. He is sick.

How many days did it take before you met with the Karen army?

We escaped at 10:00 am in the morning and the DKBA shot at us at about 1:00 pm. We were already on this side. We swam. They shot at us. We were afraid and we ran up to the mountain and we arrived to the village in the day. We arrived to the village at 4:00 pm. We arrived to a Karen village. They fed us rice and gave us clothes. Told us to take a rest.

So you didn't meet with Karen army?

Yes, the Karen army took us. The Operation Commander took us.

Did any porters try to escape before you fled?

Many, more than about 20 - 30 people. They were all porters.

How many porters are included with the army you followed?

Over 400 porters were included. Over 50 porters escaped. Some escaped and died. Some were recaptured and killed. They recaptured and shot three porters. They shot them in front of me.

How many porters do you think are still left with the army?

There were over 100 soldiers and about over 70 porters still left with the army. There were over 70 porters at Kyeh Pyaung Gone. There are over 300 porters still left when we calculate them all. They were not all allowed to stay together in the same battalion.

Why did you decide to escape?

Later we will die. We will die when we stay with the army for a long time. We will be hit by mines or killed by them [the soldiers]. They beat us when they are free [in their spare time]. Because of that punishment, porters work during the daytime and get sick at night time. Some people died when their sickness was serious. Some people can't suffer the pain from the wounds when they are stabbed with knives and beaten. We were afraid and we said we will die if we stay here for a long time. We will have to escape even if the Karen capture us and kill us. And we ran after we decided that. The Karen army [DKBA or KNLA] Operation Commander, and the Karen villagers saved us when we arrived to the Karen village.

How did they treat you? Did they treat you like the Burmese army treated you?

They are very different from the Burmese army. The Burmese army ordered us to work and didn't feed us until we were full. They beat us. The Karen army and villagers gave us clothes, blankets and mosquito nets when they saw us. They gave us a place to sleep and fed us until we were full. They didn't order us to work. And they said they will find work for us. They told us to stay with good behavior when we arrived there. But they didn't lie. The Burmese and Karen

army is different. The Burmese army said the Karen army will kill us when they see us. In fact it is very different from what they told us. Other than the fact that they don't kill us, they also feed us good food and give us a good place to stay.

What do you want to do in the future?

I will be arrested if I go back to Yangon. So I will work in this country. My parents are poor. I never even dreamed about this place. I have never been to Thailand. We know we will get a lot of money if we work. They said they will find us work so I will work. Instead of going back, I will work and send the money back to my parents. I think I will work and stay here.

What is your opinion of the Burmese army?

We are Burmese. We are not concerned with Thailand. I have never been and I don't know. I just hear about Thailand and learned from school. They [the Tatmadaw soldiers] said the Karen army is bad. They kill Burmese army soldiers after they capture them. They kill Burmese people. We have heard this and we were afraid of the Karen army. Now, we experience that the Burmese army kills Burmese people. They kill people who can't work and order people to work like cows. They asked us to work when we [the porters] couldn't work and they killed the porters when they can't work. They treat us like this. We were afraid and escaped to here. They said the Karen army is bad but the Karen army saved us. They fed us good food and will find a job for us. They protect our lives from the risk. At that time, even though I am Burmese, I hate the Burmese army. To be honest, I want to shoot the Burmese army. I am thinking about this. People who are not the same ethnicity are kind to us and help us. People who are the same ethnicity and the same race kill us. They don't treat us like a human being. They treat us like cows. If possible, I don't want to go back to Burma and I will stay here.

How do you feel about prisoners being used to porter for the army?

We do wrong things and have to be in prison. That's true. We killed people and we have to be in prison. We are satisfied. We are bad to people and we have to be in prison. It is true. As I know when we were in prison, the prisoners have to work. As I heard from other people, people who have to be in prison in other countries like Thailand, they work and they are paid. For us, it is ok if they don't give us money, as long as they just feed us good food. In Burmese prisons, besides not feeding good food to prisoners, they ask prisoners to work like animals. We can't sleep well. The place is not good. No matter if we have to go to *yeh beh* [prison labour] camp because it is our fault and this is the order from the Prison Department. But the Burmese army and the Karen army fight for their beliefs. It is not related to us. They forced us to follow them. We live in flat land and we know nothing about mountains. We can't climb up the mountains. But they forced us to climb up. They beat us with sticks and stab us with knives and they kill prisoners when they can't do it anymore. They have no human hearts. Their hearts are dogs' hearts. They aren't kind to human beings. They shoot human beings. They kill us if we can't do what they ordered us to do. They treat us like dogs and cows. What they believe is wrong. Even if we have to be in prison, we don't need to follow them when they call us [to be porters]. We have to be in prison because we did wrong things and we will stay in prison. But now they pull us out when they need us. They give our names to the dead list [of prisoners who died in prison]. After they kill us, they report that we just got sick and died. Family and relatives know nothing. The Burmese army is no good. If they want to fight, why don't they fight and carry their materials by themselves. Now, the people [Karen] who they [the Tatmadaw soldiers] said are not good are the ones who saved us. We can stay and eat without worry here, with the people who they fight. They [Tatmadaw soldiers] said those people [Karen soldiers] kill Burmese people. But now the people [porters] who they [Karen soldiers] are saving are Burmese. They [the Burmese army] fight with wrong beliefs.

Do you remember the date when you were sentenced?

I don't remember.

Is there anything else that you want to say?

I don't have anything else. But I want to say I don't like [the Burmese army] killing each other. I loathe and hate them. In the end I want to say if it is possible, I want to kill them. We are humans, even if we are prisoners. Soldiers are also human. We have to carry when they can't. But they are not like this. If we can't carry, they stabbed us with knives and beat us. The prisoner couldn't suffer and escaped. When they recaptured the prisoners who escaped, they killed them. They shot the people who escaped. We were lucky and we stayed free to get here. Many porters escaped and they shot and killed many porters, 30-40 porters. There were 400 porters. There were just 200 soldiers. They called us to carry their materials.

Interview | Win Naing, 27 (Janury 2011, Dooplaya District)

Address prior to arrest: T--- village, D--- Township, Irrawaddy division
Ethnicity: Burmese
Religion: Buddhist
Occupation prior to arrest:
Reported reason for arrest: Murder
Date of arrest:
Reported sentence:
Reported date sentence began: May --- 2008
Prison(s): Insein; Pa'an
Date sent to labour camp:
Labour camp:
Date taken to porter: January 10th 2011
Size of group taken to porter:
Area/ location portered: Kya Min Gone
Battalion: 208 [unsure if IB or LIB]
Number of soldiers and porters (exact, not a ratio):
Date of interviewee's escape:
Number of porters escaped (not including interviewee):
Location of interviewee's escape:
Location of interview:
Date of interview: January 28th 2011
Future plans: Stay in Thailand

Why were you in prison?

Murder. We argued with each other. He was going to beat me with a stick and we squared up to each other. I got the stick and beat him.

Did you escape after you killed him?

No, I handed myself in.

Who came and arrested you?

Police. They arrested me directly. Local policeman Aung Kyaw came and arrested me. They are with the D--- Township police.

Which court did you have to face the trial?

In Pya Bpone District law court.

How many years were you sentenced?

Ten years. Ten years of hard work.

Did anyone ask for a bribe?

They didn't take a bribe but the police did. My father followed the case when I was first arrested. He followed the case and he said don't worry about that. My father gave money to them but I don't know how much. After the trial was done, I asked my father and he said he gave them money but he didn't remember who he gave the money to. We looked for the one who we gave

money to but we couldn't find him. We had to lose the money. I didn't know how much we had to pay. I didn't ask him because I had my own problems and he had his own problems.

How do you feel about the process by which you were put in prison and sentenced? Was it a fair process?

How can I say, did they ask me that if I am guilty? I did the right thing so I said no. It is not the same as a confession when I say I am not guilty.

Did you have to work when you arrived to prison?

On May --- 2008, I arrived to prison. They asked me to stand up as a new prisoner when we first arrived. I had never been to prison and didn't know about this. So I was beaten. I was beaten. After that, they asked me to work in the farm. One of my friends is still left there. Just only he [gestures] and I fled to here.

How many hours did you have to work in a day?

They don't limit. We go and work when we want and we don't go when we don't want.

Do they give salary from work?

No, they don't give a salary. We got nothing.

Can we pay them money if we don't want to work?

Yes, there are people who give them money. I have been in prison. They were about to beat me. I took out money and they didn't do anything.

How do they pay, for a week, a month or a year?

Some people pay for a month. Some people pay them with snacks and alcohol. Some people pay 4,000 - 5,000 kyat per month and some pay 13,000 kyat. There are room leaders. If you are a new person when you arrive to the prison, they push them to the *Mayla* room. The jail warden doesn't know. The room leaders, even if we are same Burmese ethnicity, they oppress us. The *Mayla* room is the place where people shit and urinate. We called it the *Mayla* room. They put them there. They thought that they would get money from them. People can't stay there because it smells of shit and urine. You could say '*brother can I pay money? I want to go and stay there [not in the* Mayla *room]*.' But there were Chin guys who could pay money and they still oppressed them because they don't like the [Chin] prisoners.

What about food? How did they feed you?

Seven days in a week, they fed meat every two weeks. Mostly they fed us eggs. They fed us eggs for two weeks and meat for two weeks. For the rest of the day, the fed us bean soup, bean and fish paste and salt. They added a pack of dry noodles when the ICRC came and visited the prison. They didn't crush it because if you crush it you can't scoop it back out afterwards [when the ICRC left].

Were prisoners allowed to have visitors in prison?

Yes, they were allowed. They were allowed to meet for 15 minutes and you had to pay 5,000 kyat. Sometime when they don't like you, they just give you 5 minutes. And they say '*get out, get out, we have an important issue.'* They forced you to leave and you had to wait for a while because you hadn't finished your conversation so you pay 500 kyat for one more time and meet

again. If you meet inside, you have to pay 2,000 kyat. Meeting outside and inside is not the same. If you meet inside, you can talk to each other like you and I are talking. Outside, they block with an iron door. You can't even push a finger through. We are in the light and they are in the dark. We didn't see the person we visited with but they could see us.

Were prisoners allowed to read books or magazines or write letters?

Yes, they are allowed. But you can't write other things about them. You can write like I am doing well in prison, how about mother and father? Are you doing well? You can just write this one. You have to show them the letter after you write it. You can't send it if they don't like your letter.

Did prisoners receive medicine when they were sick?

There is no one who got injured when I was in prison. But there were people who got sick. I got beri –beri and I couldn't eat for 10 or 15 days. What do they do? They did nothing to me. They gave medicine. We had to tell them about our disease, like I was swollen. I couldn't urinate. They gave the medicine that matched with the disease.

Did any outside organisation come and visit the prison?

They did come but we didn't know them. They fed us good food when the outside organisations came. The fed us bean curry as before but they put it with many things. They take out everything when those people went back because they know the prisoners eat like this. They went back after some people had eaten but some people hadn't eaten yet when they went back. People who stayed in the kitchen, they took out the good things from the curry and said it was for the teacher [prison leader]. And [what was left] was for prisoners to eat.

When did they take you out from prison?

On January 10th 2011, they said people from Taung-zun *yeh beh* camp called us. We didn't have to go porter. We arrived at *yeh beh* camp. After that we were picked up to go porter.

Could you pay money if you didn't want to come?

Yes, you could pay money. For example, if my name is on the list but I don't want to go because I am afraid, I can give them two hundred thousand kyat and they pick up someone instead of me.

Did you know where you have to go when they take you out from prison?

I don't know. Later, we arrived at Insein. It took 7 days from Insein. On 17th January 2011, they took us out from Insein to Taung-zun and also it took 7 days from Taung-zun. There were 4, 5 or 10 people [in each truck]. They shackled our legs in pairs. As soon as they open the back of the car, those guys [soldiers] came and they were wearing hats and had applied *Thanakha* to their faces. I thought in my mind '*wow, they are actors. They … I don't know. I just thought wow, those people are actors*.' As they opened the car down, they ordered us to keep our heads down and they police spoke out and said we also have to keep our heads down. They said that and they beat us in the car until we arrived at N'Poo. At that time, the jail warden said, it doesn't mean that I want to beat you. You have to follow prison rules when you stay prison. You have to follow road rules when you are on the road and you have to follow school rules when you are in school.

How long did you stay with the army?

I have stayed with the army for 27 days.

Did you know the unit of the army that you follow with?

I don't if it was LIB or IB but they are 208.

Do you any commanders' names in the army?

I don't know any.

Where did they send you after they took you out?

They sent us to Pa'an prison. We arrived at Pa'an in the evening and we slept one night at Pa'an. They called out our names in the morning and gave clothes to us, prisoner uniforms. They gave us trousers, long-sleeved shirts, hats, rain-coats, blankets and *S'Lon* [bowl]. They also gave us footwear. And they gave us a pack of rice to each person to eat on the way. At that time we were in the army's hands. After Pa'an, we arrived at Phyu Ha Gone [Tatmadaw camp]. We arrived there.

How many prisoners were taken out?

100 prisoners.

Were all those prisoners included with the army unit or did they separate you?

Yes, they separated us, like depending on how many prisoners had to be in a [military unit] section.

Can you tell me about your experience since you were taken out and until to here?

We had to go directly by car when we left Pa'an. We met with our *Sa Ya* but we didn't know their name. We were strangers to each other. He said you will have a chance to stay and eat in a good condition. You can stay freely, he said. They persuaded us before we arrived at their camp. On the way, they told us, look at that mountain and this mountain, they *Ng'Bpway* will shoot at the soldiers. The Corporal and Sergeant talked to each other and said they can get shot but they won't shoot private [low-ranking service personnel] like us. They will not shoot us. If they shoot, they just shoot at Officers. It is good to shoot [armed Karen groups]. They will be good to us. They talked to each other. They felt happy when their leaders were shot. But for the soldiers who have real heart, it is not the same. If they shoot, we will shoot back, who do they think they are? They said those words. They treated us like brothers in the beginning, like if we are younger they called us younger brothers and if you are older, they called them older brothers. But they changed when we had to carry things on the way. I had to carry very heavy things. My basket was large, big and long. They put all things, including rice, rosella and dried fish for us and milk, snacks for the officers and oil. It weighed about 30 viss. For the food, they gave us a snack. When we met with *Ng'Bpway* and we follow them and they are close, we can't talk and can't eat rice. We will have to eat the snack, first, with water. We ate rice when the conditions were good. If the condition were not good we didn't eat. The food was not good. We had to eat snacks. If the condition was good, we cooked rice in the river. We cooked and we were very hungry. We stole and ate even the rice that was not cooked. Even if the rice was hot, we didn't care. It is important to fill our stomach when we can. For them, they can eat anytime. The food soldiers eat and prisoners eat was very different. They separated food for their officers and separated for themselves. We had a chance to eat but it was not good curry. We had to pick up the leaves from tree that we could eat. They didn't sweep the mines. They called us, '*teacher, come and sweep mines here*.' They didn't sweep mines because they were afraid that they would die. It became like we had to find and feed them. The curry that we ate was banana

pith and jackfruit. One steel jack of rice for three people [porters]. But for them, they eat until they are full. They eat everything their officers have left.

How did soldiers treat porters in frontline?

In the beginning where we first came here, they treated us good. When we had to carry heavy things, no one could do it because we had to climb up and down the mountains. They kicked down the people who can't climb down and pushed up the people who couldn't climb up. We couldn't climb up anymore. They pushed us up when we fell back.

Did they beat and torture you?

I didn't see them kill porters because I was in the front. But I was the one porter who was beaten and punched because I couldn't carry anymore.

Did you have an experience about landmines? Like did the army order porters to sweep mines?

Yes, we had to do this thing. It happened when we took a rest. They called you to go and pluck us this leaf and that leaf. He carried the mine sweeping equipment. He ordered us to go and climb up the tree and pluck from the tree for no reason. We dared not step down. We said, we dare not go after *Sa Ya Gyi* swept the mines. We were tortured when we said this. We couldn't suffer. Instead of getting beaten, we tried to be brave. They can eat food but for us, we had to risk our life.

How did they let porters sleep at night?

The first night, we four or five people slept and one who slept beside me escaped. His name was L---. L---, Pyo Ko Ko and I, we three were in prison together. We also thought about escape. But people were hit by mines so I dared not escape anymore. L--- came to me and told me that he was going to escape. And I told him if you escape, go to sleep early. I dared not to escape but I felt sympathy for him. I dared not to escape yet but he decided to escape by himself. For me, I would run later when I could see the way. He got up and escaped at night. I said '*If you run, take this snack, the snack for my share. This is for you. Take this. For water, find it by yourself. This snack and water is your life.*' I gave him and he escaped. I slept and pretended that I didn't know. At 2:00 am, they changed the guard. As they changed the guard, one of *Sa Ya* came and kicked. Where is the one who slept beside you? I stayed stable and pretended and I turned around and said '*Ha….Sa Ya, he is not here*.' I was kicked at that time. You must know that he escaped. They threatened me. I told them, '*Sa Ya I didn't know*.'

Have you experienced any fighting?

No fighting but the *Ng'Bpway* came and shot four or five times at night. They took cover in their place [trenches]. For mines, just a Lance Corporal stepped on a mine in front of me. They cut off his leg and we carried him back. They swore, '*fucking Ng'Bpway, they plant mines*.' They swear like this. And another one is my friend who was hit. The point [soldier] in the front posted up a stick, they called it a stick but we called it a tree branch. They cut it down and it still had leaves on it. Post up a stick and it means there are mines there. Don't step on the left side. We had to tell it to each other, back one by one from the front to behind. There was a soldier behind and in front of me. I stopped 4 yards away from them. I didn't see where the mine was. They told me don't step down to the left side. So I stopped. He was 4 yards away from me. I went straight and I stepped down to the right side and another to the left side and walked. Three friend of mine at the back stepped down on mines. One of them had his leg blown off and one got injured. His leg also got injured. I am not sure if he died or not. We had to carry him with a hammock. We had to send him back. His face was bleeding. I didn't know if he was already dead or not. But the

officer said '*the two guys who were hit by mines will be given compensation and we will make a fake leg for him and let him go free*.' But I don't think that is true.

Did the prisoners receive medical treatment on the front line?

They gave malaria medicine. We got this medicine when we were on the way. They gave it directly when soldiers went and reported that they couldn't urinate. When we went and asked, they asked us what happened to you. I cannot urinate and I am itchy. Drink a lot of water and it will disappear. They said these words.

How did the army treat villagers when they saw them?

We did arrive to a village but there were no villagers in the village, because they were afraid of them. *A Moe* and *Pa Tee* [Karen villagers] asked for help from the DKBA and the DKBA moved them to the other side. We heard about this.

What did the soldiers or officers tell you before you escaped?

We were told, you guys can escape if you want to escape. You run and if you get free from us, you will be hit by mines. The animals will eat you if you don't die. You will die one day. If the animals don't eat you, you will starve from lack of water. You guys escape and get free from us, you will meet with *Ng'Bpway* and they won't let you stay alive. They will kill you. We also will kill you when we see you. Mostly they said, the *Ng'Bpway* will kill you. They didn't call them the Karen army. They called them *Ng'Bpway*.

Did any porters escape before you?

Yes, they escaped. They escaped during the day and during the nighttime. But most of them escaped at nighttime.

Did any one get re-captured after they escaped?

Two escaped but I don't know whether it was night or daytime. Those two were white-skinned guys. We were in the same column. Two of them escaped and one stepped on a mine and died and he….no no no…it was not him. He escaped but he felt afraid and came back and met with another column. The one who escaped before me, he carried two bags. There were mortars in the bags. He couldn't carry them anymore. He was about 30 years old. We had to climb up and down the mountains. We have to walk on sideways. He threw down the mortar bags and he pretended to go and pick up the bags and bent down. One soldier said fucker, what are you doing? And held up his gun and followed him. He arrived to the valley, very far. We heard his voice. His commander asked him "*did you see him? Shoot him if you see him*". He replied, No I didn't see him. If you didn't see him, come back and we will go. We heard the sound of a mine explode in the evening. We guess the guy who escaped stepped on a mine. We thought like this because we always heard people who escaped step on mines. I always pray for the people who escaped. I pray it will not be them [who steps on a mine].

What will they do to convict porter when they can re-capture them?

They won't do anything. They will watch this guy, where he goes and what he does. He will always be watched.

How many porters are still left in the army unit you came with?

I have to stay with three columns. First, I stayed with the headquarter commander. I had to carry the headquarter commander's things. I was kicked because I couldn't carry. I stayed with the

headquarter commander for a night and he had to go back to take exam. So he went back. Later I arrived to Second-in-Command and we went to Kya Min Gone. We slept there for two nights. Nothing happened on the first night but on the second night the *Ng'Bpway* came and shot four or five times. During the shooting, they stayed in the holes [trenches]. For us, we had to stay on the ground. If the Burmese army shot around, we would be killed. They didn't order us to run because we would arrive to the other group if they ordered us to run. If we arrived to the other the group, they would know how many people [soldiers] there were and where they stayed. They worried about this.

Why did you decide to escape?

I always thought when I stayed with Second-in-Command, I didn't want to stay with them anymore. Life and death, there is a greater chance of death when we stay with them. We didn't know when they would go back. They go back and if they transfer us to another column, what can we do? Even if we don't die with them, maybe we will die with another up-coming column. We can't say for sure about that. I was lucky. At night about 3:00 am we heard the officer say *'At night, the* Ng'Bpway *came and shot. Yes, it is true. The* Ng'Bpway *came and shot.'* I heard the sound at around 5:00 am, the Karen from here talked to each other and the Second-in-Command have walkie talkies and intercept the conversation. He caught the channel but he couldn't understand Karen. The column that I escaped from, there was a Karen guy and he could understand Karen. I thought in my mind it would be very good if they exchange this man to me. I want to go and stay with my friends group. As I told from the moment he doesn't understand Karen so he changed the place. He ordered his soldiers to put me there and called this man here. He was ordered to listen to Karen and left there. I arrived to the place that they let me stay and they asked me for what crime. I told him because of the murder and others. I don't want to talk anymore when they asked how did you kill him. We had to eat jackfruit for two days and one morning, jackfruit and banana pith. They called me and asked me if I was going to escape with him. I told him don't talk to me about this. They will find the way. They asked permission, like teacher I want to go and pick things here and there. Actually, they don't want to pick, they just want to figure out the way to escape. At nighttime, we asked each other, '*hey, will we escape tonight?*' '*Yes, we will run. If you guys want to escape, you can escape. We will all follow.'* We lined up and slept. They talked to each other. I didn't sleep. They slept. At 11:00 pm, we heard the sound of mines exploding. The mines exploded and I was frustrated because they were waking up and we couldn't escape. I told them, '*friends, I am going to sleep.'* I felt frustrated. They should wake up because the mine exploded. I stayed silent and my friend called me to wake up. My friend Kh--- pretended like he was going to pee. And he told us, *'Win Naing, they are all sleeping, including the guards.' 'Ok so we will go. Two of you guys go first and we will follow you later.*' S--- went and peed. We escaped near the stream. We didn't know whether we were going to live or not on the way.

How many days did it take before you met with the Karen army?

We arrived at nighttime. We guessed we had to walk about 15 minutes. There was a stream, we walked in the stream. We thought, they won't put mines in the water. If they put mines, they will put them beside the river when the Burmese army go to drink water. We thought about many things. We four people walked in the deep water. We didn't stay in the shallows. We went for a while and three times a gun was shot. We, six people, escaped. Two group, one with two people and another group of four people. We thought maybe those two guys were shot. Those two people arrived and asked us how is it going. They changed the guard and when they changed the guard, we were not there anymore. They shot three times. That will suffice for them not to be scolded. '*Teacher, those people escaped and I shot them*.' They will lie to Second-in-Command. But really, we are free.

Who did you meet first, villagers or the Karen army?

We met with villagers. If we swam and crossed at night and if the Thai army saw us when we were in the middle of river, they will send us back. They will arrest us and send us back. So this is not a good idea. We will cross in the morning. If we cross in the morning, we can see what is the uniform that Thai police wear and that *Ng'Bpway* wear. The Thais always came to us [when we portered with the Burmese army]. They sent rations. We bear that in mind about the Thai uniform. They [Thai police] sent rations to Kyeh Pyaung Gone for the Burmese army. They were Thai police. We crossed in the morning and we all six met together on the other side. We arrived to the other side and we saw *Pa Tee* and *A Moe* [villagers]. I told them to help us and requested them not to send us to the Thai police. They said '*we won't send you back to the Thai police. We want to help you*.' So we waited here. They said they will feed us rice the next morning. Three boys, three Karen boys, came and called us. We arrived to the village and met with the Captain who drives the car. The Captain called us here.

How many people escaped?

Six people. We escaped at the same time. We all arrived here.

What is your future plan?

I want to meet with my family but I will be arrested if I go back to Myanmar. The sentence will be extended if I am arrested. If the years extend, it will worse for me. I plan to work here.

Interview | Pyit Zon (January 2010, Dooplaya District)

Address prior to arrest:
Ethnicity:
Religion:
Occupation prior to arrest:
Reported reason for arrest:
Date of arrest:
Reported sentence:
Reported date sentence began:
Prison(s): Insein
Date sent to labour camp:
Labour camp: Taung-zun
Date taken to porter:
Size of group taken to porter: 100 from Insein
Area/ location portered: Kyeh Pyaung Gone; Htee Taw
Battalion: LIB #208
Number of soldiers and porters (exact, not a ratio):
Date of interviewee's escape:
Number of porters escaped (not including interviewee):
Location of interviewee's escape: January --- 2011
Location of interview: ---
Date of interview: January --- 2011
Future plans: Work in Thailand; send money home

Which battalion are you from?

208

208?

Yes.

What did you face along the road?

I faced more bad things, less good. Mostly, I was stabbed by the butt of the gun if I could not follow. They controlled us strictly. I could carry things for one portion. Soldier or service porter, if one of them hit by landmines, they ordered me to carry things from the dead person's materials. For two persons they carried only one thing and I could not. I could not carry alone and then I fell over very often on the mountain. Behind me, they kicked and ordered me like this. Those soldiers kicked us with their legs and beat our face.

How did you distinguish whether they were soldiers or corporals or sergeants?

We can distinguish them. The highest officers have three stars in a section.

Did they have three-starred officers here?

Here, they don't wear their badge and they took them off. As they called them, we knew that the captain was the captain.

They took off their badges there?

They take off their badges and we don't know who is the captain when their enemies fight them.

What is your name?

My name is Pyit Zon.

Which prison did you come from?

Rangoon's Insein Prison and they took me out from Taung-zun Camp. Along the Karen villages, I could not carry things and I fell over. I was not lucky. Then we arrived here slowly and slowly. I am only one person and I had to carry things for two people therefore I could not carry them.

Why did only you have to carry things for two persons?

When the soldiers were hit by landmines. The soldiers who stayed behind, they had to carry the front soldiers' haversacks and they didn't want to carry them. The Corporals or Sergeants ordered us to carry them. I said I cannot carry. I am carrying as much as I can. I cannot carry and I will fall over. They kicked me and ordered me to go. Kicked and pushed me.

Now, have you been to hospital?

I have not gone to hospital.

You have not gone?

Yes.

How many days have you been here?

About three days.

Currently, are you sick?

I was so sick. I'm not shaking. I'm sick and weak from getting injured there. I'm weak and dozy.

Have you faced with people being killed?

In front of me, I faced [saw] two people who were killed. Other three friends of mine from the same prison, they deserted. One of them ran from the front [of the column] and escaped. The second one was hit by landmines. The last one was afraid and ran back. He ran back to be arrested. The soldiers pointed at him with guns and shot at him on the mountain. They shot at him and kicked him. The one who was hit by landmines, he shouted, '*Help me, help me*.' While he was shouting beside the tree, he was stabbed with the knife which was on the point of the gun. They just left him like that.

Which side did they stab? Right side or left side or neck?

Actually, I did not know whether it was right side or left side. I saw that he sat down and was stabbed.

Do you know their [the porters'] names?

One of them called Hsa Rah. we just call him like this '*Hsa Rah*.' The other one called '*Mu Tar*.' Two people. Hsa Rah was the one who was shot. The one who was hit by a landmine and was stabbed by the knife, he was Mu Tar.

What was his crime?

I don't know what crime.

Were they in Rangoon prison?

Yes, were in Rangoon prison, in Insein. That was before we went to *yeh beh.*

How many buildings [from the prison] were the porters who were involved from?

One person was from number five building and one person was from number one building.

Which building was Hsa Dar from?

From number one building. Hsa Dar was my friend. He had gotten tuberculosis. He had to take tuberculosis medicine for six months. He was sent to hospital. He had not finished taking medicine for six months; he just finished two months of medicine and was sent to be a porter. When the time was getting close to take porters from *yeh beh*, they checked the prisoners' health. We took off our clothes and they asked, '*what disease do you have?'.* They did not check properly because they just asked the questions. I said, '*I have got malaria*'. They just said, '*Nothing is happening to you, just follow*'. They disposed of their responsibility by asking questions. 'What disease do you have?' They just asked like this about our diseases and did not cure anything.

How many people [porters] came from Insein Prison?

One hundred people came from Insein.

How old were the oldest people?

Over fifty years old. A fifty three year old man was included with those sent to porter from Taung-zun and he is still there now [with the army]. There were eight people [porters] in our section. They usually divided seven or eight people in each section. Eight people for one section but we got only six people in our section.

Eight soldiers or eight porters in a section?

No, there were twelve or thirteen soldiers, including the warrant officer.

How many officers in a section?

Two officers. As I know, one warrant officer and the other one was warrant officer (2) with three chevrons. The rest of them were the soldiers with one chevron and two chevrons.

Eight porters?

Yes.

Six people deserted?

Two people remain there now. One is fifty-three years old.

How about the others? Was anybody killed or hit by the landmines?

Yes, hit by landmines. One person was hit by landmines, he was a porter. Another person was hit by landmines. He was a soldier.

Which date?

I don't remember the date.

At the beginning or middle or end of the journey?

After we came from Kyeh Pyaung Gone, one was hit by a landmine when we went and arrived at Htee Taw after one week long. A soldier with one chevron was hit first by the landmine. He was hit by the landmine and did not dare to continue to go and withdrew. There was a very narrow road that was only wide enough for one person to be able to walk [single-file]. A service personnel stood up here, the soldiers came across to him and they did not dare to step outside of the road. They ordered that service personnel to step outside of the road. That man [porter] moved beside him outside of the road and both of his legs were cut [blown] off. They shot him with a gun and left him like that.

During this happening, were there any officers there?

Yes, there were, the operations commander was there.

Did they order them not to do that?

They themselves ordered them to do it. The Battalion commander and operations commander were there.

What is the battalion commander's name?

I did not know the battalion commander's name. We did not call him by his name. We called him *Aba*. We called the battalion commander and the battalion deputy commander *Aba Lay*. We called the most powerful one who is the operations commander *Aba*.

Who shot and killed the porter?

Thep eople who shot and killed the porter were soldiers with chevrons. They ordered their soldiers who stayed close to them to shoot him.

Did you hear when they ordered them to shoot?

In front of us, they just shot him in front of us.

What kind of sound did they say?

If he cannot follow. Ask this man, '*can he follow?'* How he can follow without legs therefore we need to call [bring] him with us. They still call [bring] the soldiers to go with them if the soldier gets hit by a landmine. But if a porter was hit by a landmine, they don't call [bring] the porter with them. He will die if we leave him like this. But they did not say '*leave him*'. They said 'get rifd of him'.

In your heart, how did the service personnel feel when they saw it?

Aww, not feeling good in my heart. The same prisoners, we were friends. Although they were not friends [with the soldiers], they are the same nationality. It is not good. For instance, we are two people, it is not good in our hearts. There was nothing we could do.

What were the crimes of the prisoners [porters]?

Less murder crimes. Most of them were cases of theft. There were not many drug crimes . There were only twenty murder crimes among one hundred people. There were some small crimes, like the crime of walking past curfew at night. Many kinds of crimes. If one thousand prisoners come to porter, eight hundred of those people are small [petty] criminals.

When were you there what was your prison number?

In Insein prison, my prison number was 02740/Ka Gyi. In Taung-zun prison, my number is 1959/c.

How did you escape?

At night, we escaped about three days ago. We were waiting for them to pas out [go to sleep] but did not get it. We negotiated with six people at night. From those six people, the other one is Tha Htun and we were the only two who first deserted. We did not stand up and run. They were taking sentry duty. Bamboos were there and we were in the centre. They just took sentry duty at the front. This side was empty. It was a place where we could go to toilet. We turned and ran to this side. We reached the Moei River. We swam across the river and came to this side. I was sinking. Luckily, though, I didn't die.

Did you sink in the middle of the river?

The place where I swam, it was wide and deep. My slippers and clothes sank.

Beside the church?

Yes, at the church. Beside the church.

Do you want to go back to Rangoon?

I'm afraid. Uncle, I would like to request you that don't confer [hand over] us to the [Burmese or Thai] government.

These people [the Burmese army] will not come to this side.

However, in my heart, I want to fight these people. I would like to join with you if I can. If not, I don't want to go back to Burma. I will work here and support my parents. I will send money from here. I don't want to go back and I don't not dare to go back also.

Did that side [SPDC] ever threaten you?

They said, '*we will kill you and cut your throat*.' They told us '*don't desert,* Ng'Bpway *[the KNLA] will kill you and cut your throat*.' In reality, we faced *Ng'Bpway*, the group that holds weapons. It is not the same as the SPDC soldiers said. To us, *Ng'Bpway* is better than the SPDC army many times. We escaped because of the *Ng'Bpway* organisation.

Interview | Kyaw Min, (January 2011, Dooplaya District)

Address prior to arrest: Y--- village, Paukkaung city, Bago division
Ethnicity:
Religion:
Occupation prior to arrest: Farmer [paddy and sesame]
Marital Status: Married [three children]
Reported reason for arrest: Murder
Date of arrest: October --- 2010
Reported sentence: 10 years
Reported date sentence began: December --- 2010
Prison(s): Pyay; Bago; Pa'an
Date sent to labour camp:
Labour camp:
Date taken to porter: December 30th 2010
Size of group taken to porter: 50 from Pyay
Area/ location portered:
Battalion:
Number of soldiers and porters (exact, not a ratio): 50 soldiers and 15-20 porters
Date of interviewee's escape:
Number of porters escaped (not including interviewee):
Location of interviewee's escape:
Location of interview: ---
Date of interview: January --- 2011
Future plans:

For what crime were you sent to prison?

Murder. I didn't kill anyone myself. Other people killed and I went by there. I had to be in prison for ten years.

What was your prisoner number?

3-----.

What is the section of the Penal Code for murder?

302.

How many years was your sentence?

Ten years.

When did they sentence you?

December 7th 2010.

When did the event happen?

I don't remember. It happened in October but I didn't remember the date exactly. It was in the end of the month, around day 25. Close to the end of the month, over day 25. I don't remember exactly.

Can you explain to me about the event?

It was the time when I borrowed a farm because we had no food to eat. It was the time when I came back from the forest. I came back and I saw a corpse that had been killed by people on the way. It was on the way where I came back so the village head said I killed this man and reported to the police to come and put me in jail for murder. I saw the corpse and reported to Bpyun Khaw village head that some one was killed. There was no one on the way when I went and reported. He told me that you killed and so he reported to police to come and arrest me. I handed in myself. My wife didn't know. We had to let her know later. We are poor and lower than everything.

Which police came and arrested you?

Police from Paukkaung police station.

When did they arrest you?

They arrested me on the ---.

How many days did it take between when they reported it to the police and the police came and arrested you?

Two days. On October --- 2010.

Where did they send you after you were arrested?

They sent me to Paukkaung police station after they arrested me. The police interrogated me when I arrived at the police station. I told them I came back from the farm that I borrowed. I didn't kill. I told them.

Were you drunk at that time?

I don't drink alcohol. I didn't drink alcohol until now. The interrogated me and I said no it was not me. I refused but I couldn't. They asked me to give evidence. I didn't have evidence on my side. I didn't have cogent evidence so it became murder.

Where did they send you after they interrogated you?

They sent me to the district court of law. They sent me from the police station to Pyay prison.

When did they send you?

I had to stay at the police station for a month. After about a month, they sent me to Pyay prison. They sent me to Pyay prison in the end of November. I don't remember the date. I had to face the trail at the district court of law. After I faced the trail and I was pass the judge and I was included as porter.

Did you have to go to the court of law directly after you arrived at Pyay prison?

Yes, I had to go when they appointed me, seven days a week or ten days a week and five a week. My mother told me that she doesn't have money. She asked me to confess as I did this. So I confessed that I killed the man. My mother is old and she doesn't want to be hurt. For this reason, I confessed and was sent to prison for ten years.

Who is the judge?

The judge is a woman. She looked like a teacher. She was old, around 40 years old. She was the judge in Pyay city.

Do you remember the date when you were sentenced?

December 2010. I didn't stay in prison for a long time after I was sentenced. I had to come to here.

How many days did you stay in prison?

About seven or eight days and I was taken out to porter from here. They took out us on December 30th. We slept one night at Bago prison and a night at Pa'an prison.

When did you know you were going to porter?

On December 30th 2010, at 4:00pm. They called out people name one by one. They ordered us to line up and said that we were going to porter. I didn't know what porter is. I had never heard. They said people who can pay money can stay but people who can't pay money would be included. They took out 50 people from Pyay prison. People from my home [family] couldn't come [to give money] so I was included as a porter.

Where did they send those 50 prisoners after they took you out?

We had to sleep one night at Bago prison. They took off us on December 30th 2010. In the afternoon after they made the agenda and next morning at 8:00am, they took us off. They took us out on December 31st at 8:00am. We, 50 prisoners, arrived at Bago prison at 11:00pm. They sent us by car. The cars were green.

Who was included with you?

They police were included with us. There were five police included in our car. They were police.

Which prison did they send you?

To Bago prison. we arrived at Bago prison at 11:00pm. We had to sleep one night at there. Then, next morning, they sent us to here.

How many cars?

There were two cars. They carried 25 people in a car. There were 5 police included in each car. They covered the car with tarps. It can prevent the rain. It is like a military color, green. We can't see anything outside.

Can you breathe very well in the car?

They make a small hole in the back. Sometime we couldn't breathe very well.

What about clothes?

We had to wear prisoner uniforms and they shackled our legs in pairs. We had to wear prisoner uniforms. They started their trip at 8:00am in the morning and arrived at 11:00pm at night.

How many times did they feed you on the way?

Just only one time we could eat. They packed up a small pack of rice when we leave the prison. The small pack of rice included egg and dried fishpaste. They packed it in plastic. We could drink the water that we brought with us but if you didn't bring water, you can't drink water. We can take our water if we have. People who don't have a water bottle, they can't drink.

Can't the porters ask for water from them?

They said they had no water and they didn't give water to us.

What did you have to do when you stayed in prison?

We had to do everything. We had to do paddy fields, iron and carry paddy baskets. We had to put the harvest paddy inside and split [separate the husks] by hand. The work period was 6:00am to 12:00 [noon] and 1:00pm to 5:00pm. We have to do it everyday. They fed us rice when we were taking a rest. People who couldn't do paddy had to carry baskets and we had to do it until we had one hundred baskets of grain in a day. I don't know what they will do if we can't do one hundred baskets of grain in a day because we are workers and we do our work. But they said we have to finish one hundred basket of grain in a day. There were 60 people who had to work in the paddy field. 4,000 paddies were done by 60 people.

What are 4,000 paddies?

4,000 baskets of grain.

How many people had to do it to be able to finish 100 baskets in day?

60 people have to work. Sometime, it was over 100 baskets and sometimes, it is not complete.

What do you mean 4,000?

4,000 baskets of grain.

You have to do that work in a day?

No, we have to do it until it was finished.

How many days did you have to work?

You have to work as long as you stayed in prison. For me, I just have a chance to take a rest for two days during I stayed in prison. After two days resting, I was called for porter to here. We had to make iron, carry baskets and pick beans. I did it for two days.

You said you arrived at Bago prison at December 31st and you slept one night there. Where did they send you in the next morning?

In the next morning they sent us to Pa'an prison. We left Bago prison at about 7:00am and we arrived at 3:00pm. We slept one night at there. They unshackled us at there, at Pa'an prison. We had to sleep one night at Pa'an prison. They building that we slept doesn't have name but it was wrote down 112. We had to sleep at room No# 4. There is just only a building that we saw. They shackled us again and about at 9:00-10:00am, the soldier came and called us.

Were they soldiers? Which soldiers?

I don't know which soldiers but there is Number #22 that was written down on their shoulder. They were soldiers and we were not warmly treated by them.

Were there any other prisoners that were also sent when you arrived at Pa'an prison?

Yes, of course. There are many prisoners from other prisons. As I know, it was included with Thayet, Bago, Pa'an and from *yeh beh*. People had to stand and they took them out from every prison. They left behind 10 prisoners from our group and they took out 40 people.

There were 40 people in your group that was taken out. Were there any others included also?

We seven people, they took us out separately. We were all from Pyay prison.

How? Can you explain to me carefully.

Like this, there were ten soldiers here. They picked up anybody who they wanted.

All seven people were from Pyay prison?

Yes, all were from Pyay prison. They separated convict porters to each group to follow them among 40 people.

What about people from other prisons?

People said they were included but we don't know exactly.

Where did they go after they called you out?

They called us to the front line. There are two small Karen villages. The road ended and the car couldn't go. They started ordering us to carry things because we had to enter the jungle.

Do you know the village's name?

I don't know the village's name.

What car did you come with from Pa'an to Karen villages?

We came with military cars.

How many porters and soldiers were in a truck?

The car that we rode, most were porters and a few were soldiers. There were 7 soldiers included in the car we rode. Behind and in front of our car were the soldiers' cars. There were 4, 5 or 8 cars. There were 40 of us included before they separated us. There were 40 porters and 7 soldiers in a car. We have to keep our heads down and couldn't look anywhere. Even though the space [above our heads] was high, we had to ride like this.

At the moment you said they took out seven people from Pa'an?

No, it was like this, we all 40 people had to follow the soldiers that I said had #22 on their shoulders. They separated us out when the road ended when we arrived to Karen villages. They chose people in prison and they picked us up when the road ended.

Did you have to carry as soon as you climbed down from the car?

Yes.

What did you have to carry?

I don't know because they pack up with bag but it is very heavy. The weight is the same as a bag of rice. But I don't know what it is. We start carry and enter to jungle. We entered to jungle and after climbing up over three mountains, one couldn't climb up anymore and he couldn't carry anymore. And he was shot to dead with gun at there, in front of us. I didn't know his name but he is about 17 years old. He is very young. He is also from Pyay prison. he has close relationship with a child and he called the child to go and watch movie and he was accused that the rape the child. So he was prosecuted with rape. He said he is very close with a girl and he called the girl to go and watch movie. The girl parents prosecuted him by rape. There are many kinds of people in prison. I don't know their entire name. But we are close to each other.

Was he sick?

He was like us. as he climb up the mountains and when he had to climb up more mountains, he can't do anymore. Instead of helping him, they said we got busy job because of you and shot him.

Who shot at him?

The soldier. I didn't that he is Major or private. He is fat and big. I saw he has 3 chevrons.

What did he say to the porter?

He asked can't you follow us anymore. And the porter begs him and said I can't carry anymore. He beg said don't kill me. I will try as much as I can. After that [the soldier said] we don't want to have a busy job because of you and push him down and shot to him.

How far you are stay with the incident place?

It is far from as this river. I heard the sound he begs to the soldier. I heard the gun shot. We are very close.

When did they event happened?

It was about at 1:00pm when he was shot. We hadn't eaten yet. The fat guy told us if you do things like this then this will happen to you like this. They didn't do anything after they shot him. They just left him like this. I can see him. I was a witness. I felt a lot of pity. We felt pity for him. We have never experienced like this so we are so afraid. We tried to climb up even though we couldn't climb up. After two days the young boy was shot, a guy who was the same as us and from Pyay prison. People called him K'La we call him K'La Lay [Little K'La]. They sliced his throat with a knife. K'Lay Lay also is the same as the young boy. He couldn't climb up anymore. He was from Pyay prison and Pyay city. I don't know his name but people called him K'La. Everyone in the whole Pyay prison called him K'La Lay. He had to be in prison with a theft case. I guess he had to be imprisoned for one and a half years. He was also the same. He ouldan't follow anymore and he was [shot] and left behind. He was about 20 years old.

Tell me what happened.

I didn't see but the Karen man who has returned to the legal fold [former KNLA soldier who defected to the Tatmadaw] told us. He had a beard. He told you us you guys be careful. One guy was killed yesterday. When we asked him, was the guy who was killed named K'La Lay and he couldn't carry things anymore and he said yes. We didn't see. He was left behind us. The Karen guy killed him by slicing his throat with a knife. The killer, himself came and told us that

he killed him. He couldn't avoid it. He had to kill him. They worried that the *Ng'Bpway* will question him if they see him. We knew nothing about *Ng'Bpway*.

When did they kill the young boy?

They killed the young boy in the second day. We had already passed three mountains. We already slept one night. They killed the young boy after one day and after two days, they killed K'La Lay. After 5 or 6 days, they killed another guy called Yeh Lay. After 5 days, we had almost arrived to here. We already passed many mountains. We called him Yeh Lay. The people in prison called him Yeh Lay. He is also from Pyay prison. He was imprisoned for three years. I don't know what case. But he had to be in prison for 3 years.

Why did they kill him?

He slipped and fell. He couldn't walk. There were my things in his basket. We shared the weight with each other and we told him to follow us and we left him behind. The soldiers gave the order and called 'hey, you man'. We three porters turned back and called him. When we three people arrived there, he was kicked down to the gorge. We saw it and we said what happened to him. We went and pulled him up and we saw he was dead with a hole in his chest. We thought he was stabbed with a knife. Three were dead among seven people [porters] in our group. Just four people are still left.

How long did you have to carry?

About 20 days. This is what I experienced in 20 days. We are afraid about mine. Because we heard the sounds of mind explode. And we heard people talk about who was hit by mine. There are many porters were hit by mine. We didn't see. We just hear the sound. People from Taung K'lay prison saw it and people who came behind witness. We didn't see. I just witness those three people. They killed them in front of me. They were killed when they can't walk anymore. we are seven people but just four people still left and we have to carry for those three people. The things that we have to carry don't decrease but increase. We carry and carry and I told my friends if we still stay like this, we will hit by mine or we will be killed by them. I will not stay anymore. I will flee. I will escape to the place where I can't protect myself. Matthew is from another group. I met with him. I asked him that he is going to escape and he told me that he is going to escape. I told him that I am going to escape. I don't want to say anymore like this. We escaped and we had to sleep two nights in jungle. We didn't eat for three days. we crossed the river and when we reach up to the hill, we were pointed with gun. We are afraid when we were pointed with gun. We said we are convict porters. And I told Matthew they will kill us if they are Karen who returned to the legal fold. They are talking with monk. We have never experience about this. Are you real convicting porter they asked? We are real convict porter. They didn't kill us and feed us enough. We thank people in here a lot. They protect us and support everything. We get happy life when we arrived to this side. We are already dead if we are at other side.

How many nights did you have to sleep in the jungle?

Two nights.

How did you decide to escape and how many people?

Just only two of us escaped. He is going to shit and I also will go and shit. There is a big gorge beside the place where we are going to shit. I asked him what is your situation and he said he is going to escape. It was about at 8:00pm. I asked permission and I said '*Sa Ya I will go and shit*.' They are drunk. I don't know where they got alcohol. They said go by yourself but be careful about mines. It is your bad luck if you step down on one. He let me go. The other guy also came to shit and I asked him to escape and he said let's go. We can go back to our family if we don't

die. We both jumped down to the gorge and escaped. We dared not sleep that night in the jungle.

Didn't they know?

They didn't know. They didn't follow us and shoot us. They were unaware. They will know when they recheck people. I escaped with him as soon as I met with him. We don't know here is Thailand or Myanmar when we arrived to this side. We know nothing. We walked and one of the captains said do you guy know where you arrived now. And we told him that we didn't know. I told him that we are somewhere in Myanmar. And he said 'no you are in Thailand now.' And we told him that we are going to die and he said 'no you are not going to die. All people here are going to protect you.' It is true. They provided us enough food and they gave us cheroots and bought snack for us at night. He is a Thai commander. He came and talked to us. He is fine.

What did he say?

He asked do we want to go back to our family. We told him that we want to go back if people send us back now. My wife has given birth when I was imprisoned. My child is just about 4 months now. I have my mother. She is 70 years old. She stays together with us. My wife can't work and my old mother has to work for her.

How did they feed you on the frontline?

We had to eat banana pith. And we ate jackfruit when we arrived to the village. They ate beans they boiled and they cooked the bean water with banana pith for us. We couldn't eat anything else. We just had to eat those. They gave rice just one time a day.

Tell me about your day work after you woke up?

They woke you to get up in the morning. They woke us up and they fed us rice. We had to carry after we ate.

Was the food enough for you?

No. they fed just a little rice. They put in a small plate. We had to walk the whole day on the mountain until 4:00pm, climb up and down the mountain. They let us eat at 6 or 7:00pm. this is the time when they take a rest. they take a rest but we have to cook. Don't need to say about oppressing. The other young boy went back to prison. They young boy who had to be my partner. That young boy, we can't walk since he comes. He was beat when he can't climb up the mountain and he was kicked down when he can't climb down the mountain. How can I say for this young boy, he can't die? He was hit by mine and was sent back to the back.

Was he hit by a mine?

Their soldiers were hit by mines and it included him. We didn't see it. He was sent back at the same time as the soldiers who were hit by mines. They worred that it will become worse for him so they said you can't follow us anymore. You go back and stay in prison and he was sent back to prison. He was imprisoned with a theft case. He is from Paukkaung city. He had to be imprisoned for one and a half years. He did not die. He was prosecuted as 18 years old but actually he was just 16 years old.

What about the food that you have to eat in the evening?

The same. Every day was the same. For soldiers, they eat tinned meat and fried beans. They had meat. For us, we ate bean water and banana pith.

What do soldiers carry?

They carry guns and bullets with them. We all had to carry the rest. Some porters had to carry rice and another one had to carry fish paste. For me, they hadn't taken out anything from my basket until I escaped. I still don't know what was in it.

What do you want to say about something that you have in your mind?

I want to say people here are my benefactors that I can never forget. They saved my life and looked after me. In the whole of my life, I can't forget them. I thank them a lot. My life would have ended if I stayed on the other side. I hope one day I will meet with my family.

How many are soldiers with the troop you follow with?

Over 50 soldiers and 15-20 porters.

Which prison are they from?

I don't know but I think most are from Pyay prison.

Have you experienced with the fighting since you came along on the trip?

I have never experienced it. Just carried and walked. I heard the sound of explosions but I didn't know what it was. After they killed a guy, they ordered us to stay at the place where we were. We can't talk to the Captain like we talk here. We can't talk to each other. If we talked they came and asked what are you talking about? Are you discussing escape? We couldn't talk to each other.

Interview | Laing Oo, 43 (January 2011, Dooplaya District)

Address prior to arrest: T--- village, K' Wa township
Ethnicity: Burmese
Religion: Buddhist
Occupation prior to arrest:
Reported reason for arrest: Burglary of government rice stores during 1988 uprising
Date of arrest: October 1990
Reported sentence: 28 years and 3 months
Reported date sentence began:
Prison(s): Bago prison, Insein Prison, Thayet Prison, then Taung-zun
Date sent to labour camp:
Labour camp: Taung-zun
Date taken to porter: January 2nd 2011
Size of group taken to porter: 100 from Taung-zun
Area/ location portered: Kyeh Pyaung Gone [camp]; Htee T' Htee; Thaw Yin River
Battalion: IB 22 [LIB 208]; Company Commander Pa Nya Naing and Sergeant Maung Ni Win
Number of soldiers and porters (exact, not a ratio): 40 porters with LIB 208
Date of interviewee's escape:
Number of porters escaped (not including interviewee):
Location of interviewee's escape:
Location of interview:
Date of interview: Jan --- 2011
Future plans:

Which prison were you in?

First Bago prison, Insein Prison, Thayet Prison, then Taung-zun *kyawt htot lote* [rock production] *yeh beh* Camp. They started to extract porters there, at Taung-zun. Taung-zun *kyawt htot lote* Camp.

Which township is that in?

Bilin Township

In Mon State?

Aw, it is so close to Mon State.

Older brother's name? [Note: throughout this interview, the interviewer refers to the interviewee as 'older brother' in the third person as a mark of respect]

Laing Oo.

How about age?

43 years old.

For what crime were you in prison?

Burglary crime.

We heard that it was a political crime. Is it?

It was not a political crime. We have to eat and drink therefore the government opened [the government rice stores] for us themselves. [inaudible] We bought rice from rice delegates. They taxed us a 5 kyat rate and we took a 4 kyat rate. We took responsibility for the cars not to be snatched. From a packet of rice, we took 4 kyat per *pyi* (1.6 kg).

Where?

Bago divison.

When did you go to prison?

In October 1990

In October 1990. After the 1988 uprising?

Yes.

What was the main reason that you had to go to prison?

The crime of burglary of the rice store.

Before that time, what did you do?

Opened a tea shop with my parents.

Older brother, what was the purpose of burglary of the rice store? We want to know more about that to be more clear.

Right, it was not burglary, I just opened it, you know? Closely, including my friends, including people who I did not know, also people who could not buy rice and people who could not see. The purpose was to get convenient food for those people. According to cars, the snatch between them….

How about the cars? How do they tax the cars?

Eastern Bago is the place of crossroads. Sea routes, cars' roads, it is the crossroads. The area where I lived at the eastern side, we could carry the rice to the island. This year, all rice cars stopped on the island. Starving people grabbed the rice cars. We negotiated with the traders. Our village's name was not ruined. It was convenient for everyone; people who did not have rice for eating and drinking got food and the traders also got benefit because of the negotiation [about paying the tax].

We heard that all the rice stores were burgled. We did not know how they were burgled. Some people went to prison and some did not. So, at that time, they sentenced you for that and you were incarcerated in prison?

Yes.

How many years did they incarcerate you in prison older brother?

All together, 28 years and 3 months.

In terms of your incarceration, how do you view it older brother? Was their sentence fair or unfair? What is your personal conception? As I see it, twenty eight years are…

Are many, are many. Violated the law? I violated. The rice store is the public's rice store (but controlled by the government and owned by the government). We opened the rice store and did not have the right of distributing the rice but we distributed it for starving people. We violated the law because of burglary of the rice store. But the sentenced for the crime is too many years.

How many people were implicated together with you or included in the trial?

Not a few people, it was only me because I stayed there [in my village]. The rest of the people went here and there [went into hiding]

How many of you were incarcerated in prison?

Only me.

Therefore, did they transfer you to different prisons step by step?

Yes.

You changed the prison step by step and you arrived to this side?

Yes. From Taung-zun *kyawt htot lote* [stone production] Camp.

This is where?

Taung-zun.

At Taung-zun *kyawt htot lote* Camp, can you tell us a little bit about the situation before they extracted [took out] the porters? How did you live and eat in prison?

I was there a long time. On March --- 2007, I arrived at Taung-zun *kyawt htot lote* Camp. Since coming there, it was almost four years ago. As for eating and drinking, the rice they fed was not enough. They fed curry to us but not often, we got meat twice per week. They fed us only twice a week so we did not get enough. We did not get full wages from our prison jobs either. The state's officers specify the wages for the job. For a whole stone, traders give three thousand kyat. Mine office officers take two thousand kyat and they give only one thousand kyat for the prisoners and we still have to share half for the staff from the money that they have given us. They misuse money step by step. Actually, our wages were nothing for us and the staff. We earned three thousand kyat per whole stone but we got only five hundred kyat. Even if we got ten stones we earned only five thousand kyat. And we still had to share that with our eighty prisoners, so we got only about 150 kyat per person. They were illegally selling stones. For a whole stone called *Chethin*, we earned eighteen thousand kyat or nineteen thousand kyat. We can use five thousand kyat if they get one truck of stone (*Chethin*). This is legal stealing and selling.

How many people had to do work per mine? How long did you have to work for?

There were around eighty people. From among eighty people, we had a hammer group, a throwing [carrying] stones group and a prisoner management group. Apart from the prisoner management group, we (hammer and carrying groups) all sent two truckloads of stones if we got two truckloads of stone. And we sent three truckloads of stone if we got three truckloads of stones. According to entitlement [rank], except the prisoner management groups, we did not have respect [payment] as the people who really did the job.

Do you have a family older brother?

Yes I do.

In Burma?

Yes.

In Rangoon?

No, in L--- village, A--- township.

Is it P--- village?

Yes, it is P--- village.

Could your family visit you when you were in the prison?

Yes. They came to see me.

Did they limit how many times per month?

There was no limit. For meeting them one time, we could meet them every three days.

Where did they meet you? In prison?

In prison. They could meet me inside the prison.

Could you stay together?

Yes. My wife was allowed to sleep there at night. My family could come in the morning and stay until three or four in the afternoon, like my mother and younger sister.

Older brother, do you have any children?

I do not have.

You do not have a son or daughter?

No.

You are not married?

Yes

Your family, relatives, brother and sister came to see you?

My mother and younger sister came to see me.

Older brother was in prison, so did you have a chance to read books and magazines?

Since 2002, we had a chance to read. Before we did not have a chance to read and we would be sentenced [punished] if we listened to the radio. Later they allowed us to read things such as magazines and journals.

Did they have a library?

They did not have a library.

But they let you read? So you got book from somewhere else and you were allowed to read it?

Yes.

Your family brought it for you?

Yes. Convicts share the books with each other. They check the books from the house (from prisoners' families).

Were you allowed to listen to the radio?

They did not let us listen to the radio. We could just watch TV as *Myanmar A' Tha* (Burma Channel).

You have to watch with a lot of people?

Yes.

Newspapers and magazines that you were allowed to read, were they the Burma-published newspapers or were there any international newspapers?

Private magazines.

In Burma?

Yes. We were only allowed to read private magazines from Burma and Burmese government-published magazines.

Older brother. When you were in prison, you had to change to different prisons step by step. At that time, have you ever experienced the visit of an international organisation?

I have experienced the visit of an international organisation in October 1999. It was the ICRC.

Did anything change after the ICRC came there? Did your living situation get better?

There were many things that changed after the ICRC organisation came.

What were they? Tell us.

Before we did not have enough rice to eat and we did not have enough water to take a bath. We lost our rights that we were supposed to get. Such as the right to read, travel and cook curry. We had enough rice to eat, could read magazines and could keep a TV after the ICRC organisation came. Previously, we were totally in the dark. Now, our eyes and ears were opened. As for water, we could take a bath whenever we wanted in Thayet prison. It became like this. There are other witnesses.

When the ICRC came, were they mainly checking the convicts' situation?

They checked money to support people who were supposed to get money.

Did you get the money after the ICRC organisation went back?

ICRC organisation gave us the amount when they met us with our family at the office. They did not give everybody. It was a travel fee. Many people were happy to get the money from the ICRC.

Did older brother have a chance to meet with them while the ICRC organisation was visiting there?

They let us meet. We had to stand up in a line and they called people who they wanted to talk to. We ourselves also could go to the place where they called us if we wanted to talk with them. They asked us the situation in the prison. We told them about the needs for the convicts and the reasons that we did not dare to report to the prison authority and they negotiated with us before the time they nearly went. Before we had to milk the beans but we did not get entitlement to even half of one kyat. We got half of our entitlement after the ICRC organisation came. For instance, we milked beans and we got five hundred kyat if we earned one thousand kyat. We got entitlement like this. By letter, we can contact our family legally.

You were sentenced to burglary. Were there any other political prisoners in the prison in which you lived?

There were a lot.

How were they kept? They were mixed with other prisoners or kept separately?

Well-known people were kept in an apartment and the other political prisoners were kept with other criminal convicts. They kept fifty or so people in a building in Insein prison. Bago prison is a little bit narrow. We could see the road and the university. People are not kept like that in Thayet Prison.

How many political prisoners were there?

In Thayet prison? There were a lot in Thayet prison. Around twenty people were kept in a building. 17, 1, 2 and 1 are there. 11, 1, 2, 3 and 4 were there.

How many people were in a prison?

The whole of the prison, there were one thousand and three hundred or one thousand and four hundred people in Thayet Prison.

Did they inform you that you were going to porter before calling you to come to Karen State?

They did not inform us anything. I am a *lu nyain* [long-term] convict and it is not right that I should be taken away from prison.

I do not understand. Please explain what is a *lu nyain* convict ?

I was a long-term convict and I am more familiar than ordinary convicts if they want to hold hands together with me. This is my personal reason. I was involved in portering and had to come to the frontline because I was not getting along well with the jailers. I had given the jailer money and then my mother did not come with more money. My younger sister and brother in-law came and brought money. I always gave him 15,000 kyat or 20,000 kyat per week. And my mother came without money and they asked for money at once when they saw her. I also did not work but I had to take sentry duty. I believed I had an understanding with the jailer. I told him that my mother did not bring much money, so take the money next week. I always gave him money. This

time, he did not have understanding with me and we argued with each other a little bit. Then I was sent to be a porter.

Older brother said you did not know that you would have to carry things along the border line?

I did not know.

How did they call you and order you to be a porter?

They called us in the morning and we knew that it was for *wan saung.* They called us and locked our legs.

What did you know?

That we were being called for *wan saung*. They will send us to *wan saung* with battalions, to *Pa Thein* battalion.

You started to know at that time?

Yes.

Did you know that they would send you and what you would have to do?

I did not know.

How many convicts were taken with you, older brother?

All together were one hundred people. One hundred at *kyawt htot lote* Camp on 2nd January.

On 2nd January?

It was a Saturday.

How did they send you starting from prison to where? Explain to us a little bit, older brother.

On 2nd January, they called one hundred people to Taung-zun Camp by military trucks. There were 135 or 190 military trucks. We arrived at Thaton camp and slept there on 2nd January. In the morning on 3rd January, IB 22 subordinate LIB 208 called us to go with them. We were forty convicts with the 208 battalion. On the 3rd during the night , we slept at Sai Ei Nya Tit camp. We started to move after we slept there. On January 4th during the day, we nearly arrived at Kyeh Pyaung Gone and we slept on the truck. We reached Kyeh Pyaung Gone on January 5th. The rations and oil were left on the military truck, we had send it to Taung-zun Camp. We had to carry out their orders. On January 5th and 6th, we slept at Kyeh Pyaung Gone. On January 7th during the day, we started to move as a column. I was involved in 208 battalion's Company 1 and fifteen people were with me.

Older brother, one hundred people were extracted from the prison?

Yes.

When you reached Kyeh Pyaung Gone, only forty people were left?

We were forty people with the 208 battalion. People also were with 204 battalion and they divided the convicts for different battalions. We were not all from the same prison. It included people from Poak Tan and Insein prison. They mixed all people and divided them. Forty people were in 208 battalion. We were all in the Company 1 or Company 2 column under Strategic Operations Command (SOC).

At the beginning, one hundred people were from older brother's prison?

Yes, they took one hundred people from Taung-zun Camp.

Eventually, it was 28?

Battalion 208.

When did they come with Battalion 208?

On January 7th 2011.

How many people are left now? Ten people?

Four days, five days. We slept five days. Three days, four days, five days. We started to come on January 6th 2011. Three, four, five, six .Yes, it was the 7th. We started to come in the morning of the 7th. Fifteen people were in our company.

Among those fifteen people, there were prisoners from all kinds of other prisons also?

Yes.

They divided you?

Yes, they divided us all. Our company commander was Pa Nya Naing. Sergeant was Maung Ni Win. We had to follow him.

What did they have to do along the road?

I had to carry. It included one cup of rice and eight cans of milk .Therefore we had to walk even when we could not walk and we had to walk if we could walk. Because they beat us when we could not walk and fell over. I did not have energy but I was old and I was embarassed if I was beaten, so I was forced and tried to carry. We started to come in the morning at 7 o' clock. We ate rice in the morning at 5:00 am. We took a rest once. The next day, we started to come on January 8th. On the 8th, we did not drink water or have breakfast.

Why did you not drink water or have breakfast?

We did not cross any streams and there was no water. There was only water for them [the soldiers]. There was no water for the porters. For the rice, Operation Commanders ordered us that '*there must be no smoke from fire'*, so we could not cook the rice. We shared a little snack between each of us. We walked along there and we slept at an old logging area. We cooked the rice at night. They fed us a little rice on that night. It was on the 8th. We started coming again on the 9th and we arrived at a plateau area. We slept there one night at the plateau area. In the early morning, on the 9th, the mine exploded. The mine exploded and a soldier was hit. We cleaned [swept] the mines and continued our column. In front of us, there were two boys who came together with us. They swept the road with us. A corporal wanted to move forward and he didn't dare step off the path but he ordered the boy [another convict porter] to move aside. That boy was about twenty. I could not remember anymore. The little boy was hit by the mine when

he moved aside. After the boy stepped on the mine, both of his legs were blown off [by the landmine]. Beside him, the other boy's face was injured. They injected some medicine for him. Then, they did not tell us about the one who was injured. We withdrew with 204 [Light Infantry Battalion. I did not know where they sent him (the boy who stepped on the mine). After the mine exploded, we started to walk again for the next ten hours. At about 5:00 pm, one of the Sergeants was hit by another mine. Then, we could not continue to go and we could not withdraw because we had already withdrawn. We slept under the rain for the whole night. It was raining. We were coming there. We slept again on the 10th. On the 11th, we started walking again. One of the porters who was taking point [walking first] ran.

What?

One person from the point [front] section ran.

From where?

From the point [front] section. The point section is the porters who walk at the front. One of the people [porters] from the point section ran. He ran and stepped on a mine.

How did you know that he ran? You stayed behind so how did you know?

We had to come along that road even though we were behind. We went step by step. We had to take responsibility to tell each other. We did not use a field radio in the forest.

So what did you use?

We told each other step by step on the frontline. Come slowly on the road we went. We told each other step by step. They told us that one of the porters in the front was running.

You got the message there?

Yes, he ran and "TAW" [sound of a mine], we heard the sound of a mine. He shouted that he couldn't walk any more. He was not cured. They kept him like that there. There was nothing we could do for him.

You saw that they left him there?

Yes.

He was the only one who died?

On the 10th or 11th we slept at the place where the mine exploded. We slept there on the 11th. We started walking again on the 12th. We slept one night on the wet ground. We started walking again on the 12th and slept on the wet ground for one night. On the 13th we slept at Gan. Then we started walking and we arrived at Htee T'Htee village. At Htee T'Htee there is a church.

Any Karen villages?

A Karen village was there. There is a church beside the Thaw Yin river.

What is the village?

The village is called Htee T' Htee.

Is it called Htee T' Htee?

Yes. We heard the sound of shooting the guns when we arrived.[inaudible] How long was it? 20 days long we stayed at Htee T'Htee village, until the January 20th. They dug the holes [trenches]. We had rice to eat when they took a rest. We did not eat rice or drink water for many days along the journey. We were beaten. We could not follow [keep up with] them and we were stabbed by knives. Along the road, some soldiers were in front of me and I was behind them. The valley was very deep therefore I controlled myself a lot to go down [on the descent]. There were over 40 paws [weight] on my body [on his back that he carried]. I collided with the soldier in front of me because my speed was increased by the weight on my back and my knees had gotten worse. So I was stabbed [beaten] with the butt of the gun and beaten on my face.

Stabbed [beaten] with the butt of the gun?

Yes, these black-eye bruises, the teacher [military medical officer] cured for me, so I got better a few days ago. They tortured us like this along the journey. We came together with the Operation Commander and we were so busy that day. January 20th was the busiest day because we had to walk a two-day journey in one day.

Went back?

Yes. We went back. Battalion 204 rotated there and Battalion 208 went back. Two days along on the journey was when we got to the place where the mine exploded. We walked back in only one day instead of a two-day long journey. We finished eating in the morning at 8:00 am. I said that I finished eating at 8:00 am. They did not feed us enough rice. We ate only a little bit of rice. How long we go until we ate rice again? Until we slept at 10:30 pm at night. We could not follow. We were tortured in many ways). People fell over and fell over again from hunger.

Among the fifteen porters, two people were hit by the mines?

The ones who stepped on the mine were with the front company, not part of my section.

Did anything happen to your group among the fifteen porters?

When we were coming back, our group of fifteen was not involved with the previous company anymore. I was involved with the new column. In that column, there were three Shan people [porters] and the other one who was involved with me who was M---. Two people. Those five people together were sent to the other column. As before, the operation command sent the service personnel [porters] to the operation that needed service personnel [porters]. We came back to the first battalion if the other one did not need us.

So you had to withdraw from the frontline?

On the 20th for the whole night, we withdrew. Two people fell down in the valley and died. I did not know who they were.

Were they from your group?

They were service personnel [porters] and one of them was stabbed with a knife.

Why?

He totally could not follow [the troops] anymore. Totally could not follow them.

He could not follow [the troops] and they just stabbed him with a knife like this?

Yes, the other one fell over. Like this, he just could not see anything on the slope at night.

How did you know that the other one was stabbed by a knife?

At that time, we had service personnel at every step. We were in the middle of the soldiers, so we knew at once what happened and where it happened. We walked together. Two service personnel were behind the first soldier and two service personnel were behind the next soldier. We had to follow in the middle of the soldiers. Sometimes we also had to run in front of them when we guided them. When we arrived here, a *Kaw Thoo Lei*[79] [KNU] leader said, 'whenever we put our mines, we worry that the service personnel will step on that.' It was like they [the Tatmadaw soldiers] took cover behind us.

How did you had to walk? Did they order the service personnel [porters] to walk at the front or beside them?

We sandwiched them. Point section [of porters] went in the front. We went after the Point section. At the front, two service personnel had to go first and we directly had to follow after them. Like this [gestures]. They sandwiched us with the soldiers. For instance, four or five service personnel would die if they shot one soldier. The sandwiched us in the middle like this.

You walked together with them like this. Among your group, did anybody step on the mines?

Yes, they stepped on it on January 10th. Next time, the others [soldiers] stepped on the mines. In front of us, only two people stepped on mines on the 10th. Other companies and sections stepped on the mine. Some of our service personnel died.

You withdrew only one day. Why?

We withdraw on the 20th. We slept at the place where the mine exploded. Before reaching Htee Htaw, there was an old DKBA camp and we withdrew until we arrived there. Then a Corporal from Battalion 105 died. One of the Captains was injured seriously and two soldiers were injured seriously by mines. It was the 21st. We came to this side [escaped] on the 22nd.

Where and how did you come to this side [escape]?

It was when Thaw Yin River was behind us, close to a DKBA camp.

Which DKBA camp was it?

I did not know which DKBA camp it was. It was an old camp.

Any villages there?

No villages there. There were some rivers. A *Kaw Thoo Lei* [Karen] village was there. A *Kaw Thoo Lei* [Karen] village was there, so we heard the sound of the cattles' bamboo bells. We heard the sound of a gong. We heard the sounds of chickens. We stayed at the old camp in the day time and we slept behind at night time.

Behind where?

[79] 'Kaw Thoo Lei' is the Karen language term for the KNU-delineated Karen State.

It was a road beside the camp. We slept behind the road. We had to take sentry duty with the soldiers. It was raining at the church. People were hit by mines and the battle happened there also. We had to take sentry duty every night.

You came back to the old camp at night time?

During the day time at around 11:00 am. Our captain ordered us to wash the clothes. We had to wash their clothes. In the next coming four or five months, I was not sure whether I would be alive or dead. I became so weak at that time. I would die by mine? I would be killed by the soldiers? I will die from losing energy? I will die before the next four or five months. I was thinking about what I had to do. I had to take sentry duty at the upper mountain and people who were in the lower mountain were disappointed [when they saw I had escaped].

Did you have to swim?

We had to swim.

Only two of you came down to wash the clothes?

Two people

Did they see you while you were swimming away?

They did not see.

Were there any people who took sentry duty?

Two soldiers took sentry duty there.

Beside the river?

One corporal and a private soldier were there. The place where we lived and their place were as hiding place. Actually, they just can see 45 degrees to their right and left sides of them. We deserted about 60 degrees away from them. They stood up and looked at us. They were talking. We stood up and looked at them also. How far could they see? Then we deserted. They were about 200 keiks from the place where we washed the clothes. They stayed under the bushes. They did not dare to stay broad in the open. Then, we crossed through the river.

How wide was the river?

Wide, but it is narrow at the deep area. We crossed the river at the deep area. It was about 40 or 60 feet wide.

How many minutes did you swim? Just guess.

About five or six minutes. So tired at the shallow area. Did they know when we got to the shore? We heard six gun shots. We arrived to the Thai side.. They could not see me because we arrived to this side. They shot the gun three times for each of us.

How did older brother come to the village?

We did not come to the village. We just walked on the road.

Why did you desert? Who will you go to? What will you do?

We did not have a person to go to. We just wanted to escape that dangerous life. I currently have no purpose. On this side, we will stay in whatever situation we will face. I thought, I just don't want to be dead. I deserted with this view.

What happened when you arrived at this side?

We walked around one mile and arrived in the village. We saw two women and I talked to them in Burmese. I did not know whether they understood or not. Two or three people around thirty or forty years old came to us and they could speak Burmese. We thought they were Thai but they were not. They were Karen. In the evening, this leader sent us to Oo Poe Hta village on the --- [date].

By boat?

Not by boat. By car along the road. They fed us rice and sent us here. We were quiet for a long time. Until the --- [date] or --- [date]. Since the --- [date] all things are good.

Starting from the village, how did you arrive to the DKBA camp?

We arrived to a Karen village.

On this side, did you meet with the Karen army?

We did not see the Karen army. We just saw the villagers. They said the house that I stayed at was the captain's house. Although we just met each other now, all of them were as kind as family.

Eventually, you arrived to this side?

Yes. On the --- [date], we were sent to the village or the small town on the Mae Sot side. Teacher came and picked us up on the --- [date].

As older brother said, you did not face with any battle?

Yes, we faced battles three times when we were at Htee T'Htee village. It was not so serious.

DKBA?

Not DKBA. 'Kaw Thoo Lei *[Karen State] shoot us'*, they said. Our side shot the big weapons at them. There was fighting again the next day. After a day, the fighting happened again the next day.

How did you feel older brother? The battles were happening and mines were exploding around you. There could have been a mine under the land that you stood on.

If there was a mine… [trails off]

How did you feel for each next step?

We were more afraid of harm than afraid in our hearts.

How was it older brother?

In the column, we were civilians, not soldiers. We didn't have to fight. As in the chess game, we were like the pawns. We were civilians, not soldiers. There is no reason to involve us in the

battle. We are convicts therefore we have a chance to make ourselves as sentenced by the law in the prison. We hate. Did not have fear in our hearts. The hate of heart is in our mind. Was born with the heart of afraid. We should not die but we could be dead, I felt it in my mind.

When they called you, you did not know that you had to come to this kind of area and that you would face this kind of thing. You did not know. Would you have come if you knew?

As for our situation, we could not refuse to come even if we knew.

You had to come?

Had to come.

What could happen if you refuse in the prison?

We will be sent even if we refuse. If they cannot send us properly, they will beat and send us. There is no constitution for the convicts. Our country got independence. People who rule us are delegates. Although we proclaimed our freedom, the rules are the not for the public. The Constitution was put down in *Ka La Ka Ta* in 1984. It has not been reformed. We are in the situation of slaves however we call it.

How many years were left for your sentence?

Only a few months left.

Almost the sentence was finished?

Almost the sentence was finished.

You were called, how was your feeling about it?

I hate it. I had to stay about twenty years without living with my family happily. For instance, in the prison, I bravely had solved my sentence. I really tried to stay and not to be sent to porter. To be able to live with my family, to set up a life with my younger sister and younger brother, I did stay like that but I was sent inhumanely. That is why I hate.

If you had the right to choose. For example, to follow them to the frontline or don't follow if you don't want to follow and keep staying in the prison for the rest of your sentence. Which one would you choose?

I would keep living in the prison. Certainly.

How different was the situation in the prison and the situation on the frontline? Which situation do you like more?

I liked the situation in the prison. They sometimes ordered us to carry things. In that situation, we had the time to eat and we had no eating time hereon the frontline. As for sleep, we slept like a dog or a pig under the rain and sitting down under the rain for the whole night. There were many days that I could not sleep on the ground in the evening. Here, we can sleep warmly with the blankets. We can take a bath and eat rice regularly. Here, there is no limited time for a job, no limited time for sleeping and no limited time for eating. When we carried things [as a porter] they don't care whether you can carry or not. You must carry

You said, you could not sleep. How did the army sleep at that time?

People who take sentry duty, they take sentry duty. People who sleep, they sleep.

People who slept, how did they sleep?

They set up their poles with a tarpaulin on the roof and they slept like that.

How about the porters? Did you bring anything?

We did not have anything to bring.

They did not give you anything?

They gave us a piece of tarpaulin. We had to sleep with only a piece of tarpaulin. They gave us a blanket. It was too heavy to carry, so we did not bring it and left it behind. The things with us from the prison, some people said that you had to carry heavy things in the frontline and we left behind everything in the prison. We left it behind and they gave us a set of clothes and a piece of tarpaulin.

Did you sleep with a mosquito net?

We did not use a mosquito net. Then the mosquitoes did not bite us. As I said before, we could not sleep because of dew and the cold under us. The soil under us was cold and dew starts falling down at 12:00 pm. In addition, we had to take sentry duty with them. We were so busy carrying things. We couldn't drink enough water. We did not have enough rice to eat. We had to take sentry duty at 6:00 pm. We could not walk well from their torture.

Some people, they did not want to come to porter and they gave money Could you give money if you wanted to?

As I knew, we did not have time to give money like that. In the morning, at 7:00 am, they directly took us. They oppressed us like that.

The people who we interviewed yesterday, other porters, they said that you can give money to stay in the prison?

We had to give money if we didn't want to work.

Did you have to take sentry duty at the mined area?

Yes I had to take sentry duty. Many people were injured. They were not cured and paid with their lives in the mined area. The junta say that they support with enough medicine. For example, if we were injured in the mined area ,we had to give one thousand kyat if we had to have one stitch. We had to give two thousand kyat if we had to have two stitches. If we didn't give like that, they would not cure us. We had money for one year's wages that we had done. From our wages, we had to pay money for medicine.

On the frontline, do they cure if you are injured by walking and falling over?

They don't cure us. We had wounds on our back, shoulders and knees. We had one military medicine officer in each company. They just cure the soldiers. When I was in the prison that I lived in, Thayet prison, the medicine was better than at Taung-zun Camp if I compare. They used Chinese medicine such as paracetamol and clorfenamina.

On the frontline when you eat, do they feed the same food they eat? Do they feed the same amount?

Not the same.

How was it different?

They have meat tins, fish tins, milk tins and sugar. They cook separately for themselves. We just cook a little bit for us when we take a rest. We have banana pith. We just eat a little bit. As for them, they eat as much as they would like to eat. Captains eat the best food.

What is your plan for the future? What do you want to do?

I currently cannot go back to Burma.

Why can't you go back?

If we are arrested, surely they will arrest us because many people know us. I will be charged with another crime if they arrest me. They will add up eight years more and I will have to do eight years more in prison. At my age, I will lose my life if I have to go to prison again. So far, I have suffered 20 years. Currently I am being taken care of by the Karen teacher I will base my life here as they say. If I can base my life here, I have a plan to call my family. If the rules in Burma change and we get enough human rights, I will go back to Burma. If not, I will base my life here.

Before older brother deserted, when you were with the military, did you hear any threats about what would happen if you deserted?

We will kill you if you desert and *Kaw Thoo Lei* [Karen soldiers] will kill you also. There were many ways we would be killed if we deserted. '*Do you have spare legs if you step on a mine? If you have, then desert. We will shoot and kill you if we see you try.* Kaw Thoo Lei *also will kill you*.' If a service personnel deserted, they share that service personnel's materials for the soldiers. They say these threats when we can not follow them. If there are no spare porters and if the rest of the porters can't carry, they have to help them. They order service personnel to carry things by beating them. Some areas, some companies, they stab with knife and they beat porters with guns**.** There were three Shan people and one of my friends in the Company with Column Commander Captain Khin Maung Aye. We came together with those Shan people. One of them had to carry the Battalion Deputy Commander's materials. He was small and his health was not good. There were a lot of Second-in-Command materials.

What is Second-in-Command?

Second-in-Command is the battalion deputy commander. He [that porter] had to carry the Battalion deputy commander's materials. His health was not good, so he could not and he fell over. He fell over and the Battalion Deputy Commander stabbed [beat] him with the butt of his gun and gave permission to the soldiers to shoot the one that fell over. A small captain went and pulled him up and he did not get shot. He was not dead but his health condition was getting so bad. He could not sit well because his legs and hands were in pain). He could not eat rice well. The circles [bruises] were on his back from being stabbed [beaten] by the gun. His name was Eh Sai from Shan State. We did not hear what happened to him. Those three people [from Shan State] were friends from the stone mine [had worked together in labour camp]. I think that this small boy could not go home. His health condition was getting worse. They did not cure him with any medicine. I thought '*he will die*.' He could not eat rice and could not sit as we sit. He had keep one of his legs straight. One side of his muscles become like it was dead.

You are Burmese?

Yes, I'm Burmese.

Buddhist?

Buddhist.

Can you tell me your prison number?

0----.

When you arrived at the Karen village, did you see how was the relationship between the soldiers and the villagers?

There were no villagers when the army entered the villages I faced along there.

How many villages did you come through?

Two or three villages. I saw villages that were shattered. It seemed like they ran away when the army entered the village. One bamboo was cut and it was green. Green bamboo will be dry in two or three days if you cut it. We knew when we saw that. No people. They ran away. None of the villagers were there. They destroyed the houses.

At the church school, that village is Htee T' Htee village?

It is called Htee T' Htee.

You arrived at that village and none of the villagers were there?

No.

Only the shell of the buildings was left?

Yes, also the Church school was a shell. Other armies had already been there when we arrived. Battalions 209 and 205 had already been there. When 204 and 208 arrived, 209 and 205 started to move away. We had to be based there.

They arrived in the village, destroyed the village, what about any barns or rations?

No rations. They destroyed the houses. They took fruits and vegetable in the hill fields. They dug trenches.

Any chickens, pigs or ducks?

There were. We didn't see if we wanted to eat them.

Did they take all he villagers' chickens, pigs and ducks with them?

Last night, they shot at the other side and many cattle died.

They shot them to eat?

No, they just saw the movement of Kaw Thoo Lei [KNLA] and the Operation Commander ordered them to shoot. They shot big weapons and small weapons.

To the Thai side?

Yes, the Thai side.

Which operation commander ordered them to shoot onto the Thai side?

The Operation Commanders of Battalions 204 and 208.

Name?

I don't know the name. It was the Operation Commander for Battalion 204 and 208. The battalion commander for 208 went back for training when we arrived there.

It that Brigade [IB] 22?

Yes. 208 and 204 battalion's operation commander had glasses. He ordered it. We knew that cattle died. It was behind the church school. Only the Thaw Yin river separated Thailand and Burma.

Do you use *Na Ah Pa [SPDC]* to call them?

On that side in Burma, we use *Na Ah Pa [SPDC] and Na Wa Ta [SLORC]*.

Where? In the prison?

In the prison. They changed it to *Na Ah Pa* in 1997.

Do you use that?

Yes.

What did you hear this stood for?

We call them like that in the prison. *Na Wa Ta. Na Ah Pa.*

How about Kaw Thoo Lei? We heard you use that name. Did you know it before or did you know about it when you arrived here?

We knew it before. As we knew before is was different. We know the true military of Kaw Thoo Lei when we arrived here.

How did you hear about Kaw Thoo Lei before?

Kaw Thoo Lei uses mines, cuts by knife, destroys cars and roads, burns the villages, rapes and takes by force. We heard it from *Na Wa Ta* news. When we arrived here, they are totally different from what they said. They do nothing like that. However we are, they treat as a human. Today, some say, who is this person? What kind of person? How is the situation? But they do not reject us. They treat us as a human, treat us friendly, feed us food, give us health care and give us clothes. I know their [Kaw Thoo Lei] aim. Their aim is to work for many people, not only for their organisation. As I thought before, they base and work only for Kaw Thoo Lei [Karen] organisations. On this side, they are working for many people, like the children who are in my current place.

For all ethnic groups?

For all ethnic groups. We don't have like that in Burma.

Did you have to wear separate clothes as a service personnel?

Yes, blue. They gave us short-sleeve shirts.

They had military clothes?

Yes. Service personnel [porters] and soldiers are totally different however you look. We had a blue hat.

Do you think that were any other political prisoners?

No, they were not. Just a few from the 1988 uprising are left. After 1993, they don't send them to *yeh beh* [prison labour camp]. I don't know what reason.

Thank you very much older brother for telling us sufficiently. We function certain records. We will have meeting and inform certainly.

If possible, if you can consider for us. rules. The constitution acknowledged at *Ka La Ka Ta*, in 1984. We want to change that rule, I want you to force the government in any way. By that rule, our convicts are tortured a lot. Crimes are so bad. They scold the service personnel however they want. In reality, convicts have the right to tell. They have the rules not to enter in the prison if they do drugs. Now, they do drugs and come to prison. We are beaten. In addition, they misuse their right and authority from the state. They use it for their personal business by profiteering wages from convicts. A deputy jailer earn forty or fifty thousand kyat per day. Ordinary jailers earn about 1,000,000 kyat per year.

In one year?

One year. As we see, the rules they rule over us are the colonial laws.

How do you know that the laws in the prison are the colonial laws?

We stayed in the prison for a long time. We always studied the law books. We studied many sections of the Penal Code, like 208, 209 and 210. We had to stay for a long time, so I tried to know the rights that I have and the rights I have about doing [porter] service.

How about older brother's education?

I graduated tenth standard.

Interview | Chit Lwin, 42 (January 2011, Toungoo District)

Address prior to arrest: Section ---, D--- Town
Ethnicity: Burmese
Religion:
Occupation prior to arrest: Farmer
Marital status: Married; two children
Reported reason for arrest:
Date of arrest:
Reported sentence:
Reported date sentence began:
Prison(s):
Date sent to labour camp:
Labour camp:
Date taken to porter:
Size of group taken to porter:
How many soldiers in operation:
Area/ location portered:
Battalion:
Number of soldiers and porters (exact, not a ratio):
Date of interviewee's escape:
Number of porters escaped (not including interviewee):
Location of interviewee's escape:
Location of interview:
Date of interview: January --- 2011
Future plans:

When did you have to be imprisoned?

I was imprisoned in 2009.

For what crime?

I was accused of a murder.

How many years have you lived in prison?

One year and two months.

Which prison?

Toungoo prison.

When did the army take you out from prison?

January 13th 2011.

How many prisoners did they take out from Toungoo prison?

They took out 300 prisoners but not only from Toungoo prison. They combined with other prisons. Like they took out 75 people from Toungoo prison and 75 prisoners from other prisons. They took people out from different prisons. All total were 300 prisoners.

When did they come to Bawgali?

On January 13th 2011.

Was there fighting on the way?

No fighting. We had to sleep one night. We didn't arrive to Bawgali directly because we lost the way.

Do they provide enough food?

The food is poor. How can we have enough food? We can eat when they eat.

How did you sleep?

We can't sleep. We have to follow the troops when they leave. I have never experienced this event in my life.

Do they kick and beat you?

Yes, they do. They ordered me to carry two backpacks. Not one backpack. *Bo Gyi* [officer] said, we will ask you to carry what you can. But two backpacks, it was very heavy. Many bullets and rations. They beat us when we can't carry. They said you are slow. The Arakan soldiers are the worst in [LIB] 377. They are the very worst. They are just going to kill us. They [the soldiers] said *"we will shoot when you can't carry anymore."* and they asked us *"do you want to die here?"* They have no human hearts.

Do they give medicine when you get sick?

They give four or five tablets for malaria. But we have to drink [the medicine] at the time they ask us.

How heavy were the two backpacks that you had to carry?

One backpack was about 15 viss [24 kg / 53 lbs], two backpack were about 30 viss [48 kg / 106 lbs]. The place is not flat. How can I climb up the mountains? I was beaten with the gun butt and I still have the wound on my arm. I still have a wound on my thigh, where I was beaten by the battalion commander.

Do you know the battalion commander's name?

I don't know the battalion commander's name, they called him Bo Myit Shin or …I am not sure. I don't know the name because I wasn't there for a long time.

I heard they were hit by landmines after they left Bawgali?

Yes. We left Bawgali and we slept one night. I don't know the village name. We had to sleep one night, under the mist on the road beside the village. It was the very worst. They left at 4:00am in the morning. After we left the village, the point team [at the front of the column] was hit by the landmine. We heard the sound "DOH" [explosion]. Two porters were hit. Five soldiers were hit. One died directly. I thought the rest were going to die because their wounds were serious, both porters and soldiers, they will die. The landmine was close. I thought it would be very big but I had never seen it before. The sound was very awful. The mine was big and I thought that all of the people hit will die. I was afraid and shaking at that time. I didn't want to follow them anymore.

When did you desert?

On January 4th I couldn't carry anymore and I was beaten a lot. I waited for the chance to escape. And today, is it January ---? Yes, I escaped on January ---. The mine exploded yesterday on the ---. I escaped on the ---. I was afraid when I looked at the landmine victims. I was very afraid. I don't want to die. The soldiers take cover behind the porters. They disguise themselves as porters. They wake us up very early to do sentry duty. They keep us in the front with a BE [minesweeping] unit. We two [porters] were in the middle. One *Bo* [officer] was beside me. They woke us up. For the soldiers, they aren't going to die when people [KNLA] shoot. They take cover behind us and use us as a cover [shield].

How many people escaped?

Just two people.

What will they do after they recapture convict porters?

They will kill them, really. You are dead when they recapture you. Even if you are not trying to escape, they abuse you. The load is very heavy and I can't walk very quickly, so they hit and beat me on the way. They abuse us. They will kill us when they recapture us. I thought they would shoot me yesterday because I was slow. I was very tired. I don't care if they shoot me and I die. I walked very slowly. They hit me with their gun butts. They hit me on my shoulder but I covered it with my arm.

Why did you escape?

They abused me a lot, how can I suffer. It is ok if they give us a fair load to carry and provide good food regularly. They ordered us to work very cruelly and, for food, they didn't provide it to us regularly. We work the whole day and they fed us one time. How can we suffer that in the long term? They are soldiers but we are civilians. They can face the situation. We are civilians and we can't face it. So I don't care whether I did but I don't want to step on landmine. We, porters were ordered to follow them closely with two soldiers when they cleaned [swept] landmines. We will die if we stay longer there.

What is your future plan?

I will go back to my village.

For what crime were you imprisoned?

I was accused of murder. I had to be imprisoned for 10 years.

What do you want to say about the SPDC army prosecution?

They are inhuman. I definitely am not satisfied with them. I am 48 years old now. If I was young, I would want to go back and fight back against them. I would go back and do it if I was around 20 years old. I want to rebel against them. I can't suffer it. They abused us a lot. We are the same humans. Sometime it comes out in my mind to rebel against them. They abuse civilians a lot and I don't like this. I can't prosecute them because it is their decade [their time in power]. They do whatever they want because they have guns. They can do anything. I would return and fight with one of the armed groups if I was young but now I am over 40 years old and I have a daughter and a son so I don't want to join. They beat me and it makes me want to return and join an armed group.

Interview | Soe Htun (January 2011, Toungoo District)

Address prior to arrest: B--- Section, P--- City, Bago Region
Ethnicity: Burmese
Religion:
Occupation prior to arrest:
Marital status: Single
Reported reason for arrest:
Date of arrest:
Reported sentence:
Reported date sentence began:
Prison(s):
Date sent to labour camp:
Labour camp:
Date taken to porter:
Size of group taken to porter:
How many soldiers in operation:
Area/ location portered:
Battalion:
Number of soldiers and porters (exact, not a ratio):
Date of interviewee's escape: January --- 2011
Number of porters escaped (not including interviewee):
Location of interviewee's escape:
Location of interview:
Date of interview: January --- 2011
Future plans:

What is your parents' occupation?

My father passed away. My mother sits and eats. I worked. I drove a motorbike taxi.

How many siblings do you have?

I have four siblings.

How many years did you have to be in prison?

I was imprisoned when I was 19 years old. I have lived in prison for two years.

For what crime did you have to be imprisoned?

Marijuana.

How many years you have to be imprisoned because of marijuana?

17 years.

Which prison?

Toungoo prison.

How many prisoners did they take out from Toungoo prison?

They took out 75 prisoners from Toungoo prison.

Did they also take them out from other prisons?

They took out 75 prisoners from other prisons. The total of all was 150 prisoners: 75 prisoners from Toungoo and 75 from Yamethin prison.

Did they say where they were sending you?

As I know, one group went to Thandaung Gyi, another group to Bawgali and another group to Kyauk Kyi.

How many porters were included with the Bawgali group?

As I know, there are 50 perisons were included with this troop.

Was anything happen when you came on they way?

As we moved out from Yin Toe Lay village, one troop was hit by the landmine.

How many died?

Four soldiers got injured, one died and two porters got injured.

Where did they send these injured people?

I saw them carry them to the back.

How do they treat prisoners?

They ordered us to sit on the road. They don't allow us to go anywhere.

What do they ask you to carry?

Their equipments and rations, like rice.

How heavy was it?

As heavy as half a rice sack and we had to carry their backpacks.

Do you know their battalion number? Which LID are they from?

The LID that we came with is 377. There were also battalions 376 and 375 under their command.

Do you know any commander's names?

I don't know their names.

How did they provide shelter and food?

We can eat when they eat. We can eat when they cook and we eat at night. If they don't eat, we just have to stay like this.

Are there any other ways they persecute prisoners?

They beat you when you can't walk.

Do they provide medicine when prisoners get sick?

They won't give medicine if you just have *pay na kaw na* [headache and joint ache] but they give medicine for malaria.

When did you desert?

On the --- [January 2011].

Where did you leave prison?

On the --- [January 2011].

Where will you go now?

I will go back to P--- city.

Do you dare to go back?

I will let my mother know and we will go and live in another place.

Do you have anything that you want to say about the persecution porters face?

They won't help *wan saung* [porters] when *wan saung* can't carry anymore. They will beat and kick us and beat us with sticks.

Interview | Htway Thu, 28 (January 2011, Dooplaya District)

Address prior to arrest: A--- village, Pakkoku Township, Magwe Region
Ethnicity: Burmese
Religion: Buddhist
Occupation prior to arrest: Farmer, beans and tobacco
Reported reason for arrest: Beating
Date of arrest: July --- 2010
Reported sentence: 5 years
Reported date sentence began: August --- 2010
Prison(s): Pakkoku; Pa'an; Kawkareik
Date sent to labour camp:
Labour camp:
Date taken to porter: December 30th 2010
Size of group taken to porter: 30 from Pakkoku; 400 from Pa'an
Area/ location portered: Palu Pa Doh, Kawkareik Township
Battalion: LIB #231
Number of soldiers and porters (exact, not a ratio): 70 soldiers, 30 porters
Date of interviewee's escape: January --- 2011
Number of porters escaped (not including interviewee): 2 others
Location of interviewee's escape: Palu Pa Doh
Location of interview: ---
Date of interview: January --- 2010
Future plans: Maybe Thailand, not sure

Why were you in prison?

It was like this. The situation is very hard during this government's time. The staff who are appointed by this government are very bad. I do not mean every staff member is bad, but most of the government staff are bad. Even the VPDC [Village Peace and Development Council] treat people badly. They abuse their power and oppress other people badly. For me, I do not like their attitude. They behave as bosses to us when we participated in social things in our village. We could not be patient with them and argued with them. I took a stick and beat one of them. He got injured on his cheek. Then, the judge sentenced me to be in prison for five years. I did not know that they had made a prior understanding with the judge. They both are government staff, so they colluded together. They put me in prison for five years for this little matter.

Were you a member of the VPDC, too?

No. I quit the month after my mother died because my father was already over 80 years old and I thought I should stay with him and look after him. I argued with the VPDC and I was put in prison for five years even though it was a small matter. It was very long for me to stay in the prison, for five years. They put me in the prison for five years because I could not pay them money. If we could pay money, even if it was for the crime of murder, they would let us go free from the crime. The judge in Pakkoku is Ma Khin Oh Tin. We can pay her money. She looks only for money. She does not consider any laws.

Can you tell us how the argument happened?

The argument occurred when we held the funeral ceremony for the monk in Pakkoku. This monk, who was the most senior in years of the monkhood in eastern Pakkoku Town, passed away.

When did it happen?

It happened on the October --- 2006. I hit one of the VPDC members and ran away. But, I was arrested when I came back to my village.

Did you have to go to court after you were arrested?

Yes, I had to go to the court. My crime did not take long to be solved in the court. For the other crimes, they took very long to be solved in the court. For me, the judge just made more problems for me with my crime because I could not pay her the money. The most important thing for them was money. It would be fine if you could pay them money. It depended on how much money we could pay them and they would diminish the charge. There were a lot of crimes such as the crime of murder by knife [stabbing], where the complainant's colon was destroyed by the knife. Even for these kinds of crimes, they charged the perpetrators to be in a prison only for two or three years. These crimes were worse than my crime. For my crime, it just cut his cheek a little and they put me in prison for five years.

What did you hit him with?

I hit him with a stick and it cut his cheek a little bit.

How many days did you have to face the court?

I was at the court seven times.

How much money did you have to bribe if you wanted them to reduce the charge for your crime?

We had to pay a lot of money to them. We would have had to bribe them 1,000,000 kyat (US $1,197)[80] so they could share it with each other and reduce the charge. For example, they will sentence you to three years only, if you are supposed to be in prison for five years. For me, I could not bribe them because I am a daily paid labourer and I did not have the money to pay them.

Which prison were you sent to?

I was sent to Pakkoku prison. There were other people whose situation was worse than me. For me, I myself argued with others and committed the crime. For others, they were accused of the crime of murder and were put in prison for many years, at least ten years, because they could not bribe the judges. For example, someone died and they accused one person of killing them, even though there were no witnesses.

How many brothers and sisters do you have?

I have three siblings. I have an elder sister and a younger brother.

Did your sister get married?

She already got married and has three children. Neither I nor my younger brother are married yet.

[80] All conversion estimates for the Kyat in this update are based on the fluctuating informal exchange rate rather than the government's official fixed rate of 6.5 kyat to US $1. As of February 5th 2011, this unofficial rate of exchange was US$1 = 835 kyat, and this figure is used for all calculations above.

Are both of your parents alive?

My mother already passed away and only my father is alive. He is over 80 years old. But, I am not sure whether he is still alive now because I left my village a long time ago. He was still alive when I left the village.

Did the police come and arrest you after you argued with the VPDC?

Yes. Those who came and arrested me were police.

Do you still remember what police force came and arrested you?

Yes. I remember. Pakkoku Town is divided into eastern, western, northern and southern parts. The eastern police force came and arrested me.

What are the names of the policemen who came and arrested you?

Myat Than, the [police] captain in eastern Pakkoku, came and arrested me.

How did they treat you when they came and arrested you? Did they question you?

At that time, I ran away to Irrawaddy [Division] and avoided them. I got malaria and glandular fever and I could not move at all. I stayed at my sister's house and could not go back home. On the morning when they came to arrest me there, they did not ask me anything and just asked me to follow them, like that. I had run away the day after I argued with the VPDC. They came and arrested me when I came back.

When were you arrested?

I was arrested on July --- 2010. I had run away [been on the run] for four years. But, they came and arrested me when I came back.

Where were you staying when you were arrested?

I was at my sister's house.

How did they treat you when they came and arrested you?

At that time, I was very thin. I was thinner than now. I got malaria and at the same time, I also suffered from glandular fever. They did not beat me when they came and arrested me because I was very sick. I would just have had to die if they had beaten me at that time. But, they shouted at me. For the other criminals, they beat them with iron sticks, kicked their backs with boots, grasped their heads and hit their heads on the ground. I saw these incidents when I stayed in jail.

Where did they ask you to follow them?

They called me to follow them to the jail in Pakkoku police station.

How long did you have to stay in the jail?

I slept there two nights and was sent to the prison directly. I was called to attend court when I stayed in prison. They did not keep the criminals in the jail [at the police station]. I had to attend court when I reached the prison.

Which prison were you sent to?

I was sent to Pakkoku prison.

How long did you have to stay in that prison before you had to attend court?

Wait, I will count how many days I had to stay there [before trial]. I stayed there for 26 days. It was almost a month. After I stayed for 26 days, I was sentenced the next day.

When were you sentenced?

I was sentenced on August --- 2010.

Were you alone when they came and arrested you?

I was arrested alone.

How long did you stay in the prison after you were sentenced?

I stayed there for five months in Pakkoku Prison. Then I was sent to be a porter. There, they asked all the prisoners to come out, and looked at us one by one. They chose the prisoners by themselves. Those who could afford it and paid money did not have to go to be porters. If we could bribe the jailers and jail wardens, we could leave the prison and make wax. So, those who could afford to pay money would not be in a poor situation. They only had to make wax and could live well. There were many people who stayed in the prison longer than us who were not recruited to be porters because they could pay money. They could stay in the prison silently. For us, we were recruited to be porters.

What is your prison number?

It is 00---. This is my Pakkoku prison number.

Did they send you to prison immediately after you were sentenced?

I stayed in prison and had to attend court and I came back the same day. I could not sleep in the courthouse jail. I had to attend the court when I was appointed to attend.

Can you pay money if you do not want to be in prison?

Yes. Even if crime is the crime of the murder, you are free from the sentence if you can pay money. There are perpetrators who are free from the sentence for the murder crimes after they paid 5 or 6 million kyat (US $5,988 - $7,185) even if there was a strong witness.

How much do you have to pay to be free from a charge for your crime?

I couldn't be completely free even if I could pay money because he [the plaintiff] is a government member. But, I would be in prison only for a year, or a year and a half, if I could pay 500,000 kyat (US $599).

How did the jailers treat you in prison?

They are not different from other government staff, because they are government staff too. Once we arrived at the prison, we had to pay the so-called 'introduction fee' to the jailers. We have to pay them money to buy alcohol. If we did not pay them, they would slap our faces and punch us.

How much did you have to pay them for the alcohol?

We had to pay them 2,500 - 5,000 kyat (US $3 - $6) to buy whiskey.

Did they talk to prisoners nicely?

They treat those who can bribe them nicely. For those who cannot bribe them, the jailers did not treat them nicely and hurt them.

What did you have to do when you were in prison?

I had to make waxes. We had to make 4,000 waxes every day. If we couldn't make the 4,000 waxes per day, we were beaten by them [the jailers].

Did you get any payment for doing this?

No. We did not get any payment, but they [the jailers] earned money. They earned 50,000 - 60,000 kyat (US $60 - $72) per day.

Have you ever been tortured in prison?

Sometimes, I was tortured in prison when I could not bribe them money to buy alcohol. Also, they called us and beat us immediately when they got angry from something that happened outside, because they do not like us.

How many prisoners were there in Pakkoku Prison?

There were over 200 prisoners in Pakkoku Prison. Some prisoners had to work on farms owned by the government. Some collected firewood.

What kind of food did they feed you in prison?

We grew eggplants, morning glory [water spinach] and radishes in the morning. Mostly, we grew beans. They mostly fed us these beans.

When did you have to have breakfast?

They did not feed us in the morning even though we were very hungry. We started working in the early morning and had breakfast at 11:00 am and dinner after 6:00 pm.

Did they provide you with coffee and tea in the morning?

They never provided us with fried rice and tea to drink in the morning. We even had to give money as a bribe to them because they came and pressed us to give them a bribe.

What did you have to do in prison?

In the early morning when we got up, we washed our faces and lined up. We had to get up at 4:30 am and do homage [Buddhist worship]. Then, we had to line up and start working. In the morning, we had to dry waxes, and we had to make them [wax] in the afternoon. After that, we started working and had breakfast. Then, we started working again and finished working after 4:00 pm.

Did you have time to rest when you worked?

No, they did not allow us to rest.

Did you have to cook for yourself or did they cook for you?

They cooked for us.

How did they look after prisoners' health when they were sick in prison?

Whether you were sick or got a cold, they gave only half a tablet of Paracetamol. They gave only these medicines to those who suffered from other diseases, too. I think the higher-ranking officials would provide good medicine to the prisoners, but the lower [officials] take them for their own benefit and give us bad medicines.

Is there a clinic in the prison?

Yes.

Do you have to pay money when you go to the clinic?

We do not have to pay money. But, they check the medicines, such as Paracetamol, and if they think it is good quality, they [the officials at the clinic] ask us to buy it.

Have you ever seen prisoners who were tortured in prison?

Yes. There were many different kinds of prisoners. Some are crazy and were put into prison. The jailers oppressed and tortured us when they were drunk.

Have you ever been tortured in the prison?

I was punched once because I could not pay them the introduction fee.

Could you listen to a radio when you were in the prison?

No. We cannot even wear a watch. We are not allowed to use anything that is mechanized. They never allowed us to listen to the radio.

Could you read magazines and books?

There were jailers who became friendly with us. We borrowed magazines from them and read them secretly. For them, their salary is not enough for them to support themselves. We borrowed the magazines that they had borrowed for 50 kyat (US $.06) from the outside, and paid 100 kyat (US $.12) to them. They had to do it secretly, too.

Could your relatives and family visit you in prison?

They allow our family and relatives to come and visit us in prison. We can meet them for 10-15 minutes. They can come and meet us in prison, except on Sundays. Our family has to buy things at the jailer's wife's shop. The jailer's wife sold things near the prison. They [our families] also have to pay 200 kyat (US $.24) at the entrance gate. Sometimes, they [the gatekeepers] are corrupt and take some of the fried beef, fried fish and other things sent from our houses. If our family sends us ten packages of coffee, they take five packages of coffee. They do not give us all the things that our family sends to us.

If your family wanted to continue meeting with you for longer than 10-15 minutes, could they bribe the jailers?

They can bribe the jailers secretly and continue to meet with us. Our relatives can come and visit us every week. In the past, they did not allow the relatives to come and meet us every week. They limited the time. But later, they allowed relatives to visit every week when members of the Black Eagle group arrived in the prison. The Black Eagle group became very strong in our town. They had 86 gang members. They were very cruel. Ten of them were arrested and sent to the prison. They were from rich families. This group dismissed [evicted] people from their houses and destroyed others' shops in Pakkoku when they were not satisfied with them. They also killed people. When this group arrived in prison, it became freer for other prisoners to meet with their relatives. They [the jailers] are fine when they get money.

Could you write a letter to your family?

We are not allowed to write letters to our family, but we used to write secretly and send them to our family. We, the prisoners helped each other and had sympathy for each other. We shared our food, such as fried beef, to those whose families did not come and send things to them. We understood each other and helped each other. The prisoners who could bribe the jailers could stay freely and do whatever they wanted, such as singing a song and other things.

How long did you stay in prison before you were recruited [forced] to be a porter?

I stayed in prison for around six months.

When were you recruited [forced] to be a porter?

Our names were collected on December 30th 2010 and we, 30 prisoners, had our legs chained at the same time and were kept in a separate room. On December 31st 2010, the jailer and ten policemen with their guns sent us to Meiktila Prison. One of the jailers and an army corporal were involved and sent us to Pa'an Prison from Meiktila Prison. The army came and called us again from Pa'an Prison to Kawkareik military camp. In Pa'an Prison, they gave us blue prisoners' uniforms and a pair of trousers. Before, it was a white prisoners' uniform. Later, it changed to the blue uniforms. They gave two suits for each prisoner, a uniform and a normal suit. The uniforms are very thin.

When did you reach Meiktila Prison?

We reached there on December 31st 2010. We continued travelling to Pa'an Prison on January 1st 2011.

What battalion came to pick you up at Pa'an Prison?

It was LIB #231 from Kawkareik.

What did the jailers tell you when you were recruited [forced] to porter?

They did not tell us anything where we were sent to porter. They just chained our legs and sent us directly. We also dared not ask them [anything].

Where did you have to go from the Kawkareik military camp?

From there, we had to come to Myawaddy and then to Palu Gyi [Palu Pa Doh]. We had to carry equipment and cross over mountains. We also had to sweep for landmines during the trip.

When did you leave from the Kawkareik military camp?

We started leaving there on January 3rd 2011 and went to the front line.

What are the names of the commanding officers of LIB #231?

I do not know the name of the battalion commander. But I know Officer Kyaw Thu Win and Officer Si Thu were Lance Corporal and Corporal.

What did you have to carry?

We had to carry many kinds of bullets, pitchforks, a tool that can find landmines, mattocks, backpacks and rations. Each prisoner had to carry 40 *viss* (64 kg. / 141 lb.) of weight.

How many soldiers were there in LIB #231?

There were over 70 soldiers. Combined with the 30 porters, there were over 100 people in the battalion. We were in LIB #231 walking on the front line, and LIB #357 followed behind us, and then followed LIB #356, followed by LIB #443 again. There were four battalions that came along together and operated on the front line as far as I know.

How many prisoners were in LIB #231 along with you?

There were 30 prisoners from Pakkoku Prison in LIB #231 along with me. From Pa'an Prison, 400 prisoners were sent to the front line in the same group as me and came to Myawaddy, and I heard another 400 prisoners were sent to follow another military group and came from that side, too. Their aim is to surround and fight the *Nga Bp'way* [ring worms] which is the name they called the Karen revolutionaries. There were only 30 prisoners when we came from Pakkoku Prison, but when we arrived to Pa'an Prison, there were 400 prisoners. They sent all 400 of these prisoners to the front line. They called us nicely as public service personnel and comrades. But, we did not feel like we were comrades or public service personnel because they fed us rice without curry. We collected chilli on farms when we saw it, and ate it with rice. We have passed through with this experience. Even though we wanted to drink water, we couldn't drink it. But, we had to carry very heavy loads for them. We couldn't eat on time. Sometimes, we had not eaten for a day and we just had to stay like that.

Which camp on the front line did you stay in after you left the Kawkareik military camp?

From Kawkareik military camp, we came to Myawaddy directly. As our battalion walked before the other battalions, we had to dig trenches, sweep landmines and carry packages [loads of military equipment]. We had to dig the trenches and, at the same time, we had to carry the packages, too. Even though we dug the trenches, they weren't for us to sleep in. It wasn't for me to sleep and stay in the trenches. They will not die when bombs explode or when the shelling happens because they stay in the trenches. For us, we had to line up and sleep in cornfields. At that time, they had not unchained our legs, yet. We could not bend our knees. We had to sleep with our legs straight. They unchained our legs just two days ago.

How could you walk and climb the mountains with chained legs?

They did not unchain our legs until we had to follow them to the front line. Later, we walked on a long trip and longer, and climbed the mountains higher and higher. We could not walk with our chained legs anymore. We told them and they unchained only some peoples' legs, not everyone. I still have the marks of the chains on my legs and feet now. They sent us to Palu by military truck, and we reached there on the evening of January 2nd 2010.

Could you look around when you were in the military truck?

No, we were not allowed to see outside. They covered the truck with a plastic sheet. We started walking with our chained legs from Palu. Later, we had to climb the mountains higher and higher; some prisoners fell down, but they had to climb. Even though we were exhausted and wanted to rest, we could not tell them. They would kick our backs with their military boots and slap us when we told them that we were very exhausted and wanted to rest.

Have you ever been tortured by the Tatmadaw when you carried things [portered]?

Yes, I myself have been tortured by them. I also saw three porters who were tortured in front of me, too. They often kicked us with their boots. They kicked the first porter twice or three times because they said he did not sit down carefully. They kicked another porter again and said it was because he put the barrel on his legs [to carry it].

Why were you tortured?

For me, I was tortured because I was involved in carrying the artillery. There were five people in this group and one of the sergeants did not come along with us at the same time, when we climbed the hill. Then, the soldier on the hill told us that we were not clever and beat us. For us, we had to do whatever they ordered and we did not do anything wrong to them.

How many times did he beat you?

He beat me just twice, but he kicked another prisoner five or six times. At night, the prisoner who was kicked told me that his back was in a lot of pain.

How did they treat those who were exhausted and could not porter anymore and those who were sick?

They told us *'This is the army. We will shoot you dead when you cannot carry. Especially, if you get sick, we will not cure you. It does not matter even if you die. Do not come and tell us that your legs are hurting; we will beat you and break all of your legs*.'

Have you ever seen them shoot dead the porters who could not carry anymore?

I did not see it happen when I came to porter at this time. But, I know it is true that they kill porters. It was not just that they threatened us. They will really do it. The porters who had experience also told us that they have seen the army kill the porters who could not carry the loads anymore. I served as a porter only for seven days. Therefore, I did not see them kill any porters, yet. But, we heard it happened later, after ten days.

What is the position [rank] of the soldier who beat you?

He is a simple soldier. He does not have any position. They hold arms and do whatever they want to us.

Were there any porters who stepped on landmines?

In my group, none of the porters had stepped on landmines yet. But I am not sure about the porters in other groups. When I carried things on the front line, I did not see any porters step on the landmines yet. But the SPDC [Tatmadaw] soldiers stepped on the landmines. It is their fate because they do bad things, in dereliction of their duty. Before we deserted, one of the corporals lost his arm and got seriously injured. On the next day, another corporal stepped on a landmine. Again, on the next day, they wrongly fired at each other. The SPDC [Tatmadaw] army based on

the hill mistakenly shelled the SPDC [Tatmadaw] army based below the hill. I was lucky on that day. For us, we had to carry packs of rice and bottles of water for them. The officer who was going to die told me '*What are you doing? Go and bring the bottles of water*.' At that time, we were sitting and he shouted at me '*What are you doing? Go up quickly to the hill*.' A few minutes later when we were on the hill, we heard the mortar shelling.

What did they feed you when you carried the loads?

They did not feed us anything. They fed us only rice. They cooked banana trees and fed us that only sometimes. During the seven days I followed them on the front line, we did not eat for three or four days. They packed rice in the morning and gave us some. Sometimes, we could not eat the rice that they gave us because it had become rotten. Sometimes, they did not feed us and gave the reason that they were busy. They did not feed us every day. I did not eat for two or three days when I was carrying [portering] on the front line. We did eat for the rest of the days. My family sent me fried chilli and yellow cooked beans before I left the prison, and I ate them on the front line. Some porters did not bring any food with them because their families did not know that they had been recruited [forced] to porter and sent to the front line. For me, my family came and visited me the day before I was sent to the front line and gave me some food to bring with me. But, we shared the food between every porter and ate together on the front line.

Did the soldiers eat the same as the prisoners?

No, they ate very different food from us. They drank milk and ate fried rice with dried fish in the morning. For us, we did not eat anything in the morning.

How about the food that the officers ate?

Even though the soldiers could eat these kinds of food, the officers ate much better food than the soldiers. They ate as the monks do in the monastery. They ate only the best food. They asked the soldiers to hunt for chickens in the villages and fried them. They also took back cat meat from the villages and ate that too.

How did you have to sleep at night?

We, 30 prisoners, had to sleep together in a small room when we arrived there [at Kawkareik military camp]. We also had to sleep together when we came to the front line, too. We were not allowed to bend our knees. They kicked us when we bent our knees. The soldiers also watched us [when we slept]. The ants bit us a lot at night when we slept. We were not allowed to wash our faces when we got up in the morning. We were not allowed to take a shower either. We had to eat with our very dirty hands. We were not allowed to wash our hands. We just had to eat like this. If we continued staying like this longer and longer, we would die.

Could you take a rest when you were too exhausted to carry [porter]?

No, we were not even allowed to say that we were exhausted and could not carry [any more]. I was beaten once when I said I could not climb the mountain. That mountain was very high and steep. I told them that I could not continue walking anymore and wanted to rest. Then, they beat me immediately. I was beaten twice on the front line.

How did they ask you to walk on the front line?

They did not ask us to walk in the same position because sometimes we had to sweep landmines with a kind of tool that has prongs. It is like a pitchfork. We used it to scrape the ground and found the landmines. We did not know anything about landmines, but we had to

scrape the ground and find landmines. We were very lucky that we were not killed by the landmines.

Did you find any landmines?

I did not see any landmines. But other porters found landmines.

Did the landmines explode and cause injury to the porters?

No. None of the porters stepped on landmines or got injured by landmines up until now. All were lucky. But the army [Tatmadaw soldiers] got injured by landmines. One of the corporals lost his leg that day. It is fate as a result of doing evil things.

Did the porters have to walk in front of the soldiers or behind?

They divided the porters. For example, there were ten porters and they divided three porters into each group. Each soldier walked after three porters.

When did you flee?

I fled in the afternoon, after 5:00 pm on January --- 2011. On that day, the SPDC [Tatmadaw] army wrongly fought each other. The SPDC [Tatmadaw] army on the hill shelled mortars to another SPDC [Tatmadaw] army camp below the hill. There were three soldiers who got injured and another soldier who died immediately in the SPDC [Tatmadaw] army camp below the hill. Then they also shelled mortars back up the hill. Then the SPDC [Tatmadaw] army under the hill withdrew and ran to climb up the hill. They were very afraid and left their things and ran to climb up the hill. They only cared about their own lives and they did not care about others' lives. They asked seven porters to go down and take the remaining things. For us, they do not care whether we will die or live. But the KNLA soldiers did not shoot us. We knew about *Ng'Bpway* when they arrived here. *Ng'Bpway* were not like what they told us. We were forced to follow [Tatmadaw soldiers] even though we did not want to. No one wants to follow and do this kind of work. We fled when we came down to carry the loads. They [the Tatmadaw soldiers] fired at us with machine guns and shelled us with mortars when we fled.

Who fired at you?

The KNLA did not fire at us. They, the SPDC [Tatmadaw] soldiers, fired at us and wanted to kill us because we deserted.

How did you plan to flee?

At first, we, all seven porters, decided to flee together. We discussed it secretly when we came down. But, the other four porters carried the loads and went back immediately and we could not call them to flee along with us. Then, we, three of us, found it difficult to decide whether to flee or not because the four porters who went up might be killed if we fled. We told each other that we would die if we did not flee and if we continued carrying for them. Then, we decided to flee and we would die peacefully if they fired at us and the bullets hit us. We entered the bushes and ran away. Then they shelled six or seven mortars towards us. The mortars hit the [Moei] river and reached inside Thailand. The fighting occurred around lunch-time.

How many porters deserted along with you?

Two other porters deserted along with me. Three of us deserted together.

Did the SPDC army [Tatmadaw soldiers] see you when you deserted?

They fired at us because they saw us.

Where did you arrive after you ran away?

We reached corn plantations on the Thailand side [of the Moei River]. There were two corn plantations and we hid ourselves between these two plantations. Then, we came forward and encountered a Karen hut. They called us to come to the hut and gave us trousers and clothes for each of us to change out of our uniforms, which were wet. They also fed us rice. Then, we moved to another hut.

What is the name of the village?

It is not a village. People were doing plantations there.

How many people were in the hut? Were they KNLA soldiers?

There were seven people in the hut. They were all villagers. There were no KNLA soldiers. They also came to hide on that side temporarily because they were afraid of the fighting. They said their villages are inside Burma. They also had to leave their bean plantations when they fled to stay there [in Thailand]. They dare not go back and take back their beans that were already harvested, because they are afraid of the SPDC [Tatmadaw] army. They seek odd jobs here and stay secretly here [in Thailand].

Who did you meet with?

We also met with another Karen man. I do not know whether he is a KNLA [soldier] or not. He stays near the river.

Who helped you when you arrived here?

When we arrived here, some people helped us because we were in trouble. But I do not know who they are. For us, we can only understand the Burmese language. We do not understand the Karen and Thai languages. They told us their Karen names, but we just cannot remember.

How did you come here?

We were picked up by a car and brought here.

How many nights did you sleep there [in the corn plantations]?

We slept there for two nights.

Did you know the person who went to pick you up?

No, I do not know. When I arrived there, there was a school. Most children studying there are Burmese children. They have a playground. The teacher there came and picked us up to [bring us] here. He is a little fat.

What was your family's occupation before you were in prison?

My mother died in July [2010]. I came back to my village after my mother died because my father is over 80 years old and cannot do anything. My parents married when they became old. They were a bachelor and a spinster. My sister stays with her family. Currently, she and my younger brother look after my father.

Can you tell us a little bit about your family?

We did not have any farms. We worked as daily paid labourers for other people.

How much did you earn per day?

We earned 2,000 kyat (US $2.40) per day.

Is there any school in your village?

There is a primary school in my village.

Is your brother studying at school?

He quit school because he failed 10th standard again and again.

What is your opinion on the [Tatmadaw] military government?

They do not have any sense of humanity. They cannot sympathize with other people and do not care what happen to the others. They care only for their own benefits. Now, they are doing the election on their own. I have seen that they asked civilians to sign forcibly. They claim that people could vote freely. It is not true. I have experienced it for myself. I did not want to vote and I was forced to vote. Since I was born, I only support Daw Aung San Suu Kyi. Since I was a child, I only liked the bamboo hat [a symbol of the National League for Democracy (NLD), Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's political party]. I support Daw Suu because she has sympathy. They are not like that. They held the election on their own. They said they would confiscate farms and other properties if people refused to give their votes, and would arrest the people who refused to give their votes. Therefore, people had to sign, and gave their votes to support them because they were afraid.

Were there any porters who fled before you?

We heard there were six porters from another group who fled before us and another who also fled. Including us, there are ten porters who have already fled from the army [Tatmadaw].

Are there any porters who were caught back?

We heard there were two or three porters who were caught back.

What do you think they will do to these porters?

They will torture them to death. They will hate these people more, and punish them badly.

What is your future plan?

I want to stay and work peacefully. I have something that I want to do in my life. I want to be a monk again, but I cannot be a monk because I committed a crime. In Buddhism, if you are not free from the penalty imposed by the monarch [ruler], you cannot be a monk. I do not know what to do now.

Do you dare to go back and stay with your family?

If I go back, I will be arrested again and have to stay in prison for a second time.

Do you have any contact with your family?

I have my village phone number, but I do not know how to contact them for now. I want to contact them to let them know that I am still alive. It is good for me to make my father happy because he will be happy when he knows that I am still alive.

Do you want to add anything else?

I have many things that I want to talk about, my experiences. I am not satisfied with them. I am from the Irrawaddy Delta. When Cyclone Nargis hit there, the aid arrived for the people who suffered from Nargis and were in trouble. They [government officials] were corrupt with the money that came to help the people. They opened the packages and took the good things for themselves. For the suffering people, they had only the very old and worn *longgyis* and clothes with them. They also appointed many staff at that time. But, they only allowed their relatives to become staff and paid them a high salary. They did not accept other outside people [to become staff] except their relatives. They paid them over 100,000 kyat (US $120) per month. These problems that should not happen occurred at that time, because they appointed many staff. Those who suffered from Nargis and were really in trouble did not receive anything.

Where did you stay at that time?

At that time, I was a monk and stayed in P---, Bogale Township. The monks were involved in finding support for the people at first. Later, the people found ways to get support on their own. We showed them ways. We dared to speak loudly [lobby for support] as we are monks, but for the people, they dare not to speak like the monks. But, later they found ways to get support.

Did Nargis also hit your village, too?

My home village is Pakkoku, but I went to stay in many different places. Since I was 13 years old, I went to stay in other places. I just came back to visit my village sometimes. I mostly stayed in the lower part of Burma.

When did you quit the monkhood?

I quit the monkhood on June 8th 2010. After I quit the monkhood, I came back to Pakkoku and then I was arrested to stay in prison. I had been a monk for four years.

Interview | Thi Ha Soe, 23 (January 2011, Dooplaya District)

Address prior to arrest: M---, Myaing Township, Pakkoku distict, Magwe division
Ethnicity: Burmese
Religion: Buddhist
Occupation prior to arrest:
Marital status: Married; one child
Reported reason for arrest: Murder
Date of arrest: February --- 2010
Reported sentence: 5 years
Reported date sentence began: December --- 2010
Prison(s): Myaing; Pakkoku
Date sent to labour camp:
Labour camp:
Date taken to porter: December 30th 2010
Size of group taken to porter: 30 from Pakkoku
Area/ location portered: Kawkareik
Battalion: LIB #231
Number of soldiers and porters (exact, not a ratio): 70 soldiers; 30 porters
Date of interviewee's escape: January 10th 2010
Number of porters escaped (not including interviewee): 2
Location of interviewee's escape: Palu
Location of interview: ---
Date of interview: January --- 2011
Future plans: Home

Why did you have to be in prison?

I had to be in prison because I beat a policeman. We, three family members, were arguing with the policeman who insulted our mother, and we beat him and he died. We beat him with a stick. We, three family members, beat him and all three of us had to be imprisoned.

Who came and arrested you?

The police came and arrested me. It was the police from Pakkoku village, Myaing Township, and the police in P--- also came and arrested us.

Do you remember when they came and arrested you?

I was arrested on February --- 2010.

Which prison were you sent to?

I arrived to Myaing prison after I was arrested. I had to face trial in Myaing Township court. I had to stay at Myaing prison for nine months and 24 days. After facing the trial in Myaing Township, they passed judgment on December --- 2010. They passed judgment [sentenced us] for five years, for the policeman who died in our house compound; it became trespassing, so the case became lighter. When we beat him and he died and he was in our house compound, he was trespassing. So our murder case became lighter.

Can you give a bribe to the judge if you don't want to go to prison?

You can give a bribe to the judges but [in our case] the complainant gave money to the judges too, and then the judges didn't accept the money from us because the other side [the complainant] gave them money so they wouldn't accept the money from respondent.

Why did they pay money?

Actually, my two brothers [one was actually a cousin] admitted that they beat him and were guilty, but actually I did that [the crime]. My younger brothers considered that I have a wife and child. First I thought that I wanted them to be free and that I deserved to go alone [to prison], because we are siblings [relatives]. I deserved to go alone and I wanted them to be free because the case was a just one. They refused and admitted to the crime as well. We argued in front of the judges. They admitted to the crime and the judge asked, '*Are you done arguing?*' We continued the argument. They admitted to the crime and I refused to accept it so they sent us to prison with the same level [sentence], five years each.

How do you feel about your case? Is the case just or not?

How can I answer when people ask is it just or not? We did this because they insulted our mother. We were out of control when we did this. It doesn't mean that we wanted him to die. But they paid money and sent the three of us to prison. The judge also followed the money. We are a little unsatisfied with them because it is not fair. They didn't accept our money when we tried to pay the judges, but they accepted it from the other side and sent us all to prison. So we can say that they are not fair.

Did this happen because they came and took over your house?

No, it was not like that. We live in Maw. We went to live in Maw and we left our house with another person, a relative of ours. They [our relative] has money but we don't have money. It is like that. We left the house to them and when we went to go back and stay at our house, they didn't move for us. So we reported it to a *lugyi* [high-ranking police officers] at *Ya Ya Ka* [the VPDC] and then the problem started. They [Ya Ya Ka] were on their side because they [our relatives] have money. For those who don't have money, we just have to sit like this.

Which prison were you sent to after that?

We were sent to Pakkoku prison on December --- 2010.

What did you have to do when you arrived at the prison?

The day when we first arrived in prison we had to water the plants that they planted in the prison garden, like *brinjal* [eggplant] and carrots. The next day we had to change duties.

How many hours did you have to work per day?

We had to work from 8:00 am to 4:00 pm and we finished work at 4:30 pm.

Do they pay you money?

No. We have to do it every day. All prisoners have to do that.

Can you pay a bribe if you don't want to work?

Yes, you can pay. There are some prisoners who do that. You can stay outside [the prison] if you pay money. People who have money and are rich, they pay money to the jailer when they are in prison. They don't stay in the prison. They stay in the city.

What kind of food do they feed prisoners?

For food, on Sundays and Wednesdays we have a good curry. For the rest of the days, seven days a week we have fried fish paste, sometimes with bean curry and *A'Chin* [sour vegetables] curry.

How many times do they feed you rice per day?

They fed us rice two times a day. They fed us at 11:00 am in the morning and 6:00 pm in the evening. The rice that they feed us is enough, but people can't eat it because there is no curry. No curry. Sometimes they mix their rice with water. People can't eat it. Some people eat it just like this, without curry.

How do they let prisoners sleep?

They sleep in a line. There were 53 people in our cell #2. We had to lie down and sleep.

Do they lock prisoners' legs with chains when they sleep?

They didn't lock our legs in prison, but they did lock us in a dark room if the prisoners fought with each other. They didn't do anything if you didn't fight and stayed quiet. You had to work, just the food was poor.

Could the prisoners' relatives come and visit them?

They couldn't visit for a long time. They could come and meet. The place was set up with two *tha t'ka* [wire mesh fences] and they were about two or one and half feet apart: the prisoner sits here [gestures], and the visitor sits there [gestures].

Can they meet freely?

Most people who come to meet the prisoners have to take time and wait. Even though they can meet, they only have a little time to talk, 15 minutes. They can talk just that amount of time.

Do they need to pay money when they come and meet prisoners?

They come one time and, when they come, they have to pay for each visit with a ticket.

Do they have to buy the ticket?

Maybe that kind of ticket. You can enter and meet a prisoner if you have the ticket but you can't if you don't have the ticket.

Are prisoners allowed to read a book or write a letter?

There is no time for poor people to read in prison. Just people who have money can take a rest, but not poor people.

How much do they have to pay per month?

I think they have to pay over 10,000 kyat (US $12) every month, or you can pay for the month when you don't want to work.

Do the prisoners get treatment when they get sick?

We didn't get injections so I don't know. For tablets, they didn't give prisoners the whole tablet; they give just half and you were yelled at when you went to take the medicine. If you cough when you go and ask for medicine, they ask you if you smoke, and they collect [confiscate] your smokes. You don't get warm clothes and when you catch a cold, you are yelled at when you go and take the medicine. For this reason, many people get sick and die.

Do INGO's like the UN and ICRC come and meet with prisoners?

During the time when we were in prison, we didn't see them.

How many policemen died when you beat them?

One. First, there were five people who came. Three went back and just two stayed. The policeman who slapped my mother, I beat him. We did nothing to the other one. Also we couldn't do anything to him. We told the truth when we arrived at the police station.

How long did you stay in Pakkoku prison?

Just ten days and then I had to come here.

How many years did you have to be in prison?

Five years.

How long did you stay in prison?

Nine months and twenty-four days in a prison cell while waiting for trial, and ten days in prison.

You had to stay in a prison cell for nine months and twenty-four days?

Nine months and twenty-four days in a prison cell and ten days in prison. After that I was taken out to be a porter. After ten days, we were taken out as porters.

Can you give money if you don't want to porter?

Yes, you can give money. There were many people who gave money. And we heard from other people and they said the jailers got a lot of money when porters were called. Sometimes, they demanded money from the prisoners when the porters were called.

Did you know that you have to go porter?

First they said 30 had to go as porters and 50 had to go to *yeh beh* [labour camp]. We thought, '*We are new arrivals and we won't be included to go porter.*' There was no preparation because we had just arrived. We knew nothing about prison and we just stayed like this. They chose people on December 29th and 30th and they locked our legs with chains. We were included when they locked our legs but we didn't know we would be included when they chose people to go as porters.

When was that?

December 30th was when they locked our legs with chains and on December 31st, they sent us to be porters.

Who told you that you had to go and porter?

The jail warden. They already collected the name list. They already had the name list that would be included. For us, we knew nothing.

Which army [battalion] came and called you?

From Pakkoku, the army didn't come and call, just military trucks came with Jailer U Kyaw Tha and policemen from the district. Ten policemen were in each truck with 15 prisoners. In total, there were 25 people in a truck. We were sent from Pakkoku [prison] to Meiktila [prison]. We left from Pakkoku on Dec 30th and we arrived at Meiktila on December 31st. We slept one night at Meiktila. On January 1st, we went from Meiktila to Pa'an [prison]. They unlocked the chains from all the prisoners. They sent us with trucks along the way to Pa'an. After Pa'an, we arrived at Kawkareik [Tatmadaw] army base where the army battalion that called us to porter was staying. We slept one night at the army base. There were many porters there. There were two rooms for porters to sleep. One room was here [gestures] and the other room was there [gestures]. There were many porters. We heard them say there were 800 porters. The column that we followed was LIB #231.

How many prisoners came with this column?

We, all 30 people from Pakkoku, came with LIB #231.

Can you tell me about your portering experiences?

Yes, I can tell you. I will say how I came from the battalion base at Kawkareik to here now. We left from the battalion base in Kawkareik and we arrived at Myawaddy at 12:00 or 1:00 pm and then took a rest for a while at Myawaddy. People in Myawaddy donated to the prisoners. For people like us, they donated snacks, betelnut and cigarettes to us. After they donated, we came to here [eastern Kawkareik Township]. We came to Palu Lay village. I don't know what the villages are named here. We arrived at that village and we slept one night at the temple. The trucks sent us to the temple and went back. Starting from the temple, we had to walk on foot; we had to carry their loads, rations and things. We had to carry everything for them. On the front line anywhere they arrived, we had to organise the place for them. We had to dig holes [trenches to sleep in] for them and cook for them. We had to carry everything, including mortars. We carried [portered] and came forward and the fighting happened. The fighting was very serious for two days. We dared not carry to the front line. They [LIB #231] marched to the front and retreated. We had to follow them and carry things. Day after day, we had to do that. On January 10th, the fighting happened. They [Tatmadaw and DKBA forces] fought each other. The Burmese [Tatmadaw] army marched to the front and the soldiers arrived to the top of a hill and the [DKBA] soldiers on this side shot at them and they dared not stay on the hill anymore. They retreated and their mortars and backpacks were still left on the hill. They could only bring their guns with them. We had to carry their materials for them. They asked seven porters to go and get back their materials. They said the DKBA would not shoot *wan saung* [porters]. They ordered us to go and get their materials back. They ordered us and we had to go and get them back. We looked at the situation. There were no [Tatmadaw] soldiers on the front line so we three discussed it with the other four people [porters]. For the other four, they wouldn't escape. Even if they ran, they would die. We told them we also would die if we stayed there. We couldn't work anymore and they locked our legs with chains. Young people like us, we didn't want to stay, but even the old people who were over 50 years old were included. They couldn't work. [If] we stayed there, and one day we would die. We decided to run even if we would die. We escaped on January --- 2010.

Did the army provide clothes to you, like a shirt, trousers, sandals and a backpack?

They didn't give us that. They gave us a prisoner uniforms in Pa'an prison, blue coloured clothes: two shirts, two *longgyis* and a pair of trousers. We brought our own clothes, civilian clothes, but we couldn't wear them. They want to see us wearing the clothes that they gave to us. We were not allowed to change and wear other clothes because the military ordered and we are civilians, so there was no opportunity for us to respond to [argue with] them. We had to eat what they fed us and do what they ordered us to do. We couldn't say anything. We had to wear the clothes that they gave to us. We had to sleep on the ground without blankets.

Were the clothes that they gave to you useful for you?
The clothes they gave us were very gauzy [thin]. We had no clothes to protect our shoulders even though our shoulders were in pain. Their clothes were not useful. We couldn't use their clothes. No way were their clothes useful.

How many hours did you have to carry [porter] in a day?

From 6:00 am in the morning until 6:00 pm, when it was dark, and sometimes we were still carrying for them at 7:00 pm, from hill to hill. They had a lot of materials and it was not easy to finish carrying. Sometimes, all 30 porters had to carry but sometimes they separated people, like the people on the front line: [some] had to dig the holes, some were cooking and some were carrying things. It would be done in a few trips if all 30 porters carried, but only a few people carried so we had to carry until it was dark. But no one could take a rest. Even the porters who were separated, the people in the front, had to do their own work.

Do they allow you to rest when you get tired?

They don't let us rest. They kicked and punched people who asked for a rest. Our mother never slapped our face but they sometimes kicked us and yelled and swore at us when we did something wrong. We had to stay quiet without saying anything to them. We had to go as we could.

How did you have to walk with the army on the front line?

One soldier walks in the front, and one soldier walks between three or four porters. We did not all go together. Soldiers were walking between us. They were holding their guns when they walked with us. There were ordered to shoot if the porters tried to escape and shoot the porters who they saw running.

Did you have to do anything else besides portering?

For other work, we had to dig the holes [for Tatmadaw soldiers to sleep in] and we had to cook for them. We had to do these two jobs when we weren't portering. Even when we didn't have to carry, our hands became wounded [blistered from using the shovels]. We had to dig holes that had rocks in them. The holes were not shallow. We had to dig the holes as deep as our waist. People who had to dig holes couldn't do it anymore because they always had to hold the shovel. They also didn't have experience with this kind of work.

Did they still keep your legs locked even when you were in the forest?

They unlocked us one time in Pa'an. After we arrived to Pa'an and came forward, they locked our legs again. They unlocked us on January 8th 2011 and again on January 9th 2011 in the morning. We had to walk in chains when we went. We had to carry loads. The chains they used to lock our legs were not small. It was difficult for us to work. Even if our hearts were willing to go, our bodies couldn't move. We couldn't walk as we wanted to walk. The chains sometimes got tangled with things. They locked our legs with bicycle and motorbike chains. As you know, the chains can twist. Some people's legs got injured because of the twisting. For us, they locked

us with a big chain. We bandaged [padded] the chain with clothes so our legs wouldn't get injured. They also tied us with ropes [thin wire], like what is used for bicycle brakes, if there were no chains.

Do they provide enough food to porters on the front line?

We just have to cook for them. We never have enough food. They feed soldiers on the front line curry. We have to cook it, and they eat. When the time comes for them to feed us, we couldn't clean our hands and they just fed us white rice. Even salt was not included. Even chilli, we had to take it secretly. We couldn't pick it [in the forest] if they knew. They said '*There are mines there.*' We didn't pick the chilli in front of them. We picked the chilli behind them.

Did the soldiers eat together with porters?

No, they don't eat together. We have to cook for them and send them things like dried fish, canned fish and *luffa* gourd[81] curry. There is no curry for *wan saung* [porters]. The curries are just for the soldiers. We just have to eat rice since we left the prison. Just rice, no salt. Sometimes, they don't give us salt. We just eat rice. We can eat it when we get hungry, but we don't want to eat it.

What do the commanders eat?

For them, they eat fried fish, fried fish paste, fried chilli. They make it in the battalion base. For us, we are from prison and brought nothing with us, so we have nothing to eat. They didn't do anything for porters about food. They said just people on the front line are important. Sometimes we ate once a day and sometimes we didn't eat for the whole day. We begged from other porters, so we became beggars when we were in forest.

Who did you beg from?

From the same porters. Sometimes, the porters also have groups. Some of the soldiers who are kind fed the porters who were with them. We had to beg when we were really hungry. Sometimes they [porters] begged from soldiers and the soldiers gave to them. There were a few people who were good-natured. Most were cruel. Most soldiers were the people who wanted to kick and punch porters. We were in their hands and we couldn't say anything.

How do they let porters sleep at night?

For the soldiers, they sleep in the holes [trenches]. For us we slept in the corn plantation, but there were no corn plants. All the plants had fallen down. We couldn't clean it up. We had to sleep on the plants. No blanket. We had to sleep in the clothes they gave to us. Just one pair of clothes was with us when we came to the front line; just the pair of clothes that they gave to us. We had to work and sleep in the pair of clothes that they gave to us. For them [the Tatmadaw soldiers], they had two blankets on the floor. They had enough equipment for themselves. Their materials lasted longer. We couldn't take our clothes that we brought from home. We had to leave them behind. We had nothing to cover our bodies. We had to sleep on the ground and we were caught in the rain one night.

Did you experience fighting when you were with them?

Since we arrived, there was fighting between them [the Tatmadaw and DKBA]. Among them, there were two episodes of serious fighting. On January 6th or 7th 2011 the fighting was serious. The other side shot and the Tatmadaw soldiers also shot at them. We knew nothing. We had to

[81] *Luffa* gourds, also called sponge gourds, are similar in taste and appearance to zucchini.

avoid. We had no experience and we didn't know how to avoid. The bullets have no eyes and we can't see the bullets. We hid in a place where we could see when the mortars came. The next day that fighting happened was on January 10th 2011. It happened at 3:30 pm. The fighting happened before Bp'Doh [Palu Pa Doh.] They called it '*Bp'Doh*' but I don't know. I know it from them [the soldiers]. When we were close to arriving at Bp'Doh, 20 soldiers marched to the front and the people on this side [the DKBA] shelled them with mortars. We shot and they shot. The soldiers on the front hill dared not stay anymore. They retreated and ran back. We were on the hill and had to hide. We dared not put up our heads. The bullets were running to [being shot at] us and went over our heads but they didn't hit us. The soldiers who were kind told us how to stay low when the bullets came.

Did any of the soldiers or porters get injured or die in the fighting?

Yes, soldiers did, but no people from this side [porters] were shot. Just among the soldiers, one died and three got injured. One of the soldiers died directly. For the rest, their legs and hands were injured. We had to carry those three soldiers who got injured. They were all soldiers. None of the porters were killed or got injured when we escaped to here.

Did any soldiers or porters get injured by landmines?

One stepped on a landmine. He was a corporal. He marched to the front and stepped on a landmine and his right leg was blown off. Another one was a two-star officer, a Lieutenant. His leg was blown off by the shooting of heavy weapons [artillery] from the DKBA side. That is all that I saw. One was dead and five got injured. No porters stepped on landmines.

Did soldiers ask the porters to sweep for landmines?

Yes, we had to. I couldn't find any. Other people saw them. I couldn't find any mines. Every porter had to do it. Sometimes people in the front had to do it. For people behind, they didn't need to do it. But sometimes the people behind had to go to the front. They changed porters' places. They didn't keep us in the same place. They ordered porters in the front to find mines, clean the road and dig the holes [trenches].

Did the porters get medical treatment when they got injured or sick?

No porters got injured or sick but they said that if the porters did get injured by landmines, they would shoot them to death. They wouldn't treat them. Even among themselves, the same soldiers, they don't feel sympathy. They told us like this: '*You will have to die even if you don't want to die. We won't keep you alive.*' They will kick us down to the valley.

Who told you that?

The commander, a three-star Captain. I don't remember the commander's name. He was skinny and thin. He said they used to go to the front line with 200 porters and just seven porters came back. For the other 193 porters, he didn't mean those porters were dead because of landmines, but that they killed those porters because those porters were sick or couldn't work. He said only seven porters came back.

Were the porters abused by soldiers?

This is something that we had to face everyday, in working time and even in sleeping time, we were abused, yelled and sworn at. We were punched if our behaviour was not agreeable to them. They locked us with chains and they kicked, punched, yelled and swore at us when they heard the sound of chains. These are things that we had to face every day.

Who did this to you?

The three-star commander.

What about the soldiers?

The three-star commander controlled us. He controlled all *wan saung*. During the daytime we had to work with the soldiers and we had to stay with that commander at night-time.

So both soldiers and officers were violent to porters?

Yes, they were. As for the officer who controlled us, he slapped and kicked porters in front of us. We felt sympathy for the people who came from the same place. They had to work and were abused. When the soldiers did this, there was no way for porters to live. We thought to ourselves that one day we would die, but we didn't know where we would die. The way they treated us, fed us and ordered us to work, as they told us, there was no way for us to survive. Even if you just got sick, you'd have to die. They wouldn't call us if our legs got blown off by landmines. They 'd kill us.

Do you know anyone, commanders or soldiers name who did [human rights] violations against porters?

I remember *Bo* [Officer] Aung Kyaw Soe. He is a Lieutenant with three stars.

Have you ever experienced how the Tatmadaw treats villagers?

The Karen villagers here, we never met with them. When we arrived at *Tat Gone* [a small hill occupied by Tatmadaw soldiers], we heard the Karen soldiers and the Burmese [Tatmadaw] soldiers swearing at each other on the radios. For the rest of the time, we didn't see villagers. There were no villagers in the village. In the village, they [Tatmadaw soldiers] killed pigs, chickens and cats but they didn't kill and eat the dogs. For pigs, they shot them with their guns.

Were there no villagers in the village?

There were no villagers. The village was good and clean. They didn't take their property, like cars, *et cetera*.

Do you remember what village?

I don't remember the village's name. I heard they called it P'Lu Lay [Palu Poe][82] village. There were no villagers in the village. They all ran away. They were afraid because of the fighting. The soldiers killed any animals that were good to eat in the village. Only the dogs they didn't kill. They couldn't catch the dogs.

Did the porters include any villagers?

No. The villagers were not included. All were prisoners.

Were any porters under 18 years old?

There were many people included with the porters who were under 18 years old. There are many young people included, but we were not allowed to ask the age of the soldiers. One who was either Karen or Shan came when we were digging the holes. He told us his age. He said he

[82] Palu Poe is a Karen village name that means 'Small Palu'; the Burmese word for small is 'Lay'.

was 18 years old. Only him. He was good-natured. He helped us and fed us. He was young. He asked me if I was already married and introduced himself. He asked my age and I also asked his age and he said he was 18 years old.

Was he a porter or a soldier?

He was a soldier.

What about the porters?

One is my younger brother, who is 17 years old.

Did the soldiers threaten you before you escaped?

The three-star captain who controlled us told us that [we] had better not escape. If we escaped, they'd shoot us with guns and, he said, '*You will step on landmines and die. You will not be free even if you escape. You will die when they shoot you with guns.*' They banned us from escaping. We knew nothing and we were afraid to escape, but later we couldn't suffer anymore and we escaped. Later I thought, '*We will die if we have to die. We will have to work and get tired before we die if we stay with them. When we escape, if they shoot us, we will die directly without feeling pain.*'

Were there any who escaped before you?

Not from our group, but there were from other groups. There were six porters who escaped from the other groups. All total, there were seven people who escaped. First, six porters escaped and then one other person. They said all seven porters escaped.

Did they re-capture them after they escaped?

They followed and [tried to] arrest them but they couldn't re-arrest.

How many soldiers were in the battalion that you came with?

I guess there were 40, 50, or 60 people. We can't say exactly but I thought there were about that many. There were 90 people, including porters. This was Battalion #231 but there were many battalions that came here.

What do you think they would do to the porters who are recaptured?

They would lock our legs with chains and beat us, oppress us and order us to carry [porter] even if we can't, and they will beat us if we can't carry. They will oppress in many ways. They will kill porters after we can't work. They won't think about us. The soldiers will do as they said [ie. kill porters who can't work anymore], so we have to stay in good health. To be able to stay alive, we try to work and not get injured and do what they order us to.

How many porters do you think are still left in the battalion you escaped from?

There are 27 porters still left. We are the only three people who escaped from the battalion.

Why did you decide to escape?

We couldn't do their work for a long time. There would be no problem for us if they were kind and ordered us to work on the flat ground or repair the road, but now we have to climb up and down from hill to hill and dig the holes, and we have to do that every day without stopping.

Mostly we have to carry mortars, water pails, food and bags of rice for them. It is very difficult for us to climb up the hills with a bag of rice. We have to do this and carry this every day. Day after day, we can't do it anymore. Our shoulders become painful and we can't work anymore. The time we had to rest was short but the time we had to work was long. We had to carry [military supplies] up 14 or 15 hills in a day. Sometimes, the hills were far but sometimes they were near. We couldn't stay anymore. The reason that I escaped is the food they fed us and the work they ordered us to do. The food that they fed us had no nutrients, it was just rice. We couldn't have enough water. We couldn't drink enough water to fill ourselves up so I couldn't stay anymore.

How heavy was the load that you had to carry?

The load that I had to carry was 30 to 40 *viss* (approximately 48 – 64 kg. / 106 – 141 lb.). We had to carry it on our backs. We couldn't carry it on our shoulders. We had to carry it with a basket. Sometimes we couldn't carry it with our shoulders; we had to use our heads.

When did you escape?

January 10th 2011 at about 5:00pm. I don't know the place where we escaped from but I can say that, before we arrived at *Bpay T'Gone*, there was a mountain and their temporary army base was there. There was a hill in front of the mountain and 20 of their soldiers marched to the hill and attacked the DKBA. The fighting started between the SPDC [Tatmadaw] army and the DKBA. The soldiers from the Tatmadaw dared not stay on the hill anymore. They retreated and fled back. Their bullets, mortars, backpacks, spades and mattocks were still left behind. The soldiers dared not go and take them back. They told us: '*The DKBA won't shoot prisoners so you guys go and take back those things.*' They ordered seven of us to go and take back those things. There were no soldiers in front of us when we went and took back their things. They said: '*We will shoot them for you if they shoot you guys.*' When we arrived at the foot of the mountain, there were no soldiers so we escaped. This is the only way for us to escape. This is not the chance that we found. This is the chance they gave to us. So we escaped. Among the seven of us, four people said '*Don't escape. You will step on landmines and you will die. They will shoot you with guns and you will die. Either way you will die, so don't escape.*' We told them: *'You guys also will die one day if you stay there. They ask you to work and you will die. We will die when we run and they shoot at us. We won't have to feel pain.*' We three discussed it and escaped together.

Did the Tatmadaw soldiers know when you guys escaped?

They saw us when we ran. They saw us and then shelled us with mortars and shot at us with a machine gun. Not only the soldiers here on that mountain [gestures] shot at us, but also other soldiers on another mountain shot at us. They shot at us. The bullets came over our heads. We were lucky and the bullets didn't hit our heads. They shot at us a lot. They shot six mortars and, with the machine guns, they shot 100 bullets within five minutes. They shot at us a lot but none of us were hit.

What is your future plan?

Currently, I don't know what to do. I have never been to Thailand. I've just heard the name. I don't know what kind of job I will have to do. I have no person that I know. I want to work if the job is good but, if the job is not good, I want to contact my family and ask for money and go back to Burma. I know no one here. There are people who can't understand Burmese. I don't know anyone and I don't know who to ask for help.

Do you dare to go back to your village?

I dare not go back to my village. I will return to Burma and stay somewhere else.

Do you dare to go back to Burma?

It doesn't mean I dare to go back. I have to go back if I can't stay here. Even if this country accepts us, we have a livelihood problem.

What is your opinion of the Tatmadaw?

Before, people respected, loved and supported the Burmese army [Tatmadaw] but now the Burmese army oppresses civilians a lot. It has become like it was during the Japanese decade. When Japan ruled Burma, the Japanese army slapped, kicked and punched when they saw people. Now the Burmese army has become like the Japanese army. Instead of helping each other, they don't help. They oppress each other. Oppression, verbal abuse and beatings are happening more. They hold guns and civilian can't argue back to them. They hold guns and they do whatever they want, and we have to do what they order. They beat and oppress us if we don't. For this [in this way], the Burmese army oppresses civilians a lot.

How did you feel when you had to become a porter after being a prisoner?

I had to go to prison because I was guilty. Before, the army and civilians cooperated together. We were guilty and we had to be in prison, even though we couldn't stay comfortably in prison. They used us as porters and they didn't keep [look after] us very well when we were on the front line. They oppressed us. We aren't satisfied with the Burmese army. The things they do are wrong.

Some porters agree with this process. What about you?

We were guilty and we had to go to prison and we had to stay in prison. That does not relate us with the front line. Prisoners and soldiers are opposite. We are guilty and we will repay our debt in prison. But they used us on the front line. They already signed an agreement that they will not use civilian porters. They don't use civilians as porters but they use prisoners as porters. They use prisoners as porters and they treat them as cows and buffalos on the front line. And we were like elephants in the jungle. Our legs were locked. The elephant's legs are locked when the elephant pulls logs. If the elephant can't go, the human beats them. We are also the same as this. They are not fair using prisoner as porters. We are in prison because of our own fault and we will repay it in prison. We don't want to work with the army but we have no opportunity to say so. So they oppressed us a lot.

Are there any other things that you want to say?

No.

Interview | Win Win Naing, 17 (January 2011, Dooplaya District)

Address prior to arrest: Myaw Weh Taung, Myaing Township, Pakkoku distict, Magwe division
Ethnicity: Burmese
Religion: Buddhist
Occupation prior to arrest:
Reported reason for arrest: Murder
Date of arrest: February 26th 2010
Reported sentence: 5 years
Reported date sentence began: December 17th 2010.
Prison(s): Myaing; Pakkoku
Date sent to labour camp:
Labour camp:
Date taken to porter: December 30th 2010
Size of group taken to porter: 30 from Pakkoku
Area/ location portered: Kawkareik
Battalion: LIB #231
Number of soldiers and porters (exact, not a ratio): 70 soldiers; 30 porters
Date of interviewee's escape: January --- 2010
Number of porters escaped (not including interviewee): 2
Location of interviewee's escape: Palu
Location of interview: ---
Date of interview: January --- 2011
Future plans: Thailand

Why did you have to be in prison?

Um, like, *yeh moo* [beating someone to death]. Someone had an argument with our mother. I beat up a policeman and I had to be in prison. The incident happened on February --- 2010, last year.

Why and how did this case happen?

We didn't have money. Our family went and worked outside of our town and city, and we left the house with our relative for a while when we went and worked out of town. After a year, when we came back, our relative didn't give us back our house but my mother stepped in and stayed in the house. The person who we left the house with didn't feel satisfied, so he went and reported it to the police and the police came and argued with my mother, and the policeman hit my mother's cheek. We beat the policeman and our hands were out of control, and he died. I fled away after I beat the policeman but I was arrested in July 2010. I escaped and was arrested when I got malaria. I was arrested at Bpauk Tone village, K'Lay city. The P--- [Town] police came and arrested me. I was arrested when I got sick. I don't know who went and informed the police. There were six policemen who came and arrested me, but all the people who came and arrested me were more than ten people, including civilians. They arrested two people, me and *Bp'Kyi* [a cousin of his father].

How did they come and arrest you? Were they violent towards you?

They beat me and my forehead was cracked and my head was beaten with a stone, just that. Nothing else. After that, they called me back from K--- city to P--- jail. I had to stay in P--- jail for 14 days.

Did you know or remember the name of police who came and arrested you?

Htway Aye Maung, he is Kachin and he is *yeh aoht* [police officer]. Another one is Than Zin Oo and another is Way Lwin. I don't know about the rest of the people.

Did you have to go to court after you were arrested?

Yes, I had to go to Myaing [town]. I don't remember the date when I was prosecuted and faced trial. I just remember the date when they passed judgment. The judge passed judgment on me on December --- 2010, for murder.

They arrested you guys [including his brother Thi Ha Soe] in different places but they passed judgment in the same court?

Yes.

Do you remember the name of the judge who passed judgment on you?

I don't know the judge's name. She was young. I don't know her name. She was around 30 years old.

Can you give them a bribe if you want to make the case become light, or if you don't want to go to prison?

We can give a bribe if we have money, but we didn't have money so we had to be in prison. If we had tried to pay the money, we could have been free with 300,000 kyat (US $360).

How many years did you have to be in prison?

Five years.

How do you feel about their judgment? Do you think it was just?

In my opinion, he hit my mother's cheek and I killed him. They put me in prison for three years. I think this is not justice. We don't have money. The judges look at whether the person has money and they pass judgment. So I think this is not justice. I was in prison in Pakkoku prison. They didn't send me to other prisons, just to Pakkoku prison.

Did they send you to *yeh beh* [prison work camp]?

They didn't send me to *yeh beh* but they sent me with the military as a porter.

What did you have to do when you lived in prison?

There was nothing else special that we had to do.

Can you explain to me about your experiences in prison? Like, how do prisoners have to stay, what do prisoners eat and how do the jailers treat the prisoners?

For the food, we were prisoners, so the rice that was provided by the government was not good and neither was the curry. You could eat until you were full and had eaten enough food, but the rice and curry were not good. We had to wake up at 5:00 am in the morning. After waking up at 5:00 am, we had to line up and do exercises. After doing the exercises, we had to work at 6:00 am. We had to start work from 6:00 am to 4:00 pm but we had one hour to rest at noon-time.

Can you give them money if you can't work and want to rest in prison?

Yes, you can do that. You have to pay 1,000 kyat (US $1.20) per day. You can take a rest after you pay 1,000 kyat. You can bribe them if you don't want to work. People who don't want to work and people who are rich pay the money.

How does the jailer or jail warden treat their prisoners?

I stayed in prison only for ten days so I don't know a lot. I only saw the jail warden one time. I didn't see them a lot.

What kind of food did they feed you in prison?

In prison, we ate carrot leaves, rice and bean curry. Maybe once a week, we ate meat. For the rice, they gave us enough but for the curry, they gave us to share.

How do the prisoners have to sleep in jail?

In prison, there is a row of tables like a rack and we had to sleep on it.

Can a prisoner's family come to meet and visit them?

Yes, they can meet, but they can't meet freely. The guard stands beside them. They can meet for just 15 minutes. They can't talk freely. They [the prison staff] take half of the things that the family of the prisoner brings, like money, curry and other food.

How much money do they have to pay when they visit the prison?

They have to pay 300 kyat (US $.36) to meet someone and they can meet them for 15 minutes. Some people can meet just for five minutes and then they have to leave. They do this when they didn't get money from the visitor.

Are the prisoners allowed to read news, books and magazines or write letters to their family or friends?

I don't know if they allow prisoners to read but the prisoners are not allowed to write or to keep pens and pencils and books with them.

Can the prisoners receive medical treatment when they get sick?

They do give medicine but when you go and ask for medicine, like if I am coughing and I go and ask for medicine and I say I am coughing, they ask '*Do you smoke?*' and they collect [confiscate] your cigarettes if you say that you smoke. They give you half a tablet [of medicine]. If you go and tell them that you have a stomach ache, they ask you '*Did you eat chilli?*'. If you ate it, they say, '*Give me your chilli,"* and then they take it and give you half a tablet.

Did any visitors from the UN or the Red Cross come when you were in prison?

No, I have never seen that.

When did you have to come here as a porter?

On December 29th 2010, they called out a list of names, including prison numbers. People whose names were called had to go and it included me. Me and my brother [Thi Ha Soe] and friends of mine.

Where?

In Pakkoku prison.

Could you bribe them if you didn't want to come?

You could give them money if you didn't want to come. You had to pay 200,000 kyat (US $240) per year if you didn't want to come. For the two of us, we don't have money and we couldn't give it, so we had to come here.

Do you know that you had to porter when you came here?

We didn't know if it was for portering or *yeh beh* [prison work camp] when we lived in prison. They wrote the name list, but we knew nothing. They called us and we followed. We didn't know where we had to go.

Didn't the jailers say anything?

They didn't say anything.

How long did you have to stay with the army as a porter?

I stayed with the SPDC [Tatmadaw] army for eight days.

Do you know the battalion that you came with?

231 battalion [LIB #231].

Do you know the name of the commanders in the battalion?

I don't know their names. I remember one or two: Bo See Thu and Bo Kyaw Soe Win. Bo See Thu is a Lieutenant, with two stars. Bo Kyaw Soe Win has three stars.

How did they send prisoners from Pakkoku prison to here?

They took us out from Pakkoku prison at 7:00 am. The police from Pakkoku accompanied us. They sent and accompanied us with military trucks. We had to sleep one night at Meiktila prison. They changed the trucks the next day. Another army group came. They came and we arrived to Pa'an.

How many porters were included?

There were 30 porters from Pakkoku prison.

Did you have to sleep on the way?

We slept one night at Meiktila and one night at Pa'an. After Pa'an, the army from Kawkareik came and picked us up.

Were they LIB #231?

No, I just know LIB #231. It was just LIB #231 that came and called us. We had to sleep one night when we arrived at Kawkareik. Then, from Kawkareik, we passed Myawaddy and there is

a Karen village at P'Lu Kyi.[83] We slept one night at the monastery. The next day, we had to walk with locked chains.

How did they ask you to walk? Did you have to walk behind the soldiers or in front of the soldiers?

We had to line up and walk. There were many people. They [the soldiers] walked beside us.

How did they order you to walk on the front line? Did they lock your legs and order you to walk?

From the monastery to P'Lu Lay village,[84] we walked and they didn't lock our legs with chains. They locked our legs when we slept at P'lu Lay village. They locked our legs with chains and we had to do what they ordered.

How many porters were included with the battalion that you came with?

30 porters from Pakkoku were included with the battalion that I came with.

Can you tell me about your experience as a prisoner porter?

I don't know what to say.

What did you have to do when you stayed with the army?

I had to dig a hole [trench] for them at their outpost and carry rice, pots, water, bullets, materials for finding mines and their backpacks for them. The weight was about 30 *viss* (approximately 48 kg. / 106 lb.).

Did they provide clothes, sandals and backpacks to prisoners?

They gave us trousers, clothes, sandals and hats for us. But we didn't get all of it. We didn't get hats. For the other people, they got hats. We got trousers, slippers and shirts.

Were these materials useful for you?

It was useful for me because we couldn't wear our clothes from home and we had to wear the clothes that they gave us.

How many hours did you have to carry [porter] in a day?

From 6:00 am, we carried without resting until the evening. We had to carry the whole day.

Could the porters take a rest when they got tired?

No, they were not permitted to take a rest when they got tired.

What did they do to the porters who couldn't carry anymore?

For the porters who couldn't carry, if the porter says, '*Sa Ya [teacher] I can't carry anymore,*' they kicked and hit that porter.

[83] Palu Pa Doh [Big Palu]
[84] Palu Poe [Small Palu]

Did you have to do other things for them?

We had to dig the holes, cook and carry water for them.

How did they feed porters on the front line?

Sometimes, we couldn't eat but sometimes we could. When we could eat, we just had rice, no salt, oil or curry.

Was the food that they fed enough for the porters?

No, it was not enough. We couldn't eat until we were full. We had to do what they ordered us to do while we were eating, like when they ordered us to go and carry rice, water and dig the holes.

Did the soldiers eat the same as the porters?

No, they ordered us to cook separately for them and we had to carry food for them.

How did the porters have to sleep at night?

We, porters had to sleep in a line at night, systematically. We were not allowed to stand up or make a request to go or if we wanted something at night. We were beaten if we said something.

Did you have experience with the fighting when you were a porter?

I heard the Karen army [DKBA] and the Burmese [Tatmadaw] army fight each other when I was a porter. I, myself had experience and had to hide during the fighting. I had to run and hide here and there when they were fighting.

Where did the fighting happen?

To the east of P'Lu Lay village. The fighting happened along the way from the time we left the village until we escaped from the army.

When did the fighting happen?

The fighting happened in the morning. For the Burmese army [Tatmadaw], they didn't even see people [the DKBA]. They [the Tatmadaw] shelled mortars in the morning. The Karen army [the DKBA] came and attacked them at 2:00 pm. They shot them one by one. If the Burmese army shelled ten mortars, the Karen army shelled just one. The Burmese soldiers got injured. The Karen army shelled and an officer with two stars, one of his hands was blown off and his stomach and face were injured. The same [Tatmadaw] soldiers mistakenly shot at each other and one died directly. Another one's leg was broken, another one's hand was blown off and another one got injured to his head. Four got injured. Just one died. Another one stepped on a landmine that was planted by the Karen army [DKBA] and his leg was blown off.

Did you have any experiences with landmines?

No.

Did the porters have to sweep for landmines?

Yes, we had to clean. The soldiers ordered us to clean and find landmines at the place where they were going to put their base. For them, they could take a rest but for us, we couldn't take a rest. We had to find [sweep for] landmines. But no one got injured from the mines.

Did they provide medicine when porters got sick or injured by landmines?

I don't know about other people but, as for me, I didn't get any. Like if we couldn't go and we told them that our legs or hands were in pain, they said they'd break our hands and legs.

What did they do to the porters who get sick on the front line?

At the moment, as I saw, there were no porters who got sick. I also can't say.

Did the soldiers abuse porters on the front line?

They kicked and hit porters when the porters couldn't walk, carry or do what they wanted. They don't just yell and swear. They beat them when they couldn't order porters to work.

Who did that? Was it an officer or a private?

Officers and privates are not different. They do the same. They beat and kick if porters can't carry.

Do you know the names of the commanders or privates who did that?

I don't know their names.

How does the [Tatmadaw] army treat villagers?

It seems like they have power and people have to do what they want. They beat and oppress people who don't do what they order.

Have you ever witnessed them oppressing villagers?

I never witnessed it. I heard it from other people.

Were there any villagers included in the porters?

No, but I don't know about other battalions.

Did the army threaten porters not to escape?

Yes, they did. They worried that we were going to escape. '*If you arrive in Thailand and meet with T'Bpoh [KNLA soldiers], they will kill you, or you will step on landmines when you escape. It is not easy and they can arrest you.*" They did threaten us not to escape. Like, they said '*The Ng'Bpway [derogatory term for Karen soldiers] will shoot you to death if you go to them.*'

Were there any porters who escaped before you?

I heard before I escaped that six porters had escaped from another group.

Could the Burmese army [Tatmadaw] manage to re-arrest them?

No.

What would happen if a porter who escaped was re-arrested?

I thought if they re-arrested a porter who escaped, they'd order him to work very hard even if he couldn't, and he could be ordered to work more than before. They would oppress him and find his mistakes even if he didn't make any. I thought they would oppress him like this.

How many porters were still left after you escaped from the battalion?

There are 27 porters still left.

Why did you decide to escape?

They ordered us to work every day and we couldn't work anymore. They ordered us to work but we couldn't eat and drink. We would die if our time there became longer and longer. It is better for us even if we couldn't escape. If we couldn't escape and they shot us to death, we dared to die, so we escaped.

Can you tell me about your escape step-by-step from the army to here? When did you escape?

We escaped on January 9th 2011 at 3:00 pm. We escaped from the place where they were fighting, the fighting area called Bp'Du Oh [Palu Pa Doh]. There was fighting with the Karen army [the DKBA or KNLA]. The Karen army shot shells to the Burmese army [Tatmadaw] and they dared not stay. They were on the hill; they dared not stay there and they retreated. Their backpacks, mines, bombs, bullets and hoes were still left on the hill. They dared not go and take them back. They let us porters go. They said '*If you go the Karen* Ta Bo *[rebel group; either the KNLA or DKBA] will not shoot but they will shoot if we go.*' So they let us go. We, seven people, went and we told each other to run. When we arrived to the place where they [other porters] were afraid and dared not to escape, the others said, '*Even if we run, we will not be free and it will not be easy if we are arrested. Mines were set up and if we step on one, we will die.*' For us, we told them, '*You guys stay if you don't want to follow us. For us, if we have to die, we will die. We can't suffer their oppression anymore.*' We talked and four of them went back and we three people fled to here. We fled to Thailand and we sat under a tree on the shore of the river. We thought, '*Where are we going?*' because we had never been here. We didn't know what to do. We worried that the Burmese army would follow us, and we fled to Thailand. We fled to the Thai side and we met with *A Moe* and *Pa Tee* [Aunt and Uncle; the terms used here refer to villagers Win Win Naing met in Thailand, not to his relatives]. We called them and we went and stayed at that hut.

What time did you arrive at the hut?

About 4:00 pm or 5:00 pm. We didn't sleep there. They asked us to change out of our prisoners' clothes and they gave us clothes to wear. After that they fed us rice. After that, the Karen army [KNLA or DKBA] – or not, I am not sure – came and called us and they kept us at their place. We had to sleep at *Pa Tee* and *A Moe*'s hut for two nights.

How did you get to here?

The Karen elders or KNU leaders came and called us. They came and called us yesterday and we arrived here.

Do you know the people who went and picked you up?

We don't the names of the people who came and picked us up. People said they were schoolteachers or school principals.

What is your future plan?

I will stay in Thailand. I have never worked and I can do nothing. The work that I can do is rare [limited]. I don't know what I have to do now.

Have you ever been to school?

I already graduated 8th standard. I couldn't continue because my parents couldn't afford the school fee. So I had to leave.

How many siblings do you have?

I have six siblings. One is a girl. My father passed away.

What is your opinion of the Tatmadaw army?

They don't give democracy and the fighting happens with the Karen army. I thought this is not fair and just, because when others get democracy, our country, Burma, doesn't get democracy. The Karen army and the students stand up against the government and I am happy, because if they win, we will get democracy. I encourage them. I support and stay with the Karen army. I don't want to see the Burmese police and army. I really hate them and feel hurt by the Burmese military.

How do you feel when they use prisoners as porters?

I can't say and I don't know how to say.

Some people think they are guilty and have done wrong things, so it is fair for them to be porters. What do you think?

I think this is not fair because they slapped my mother's cheek. No one can suffer it when his mother's cheek is hit. I am like this. I couldn't hang my head when my mother's cheek was slapped. So I beat him to death. I had to be in prison for five years and I had to go with the army as a porter. I think this is not fair.

Why do you think this is not fair?

I think this is not fair, because they insulted my mother and slapped my mother's cheek and I killed them. I killed him because he insulted my mother and slapped my mother's face. I was put in prison and followed the army as a porter. This is not fair.

Do you have contact with your family?

I haven't had contact with my family yet.

Does your mother know that you had to come here to porter?

We couldn't meet with our mother when we stayed in prison. They will know now but not before.

Do you want to go to school?

Yes, but I don't have money.

You are a child under 18 years old so I will submit your information to UNICEF and is it ok if they want to come and interview you?

I am willing to come and meet them.

What other help do you need?

I want to contact my mother first and I want to work, and I will go to school if I can go to school.

Are there any other things that you want to say?

There are no other things that I want to say. I want to work and my hobby is working in a car shop fixing cars. I want to work like this but I am not interested in carpentry.

2010

Interview | Htike Lin, 41 (January 2010, Papun District)

Address prior to arrest: S---, K--- village, Shan State
Ethnicity: Chinese
Religion: Christian
Occupation prior to arrest: Company driver
Marital status: Married; six children
Reported reason for arrest: Drugs
Date of arrest: August --- 2007
Reported sentence: 15 years
Reported date sentence began:
Prison(s): Lashio
Date sent to labour camp:
Labour camp:
Date taken to porter:
Size of group taken to porter:
Area/ location portered:
Battalion: LIB #56
Number of soldiers and porters (exact, not a ratio):
Date of interviewee's escape:
Number of porters escaped (not including interviewee):
Location of interviewee's escape:
Location of interview: Papun district
Date of interview: January --- 2010
Future plans: Home

What is your father's name?

My father's name is P---.

What is your mother's name?

My mother's name is Daw M---.

How many standards have you graduated?

I have graduated the 4th standard.

How many children do you have?

I have six children.

What crime have you committed?

I have committed the crime of drugs.

When were you arrested?

I was arrested on August --- 2007. My case is a trading case.

How much did you have to sell?

The interest [profit] is 20,000.

Where did they take you after you were arrested?

They took me to S--- police station then again to S--- District prison.

How long did you have to stay there?

I stayed there for more than five months.

What were you doing in that five months?

I had to face crime.

Are there any cash fines in the prison?

Yes, but they don't measure the amount of cash.

How long was your sentence charged for the crime?

I was charged for 15 years.

Where did they send you?

They send me to Lashio jail.

What was your prison number?

My prison number is 8----.

Which battalion did you come here with?

I came with Battalion [LIB] #56.

Could you tell us of your experience on your way here?

We have to carry loads the whole day and sometimes we have to travel at nighttime. They blame and threaten us if we can't travel. I heard that they killed one porter after I left and they killed two porters the same day I escaped.

What is the name of the last camp you arrived at?

I don't know what they call the camp by name because I have never been here before. We worked at the last camp for three days. On the first day we had to transport rations for them and, on the last two days, we had to transport their ration twice a day.

Did any battle happen on your way?

Yes, it happened between the two hills and 5 SPDC soldiers and 2 porters were injured.

How many died?

There is no one who died.

Why did you escape?

I didn't want to do it any more.

How terrible is it, what they force people to do?

They ask us to carry heavy loads without relaxing.

How many child solders were included?

Yes, only a few child soldiers were included but not too many.

What is the age of the youngest people?

It will be 13 or 14 years old but not too many.

How many people of that age did you see?

I saw only 4 or 5 people that young.

What did they say to make porters afraid to escape?

They threaten us and said they will shoot us if we escape or the KNLA will kill us if we arrive to them.

Why did you escape even though they threatened you?

I escaped because I couldn't be their porter anymore. I always prayed to God to secure me and help me escape soon.

How do you feel now?

Now, I am really happy.

What is your plan for the future?

I am from S--- in northern Shan state. So, it is a little far to go back home and I also don't know the way how to go back. But I want to go back.

How do you see the SPDC army?

I see that the SPDC army just does what they want to do and it is not based on justice.

How would you call them?

I would like to call them an army without justice.

Interview | Dee Zar, 33 (January 2010, Papun District)

Address prior to arrest: Yangon
Ethnicity:
Religion: Muslim
Occupation prior to arrest: Taxi driver
Marital status: Single
Reported reason for arrest: Manslaughter
Date of arrest: June --- 1999
Reported sentence: 20 years
Reported date sentence began: June --- 2000
Prison(s): Insein; Tharyarwaddy; Toungoo
Date sent to labour camp:
Labour camp: Kin-tha 1, Naypyidaw – 3 years
Date taken to porter: 1 month before escape
Size of group taken to porter:
Area/ location portered: Kyauk Kyi area
Battalion: LIB #56
Number of soldiers and porters (exact, not a ratio):
Date of interviewee's escape:
Number of porters escaped (not including interviewee):
Location of interviewee's escape:
Location of interview: Papun District
Date of interview: January --- 2010
Future plans: Home then Thailand

What is your father's name?

My father's name is U K---.

What is your mother's name?

My mother's name is Daw A---.

Which standard have you finished?

I have finished the 4th standard.

Why did you have to go to jail?

I had to go to jail for manslaughter.

When were you arrested?

I was arrested on June --- 1999.

Could you tell me a short story about yourself?

I had opened a tea shop. Many people came to drink coffee at my shop. I had a good relationship with them all. One of my friends was using opium injection and he went into shock and died in my toilet. Then the police arrived and took me to court. I was charged and sentenced to be in jail for 20 years.

Which court of law were you charged?

I was charged at Insein West court of law.

When were you charged?

I was charged on June --- 2000.

Which jail did they send you to?

They took me to Insein prison.

What is your prisoner number?

I can't remember it.

How many prisons were you moved to?

First I was in Insein prison and later I was sent to Tharyarwaddy prison. Then I was taken out as a convict at Kin-tha (1) *kyauk toht loht* [stone production] camp.

How many years did you work there?

I worked there for around 3 years.

When did they take you out of prison to be a porter?

They called us on the 8th and took us out of prison on the 9th then they moved us to Toungoo and we had to sleep there for four nights. On the 13th, Battalion #56 came and took us to be porters.

Could you give us details of the places you had pass through?

We came with an army truck to Kyauk Kyi area, then there was a battle and two officers and three soldiers were injured. They took the officers back to the base line for medical treatment. I thought that I would escape at that time but, because I didn't have a gun to protect myself, I had no chance. So, I had to transport food and cartridges on the battlefield. And we had to move the rations that we had already transported again to another place. It was going to take 5 or 6 days to move it all, but I had already worked on it for 4 days and I had to carry loads twice a day. Me and one of my friends escaped the next morning during the first trip of our transportation and it is also the time when mules and people are mixing up. We told them that we had to go to the toilet then we escaped into the jungle.

What did you have to carry?

We had to carry cartridges, rice, dry fish and vegetable oil.

How did they treat you along the way?

They would beat us and force us to carry loads even if we could not carry them. On the way, one of the porters ran out to escape but the SPDC shot at him and he was injured. One of the officers asked his man to give him some medicine and sent him back to base line for treatment.

How long have you traveled from Kyauk Kyi to here?

We have traveled almost one month.

How did you feel during that one month experience?

We feel better than this when we are in prison, even though we have to break rocks there. When we come as a porter, we have to carry what we can't carry and also we don't have enough food to refill our energy. We also have to travel through jungles and mountains which we have never experienced before. We were suffering from their beatings even when we became weak and tired. Later, we escaped because we couldn't bear their torture anymore.

How do you view the Burmese army?

I view them as a ferocious armed group.

What is your plan for the future?

My plan is to visit my parents for a few days. I will sell my house and land that I own and then travel to Bangkok in Thailand and stay with my brother there.

Where do you need someone to take you so you can go back to your village?

I can get back to my village by myself if someone takes me to Kyauk Kyi or Mae Sot.

How do you think people feel under SPDC government control?

In my view, there is no satisfaction among the people. There is no justice.

How can you say that there is no justice?

Yes, I can say that because they charge only around seven years in prison for a murder. People like me just open a teashop and various kinds of people will come. And a house should have a toilet. Some people will use drugs when they go to the toilet and how can we know about that? Later, the mistake is put on the shop owner alone and he is charged with 20 years in prison. That why I say there is no justice.

Is there any way to reduce or lighten your crime?

Yes, there is. They ask for money.

How much did they ask from you?

They ask 2,000,000 kyat from my mother and my mother said she will pay this money if they close down this crime and release me. But they said they can't release me it can only lighten my crime. I mean that, for me, I need justice. People should be punished for the crime they commit. They should not be making money on crime. Now, they only use their power and do what they want.

Interview | Aung Thu, 20 (January 2010, Papun District)

Address prior to arrest: M--- Street, Section ---, Lashio, Shan State
Ethnicity: Shan
Religion: Buddhist
Occupation prior to arrest: Tradesman
Marital status: Single
Reported reason for arrest: Selling drugs
Date of arrest: March --- 2007
Reported sentence: Six years
Reported date sentence began: September --- 2007
Prison(s): Lashio; Mandalay; Kin-tha (1); Toungoo
Date sent to labour camp:
Date taken to porter: 1 year after arrived at Kin-tha
Size of group taken to porter:
Area/ location portered:
Battalion: IB #56
Number of soldiers and porters (exact, not a ratio):
Date of interviewee's escape:
Number of porters escaped (not including interviewee):
Location of interviewee's escape:
Location of interview: Papun District
Date of interview:
Future plans:

What are your parents' names?

My father's name is U --- and my mother's name is Daw ---.

What is your education level?

I have graduated grade 8.

What crime did you commit?

It is a drug retainer.

When were you arrested?

I was arrested on March --- 2007.

Could you tell us about your story?

My father suffered from paralytic stroke and received medical treatment in Mandalay hospital. My mother stayed with my father in hospital. We didn't have enough money to pay for the treatment. So, I think I will find a job and will come back when I earn some money. Then I went to Lashio and met with a friend and he said that there is a job for me. I just followed him and we had to sleep one night there because we missed the bus line. For me, I didn't have any ID or recommendation to stay one night in a hotel. But he told me he has an ID to rent a hotel room for one night. So, we decided to sleep there. At around 10:00 pm the police came and knocked at the door. My friend, he walked to the door and opened it. Then he showed police with his eyes directed to my pillow. Therefore, the police opened up my pillow and saw drugs underneath. The police ask me who this drug belongs to. I said I don't know. I told the judge that this drug is not mine. I would not open the door easily if I really kept this drug in my hand.

This drug is belonging to him (my friend). It is not mine. I didn't know that he put it under my pillow. The police ask me to show them the house that I sell the drugs to but I don't know which house it is. I answered if you would like to know the house, you must ask him (my friend). I really don't know. The police released him and arrested only me and opened the case. First, the police put me in a detention room. They investigated me and beat me a lot. But I know nothing. Later, they charge me to be imprisoned.

Why did they do this to you?

Police just wanted the case to make money so they hired him [my friend] to do that to me.

Is this their [police] practice?

Yes.

How do you feel about this happening?

I feel really sorry because it happened when my father had suffered from paralytic stroke and was receiving medical treatment at the hospital. My father died when he heard that I had been arrested and sent to a convict camp. Now, I still have my mother but she is so old. She can't work as before. My mother is staying alone. I really feel sorry every time when I think about her.

Where did they take you and who passed the judgment?

They took me to police station (1) Lashio and the judge of Lashio Township make the judgment.

Do you know the name of the judge?

No, I don't

When was the judgment made?

The judgment was made on September --- 2007.

How many years were you charged?

I was charged with six years in prison.

Which prison were you sent to?

I was sent to Lashio prison, then to Mandalay prison and then to convict camp, Kin-tha (1) *kyout htot lote* [stone production] camp.

What is your last prison ID No?

My last prison ID No. is 0----/K.

How long did you have to stay there?

I had to stay at convict camp for around 1 year.

When were you taken out?

I was taken out on the 9th from Toungoo prison.

Who took you out?

IB #56 came and took me out.

How did you come up here?

First, we came by truck and later only on foot. We had to sleep 8-9 nights along the way.

What do you have to carry?

I had to carry rice and cartridges. A battle also happened on our way to Kyout Toung.

What did you experienced on your way?

I was kicked in the face and beaten on the head by SPDC soldiers. I never faced hardship like this before. We didn't have to work like this even when we were in convict camp. We also had enough food in there. So, I was beaten a lot.

Interview | Zaw Htun, 32 (January 2010, Papun District)

Address prior to arrest: Sh--- Section, Phyu City, Bago Division
Ethnicity: Burmese
Religion: Buddhist
Occupation prior to arrest: Paddy field
Marital status: Single
Reported reason for arrest: Girlfriends' parents complained to police that she was underage
Date of arrest:
Reported sentence: 20 years
Reported date sentence began:
Prison(s): Mawlamyine
Date sent to labour camp: 3 years after imprisoned
Labour camp: Meikathey [Thaton]
Date taken to porter:
Size of group taken to porter:
Area/ location portered:
Battalion: LIB #709
Number of soldiers and porters (exact, not a ratio):
Date of interviewee's escape:
Number of porters escaped (not including interviewee): 1
Location of interviewee's escape:
Location of interview: Papun District
Date of interview: January --- 2010
Future plans: Earn money to send home

What are your parents' names?

My father's name is U --- and my mother's name is Daw ---.

Which standard have you graduated?

I have graduated the 10th standard.

How did you become an SPDC porter?

First, I took my girlfriend for a pagoda visiting trip then we spend time for 6 months. Her parents reported us to the police and both of us went to the police station and explain to them that we love each other and plan to get married. Then the police released us back home. She is already 17 years and 11 months old. There is only one month needed to become adult. I heard afterwards that someone gave 100,000 kyat to M--- police to arrest me. The police arrested and questioned me there. After that they sent me to Thaton to face the court.

When did it happen to you?

I don't remember it.

How long did they charge you to be in prison?

They charged me to be in prison for 20 years.

Which prison did they put you in?

I was charged in Thaton and put in Mawlamyine prison.

What is your prison ID number?

It is 3----.

What do you think about this happening?

This has become the system in the courts of Burma, that the crime will become smaller if you give money and it will become heavier if you can't give money.

How long did you stay in prison?

I stayed in prison for around 7 years.

Which prison were you taken from?

I was kept in prison for three years and then sent to a convict camp called Meikathey. I was taken out by the military and slept two nights in Thaton. The next day I was sent to Myaing Gk'Lay and slept there for one night. In the morning, we came here directly by truck.

Where is Meikathey convict camp?

It is in Thaton district.

Which group of SPDC army did you come here with?

I'm coming with #709.

How long have you stayed with them?

Around 12 days and then I escaped.

What did you have to do?

In the morning time we have to work and then cook in the afternoon time. They give us rice but we can't cook rice to eat. We have to cook a half milk tin of rice for four of us to eat and boil a pot of water for them. So we found some things in the jungle that we can eat to fill our empty stomachs. We don't have enough food and we still have to work. If we stayed there for longer then we would become weak and dizzy. So, we decided to escape.

How many of you escaped?

Two of us escaped.

What is the name of the other person?

His name is Ko A---.

Why did you escape?

We escaped because we didn't have enough food and because they have arbitrary control over us.

What is your plan for the future?

I have a plan to find a job somewhere to earn and save some money to transfer to my parents as we are a poor family.

Are you afraid to go home?

No, I am not afraid to go back to my parents. But I already decided that it is better not to go back. Because, I will be arrested again if they see me when I go back and they will repeat the punishment on me again and again without any benefit to my family. My idea is to work far away from Burma and to help my family's income.

How do you see the SPDC government?

There is nothing satisfying under SPDC government control. It is not the view of me alone. Many people are against the SPDC government control system.

How do you see the group of SPDC soldiers that you came with?

There are some good people included but most of them are bad. But we also could not tell them that they are bad because they have to follow orders from upper levels. However, we can say that there is no justice in their control system. An SPDC soldier doesn't have the right to do anything. So, they just have to obey and follow orders from above. There was one Lance Corporal, one Corporal, one Sergeant and four new recruited soldiers, who showed me their desire to desert from the SPDC army. There were six SPDC soldiers who I was with who said they would follow me to desert from the military if I knew exactly the situation here, that the (KNU side) would save me like this. One of the SPDC soldiers told me that he already escaped three times from the army but he couldn't make it. He asked me *"Is it safe to live with you in your village?"* then I answered him *"Yes, it is safe for you to live with me."* Then he told me he will escapes from the military when he arrives back to the back row. He also told me that he dares not to escape here in the frontline area. Because, it is said in the SPDC military *"Don't escape in the frontline area. Karen rebel group will kill you if they get you."* So, they dare not to escape and even us porters dare not to escape due to those words from above.

What kind of job do you hope to get?

I would like to get any job that is appropriate to me if you can help. But it is better to get a job that meets with my skills.

What would you like to share more about?

I just would like to say that I already made a decision that I will be happy to give my life for many other people to gain justice and peace.

Interview | Moo Thee, 43 (January 2010, Papun District)

Address prior to arrest: Section ---, N---, Shan State
Ethnicity: Shan
Religion: Buddhist
Occupation prior to arrest: Digging stone and gardening
Marital status: Married
Reported reason for arrest: Selling drugs
Date of arrest: December --- 2008
Reported sentence: 12 years
Reported date sentence began: May --- 2009
Prison(s): Lashio (1 month); Mandalay; Yangon; Mote-pa-lin (5 months)
Date sent to labour camp:
Labour camp: Mote-pa-lin
Date taken to porter:
Size of group taken to porter:
Area/ location portered: Bpa Hike camp, Papun
Battalion: LIB #709
Number of soldiers and porters (exact, not a ratio):
Date of interviewee's escape: less than two weeks after arriving at Bpa Hike camp
Number of porters escaped (not including interviewee):
Location of interviewee's escape: Bpa Hike camp, Papun
Location of interview: Papun District
Date of interview: January --- 2010
Future plans: Home

What are you parents' names?

My father's name is U --- and my mother's name is Daw ---.

How many standard have you graduated?

I have graduated 5th standard.

How did you become an SPDC porter?

I was put in prison and the SPDC military took me out to be a porter.

What is the crime that you committed?

I committed the crime of drugs 15/16.

When were you arrested?

I was arrested on December --- 2008. They destroyed everything in my house then arrested me but I had nothing [no drugs] in my hands.

Why did they arrest you?

It was not me alone. They raided seven houses in N--- and arrested people in the same day and at the same time. They found drugs in only two houses and they found nothing from the other houses. I admit that I used to sell drugs before but I had stopped it for a long time, when they arrested me. They found nothing in my house then they called one of my children and questioned him about my occupation. My child knew nothing and they couldn't arrest me.

Later, they put the package of drugs among my firewood when I wasn't looking and asked the village head to search for drugs in my house again. The village head found the pack of drugs among the firewood and then they arrested me. I tried to deny it when I was in court but I could not make it.

Why did they do like that? What is their purpose?

According to law and order, they have to fight against drugs but they don't do it to the opium fields because they get money from the owners. They search for the people who have the name for selling drugs in the town to arrest or to make money from. They destroy the house when they search and they leave compensation for 10,000 Kyat to the house owner. What we can do with this 10,000 Kyat of money. Only God will know whether this is fair or not.

How long did they take time for the investigation?

They investigated my case for four months.

Which judge makes decision on your crime?

I can't remember the judge's name but it was a judge in N---.

When was the judgment made?

The judgment was made on May --- 2009.

How many years were you charged?

I was charged for 12 years in prison.

Which prison did they sent you?

I was sent to Lashio prison.

What is your prison ID number?

My prison ID number is 0----.

How long did you stay in Lashio prison?

I didn't have to stay in Lashio prison for a long time. It was only one month and then they told me to move to another prison and got me out and sent me to Mandalay. I had sleep in Mandalay prison for five nights then again back to Yangon for nearly one week and then they sent me out again to convict camp.

Which convict camp did they take you to?

It is Mote-pa-lin convict camp.

How long have you stay in Mote-pa-lin convict camp?

I stayed there for around 5 months.

What did you have to do in there?

We have to carry clods [of dirt]. We had to start working at 5 o'clock in the morning and have breakfast at 12-1 o'clock in the afternoon. We only can relax at our breakfast time for a while. And then go back to work again after breakfast until 5 or 6 in the evening time. We can't walk during work time, only running is allowed. But that depends on their orders.

When were you taken out from there?

I was taken out from there on the 10th. I had sleep in Thaton prison for two nights then #709 took me out from there. We had to cross Ka Ma Maung and then to Papun. We slept at Papun for one night and then the next morning we continued to the mountain range area. I don't know the names of the villages that we went through.

Which camp did you arrive at last?

The last camp that I'd arrived at was Bpa Hike camp.

How long did you stay in that camp?

I arrived there on the 21st and escaped on the ---.

Why did you escape?

I escaped because they dare not transport their rations due to landmines. We had to eat the small rations that we have in camp with a large number of people. We had to eat poorly and that is why I escaped from there. It is appropriate for them but not for us. They don't work but we have to work everyday and eat boiled rice from half milk tin by four or five people. So, it is not fair. For them they can eat it because they don't have to do anything.

What is your next plan?

My next plan is to go back to my family and live together with them. I have to try [to earn money] for my children's education too.

How do you view the SPDC military group?

Before, I think the SPDC military group is good and I always welcome them to my house for coffee. But when I experienced for myself, I understand that the SPDC in my thinking before and now is absolutely different. They have nothing good. They ask me to carry loads that need two people to lift. For them, they carry only a light load. If we look at this, even children can know that they are good or bad. For me, I see nothing good in them. So, I have to tell the truth that they are absolutely bad.

Interview | Min Win, 23 (January 2010, Papun District)

Address prior to arrest: Insein Township, Yangon Division
Ethnicity: Burmese
Religion: Buddhist
Occupation prior to arrest: Flower seller
Marital status: Married
Reported reason for arrest:
Date of arrest:
Reported sentence:
Reported date sentence began:
Prison(s): Toungoo
Date sent to labour camp:
Labour camp:
Date taken to porter: 6 days after arrest
Size of group taken to porter:
Area/ location portered: Baw Hser Koh
Battalion/ officer: #320, commanding officer *Bo Gyi* Hteh Lin Ko
Number of soldiers and porters (exact, not a ratio):
Date of interviewee's escape:
Number of porters escaped (not including interviewee): 7 (2 died crossing river)
Location of interviewee's escape:
Location of interview: Papun District
Date of interview: January --- 2010
Future plans: Home but then move to border

What are your parents' names?

My father's name is U --- and my mother's name is Daw ---.

Which standard have you finished?

I have finished the 4th standard.

Why did you become an SPDC porter?

They arrested me when I was waiting for the bus to get flowers to sell on the roadside. First, They told me to go with them just for a moment. After that they tied me up with rope then they sent me to Toungoo prison.

When did they arrest you?

I can't remember it.

How long did you have to stay in Toungoo prison?

I had to stay in there for six days. After that SPDC soldiers came and took us by trucks.

Where did they take you?

They took us to their military camp.

Where is their camp?

Their camp is in Toungoo town. They took us to #62 camp. They next morning they told us to go porter.

Where did they ask you to go porter?

They took us by truck to Mone town. We started carrying loads from Baw Hser Koh military camp for seven days.

Did you go together with SPDC soldiers?

We had to travel in the jungle and cross over many mountains. There were many camps on our way. Lastly, we arrived at a camp that is at the top of a mountain.

How do they call that camp?

I also don't know because I escaped on the same day I arrived to that camp.

Which unit of SPDC military did you come along with?

I came with #320.

Do you know any names of their commanders?

No, I don't. I know a name called *Bo Gyi* Hteh Lin Ko but I am not sure of his rank.

Could you tell us about your experiences when portering?

Once, they only fed us once in a day and some days they fed us both breakfast and dinner and some times they fed us nothing. They beat us with their guns, their hands and kick with their boots if we become too weak to carry loads. Now, I am still in pain from their torture. They said they will leave us if we can not carry load. I think they will leave us at their camp but they mean that they will leave us after they kill us. So, I try to carry my load as the best as I can. They also don't give us enough time for our meal then continue walking. At nighttime, we have to sleep without any blanket.

Did you see any porters die on the way when you came?

No, but two of the officers stepped on landmines and one died and the other one is injured. Some porters had to carry the injured one back to the back row for medical treatment. They also detonated another mine on their way back. There were six people and all of them died there.

Why did you escape?

They forced us to be porters. We requested them to inform our family. We have a wife and children at home. They told us they would inform our family but they don't inform our family. However, we have to come because we are afraid of them. When we arrived here, they tell us that we can not stay here and also they don't send us back home. We have to stay with them for six days in the jungle. We have to transport their things. So, we don't know if we will step on a landmine. Therefore we escape because we don't know the day that we will die.

How many people did they arrest together with you?

They arrested around 14 people. We're all from Yangon.

What time did they arrest you?

It was at around 8-9 o'clock at night.

What is the date they arrested you?

It was on December --- 2009 and they sent us directly to Toungoo.

How do you view the SPDC military?

If I tell you my true attitude, I don't want to go back to Burma again. But I will go back home because my family and my parents are already worrying about me now. I will not live at my old place again if I arrive back home. I will find a job at another place, like somewhere along the Thai-Burma border.

Why don't you want to go back home?

I want to kill SPDC soldiers if I see their faces, that why I don't want to go back home. I am telling you the truth. I hate them and also I'm afraid of them.

How did you escape?

Eight of us escaped that day. Four of us fled this way and crossed four hills then went down to the riverside. After that we crossed the river to the other side because we were afraid of SPDC soldiers. Two of our friends died when we crossed the river because they can't swim.

Who are they?

I also didn't know them before. Both of them are from prison. We can't find them when we arrived at the other side of the river. We also were very tired and nearly died too.

Who took you here?

We just walked along the riverside and then saw a hut in a hill field cultivation area. But we saw nobody in the hut. We also became hungry and we boiled beans that were planted in that hill field and ate them. We also slept there for two nights. In the morning of the second day, we went out to find the way to go. We found some footprints that we followed and we met with Thai soldiers. We ask them to give us food because we are hungry. Then they prepared food for us. A person, I think he is from here, he came and got us from the Thai side by a boat. When we arrived here, they questioned us and told us to tell them our true story.

What are the names of your other friends who died?

One of them name is Bpyoung Gyi and I don't know the name of another one.

What is the name of your friend who came with you?

His name is Ko S---.

Is he from the same prison as you?

He is from the same prison as me and is also from Yangon.

What is your future plan?

For us now, we don't have any recommendation letter or ID. So, we worry that we will be arrested again on the way back home. However, my plan is to get back home and take my daughter and wife to my uncle who lives in northern Shan state and work there. After that I will continue to China when I have saved some money for my family. I don't want to stay in Burma anymore.

Which way would you like to go back home and where do you need people to take you to?

I can go back home if people take me to Pa'an or Mawlamyine or Bilin.

What would you like to share more about?

I would like to say that I felt very happy when I saw that SPDC soldiers were attacked by the KNLA.

Interview | Shwe Aung, 44 (January 2010, Papun District)

Address prior to arrest: Section ---, Yangon
Ethnicity: Burmese
Religion: Buddhism
Occupation prior to arrest: Tradesman
Marital status: Married
Reported reason for arrest: Arbitrary arrest
Date of arrest: December 6th 2009
Reported sentence:
Reported date sentence began:
Prison(s): Toungoo
Date sent to labour camp:
Labour camp:
Date taken to porter: 6 days after arrest – December 13th 2009
Size of group taken to porter: 100 military trucks at Toungoo
Area/ location portered: Baw Hser Koh
Battalion: LIB #320 in Division #60
Number of soldiers and porters (exact, not a ratio):
Date of interviewee's escape:
Number of porters escaped (not including interviewee):
Location of interviewee's escape:
Location of interview: Papun District
Date of interview: January --- 2010
Future plans: Home

What are your parents' names?

My father's name is U --- and my mother's name is Daw ---.

How did you become an SPDC porter?

I was coming back from work and was waiting for the bus. There were three people who came and told me to follow them just for a moment. Then they took me to the police station.

When did they arrest you?

It was on December 6th 2009.

Where did they send you after you were arrested?

They sent us to Toungoo prison.

How many people did they arrest together with you?

Only me they arrested at the bus station but they sent six people together with me to Toungoo prison.

What did they tell you after you were arrested?

No, they told us nothing. We knew that we were arrested to be porters when we arrived at Toungoo. They collect people in Toungoo. We had to stay in Toungoo for 6 days then they took us from Toungoo to SPDC military #60 base camps and we slept there for one night. In the early morning of the next day, we left the base camp in trucks.

How many trucks?

It was around 100 trucks.

Where did you arrive?

We arrived at Baw Hser Koh camp and we slept there for one night. In the next morning we started traveling along to here.

Did you leave Baw Hser Koh camp by truck?

No, we walked.

What kind of loads did you have to carry?

I had to carry fish paste, rice, medicine and cartridges.

Which military unit did you come with?

I came up with #320.

Could you tell us more about your experiences of portering?

Yes, we had to carry loads along our way. I can't even walk after one day but they force me to go and I threw my shoes away and climbed up the hill. I started getting tired and said I will die if I can't breathe. He told me it is not only me to die. We all are the people who are going to die. In the evening I started to lay down on the ground and they kicked at my ribs three times. Then I tried to stand up again from the ground and one of porters who was nearby helped me with some of my load. So, I can continue working. We had to carry loads like that for seven days and the next four days we had to carry loads again. I became really tired and told them that I couldn't carry loads any more. Just kill me if you will force me to continue to carry loads. However, I forced myself to continue to carry loads because I was afraid of them. We also can't eat what we want to eat. Sometimes we have to eat the same thing for breakfast and dinner. We have to eat poorly but they eat good food. I told them to feed enough food to us as long as they ask us to carry loads. But they said we have to eat what our scale is [according to our rank].

When did you come out from Toungoo prison?

We came out from Toungoo prison on December 13th 2010.

How many days did you have to carry loads on the way to the last camp?

It was six or seven days on the way.

How many days did you stay in the last camp before you escaped?

We escaped the first day we arrived at the camp. We don't have any plan to escape but there were many things that need to be transported waiting for us at the back row, that will take one month [to transport], such as beans, rice, medicine, milk and sardines. It will take one month to transport everything. They said they would send us to the back row for their ration transport. Then we decide to escape because we are afraid of mines if they send us back to the back row for transportation. We aren't afraid to die but we afraid of being injured and then killed by them. That's why we escaped.

What is your future plan?

I have three children. We are very poor. My oldest daughter is studying in 9th standard. She has to pay a lot of money for her school fee. Her exam is also getting closer. So, I would like to go back home if it is convenient for you to help me.

What kind of military do you think the SPDC is?

The SPDC use their power and torture people in villages.

How do you feel about SPDC soldiers?

I hate the SPDC military. I hated them before I came here because they kill the students, civilians and monks. So, I see them as a group of killers. I don't see them as a military that fights for their country or for civilians.

What would you like to share more about?

I just would like to say that I would like to go back home as soon as possible.

Interview | Yan Kyi, 35 (January 2010, Papun District)

Address prior to arrest: Tharyawaddy Township, Bago Division
Ethnicity: Karen and Burmese
Religion: Christian
Occupation prior to arrest: Paddy field
Marital status: Married; 3 children
Reported reason for arrest: Murder
Date of arrest:
Reported sentence: 10 years
Reported date sentence began: January --- 2004
Prison(s): Tharyawaddy (8 months); Kin-tha 1 (six years); Toungoo
Date sent to labour camp:
Labour camp:
Date taken to porter: December 12th 2009
Size of group taken to porter: 200
Area/ location portered: Baw Hser Koh
Battalion: #320, commanding officer Hla Tun
Number of soldiers and porters (exact, not a ratio):
Date of interviewee's escape:
Number of porters escaped (not including interviewee):
Location of interviewee's escape:
Location of interview: Papun District
Date of interview: January --- 2010
Future plans:

What are your parents' names?

My father's name is U --- and my mother's name is Daw ---.

How many standards have you finished?

I finished 4th standard.

How did you become a SPDC porter?

I was a convict.

What crimes have you committed?

I committed the crime of murder.

When did you commit the crime?

It was in year 2003.

Could you tell us about your story?

The crime started from having an argument at my wedding ceremony.

How did the argument happen?

This person killed my brother during 1988 students' demonstration. He came to my wedding and got drunk and then started an argument with me. I wasn't thinking too much and killed him back for my brother.

Who is he?

He is also from Tharyawaddy district.

Which police arrested you?

It was the Tharyawaddy police.

What is the name of their leader?

His name is Khin Maung Tint.

Which prison did they send you to?

They sent me to Tharyawaddy prison.

Who made the judgment?

U Kyaw Aye, judge of Tharyawaddy Division, made the judgment.

When was the judgment made?

It was made on January --- 2004.

How many years were you charged?

I was charged for 10 years.

Where did they send you?

I was sent from Tharyawaddy prison to Kin-tha (1), *kyout htot lote* camp.

What is your prison ID number?

My prison ID number is 0----.

How long did you have to stay in Tharyawaddy prison?

I had to stay in Tharyawaddy prison for 8 months.

What did you have to do in Kin-tha (1) camp?

I had to break the rocks.

How long did you have to stay in Kin-tha camp?

I was in Kin-tha for around six years.

Could you tell me some of your experiences?

[No clear explanation]

When were you taken out of Kin-tha camp?

I was taken out of Kin-tha camp on December 12th 2009.

How many prisoners were taken out?

200 people were taken out.

Where did they send you to?

They sent us to Toungoo prison and we stayed there for four days. After that SPDC soldiers came and took us by truck then I just knew that we have to go to work as SPDC military porter.

Which military unit did you come with?

We came with #320.

Do you know any commander name in #320?

No, I don't know. I only know one of the officer's names, it was Hla Htun.

Could you tell us how did you come here in detail?

We left from Toungoo to Thandaung and again to Baw Hser Koh by truck. Then we had to walk all the way from Baw Hser Koh to here.

What did you have to carry?

I had to carry cartridges. It was very heavy. It was around 18 Viss.

Where did you start carry that load?

I carried it from Baw Hser Koh to here.

What is the name of the last camp that you left?

I don't know the name of that camp.

Why did you escape?

I am afraid to die when I see other people die.

What is your future plan?

I would like to go home because I have had no chance to see my parents for a long time.

How many children do you have?

I have three children.

What do you think about what kind of military group the SPDC is?

They have no empathy. They torture the civilians and don't feed enough food to the people who work for them.

Don't they threaten you?

Yes, they do.

Why did you decide to escape?

We know that we will also die if we continue stay with them that why we decide to escape.

Could you tell us more about your paddy fields in Tharyawaddy district?

I have six acres of paddy field.

Is it enough for your family to live?

Yes, it is.

Would you like to say something more about the SPDC?

I think I will not continue to stay at my own village. I will move to another place because I don't want to meet with them again.

Interview | Aung Hin, 29 (January 2010, Papun District)

Address prior to arrest: H--- village, Th--- Township, Bago Division
Ethnicity: Burmese
Religion: Buddhist
Occupation prior to arrest: Farming
Marital status: Married
Reported reason for arrest: Murder
Date of arrest: November --- 2001
Reported sentence: 20 years
Reported date sentence began: May --- 2002
Prison(s): Insein (13 months); Tharyawaddy (6 years); Mote-pa-lin (sent May 2nd 2009); Thaton (sent December 9th 2009)
Date sent to labour camp:
Labour camp:
Date taken to porter: December 9th 2009
Size of group taken to porter: 90
Area/ location portered: Myaing Gyi Ngu
Battalion: LIB # 709
Number of soldiers and porters (exact, not a ratio):
Date of interviewee's escape: December --- 2009
Number of porters escaped (not including interviewee):
Location of interviewee's escape:
Location of interview: Papun District
Date of interview: January --- 2010
Future plans: Home

Why did you become a porter for the SPDC army?

I became a porter for the SPDC army because the crime of killing occurred. I killed a person with a knife who insulted [raped] my older sister. I was arrested on November --- 2001 by Th--- police and was sent to Th--- police station. I was sentenced to stay in prison for 20 years on May --- 2002 by Bago Division judge. Then, I was sent to Insein prison and stayed there for 13 months. I was sent to Tharyawaddy Prison again and then I was sent to Mote-pa-lin Prison on May --- 2009. They took out 90 prisoners including me from the prison to be porters on December 9th 2009. We were sent to Thaton Prison and slept there for two nights. Then, they came at night to take us from there. Firstly, we came here to this site by cars, and then we had to cross the river by boat. After that, we had to walk from this site to the place where we deserted. We started walking from Myaing Gyi Ngu. We had to carry rice, bullets, and rations. It took four to seven days to reach the army camp by walking. According to my experiences, they walked through jungles and slept there. We had to climb the mountains and they kicked us from behind when we could not walk. They shot a man dead at night in a village and gave 30,000 Kyat in compensation for the dead man. In the morning, a woman and a young person came and cried. As they had to do the funeral, we were told to give the money to them and gave 30,000 Kyat to them. When we arrived to the army camp, we had to stay only three or four days. They ordered us to clean the bush and cut firewood. We had to do all the tasks there. We were tired doing these tasks. We both fled from the army in the morning when they [SPDC soldiers] ordered us to clean the bush and cut firewood. My Tharawaddy prison number was 5-----. There were over 700 prisoners in Mote-pa-lin Prison, they took for porters only 90 prisoners. They took out other prisoners for porters seven months after we arrived here.

Why did you desert?

We deserted because they, LIB # 709, tortured us. We could not continue to stay because they did not feed us enough. They only fed us porridge to eat. Eh Kler and I fled from being convicted porters when we were told to carry back big firewood. We told them to go first and we would carry it back. Then, we ran away with our knives. We continued running through the jungle for three hours and we saw a house beside the field. We called the house owners but we saw no one. As we were hungry, we pounded paddy and got a cup of rice. Then, we cooked porridge and drank it. After that, we walked straight down the path and saw two elephants and an old man and young person. We gave them our knives. We told them about ourselves, that we had deserted from being convicted porters. They called us to follow and fed us a meal, rice and pork curry. Then, they sent us here. We arrived here on December 28th 2009. We had to sleep five or six nights on the way.

What is your plan in the future?

I want to go back and stay with my parents and family. If I am sent back to Pa'an city, I can get back to my village.

What are the common livelihoods in your village?

The common livelihoods in my village are doing fieldwork. The people who do not have fields do daily paid work. Rich people are fine, but the poor face poverty. In the past, farmers have to pay 12-13 baskets per acre. Later, people said that they did not have to pay the same as the previous amount, they had to pay only five to six baskets per acre. If farmers can't pay them, they arrest the farmers. So, the farmers have to hide themselves in their fields and sleep in the fields at night. Some people do not get the paddy they cultivate due to floating and the insects bite. They [SPDC authorities] know about this situation and saw it for themselves, but they demand it forcibly.

What do you think of the SPDC army?

The SPDC army oppresses its own nation. I am not satisfied with them. As we are not able to do anything, we have to be patient.

Do you want to say something?

As for me, I would like to say that I have not seen my mother and my family for six years. If possible, I want to see my mother and my family as quickly as possible.

Interview | Htun Htun Lin, 26 (January 2010, Papun District)

Address prior to arrest: Lashio Township, Shan State
Ethnicity: Chinese
Religion: Buddhist
Occupation prior to arrest: Labourer
Marital status:
Reported reason for arrest: Drugs
Date of arrest: November --- 2007
Reported sentence: 12 years
Reported date sentence began:
Prison(s): Lashio; Kin-tha; Toungoo
Date sent to labour camp:
Labour camp:
Date taken to porter:
Size of group taken to porter: 200 to Toungoo; 50 with LIB #320
Area/ location portered: Baw Hser Koh to Pla Koh camp
Battalion: LIB #320
Number of soldiers and porters (exact, not a ratio):
Date of interviewee's escape:
Number of porters escaped (not including interviewee):
Location of interviewee's escape:
Location of interview: Papun District
Date of interview: January --- 2010
Future plans: Home

Why did you become the SPDC army's convicted porter?

I became the SPDC army's convicted porter because I was a prisoner.

Why were you imprisoned?

I was imprisoned due to drug related crimes. I saw two bricks of black star opium. Its weight was about 52g. Lashio [Drug Protection Police] came and arrested me on November --- 2007. Then, I was sent to Lashio No (1) police station. I was sentenced in Lashio Township court for 12 years by Lashio Township judge. I was imprisoned in Lashio prison. Then, I was sent to Kin-tha prison (1) and my Kin-tha prison (1) number was 7----. I stayed there for over a year. There were over 800 prisoners there [at Hin Tha] and 200 prisoners were sent to Toungoo Prison on December 9th 2009. In Toungoo Prison, there were 50 prisoners were taken out for porters on December 5th 2009. We had to follow LIB #320 on the military track. Firstly, we came by the track and reached to Baw Hser Koh. From Baw Hser Koh, we had to walk and carried bullets and rice. Its weight was heavier than a rice sack. They beat us and scold us when we could not carry. They also hit us with their guns and they shot us when we deserted. There were many convict porters deserted. Some porters got shot when they fled.

Why did you desert?

I deserted because we did not have enough food to eat. The last army camp that I arrived was Pla Koh army camp. I deserted alone. I deserted because I could not continue to suffer their beatings.

What is your plan in the future?

I want to go home. If I am sent to Taunggyi Town in Shan State, I will be able to go back.

How did you feel when you saw the SPDC army torture the porters?

I wanted to fight back, but I was alone. They are so many that I could not do that.

What do you think of the SPDC army?

I think the SPDC army is a brutal army. During my time spent being a porter, there was fighting and some people got injured by landmines. On the trip, there were three or four bulldozers blown up by landmine explosion.

Do you want to say anything else?

I am not satisfied with them because they arrested me due to the drug related crime. I explained to the judge about my case, but he did not accept it. He discharged those who could bribe him with money and, on the other hand, he charged those could not bribe him. Not only the judge, but also every authority such as the police, the doctor, etc. under the SPDC government wants and demands only money. I was demanded over 10,000,000 Kyat for my discharge. I could not pay it and was imprisoned.

Interview | Eh Kler, 26 (January 2010, Papun District)

Address prior to arrest: Section ---, Three Pagodas Pass, Karen State
Ethnicity: Karen
Religion: Buddhist
Occupation prior to arrest: Labourer
Marital Status: Married
Reported reason for arrest: Drug possession
Date of arrest: February --- 2006
Reported sentence: 20 years
Reported date sentence began:
Prison(s): Mawlamyine; Zin Kyaik; Mote-pa-lin; Thaton
Date sent to labour camp: April --- 2007 (Mote-pa-lin)
Labour camp:
Date taken to porter: December 9th 2009 to Thaton
Size of group taken to porter:
Area/ location portered: Bper Heh camp
Battalion: LIB #709 under Nyi Nyi Lat
Number of soldiers and porters (exact, not a ratio):
Date of interviewee's escape:
Number of porters escaped (not including interviewee):
Location of interviewee's escape:
Location of interview: Papun District
Date of interview: January --- 2010
Future plans: Home then Thailand

Why did you become an SPDC convict porter?

I was imprisoned because I was arrested with drugs. I was arrested on February --- 2006. I kept four, five or six tablets of the amphetamine drug *ya ba* [Thai name] to drink with my friends. They [Three Pagodas Special Drug Protection Group] arrested me with these four, five or six tablets and sentenced me to imprisonment for 20 years in Kawkareik court. My purpose was to have fun as I was a youth. They should sometimes forgive the youth and should sentence fairly. I was so sad when they imprisoned me for 20 years due to having few drugs with me. It should not be like this. 20 years is as long as half of a person's life time. So, I deserted because I can not suffer for 20 years. The Three Pagodas Special Drug Protection Group arrested me and sent me to Kawkareik District Court. Before they sent me to the court, the police and the group came to my older brothers and told them they would take me out for 20,000 Baht. As for the judge, he asked us how much money we could afford to pay for discharge whenever we faced the court and we had to go to the court many times. He asked my mother, but my mother could not afford because she did not have any money to pay. Each time, he demanded 20,000,000 Kyat. But, it was not to be completely free from going to prison, he would just reduce the sentence to less years to stay in prison when he charged me. Therefore, because I could not pay, I was charged for 20 years and was sent to Mawlamyine Prison and my prison number was 3203/C. Then, I was moved to Stone Production Camp [to break the stones], Zin Kyaik and then sent me again to Mote-pa-lin on April --- 2007. There were 150 prisoners, including me, taken out for porters from Mote-pa-lin Prison on December 9th 2009. Then, we were sent to Thaton Prison. Finally, LIB #709 under Brigade #44 came to pick us up to porter for them. The battalion commander is Nyi Nyi Lat.

Can you tell us your experience step by step?

The LIB #709 went to take us out and put us in a truck with our chains and did not allow us to look at the vehicle road. They sent us to Myaing Gyi Ngu and Ka Ma Maung by truck. It was

about 6:00 pm in the evening when we had to start walking, carrying bombs, rice, etc. When it was about 11:00 pm, we reached a place and took a rest there. They ordered us to cook and we ate rice. We had to walk from Ka Ma Maung to Papun areas. During the trip, some porters could not carry the loads and were beaten, hit and scolded by the army. As I am a youth and a little strong, I kept up and told myself that if others could carry the loads, I could carry them too. Because I did not want to suffer like the others and be scolded, beaten and hit. I also saw the SPDC army shoot villagers dead. It seemed like they shot the villagers mistakenly, but actually they shot the villagers and the villagers did not die immediately. They shot the villagers again until they were dead. So, we were sad and sorry when we saw like this. It happened at 11:15 pm in Hsaw Bpweh Der village. The SPDC army was informed that the villagers would go to find fish at night and come back. However, when the villagers came back in reality, the sentry shot them. It hit the villager's leg and he cried. They continued shooting three times at him and his ear was shot and lost. Then, it was silent. They went to bury the dead body at night. But, it did not stay a secret because the other villagers heard the gun firing at night. In the morning, the villagers and *A' Moe* [the mother of the dead man] came and cried. They gave 30,000 kyat to *A' Moe* for funeral costs. The last army camp that we arrived at was Bper Heh army camp.

What do you think of the SPDC army?

I think the SPDC army is a very oppressive army and commits this oppression too much. Especially, they do not have any sense of humanity. As for the prisoners, they know only to treat us like prisoners. Therefore, as we are humans, we cannot suffer like that and so we desert. Also, I think they should feed the ones whom they ask to work for them well. Now, we had to porter very heavy loads for them. But, they did not feed us enough and, on top of that, they scolded us and tortured us. They shouted at us and ordered us to do things for them. So, we could not suffer anymore. Moreover, it is not their aim to come and operate in the front line, they just want to fill their duty. It is done when they finished carrying out the duty. According to their duty, they have to come and campaign for one or two months. They only think, if the time for carrying out that duty finishes quickly, they will have to go back quickly because they have to come and operate in the front without enough rations. They dare not even to go outside the army camp because they are afraid of landmines and ambush. They just stay in the camp until their duty period ends. They said they came to operate in the front in order to repair the roads. When I was with them, I did not see them repair any roads. They just stayed on their own and sometimes, they saved their rations and ate porridge. There were three or four soldiers under 18 years old in the battalion that I was a convict porter for. The last thing that I want to say is it is better for civilians to avoid the SPDC army's functions. If you can avoid them, it is better. If we get involved with them, it is like stepping in cat shit. Nothing is beneficial for us and there is no benefit for us.

How did the drug spread in Three Pagodas Town?

In reality, the drug is spread by the authorities, especially the DKBA (Democratic Karen Buddhist Army). They bring the drug in order to trade in Thailand. A few people who work with them spread the drug in the town. Then, some youths who start damaging their characters buy the drug and use it. As they do, more of their friends join them in using the drugs. I also mistakenly joined them and used the drug. No common people can bring the drugs. The drugs can only be transported by the authoritarian organizations, the DKBA or the SPDC army. For these reasons, the drug can only come through from these organizations. It is not easy for the common people to transport the drug. The key important people who trade the drug in the SPDC army are the Majors and Battalion Commanders who work together with the DKBA army.

Why do you think the SPDC army gives the DKBA permission to trade it?

I think it is like in order when, in order to get good milk from a cow, they feed them what the cows like. The SPDC army gives the DKBA army permission to do it in order to ask them to do

something easily under their control. They let the DKBA army go to the drug production areas. Sometimes, the SPDC army will know when the DKBA is trading the drug and sometimes will not. It is difficult to get permission to question the DKBA army because they work with the SPDC army. Sometimes, the SPDC army will let the DKBA army go without stopping them from trading it and sometimes, they will do it on an understanding with each other. Not only the DKBA army is trading the drug, the SPDC army also does trade in it too.

What do you think of your crime?

It is the discrimination of ethnicity. They oppress their own nations unfairly. They do not have any sense of humanity and cannot sympathize. They show the public that the laws are in their hands. They can do whatever they want. For my case, they should have checked whether I am someone who sometimes uses the drug or always uses the drug, or someone who trades the drug, clearly before they sentenced me. Instead of sentencing a person for so many years, there are many other ways to help a person feel regret for what they have done. Because sentencing a person for so many years, it is as long as a person's lifetime. We cannot work for our family's welfare for the entire (20) year period. Even though we are guilty, they should consider and charge as the crime actually is. They should make separate sentences for big crimes and small crimes. If the crime is big, the punishment will be big. If the crime is small, the punishment will be small. Another reason is that some people are imprisoned even though they were arrested without any drugs. I saw that there were many people in prisons or police stations who were sentenced unfairly and in an unjust way. Their [the military, police and legal authorities] action is wrong. They only know that the laws are in their hands so they can do whatever they want. So, no one can protest against their action. Sometimes, they know people who really use the drugs and it also appears in the medical check. But, these people can bribe doctors and then the doctors will prove for them that they do not use the drug. Then, they will be free from the sentence. I stayed in prison for four years only.

What is your plan in the future?

My plan in the future is I want to go back and see my wife and child at home in Three Pagodas Town only for a short time. Then, I will call my family and go to stay in another country. I will work and stay with my family secretly without communicating with other people as my mother is already in Bangkok now. My mother can call my wife and child to Thailand. But, I do not have communication with them now. If I am sent to Mae Sot or Mae La refugee camp, I will be able to contact with my home [and family] by phone because I have friends there [in the camps].

Interview | Lwin Lwin, 47 (January 2010, Papun District)

Address prior to arrest: Thayet Township, Magwe Region
Ethnicity: Burmese
Religion: Buddhist
Occupation prior to arrest: Peasant
Marital status: Single
Reported reason for arrest: Murder
Date of arrest: March --- 1986
Reported sentence: 45 years
Reported date sentence began: April --- 1987
Prison(s): Tharyawaddy; Taung-zun; Mote-pa-lin; Thaton (on Dec. 9th 2009)
Date sent to labour camp:
Labour camp:
Date taken to porter: December 9th 2009 (24 years after imprisonment)
Size of group taken to porter: 10
Area/ location portered:
Battalion: LIB #709
Number of soldiers and porters (exact, not a ratio):
Date of interviewee's escape:
Number of porters escaped (not including interviewee):
Location of interviewee's escape:
Location of interview: Papun District
Date of interview: January --- 2010
Future plans:

Why did you become an SPDC convict porter?

I became an SPDC convict porter because of the crime of murder. I was arrested on March --- 1986. Min Tone police came and arrested me and sent me to Min Tone police station. The murder happened because my younger brother was killed by his girlfriend's father because his girlfriend's parents did not want my brother to marry their daughter. But these two, the young boy and girl, loved each other. They did not tell their daughter and killed my brother. At that time, I hated them and killed the girl's father in revenge. I killed the man with a knife in a field. There was no one there. After that, Min Tone judge charged me to imprisonment for 45 years on April --- 1987. I was sent to Tharyawaddy Prison and my prison number was 6----. At that time, the value of money was very high [in 1987]. The judge told my mother if she could give 500,000 kyat, I would be free from this crime. We were poor because we were peasants. We did not have money to pay. Although we sold our all belongings and house, we could not get 500,000 kyat. They sentenced me to life imprisonment when we could not give the money. I was also sent to two prisons, Taung-zun and Mote-pa-lin. I was taken out from the prison to be a convict porter on December 9th 2009. I had been in prison for 24 years already. We were sent to Thaton prison from Mote-pa-lin prison. LIB #709 came to take us at night. When they made light, I saw the army patch #206. We slept and followed this battalion. We reached the place where we could travel with boats. After we crossed the river, we came to a village and slept there. Since we were the porters, we had to walk from where the boat left us. I had to porter six bombs, rice, salt, seasoning, fish paste and chili etc. It weighed more than one sack of rice. They kicked me when I could not porter the loads and walk anymore. They told me "*if you can not follow us, we will leave you. Do you know how we will leave you? If you know, it is good.*" I asked them "*how would you leave me*?" and they replied "*We would leave you in the earth*." I was afraid of them. They kicked me from behind and beat me with a big stick. There were only ten porters taken to the front line and nine porters arrived there. We had to leave one with LIB #707. None of these nine porters died but I could not eat and was seriously sick and injured. I was not healthy. When I fled to here, the KNLA soldiers saw that my face was very pale and

there were many blisters on my legs. They cured me and gave me medicine to drink. I brought the medicines with me until I came to here. My disease was cured after they gave me medical treatment. When I was in the SPDC army, they gave me only one tablet after I had been sick for three or four days. Sometimes, they gave me one tablet after two days.

Why did you desert from being a convict porter?

The SPDC's actions are brutal and inhumane. They do not view humans as humans. There is no such thing as age to them, no one is older or younger. I think they are power mad. They only think "*if I have to do it, I must really do it; if I am asked, it must be done. If it can not be done, I will kill everyone*." In their opinion, they can do whatever they want to the convict porters. They can even kill us if they want. They did not think in a positive way that the porters are our fellow countrymen. They don't think "*they work for us and they are older than us, many years. Whoever they are, we should treat them in a nice way and we should have a sense of humanity in dealing with them*." In their opinions, they never think to have a sense of humanity.

What do you think of your crime?

Authorities to whom the SPDC government assigns responsibility, such as police, judges, the army, etc. do not see humans as people in their life because the central authority gives them the power to do things. They only see money and how to get it for themselves. In prison, if we can give them money, we can stay comfortably and peacefully without getting out from the prison. Everywhere it is only about money. They find income from outside because their salary is not enough for them. They always try to give more trouble to the ones who are already facing problems. Actually, they want to push back into the water the ones who are already drowning. They never try to help the ones who are drowning; to lift them ashore. They never plan to help those who are facing problems.

Interview | Soe Win, 20 (January 2010, Papun District)

Address prior to arrest: Insein Township, Yangon
Ethnicity: Burmese
Religion: Buddhist
Occupation prior to arrest: Mason
Marital status: Single
Reported reason for arrest: Breaking and entering
Date of arrest:
Reported sentence: 11 and a half years
Reported date sentence began: August --- 2006
Prison(s): Meiktila [Bago]; Kin-tha 1; Toungoo
Date sent to labour camp:
Labour camp: Kin-tha 1
Date taken to porter:
Size of group taken to porter: 500
Area/ location portered: Baw Hser Koh
Battalion: LIB #56
Number of soldiers and porters (exact, not a ratio) in battalion: 60-70 soldiers; 50 porters
Date of interviewee's escape:
Number of porters escaped (not including interviewee):
Location of interviewee's escape:
Location of interview:
Date of interview:
Future plans:

Why were you imprisoned?

I was imprisoned under article 80 for 11 years and six months due to the crime of breaking into a house in order to steal. As I did not have any money to use, I committed the crime and was in prison. Then, I was sent to *yeh beh* camp and became a convict porter in rural and mountainous areas. I deserted from the army as I could not suffer anymore. The SPDC threatened us and told us not to run away. If we ran away from the army, the people there will kill you. The Karen people will commit the killing. For me, I could not suffer under their control anymore so I ran away. I was arrested by Than Win, a policeman, at night after about 5:00 pm. The policemen saw us on the street when we were packing things. They suspected us and questioned us. They asked us where we got these things and we replied that we saw them on the street. But they did not believe us and called us to follow them to the police station and they beat us. They questioned me for five nights in the jail and submitted the case to the court. There were four people who broke into the house. They are N---, H---, K--- and Soe Win [he mentioned his own name]. We were all imprisoned for the same number of years. We were sentenced on August --- 2006 and we were sent to Meiktila Prison. I reached the prison on August --- 2006. My prison number was 0----. We could bribe them if we had money in order to reduce the years in prison. For example, we have to be in prison for 10 years. If we can bribe them, we only have to stay for two or three years. So, some who have money used it to bribe the judges. We have to bribe them with millions of Kyat.

What did you have to do in the prison?

We had to grow onion and garlic and build vegetable beds.

How did the jail warden and jailer treat you?

The jail warden, U Kyaw Hein, is nice to the prisoners. If any prisoners were weak, he injects them with medicine to recover energy and he fed us good curry. In the morning, they fed us yellow beans and fish paste and, in the afternoon, they fed us *ta la bpaw* curry without salt and cooking oil.

How did they look after health care?

They opened a clinic. When we are sick, we can go and get a medical check-up there.

Were the prisoners allowed to listen to the radio, to read and write?

We were not allowed to listen to the radio but they allowed us to read. They gave us books such as old newspapers and journals about football on Sunday at the weekend. If we want to write a letter to our family, we have to inform them. Our family can meet with us everyday for only 15 minutes. We were not allowed to go over the time limit. If we wanted to meet with our family over the time limit, we had to bribe them.

Can you tell us about your experience in prison?

In prison, there were prisoners who could not cure themselves and had to die. There were thin people [the prisoners who suffer from malnutrition] and prisoners who suffer scars. The food is not good. So, the prisoners are usually weak.

How long did you stay in prison?

I was imprisoned in Meiktila Prison over two years and I was imprisoned in Kin-tha (1) Stone Production Camp in Naypyidaw for over a year. I had to break the stones there. These stones are used for building a vehicle road. When we were taken out to porter from Kin-tha (1) camp, the jail warden told us that we had to move to another *yeh beh* camp. The police came to take us at night and sent us to Toungoo Prison. They let us stay there for three days and the army came to take us at night. When I saw the army come to take us, I realized that we were going to be convict porters. If I had known that I would be sent to be a porter, I would not have followed the police. We were told that we were being sent to a new camp to break stones as it was newly opened. The army tied us with ropes throughout the trip to mountainous areas. There were 500 prisoners along with me who were taken out to porter at the same time. I had to porter for LIB #56. I deserted from being a convict porter during the trip before we reached to Baw Hser Koh.

Are there any porters who were tortured by the army?

Yes, I saw for myself that they shot dead two porters who tried to desert. They were shot dead in a jungle during the trip. One porter was shot in the side of his ear and another was shot in the chest. One of the majors told the soldier named Bpyoh Choh [Kachin ethnicity] who shot the porters to stop. After the major said that, he stopped shooting. The major did not give him any punishment even though his action was beyond the limit and caused death. These porters were Aung Zaw Min, Burmese ethnicity, about 25 years old, and the other one was Shan ethnicity, about 25 or 26 years old, too. I was also punched twice and they hit me with their guns once on my back. They punched my head once. They punched me and hit me because I did not porter anymore during the trip and couldn't continue to climb the mountains because I was sick. I told them that I was sick, but they replied "*You are a prisoner. We do not call the prisoners here to rest. We call you to work.*" Not only me but other prisoners also were tortured and some were killed when they could not porter during the trip.

Did you ever encounter fighting during the trip?

Yes, the fighting happened twice when we first came to a field beside rocky mountain. It occurred in the field. More fighting occurred when we came here.

What did porters have to carry?

The army ordered us to carry rice. Some big porters were ordered to carry big tins of cooking oil. There were only 60 to 70 soldiers in LIB #56. If we combined regiments with LIB #602, there were over 150 soldiers. In LIB #56, there were over 50 porters. I had to porter a load that was as heavy as half of a sack of rice. One sack of rice is over 30 viss. So, the load that I had to carry was 15 viss.

Can you tell us about your experiences in the army until you came here?

We came to Kyauk Kyi by the military truck and then to Seik Ku. In Seik Ku, there is a crossroad. The truck stopped there at night and we started walking into the jungle.

Did they [the SPDC army] provide you with enough food for the porters?

No, they did not feed us enough food. We had to cook the rice that they gave us. They gave us fish paste. For vegetables, we had to collect our own if we saw any during the trip. Then, we had to cook it ourselves. They fed us rice twice a day. They gave us only a little rice in a small plate for each porter. It was not a lot of rice, only a little. Moreover, they only fed us rice and fish paste. They did not feed us curry, cooking oil or salt. We ate separately from the soldiers. We did not eat together with them. The officers ordered their soldiers to cook good curry for them and they always ate good curry.

How did they [the SPDC army] look after the health care for their porters?

There was a paramedic in the army. Some porters went to get medicine when they were sick. But it seemed he did not want to give medicine to the porters. Most of the time, he did not give medicine to the porters.

How did you have to sleep at night?

At night, all the porters had to sleep together in a group. The soldiers who had to do sentry at night watched us. When we want to pee or defecate during the night, we had to inform them. If we went to pee or defecate without informing them, they shot us dead immediately. When we carried the loads, we had to walk between two soldiers.

How did you flee from the army?

I ran away when the soldiers were really far behind me. I left the load during the trip and ran to the jungle. When the soldiers saw my load, they shot at me many times. I ran away alone. They did not see me when I fled. I slept in the jungle five days and another night. While fleeing, I saw two grandmothers and they called me to follow them. They asked me whether I had already eaten or not. I told them that I had not eaten anything yet and was very hungry. They put down rice in front of me to eat. I also saw children. Those children sent me to the hill where *A'Ba* was [Burmese term meaning grandfather; he called the KNLA officer this.] I was sent to the KNLA officer and saw there was another porter like me there. We stayed there for a day. Then, we were sent here step by step.

What were your parents' occupations before you were imprisoned?

My father was a carpenter and my mother had to look after the house tasks, such as cooking and cleaning. But my mother has already died. My father got married to a second wife.

What was the situation in your village?

People in my village have to work for a day in order to eat for a day. Some people who run their own businesses, their welfare is fine. But, for those people who do not have any jobs and could not run any business, their welfare is not fine.

Is there a school in your village?

There is a school in my village. The salary is not enough for some teachers.

What do you think of the SPDC army?

The SPDC army oppressed us, the porters, brutally. We could not continue to suffer their abuses anymore. There were many porters who had already died. Our life is nothing under their control and, since we could die, I decided to desert from the convict porters. Before I deserted, I thought, I would encounter KNLA soldiers and they would help me to get back to my home. The SPDC army threatened us and told us not to run away. If we run away, there are many bombs and landmines. Our legs would be lost. They also said the Karen soldiers would kill or torture us when they saw us. In reality, the Karen soldiers did not kill or torture us. Therefore, there are many porters who want to flee from being convict porters, but they are afraid to flee. Their [the SPDC] action is not right and just. They called us to porter for them. But, they see our value is not even worth that of a horse. Even a horse gets injections and medical treatment when it feels sick. For the porters, they did not provide us any medical treatment and did not even give us medicine to drink when we were sick. Moreover, under their control, even the civilians who have not done any crimes, they are also charged and imprisoned and used to porter for the army. Their control is not right and fair. They oppress their own nations.

Do you want to say anything else?

The thing that I want to say is I stayed in prisons for four years and never went outside the prisons. Therefore, I want to go back and see my parents. I also feel hatred for the army. The army oppresses the porters in mountainous areas brutally.

What is your future plan?

I want to go back to my home. But, I am afraid they will arrest me again if I go back during the daytime. So, I would go back home at night to say good-bye to my family and come back to stay with my aunties, as they are in the cities.

Interview | Naung Soe, 41 (January 2010, Papun District)

Address prior to arrest: Myitkyina
Ethnicity: Kachin
Religion: Christian
Occupation prior to arrest: Peasant
Marital status: Married; 4 children
Reported reason for arrest: Drug use
Date of arrest: June --- 2007
Reported sentence:
Reported date sentence began: September --- 2007
Prison(s): Myitkyina; Kin-tha; Toungoo
Date sent to labour camp:
Labour camp:
Date taken to porter:
How many taken to porter: 350 to Toungoo
Area/ location portered:
Battalion: LIB #223 and 602
Number of soldiers and porters (exact, not a ratio): 40 soldiers/ 18 porters
Date of interviewee's escape: January --- 2010
Number of porters escaped (not including interviewee): alone
Location of interviewee's escape:
Location of interview: Papun District
Date of interview: January --- 2010
Future plans:

How many children do you have?

I have four children. My oldest child is 12 years old and the youngest one is over two years old.

Why were you here?

I was here because the SPDC army oppressed and tortured me as a convict porter and I could not carry anymore so I deserted to here. I was in prison due to a drug-related crime. I was imprisoned according to article 1519/K. I was sentenced to prison for the usage of drugs. I was sentenced to 17 years imprisonment. The drug protection group came to arrest me. The group was informed that I used the drug so they came to arrest me. There were eight people who came to arrest me at my home at 6:00 am in the early morning on June --- 2007 and they sent me to police station. I had to stay in a jail for (15) days. After I was sentenced, I was sent to Myitkyina Prison on September --- 2007 and my prison number was 2----. People who have money can bribe judges to be discharged. As for us, we did not have money to bribe the judges. For the bribe, we would have to bribe them with at least 4 or 5 million. In the prison, I had to stay at No #6 jail in the lower part of the prison.

What kind of food did they feed you in the prison?

The curry was not good. They fed us only *ta la bpaw* curry cooked with old morning glory that was not fresh. [*Ta la bpaw* is usually a mixed curry made of many things or vegetables.] Even this, they only fed us once a week.

What about health care in the prison?

The health care was extremely poor. When we were seriously sick and went to inform them, they gave us only one or a half of a tablet. Therefore, there were many prisoners who died in

Myitkyina Prison. They did not give us any injections. They gave the injections when the patients were about to die. After the injection, they died. If we had money, we could buy medicine and ask them to give us an injection. They will cure it for us if we have money.

Were any prisoners tortured in prison?

If the prisoners made a little mistake, they beat them.

Do they [SPDC authorities] allow the prisoners to listen to a radio, to read or write?

They do not allow the prisoners to listen to the radio or to read. They do not even allow the prisoners to wear watches. For listening to the radio, they are afraid that the prisoners will listen to news. Sometimes, they allowed us to write a letter to our family if we wanted to. Our family could come and visit us two or three times a month for 15 minutes each time. In order to meet with us, our family had to buy a ticket for 250 or 500 kyat. We also had to pay them. The total cost for each visit is 1,000 kyat for 15 minutes.

How long did you stay in prison?

I stayed in Myitkyina prison for one year and six months. Then, I was sent to *yeh beh* camp. The police came to take us from the prison and sent us to Kin-tha *yeh beh* camp in Ta Gone Town. We had to travel by train. We had to break stones and carry them to the truck there. Then, the jail warden and the jailers sell these stones. These stones are used to build the vehicle roads. At night, we have to stay in prison. After that, I was sent to Toungoo Prison. I stayed there for three days. They chained our legs when we were taken from Myitkyina Prison. They also chained our legs when we were taken to Toungoo Prison from Kin-tha camp. There were 350 prisoners taken from Kin-tha camp on the same day as me. In Toungoo prison, LIB #223 came to take us to porter. After that, I was sent to LIB #602 to be a porter again. After that, I deserted from this battalion.

What did the army order you to porter?

They ordered us to porter sacks of rice, sugar and yellow beans. Each porter had to carry a sack of rice when they sent out rations. Its weight was about 40 viss. They ordered us to carry a sack of rice a day. Even though we could not carry it, we couldn't do anything about it because they had ordered us to carry it. The oldest age of the porters was 44 or 45 years old. They ordered each porter to take responsibility for a sack of rice. Porters who couldn't carry a sack of rice on their own could carry it together with another porter. However, then they had to carry the sacks for two days. When we could not carry it, they slapped our faces.

How many soldiers were there in LIB #223?

There were about 30 to 40 soldiers in LIB #223 and, combined with LIB #56, there were about 90 soldiers. In LIB #602 there were about 40 soldiers. There were 18 porters in LIB #602. There were only 15 porters left, three porters had already left.

Have you ever seen the army torture porters on the frontline?

Yes, they kicked porters who could not carry the loads and hit them with their guns to make them go faster on the frontline. Some porters said they saw the army shoot a porter dead. The bullets hit his mouth and destroyed all parts of his mouth and he died. I also was tortured by the captain and lieutenant. All battalions, including LIB #602 and LIB #223, tortured the porters. Even though the officers saw their soldiers hit the porters with their guns, they did not say anything. I got kicked on my back when I could not porter the loads during the trip. They beat most porters.

Did they provide enough food for porters to eat?

They did not feed us enough food to eat along the trip. Sometimes, they would not feed us for two or three days during the trip. We picked up fruits such as small eggplants that we saw on the trip and we drank water. The soldiers ordered us to answer that they fed us food to eat when the officers asked us. In reality, they did not feed us rice or anything. We did not have matches either. The soldiers had food to eat. Therefore, we did not have energy and we could not carry the loads. They fed us the day after fighting occurred near a rocky mountain. When they fed us rice, they fed us twice per day. However, they gave us only a little amount of rice to eat. Three porters had to eat a mess-tin of rice. It was not enough for us to eat. During the trip, they fed us only rice, without even fish paste. The curry that we had to eat and the curry that the soldiers ate was different. For us, they cooked fish paste and banana trees for curry and fed us that. The officers ate good curry, such as dried fish, yellow beans, cans of fishes, etc.

Did they cure porters when the porters were sick?

No, they did not give us any medicines even when some porters were sick.

How did you have to sleep at night?

At night, the porters had to sleep in a circle and the soldiers took turns on sentry duty beside us. When we slept or took a rest, the soldiers waited for us because they worried that we would run away. During the trip, they did not allow us to take a rest. A porter had to walk between two soldiers.

Why did you desert from being a convict porter?

I deserted here because the food was not good and I did not want to stay in the army anymore. They also ordered us to carry sacks of rice. The army oppressed and tortured us. Before we ran away, they warned us not to flee. They would kill us and shoot us dead if we fled. They also told us that the Karen would kill us when they saw us. I fled from the convict porters alone on January --- 2010. It took two days to arrive here. I slept a night in a jungle. The next day, when I fled during the trip, I met with Karen teachers who are from upper levels [probably living in Thailand]. I slept with them there and they sent me here.

What was your family's occupation before you were imprisoned?

My family are peasants.

What are the common livelihoods in your village?

Most people are peasants. They do farming. Some people sell things in a shop. Some people are carpenters. Some people are doing well and some people are poor.

Is there any school in your village?

There is a school in my village. The teachers complained about their salary because they get only a small salary and it is not enough for them. Also, things became more expensive.

What do you think of the SPDC army?

In my opinion, the SPDC army is bad. Their action is not right. They torture us and kill us, as if they were persecuting us.

Do you have anything else to say?

The SPDC army's action is not fair. I suffered a lot from their torture as a convict porter. They ordered us to porter and they did not feed us rice. It is not just and fair. They want to kill us and they do it to persecute us. They see us as their enemy. Actually, the porters are not their enemies. They shot the porters dead when the porters tried to flee away.

What is your future plan?

I want to go back home, but I do not know the ways to go back.

Interview | Paing Paing, 41 (January 2010, Papun District)

Address prior to arrest: Lashio Township, Shan State
Ethnicity: Chinese
Religion: Buddhist
Occupation prior to arrest: Hill field
Marital status: Married; 5 children
Reported reason for arrest: Drug use
Date of arrest: August --- 2007
Reported sentence: 12 years
Reported date sentence began: December --- 2007
Prison(s): Lashio; Kin-tha; Toungoo
Date sent to labour camp: March --- 2008
Labour camp:
Date taken to porter:
Size of group taken to porter:
Area/ location portered: Baw Hser Koh
Battalion: LIB #602
Number of soldiers and porters (exact, not a ratio): 40 soldiers, 20-30 porters
Date of interviewee's escape: January --- 2010
Number of porters escaped (not including interviewee):
Location of interviewee's escape:
Location of interview: Papun District
Date of interview: January --- 2010
Future plans: Home

How many children do you have?

I have five children. My oldest child is 14 years old and the youngest one is 5 years old. In the Burmese School system, they are only second or third standard. They study fifth standard in the Chinese School. We just encourage them to study in the Chinese School. The Chinese school is a Christian School.

Why were you here?

My health was poor. I had a disease. My friend told me to drink No# 4 kind of drug a little bit and it could be cured. I bought it just a little and tested. Then, I was imprisoned due to the usage of No #4 drug according to article 1516. I did not have money to pay for a medical check that would prove my blood was negative. They demanded 25,000,000 Kyat. If the medical check proved me for negative sign, I would be charged only for seven years imprisonment. If the medical check proved me positive, I would be charged for 12 years in prison. The Drug Protection Group arrested me in my house after 9:00 or 10:00 am in the morning on August 7th 2007. I could not ask them any questions about why they came to arrest me because they beat me a lot. I had to keep my head down and I was not allowed to look at them. When I looked at them, they called me "Hain kaung *[a Burmese term used to address an inferior rudely, as if they were an animal], you are not satisfied with us? What's the matter?"* So, I could not look at them. I just had to keep my head down. They came to arrest me alone. They punched me on my face and my back. All became swollen. It was extremely painful for over a week. I could not breathe anymore. After that, they called me to follow them to the Drug Protection Office and I was sent to No #2 Police station. I had to stay in a jail there for 15 days. Then, I was sent to Lashio Prison. I was sentenced on December --- 2007 for a 12 year prison term. On March --- 2008, I was taken out to work in the Stone Production Camp. My prison numbers had changed many times, three or four times. When I was in Kin-tha (1) Stone Production Camp in Tha

Kaung Town, Naypyidaw, my prison number was 7--- and when I was sent to Toungoo Prison, my prison number was 0----. In the prison, I had to stay in No #5 barracks.

How did the jailer and the jail warden treat you in the prison?

They were not friendly to us [prisoners]. I never talked to them. The jailers came and told us to queue and, when the jail warden came and asked us questions, we had to answer that we were fed enough food and there were no scoldings or beatings in the prison. We could not express our emotion. If we did not obey them, they beat and punched us after the jail warden went back. Therefore, we dared not to say anything.

What did you have to do in prison for daily work?

We had to pick tobacco leaf. We did not get any payment for our work.

What kind of food did they feed you in a prison?

In prison we had to eat old rice and *ta la bpaw* curry.

How did they provide health care in a prison?

I was never sick in prison. If any prisoners feel sick in the prison, they will probably die because they will not be sent to the hospitals. Prisoners who are rich can give money to access medical treatment in a hospital. For example, their siblings, uncles or elder sisters can bribe them [jailers or jail wardens] with money and they will be able to send them to the hospital. Some prisoners have to die because whenever we feel sick, whether it is pain, headache, or diarrhea, they only give sleeping pills [for all these kinds of diseases]. In the prisons, prisoners who are rich can bribe them [jailers or jail wardens] to stay in nice bedrooms. The prison has two storages, upper and lower. Prisoners who have money can pay money to stay in proper bedrooms. If we want to stay in upper class, we have to give 60,000 Kyat for a bedroom which only one person can stay in and the bedroom is about 18-20 inch length. If we want to sleep in a bedroom with an altar, we have to pay 10 million or 20 million Kyat. For simple barracks, we have to pay 50,000 Kyat. As for us, we did not have any money so we had to stay in the middle.

Are prisoners allowed to listen to a radio, to read and write?

We are not allowed to listen to the radio. They let us read the news, but they only gave us old and out of date magazines that did not have good news. They did not let us see good and breaking news. We were not allowed to write a letter to our family. Our family can come and meet us once or twice per month. However, they have to pay 3,000 kyat for 20 minutes and could only meet one person. If they wanted to meet two prisoners at the same time, they had to give 6,000 kyat for 20 minutes.

What was your experience in prison?

In prison, although we have to smile, we cannot do it. When the jailer comes to visit us, he always told us to report what we want. But, no one dares to report because if we do, we will be beaten and punched after the jailer goes back. So, even though we want to report that we were beaten and punched, we dare not. I had to stay in a prison for seven months and was taken out to *yeh beh* camp by police. At this time, the army went to take us out. They chained our legs and tied our hands when we were sent to Kin-tha Stone Production Camp in Naypyidaw from Lashio Prison. They sent us to the railway station and we had to get into a train. During the trip, we had to sleep a night in Mg Lay Dormitory. Then, we reached to Nay Pyi Taw Kin-tha Stone Product Camp. I stayed there for over a year and was taken to Toungoo Prison. I did not

know that I would be sent to Toungoo Prison. We were told to stay inside but prisoners whose names were called out had to come out from the barracks. All prisoners stayed in the barracks. When our names were called out, we came out from the barracks. Our legs were chained and the army ordered us to get into the truck. We were not allowed to look at them or to speak. The army waited for us. When we arrived to Toungoo Prison, the army came to take us again. They did not tell us that we had to go to porter. They said they opened a new Stone Production Camp and that other prisoners had come who could not do the jobs. Therefore, we just had to go and train them. They lied to us. It was not what they said. We were picked up and brought to the mountainous areas. They tied us up during the trip. There were 500 prisoners taken out to porter. On the truck, we could not look around and I was carsick. We were not allowed to ask questions or speak to each other. We just had to keep our heads down. They brought sacks of rice, bullets and mortars. I was sent to LIB #602. When we reached Su Moe Camp [Hsaw Moh in Karen], the operations commander was shot and we had to go and carry him to Baw Hser Koh army camp. The next day, the helicopter came to pick him up. There were five people, like the operation commander, an officer, a paramedic, a soldier and a porter, who were shot. We had to carry these five people. After that, we had to come and porter for LIB #602.

What did the army order porters to carry?

They ordered us to carry sacks of rice and bullets. During the trip, the military truck brought only bullets, but when we arrived here, we had to go and carry rice sacks. We had to go and send the rations two or three times per day. There were about 40 soldiers in LIB #602 and there were over 20 or 30 porters in LIB #602. All porters were prisoners; the porters did not include any villagers. Some porters had to carry a load that weighed over 25 to 30 viss. As for me, I had to carry a sack of rice. When we could not carry the loads, they kicked us and hit us with their guns. While being a porter, I reached Baw Hser Koh army camp where the LID commander was based and to Su Moe army camp. Then, we carried the loads to a rocky mountain on this side. We passed over the rocky mountain.

Have you ever seen porters get tortured by the army?

There were porters who were tortured by the army. I too was punched when I could not continue walking and carrying the load during the trip. They also kicked with their military boots. Everyone, both officers and soldiers, commit abuse against us.

Did the SPDC army provide enough food for porters?

No, they did not feed us enough food to eat. Therefore, we deserted from the convict porter because we did not have energy to continue walking and carrying the loads. They told us not to run away. If we ran away, we would step on landmines and when the Karen group [KNLA army] saw us, they would question us and then kill us after they got the answers. They told us to follow them for a year and they would send us back to the prison and reduce our imprisonment years. We knew no one would reduce our imprisonment years just because we worked a year for them because we were criminals. They also said if we were caught by the Karen group, they would not even fire at us with their guns, they would cut us dead only with their knives. Moreover, they also said if they saw us when we fled, they would kill us and, when the other side [KNLA army] saw us, they would kill us too. When we were in the jungle, we would not have anything to eat and we would step on landmines because there were many landmines planted there. As for me, I did not want to die by the Burmese Army's hands. If I had to die in another groups' hands, I would die. I did not care whether I would die or not, I decided I would desert because I could not suffer anymore. They punched us. We were thirsty and we were not allowed to take a bath. Also we did not have enough food to eat. We were not even worth what an animal is worth. When the animals were weak, people gave them injections for energy. When the porters were sick, they were not allowed to say that they were sick. They said *" Do not come and tell us that you are sick. You have to come here because you are a criminal. You*

must carry loads and walk even though you cannot. Do not come and tell us that you are sick, I do not know anything." As for the Karen soldiers, I can never forget their kindness with gratitude in my life. My feet were so painful and hurt as I walked for a long time. They provided me with medical treatment, applied medicine to my pains and gave me medicine to drink. They often came to ask me about my health and whether I have enough food to eat. They told me *"eat as you want, but eat what we have. Whether the good curry or not, it will be fine if your stomach is full. We are brothers and families. Do not worry about anything. You can come when you have problems. You can come if you are honest. We will rescue you as much as we can."* Although the SPDC army told us that Karen soldiers would kill us, I did not trust so that is why I deserted from the convict porters. At that time, I thought in my mind how we could be killed. We were porters who were in a troubled situation. There were many convict porters who fled [from the SPDC army] and went back home. They were from Lashio, Taunggyi and Mandalay and also from villages. Those porters said that when they met with the Karen group, they could eat rice until their stomachs were full. The group also sent them home step by step. Even though they did not have money for their transportation, they even helped them and gave them money for their transportation. When the group had questions to ask, they asked and they did not beat them. When they had pain and hurt, the group cured fthem. I already heard this before I was imprisoned. They also said the Karen group is very nice and treated them as its family. The group also told them that they treat them as family because they were in trouble and fled. They were not the enemy. The group did not make any mistakes.

How many times did the SPDC army feed you?

They fed us rice once in the morning. After breakfast, we had to go and carry rations. After carrying the rations, they fed us once in the evening. Three porters had to eat a mess-tin of rice. It was not enough for us. They fed us rice with curry which they cooked banana tree with a little fish paste. They only ate milk and cans of meat. They did not give us milk to drink or meat to eat. They separated food for the soldiers and the porters. The food was not the same. They always had meat to eat.

Did the SPDC army look after porters when the porters were sick?

They did not even give medicine to drink when the porters were sick.

How did porters have to sleep?

We, the porters, had to sleep in a line and the army took sentry near us. Whether when we slept or took a rest, the soldiers waited for us and we were not allowed to go here and there. They ordered us to sit together in one place. We had to inform them when we wanted to go to pee and defecate. We had to inform such as *"Officer, I will pee. Officer, I will defecate. Officer, I will drink water."* They already warned us *"If you do not inform us immediately when you stand up, we will shoot you immediately."* We were also not allowed to take a rest during the trip although we were tired. They only let us take a rest for a while when they really encountered fighting. They dared not go without us, the porters. The porters had to take care of security for them. When there were porters included, the Karen group usually does not shoot because they feel pity for the porters. During the trip, a soldier walked between two porters.

Why did you escape to here?

The day I deserted, the army was hungry so they sat down for a while and ate rice. I also sat down together with them for a while. I told them that my legs were hurting. I could not walk very well. Then, they told me to go first slowly and they would come later. I took a stick and started to walk slowly from there. I walked for a while and looked back. I did not see them coming to follow me yet. They were still eating. Then, I ran away immediately. I ran away on January 1st 2010. I deserted because I could not continue carrying the loads anymore. My feet

also hurt and they did not allow me to take a rest. Even though I could not porter, they ordered me to porter. I thought, one day they would shoot me dead when I could not completely porter the loads. So, I deserted. It took three days to reach here. I was running through jungle and saw a hill field. I thought there would be a person in the hill field and went directly to the field. When I arrived at the field, I saw a hut and called *" U lay [uncle], Saya [teacher], I am a convict porter. Please help me for a moment*." I was also very hungry. They dared not reply because they were worried it would be the Tamataw and they are afraid of the Burmese army. Then, I told them that I would go down. I went down slowly to the hut. They [people in the hut] fed me rice until I was satisfied. After that, they sent me to an officer. The officer could speak Burmese very well. He told me to come to them when we were in trouble. It did not matter. We would be safe from danger when we came to them. He told me to take a rest, take a bath, and eat food until I was satisfied in order to get strong. When the order came, they would send me step by step and in the meantime don't worry about anything. Then, they sent me step by step.

What was you family's occupation?

Our family planted sweet corn in a hill field.

What was the situation in your village?

Some villagers are very poor and some are very rich. We only cultivated hill fields. Some villagers did not have jobs to do. Some worked for a day and ate for a day.

What do you think of the SPDC army?

The SPDC army's action is not right. It is completely wrong. It is clear that they do not love other ethnicities. They are soldiers, holding arms. They are mad on power and compete for power. Even though we are prisoners, we have a family and children. They do not give us an opportunity to live with our family. We work because we are poor. They only think to let us die or to take the benefits if we don't die. They order us to work harder than the animals and in worse conditions. For the animals, they are fed enough food and are given the injection when they are weak. For us, we did not get anything [food or medical treatment]. We had to work for them for nothing. They are the government army but they treated us brutally. They have no social conscience. We are not humans when we are in their hands [under their control]. Before, I thought they would not be so cruel to me because in fact I did not do any stealing or fighting. Yes, I used the drug mistakenly to cure my disease. I do not complain how very tired I feel working in *yeh beh* Camp, if it is safe. But now it is not safe, working there [as a convict porter]. We are people who have our own family and children so we have to be very careful when we were working. If we are lucky for 24 hours, it is fine. During 24 hours, if we are unlucky for a minute or a second, we will die or be injured. So, I already thought before that I would desert one day. They told us not to run away, we would not escape. They just threatened us and lied to us. As we had never been to this area, we trusted what they said at first. Moreover, in *yeh beh* Camp where we had to work, the State limited it to (25) baskets of stones that we had to break and, as for each company, each company actually had to break 60-70 baskets of stones. They got extra. They forced us to work extremely hard. When any prisoners could not work and told them so, they ordered that prisoner to lay down and beat them until their teeth were broken down and bleeding. When officers came to order us to carry the stones, we must do without complaining. We were not allowed to complain that we could not carry them. We must do whatever they ordered. We were exhausted and they only fed us Ta la bpaw curry. They did not allow prisoners' families to send food and clothes. For me, my family could not send food and clothes. I saw other prisoners' families send food and clothes and they burnt all of these.

Were there any prisoners who fled before you ran away?

Yes, there were two prisoners who tried to flee and were killed by the army.

What is your future plan?

I want to request the Karen group to help me to go back home.

Do you have anything else to say about the SPDC army?

Yes, they should encourage their own nations as well as other ethnicities. Now, they try to seize power. We are not allowed to speak. If they say it, we have to agree that it is true, even though it is not true. We cannot express what we feel. Therefore, we do not agree with the military government's work. They are the people who hold arms and have power. They only think they are completely right.

Interview | Chit Kawn, 37 (January 2010, Papun District)

Address prior to arrest: Myitkyina, Kachin State
Ethnicity: Chinese
Religion: Buddhist
Occupation prior to arrest: Mining gold
Marital status: Single
Reported reason for arrest: Selling drugs
Date of arrest: March --- 2006
Reported sentence:
Reported date sentence began:
Prison(s): Myitkyina (2 years, ten months); Kin-tha
Date sent to labour camp:
Labour camp:
Date taken to porter:
Size of group taken to porter: 108
Area/ location portered:
Battalion:
Number of soldiers and porters (exact, not a ratio):
Date of interviewee's escape:
Number of porters escaped (not including interviewee):
Location of interviewee's escape:
Location of interview: Papun District
Date of interview: January --- 2010
Future plans: Thailand

[Note: The interviewee answers the questions himself in Burmese but, because he is not very fluent, another Chinese convict porter interprets for him.]

Why were you imprisoned?

I was imprisoned due to crimes relating to drugs. I was sentenced to a 17-year prison term under article 1519. I went to sleep in my friend's house on March --- 2006 and the police from the Special Drug [Protection Group] came to search for drugs. Then, they saw opium. I was charged and imprisoned. My friend called the judge and he discharged me from imprisonment. They came to arrest me again at about 8:00 am. After that, they called me to follow to Shan Taung and sent me to Pah Gka [town]. I had to stay in a jail cell for over two months. I was arrested along with my friend. He was my landlord [boss]. I was his worker. He was freed from the charge because he bribed the judge and I was imprisoned. His name is Shain Way Aing, he is a Chinese man, too. After I was sentenced to imprisonment, I was sent to Myitkyina Prison and my prison number was 9----. In the prison, I had to stay in No #6 barracks.

What did you have to do in a prison?

Sometimes, we had to work in a plantation, building fences.

What kind of food did you have to eat in prison?

We had to eat *ta la bpaw* curry and rosella or spinach curry.

What was the health care situation in prison?

I was often sick in prison. Even though I was sick, they did not give me any medicine. My other friends shared medicine with me. We shared medicine with each other.

Was your family allowed to meet you in prison?

My family was allowed to meet me in prison once per month. But, we were not allowed to write a letter to our family.

What were your experiences in prison?

I had many experiences in prison. There were many prisoners who had to die because they had not been cured when they were sick. In Myitkyina Prison, there were 8 or 10 prisoners already died due to illness because they did not cure and send these prisoners to a hospital. I was imprisoned in Myitkyina Prison for two years and ten months. Then, I was taken out to Thah Kaung Kin-tha Stone Production Camp. I had to sleep a night in Mandalay [during the trip]. The police came to take me from there. The next day, I had to break stones and carry stones there. Then, I was taken out again. In the truck, my legs were kept in stocks. There were 100 prisoners along with me.

What did the army ask you to carry?

I had to carry bullets, rice and rations, such as salt, cooking oil, yellow beans and fish paste, etc. They ordered us to carry all the rations. I saw that there were three or four soldiers under 18 years old, about 16 or 17 years old. There was a Kachin soldier who came and asked me to carry the loads. I asked him his age and he told me that he was 16 years old. There were 108 prisoner porters along with me. All porters in the army were prisoners. Three porters had to carry two and a half sacks of rice. Each porter had to porter loads that weighed over 25 viss. When the porters could not carry the loads or continue walking, even when they felt sick, they must carry the loads or the soldiers would hit them with their guns. One of my friends was very sick and could not carry the loads and a soldier hit him with a gun. He told the soldier *"You do not need to hit me with the gun. You can shoot me dead right now."* The next day, he was dead. I have seen the SPDC army torture the porters right before my eyes. Moreover, when fighting happened or when they heard a gun firing, they dragged us [the porters] roughly to walk in front of them. In a dangerous situation, they let the porters die. During my time as a porter, whenever fighting occurred, the captain and lieutenant ordered the porters to walk in front. I was forced to walk in the front. They were afraid to go, but they ordered the porters to go. There was a porter who was shot dead. He tried to run away when he went to carry bamboo, but the SPDC army saw him and shot him dead at once. I walked in the front and he ran away in the rear.

Did the SPDC army feed porters enough food?

No, they did not feed us enough rice and the curry was not good. They fed us twice per day. Three porters had to share a mess-tin of rice together. They gave us a little fish paste to eat with rice. The army ate good curry and they gave the curry that was not good to the porters. That curry was already rotten. Whenever we reached an army camp, the porters had to carry bamboo and water. We had to work again. In the afternoon, they gave us only a little rice to eat. It was not enough for us. The army ate cans of pork. Each soldier had a can of pork to eat. For the prisoner porters, we had to eat only fish paste.

Did the SPDC army cure prisoner porters when they got sick?

No, they did not give medicine to drink when the prisoners were sick. I was sick and went to ask for medicine three times. I was scolded and they did not give me any medicine.

How did you have to sleep at night?

[At night] we were not allowed to sit down and warm ourselves at a fire. They gave us a very thin blanket for each porter. We had to put the plastic sheet on the ground and wrap up in the blanket and sleep. The army watched us when we slept and took a rest. They did not allow us to take a rest during the day and beat us when we were very tired and could not walk while carrying the loads. Only my friend helped me when I was sick and could not carry the loads. He took a few loads from me and carried them. The army did not carry anything for us. A soldier walked between two porters.

How did you escape here?

People [the army and other porters] took a rest behind while I walked before them. I looked behind and saw they were coming. So, I left the sack of rice and fled because I couldn't carry it as well. It was about 12:00 pm, at lunchtime. I fled for three nights. I had to sleep a night in the jungle and also I slept here. I was alone when I fled. It took four days to get here. When I was fleeing, I saw the Karen grandfathers. They could not speak Burmese. They sent me to the Karen officer. The Karen officer asked whether I had already eaten or not. I replied that I had not eaten yet. They cooked rice for me and asked me to eat until I was satisfied. He told me not to flee again and they would help me to go back home. I slept there a night and the next day, they sent me to an office and then to here. In the Burmese army, I never had enough food to eat. When I arrived here, I could eat until I am satisfied. Before we fled, the SPDC army threatened us and told us not to run away. The Karen would kill us after they questioned us and we would step on landmines. They lied to us. In reality, the Karen army is nice and fed us enough rice. An officer in the office asked me whether I had eaten or not. He gave me soap and asked me take a bath and wash my clothes. They [the Karen soldiers] did not do anything to me. When I arrived to the Karen group, my clothes were very dirty and the officer gave me soap to wash them. After I took a bath, they fed me rice until I was satisfied. I thanked them a lot.

What was your family's occupation?

My family did a hill field.

What was the situation in your town?

When I lived in W--- [in Myitkyina], there were only a few people who had money. Most people were workers and felt starvation. There were more people who are poor.

What do you think of the SPDC army?

I do not like them. They ordered us to work extremely hard. It is not fair and just. Whether the army makes a mistake or not, the convict porters cannot tell them anything. They have rules for us to obey. We cannot talk back to them. The military army's control is not good. In Burma, the laws are not right. Whether people make a mistake or not, they put them all in prison when these people can't give money to them. They let free from charge those who have money. They announced that they would have a 2010 election, but it has not happened yet. We do not trust them. They have already announced that they do not want the country to become a democratic country. They will seize power again. It already happened in the past.

Did other porters flee before you fled?

Yes, there were over 10 porters who fled before me. Out of 100 porters, over half of them had already run away. Some porters were shot when they tried to flee. I heard the guns firing four or five times.

What is your future plan?

I cannot go back. I do not know the way to go back. I dare not go back home because if I go back now, they will arrest me again. I want to find a job in Thailand. I will go back home when the laws are good. If the laws are bad, I will not go back home. *[Another porter explained that he says that he will go back when Burma becomes a democracy and the laws have changed. If the laws have not changed, he will not go back.]*

Do you have anything to say about the SPDC army?

I do not like any Burmese action.

Interview | Myint Aung, 39 (January 2010, Papun District)

Address prior to arrest: T--- Section, Myitkyina Town, Kachin State
Ethnicity: Kachin
Religion: Christian
Occupation prior to arrest: Peasant
Marital status: Married; one child
Reported reason for arrest: Using opium
Date of arrest: June --- 2006
Reported sentence: 17 years
Reported date sentence began: June --- 2006
Prison(s): Myitkyina; Kin-tha
Date sent to labour camp:
Labour camp:
Date taken to porter:
How many taken from labour camp to porter: 200
Area/ location portered: Baw Hser Koh; Pla Koh
Battalion: LIB #237 and LIB #47
Number of soldiers and porters (exact, not a ratio): 50-60 soldiers and 52 convict porters
Date of interviewee's escape: January --- 2010
Number of porters escaped (not including interviewee):
Location of interviewee's escape:
Location of interview: Papun District
Date of interview: January --- 2010
Future plans: Home

How many children do you have?

I have only one child, about 7 years old.

Why were you imprisoned?

I was imprisoned due to using opium within article 1519 and sentenced to a 17-year prison term. Two police came to arrest me. I was arrested alone. They tied me up and called me to follow them to the police station. I had to stay in a jail cell for 15 or 16 days. I was sentenced on June --- 2006. My prison number was 8----. Some people who have money used it as a bribe when they did not want to be charged into prison. For me, I did not have money to do that. In Myitkyina Prison, I had to stay in the lower part of No #6 barracks. Then, I was sent to Kin-tha Stone Production Camp. I had to work there, breaking stones and carrying the stones. I stayed there for a year and a month. Then, I was taken out to porter. In Myitkyina Prison, I had to eat what people from my family sent for me. [In the prison] they fed us only rice with yellow bean curry in the morning. In the afternoon, they fed us *ta la bpaw* and morning glory. In Kin-tha Camp, we had to break the stones and carry them to the truck for customers who came to buy the stones. The customers gave them money. To get more money, they ordered us to work very hard for free. They told us that they would hire us for 50 kyat per day. But, we never saw them give us any money, even though we worked there and were not taken to porter. They told us one thing and did another thing.

What kind of food did they provide you daily in prison?

They gave us a small piece of meat per week in prison.

How did they take care of health care in prison?

In prison they opened a clinic, but doctors in the clinic only gave us injections when we could afford to pay for them with money. They did not give us injections for free. We had to buy medicine from outside and they gave injections to us.

Have you ever seen any abuse in prison?

The army [police or prison authorities] who were in charge in the prison did impose restrictions on us. As we faced a crisis just to be able to survive, we sold betel quid, but they ate it without paying us any money.

Are the prisoners allowed to listen to a radio, to read or to write a letter?

In prison, we are not allowed to listen to a radio and to read. Even a novel, we have to read it secretly. I saw that they themselves read the newspaper but they do not distribute newspapers to us to read. If we want to read it, we have to pay them money. Moreover, they told us to inform them and go to write a letter in front of them when we want to write a letter to our family. However, I never did that. I just wrote a letter secretly and sent it my family. Our family is allowed to meet with us in a prison whenever our family is able to come. They do not limit it. Our family can visit us everyday but our family is only allowed to see us for five or six minutes and also has to give 500 kyat and we also have to pay them 500 kyat for the patrol. The people who provide the electricity demanded it because they said it is for patrol and water costs. Altogether, we have to give 1, 000 kyat [for each visit].

What did you experience in prison?

For me, I did not experience much in prison because I ate what they fed me and just stayed like that.

How long were you in prison?

I was in prison for over two years or about three years. After that, I was sent to a camp where I had to break the stones for one year and a month. Then, I was taken out to be a porter for the army.

Who came and took you out to be a porter?

The truck that carried the porters came to pick me up. The police were also included when the truck came to pick us up. The jailers did not tell us anything. They got us into the truck and we just followed. This truck sent us to Toungoo Prison. From there, we had to ride the military truck to Baw Hser Koh. Starting from Baw Hser Koh, we had to begin walking along and carrying the rations. We came to take a rest in Pla Koh. When we were sent to the army, our legs were unchained, but the army tied us with rope. We had to line up and they tied us, four, five, six or seven prisoners together. There were 200 prisoners taken out from Kin-tha Camp. I was sent to be a porter for LIB #237 and LIB #47. The army battalions that I was a porter for came to rotate. They also said the operation command #388 Camp changed. I also saw there were 15-17 year old soldiers. They were very young. They could not even carry their guns.

What did the army order you to carry?

I had to carry rice, cooking oil and everything. They ordered us to carry everything that they needed. There were at most 50-60 soldiers and 52 convict porters before I fled. Some porters left when they were very sick and could not walk anymore. The army also shot at porters who tried to run away. There was a porter who tried to run away at Pla Koh. The patrol saw him and shot him at once. The bullet hit him and he fell down. I did not know whether he died or not. It occurred on January 2nd 2010. All porters were prisoners. Each porter had to carry the loads

that weighed almost as much as a sack of rice. The weight was about 25 viss. Even though we could not carry them, we were forced to carry them. They reduced it only a little and ordered us to carry it. When we were very tired and could not carry the loads during the trip and we just sat down, they kicked us and hit us with their guns immediately. Therefore, even though we could not carry, we had to try and continue walking. And they fed us only a small amount of rice. They also gave us very little fish paste to eat for both meals, morning and evening. The army never tortured me because I tried to continue carrying the loads because I thought I would flee one day. I was very patient. The next day, I saw they put more rice out for me to carry. Then, I knew that I could not carry it anymore. I could not suffer anymore. I thought it was not fair. They fed us little and they ordered us to work extremely hard.

Who tortured the porters?

The Captain with three stars, Lieutenant and all the soldiers tortured the porters.

Did the army provide enough food for the porters?

No, they did not feed us enough to eat. They fed us twice per day. They gave us a small amount of rice and a little fish paste to eat. It was not enough for us. The food that the porters ate was different from the food that the soldiers ate. Sometimes, we did not even have water to drink.

How did the army take care of porters' health care?

There were porters who were sick, but the army did not give them medicine to drink. They only gave medicine to the ones who could not walk anymore and then left them.

How did you have to sleep?

At night, we had to sleep with what we brought with us from Toungoo Prison. In Toungoo Prison, we were given a plastic sheet, a cup, a thin blanket, a sweater, a long shirt, a shirt, and trousers. We had to use these and hug ourselves and sleep. Some porters could not carry the loads and they threw the sweaters and those clothes away so that we were cold at night. We were not allowed to sleep near a fire and we were not allowed to make a fire. The sentry sat down with their guns over our heads at night and watched over us. The army waited for us when we slept and took a rest because they were afraid that we would run away. They allowed us to take a rest when we reached the place where we had to send the rations. They left those who could not work any more. Porters who did not feel seriously sick were ordered to go and porter. During the trip, we, the prisoners, had to walk between the army.

Why did you escape to here?

I fled when I came back to the camp after I went to carry the rations. At that time, everyone was ready to sleep. It was also getting dark. I slipped out the fence and fled. No one knew except two of my friends when I run away. The army threatened us and told us not to flee before. If they knew or saw us flee, they would shoot us dead. If they could not shoot us dead, we would starve in the jungle. And even if we arrived somewhere, *A'Bpay* [the name which the SPDC uses to call the KNLA] would kill us, too. We would also step on landmines and die. In reality, it was not true what they said because everyone here is very good-natured and friendly. There is no one here like them, who doesn't treat people like humans. I fled alone on January --- 2010. I had to sleep a night in the jungle. Then, I tried to follow the stream and heard the crow of a chicken. I went towards the crow of the chicken and encountered people. I met with brothers here. I started fleeing from Pla Koh and, during the time I was fleeing, I slept a night in the jungle and, the next morning, I met with Karen brothers, a villager and a person who carried a musket. They sent me to the army [KNLA army]. When I arrived at the army, the army was

very friendly to me. They fed me rice until I was satisfied and let me sleep. When I woke up, they gave me cucumbers to eat. They called me to follow them to another camp. During the trip, they bought me snacks to eat and gave me slippers.

What did you bring with you when you fled?

I brought only clothes. I wore them in double layers as much as I could. I did not bring anything else, only the clothes that I wore.

What was your family occupation?

My family was peasants.

What was the situation in your village?

We farmed hill fields and panned for gold during the season when we can pan for gold. We just worked like this and supported our survival. Most villagers farmed hill fields and took any jobs that were available.

Is there any school in your village?

There is a school in my village.

What do you think of the SPDC army?

As for the SPDC army, I do not even want to talk about them. They cannot treat people like humans anymore. I would not complain if they fed me food well and asked me to work. But, they do not feed us enough and order us to work extremely hard. I feel so very angry at them that I cannot describe it. Their action is not right. The army also said if there were no prisoners, they would recruit villagers to porter.

Do you have anything else to say about the army?

Due to their actions that forced us to work extremely hard and did not feed us enough food, I feel hatred towards them. They are never nice. Before I fled from the convict porters, there were other porters who fled too.

What is your future plan?

I want to go back home and see my family. But I dare not go back alone and I do not know how to go back, either. Unless the Karen brothers and relatives here send me, I will not know how to go back.

Interview | Nge Nge, 38 (January 2010, Papun District)

Address prior to arrest: B--- village, K--- Township, Naypyidaw, Mandalay Region
Ethnicity:
Religion:
Occupation prior to arrest:
Marital status: Married; 3 children
Reported reason for arrest: Murder
Date of arrest: October --- 2005
Reported sentence:
Reported date sentence began: January --- 2006
Prison(s):
Date sent to labour camp:
Labour camp:
Date taken to porter: 4 year and two months after arrested
Size of group taken to porter: 200 from Kin-tha 1; 500 total
Area/ location portered: Pla Koh
Battalion: LIB #47
Number of soldiers and porters (exact, not a ratio):
Date of interviewee's escape: January --- 2010
Number of porters escaped (not including interviewee):
Location of interviewee's escape:
Location of interview: Papun District
Date of interview: January --- 2010
Future plans:

How many children do you have?

I have three children. My oldest child is 17 years old and the youngest one is 10 years old.

Why did you come here?

I arrived here because I had been recruited to be a porter for the army.

Why were you imprisoned?

I was imprisoned due to the crime of murder. I killed a person because he poisoned my goats to death. I got very angry with him and went to cut him with a knife. I was imprisoned for 10 years. The police came to arrest me on October --- 2005 at about 9:00 am. I was in my house when they came to arrest me. I was sent to Ta Gone police station. I had to stay in a jail cell for 28 days. I was sentenced on January --- 2006. After that, I was sent to Yamethin Prison. My prison number was 0-----. People who can afford to pay money can bribe them if they do not want to be imprisoned. I had to stay in No (1) barracks, the upper class. In prison, we had to respect the jailer and jail warden. We had to stand up and turn down our heads when they came. In the prison, we were not ordered to work, but when I arrived to *yeh beh* Camp, I had to carry stones. We did not get any payment.

What kind of food did you have to eat in prison?

In the morning, they fed us yellow beans and fish paste and, in the evening, they fed us ta la bpaw curry. They fed us just like this.

How did they take care of health care in prison?

For health care, our family had to come and look after us. In the prison, even when we were seriously sick, they gave us only a tablet of paracetamol. They did not give us other medicines. They only took good care of those prisoners whose families came to bribe them. They fed coffee and other food, too. For those who could not pay the bribe, they did not care and they even scolded us. They ordered us to work in a harder work place than the other prisoners.

Are prisoners allowed to listen to a radio, to read and to write a letter?

We were not allowed to listen to the radio. We just had to listen secretly. They did not officially allow us to listen to the radio. We were not allowed to read and write a letter to our family. Our family was allowed to meet us in a prison only on Sunday. They allowed us to meet with our family four times per month. We were allowed to meet for 15-20 minutes only. We did not have to give money for the visit. When I first arrived in the prison, I did not know that we did not have to pay money. So, I used to pay them when they demanded it. Then I found out that we did not have to pay and I did not pay them anymore. I had to stay in the prison for four years and two months. Then, the army came to take me out to porter. When the army came to take us, the jailers and the jail warden did not tell us anything about going to porter. They told us that we had to change to a new camp. They came to take us by truck and chained our legs in pairs. We had to turn down our heads on the truck. There were 200 prisoners taken out along with me from No (1) Kin-tha camp. If we combined with other prisoners, there were 500 prisoners altogether. I was sent to battalion #47. We traveled by the military truck to Kyauk Kyi and, from there, we started walking to Pla Koh army camp. After that, we had to carry the loads to Operation Command. We had to sleep three nights on the trip.

What did the army order you to carry?

The army ordered us to carry rations, rice and other things.

What was the army's purpose to come here?

I heard they came to rotate to the frontline.

How many porters were there in battalion #47?

There were 200 porters in battalion #47. About a third of the porters were the oldest age of porters. They were about 50 years old.

How much weight did you have to porter?

I had to porter loads that were heavier than one basket of rice. We could not carry this heavy load and walk for the whole day every day because we lost our energy. They forcibly pushed us to stand up, kicked us with their shoes and hit us with their guns and with sticks. I could not continue to suffer and ran away from the convict porters. I fled from Pla Koh.

Have you ever seen the army torture porters?

The army beat and yelled at the porters who could not continue to walk during the trip. After three or four days, when we had to go back in order to carry the rations, the army did not feed us enough rice. The porters could not continue walking and got beaten and hit with the army's guns. The army tortured me too, because I could not carry the loads that they ordered me to carry. They punched my waist and my hips. The 2nd Lieutenant tortured me.

Did they provide enough food for porters?

No, they did not provide enough food for the porters. They fed us twice per day. They gave us only a small amount of rice to eat with fish paste. It was not enough food and also they did not give us enough water to drink. For the army, they cooked good curry and ate it on their own. For officers, they ate cans of beef, meat and fruit.

Did they provide medical treatment when the porters were sick?

No, they did not give medicine to drink when the porters were sick. They only gave permission to take a rest for one day when the porters were seriously sick. They had to carry loads the next day. They only let two or three people take a rest. The other porters had to go and carry the loads. We had to go and porter because we were afraid of them.

How did porters have to sleep at night?

We had to sleep beside the fence without a roof and without any cover in the army camp. The army watched over us when we slept or took a rest. During the trip, we were not allowed to take a rest. Each porter had to walk between two soldiers.

How did you escape to here?

I fled in the morning when the porters were going to send rations. I decided to flee because I knew if I was ordered to continue going like this for a long time, I would die. It meant nothing to stay here anymore. I would not care even if they shot me dead while I tried to flee. I would give up my life. Then, I ran away through the bushes and they shot at me from above. I fled on January --- 2010 on the trip to Pla Koh. It took seven days to get here. I slept three nights in the jungle without any food. I had to eat banana trees. At night, I made a fire and warmed my self. Firstly, I ran away with one of my friends, but we split up. After three days, I climbed up the hill and saw a hill field and a hut. Then, I went to ask for help in the hut. People in the hut gave me rice and cucumber to eat and a cigarette to smoke. After that, they sent me to Saya [Teacher], a KNLA soldier. He gave me snacks, bananas and rice to eat. But I had already eaten in the hut. He sent me to an officer and then I was sent here. I slept with the officer there for a night. They were all hospitable to me.

What was the situation in your village?

The villagers work and support their survival just like this. Some villagers own hill fields and are able to support their welfare. Those who do not own any hill fields have to work for other villagers as hired workers and they take the jobs that are available.

Is there any school in your village?

Yes.

What do you think of the SPDC army?

I get angry with them because they called us to serve as porters and they oppress and torture us brutally, worse than animals. Their action is not right. We had to carry everything including their backpacks. For them, they only carry their guns. Due to their oppression, many civilians face trouble. Things are expensive and the civilians are faced with their corruption, step-by-step, in all their positions. The peasants have to give them taxes without fail. Eventually, they do not have anything left for themselves. On the other hand, each soldier gets 20,000 kyat per month.

Do you have anything else to say?

During the days before I ran away, the porters fled from the army every day. Some porters fled at night and some fled during the daytime when they went to send the rations. Before I went to carry the rations to the front, I heard a Burmese porter was caught and brought back when he tried to run away and then one of the officers shot him dead at the temple. They killed the porters who they recaptured because they were afraid that they would have to carry the loads if all the porters fled and then they would not succeed in their plans. So they oppress and torture the porters until they reach where they want to go.

What is your future plan?

I want to go back home.

Interview | Chan Za, 22 (January 2010, Papun District)

Address prior to arrest: N--- Section, Myitkyina Town, Kachin State
Ethnicity:
Religion: Muslim
Occupation prior to arrest: Live with mother
Marital status: Single
Reported reason for arrest: Selling drugs
Date of arrest: August --- 2005
Reported sentence:
Date Reported sentenced: January --- 2006
Prison(s): Myitkyina; Kin-tha; Toungoo
Date sent to labour camp:
Labour camp:
Date taken to porter: October 8th 2009 to Toungoo
Size of group taken to porter: 200
Area/ location portered: Baw Hser Koh; Pla Koh
Battalion:
Number of soldiers and porters (exact, not a ratio):
Date of interviewee's escape:
Number of porters escaped (not including interviewee):
Location of interviewee's escape:
Location of interview: Papun District
Date of interview: January --- 2010
Future plans: Home

What is your mother's occupation?

My mother is a shopkeeper.

Why did you arrive here?

The SPDC forced me to serve as a porter and called me to follow them here.

Why were you imprisoned?

I was imprisoned due to crimes relating to drug according to article 1519 for a 17-year prison term. I was a student and I was easygoing. My mother sold drugs. They, the Drug Protection Group, came to search our house and arrested me. They saw the drugs and me. My mother was not in the house. She went to stay at her friend's house. They arrested me and sent me to the Drug Protection Office and then sent me to a prison. Actually, it was not a crime that I committed by myself. It was my mother. They beat me when I was called to follow them to the office many times. They stepped on my legs and tortured me. I had to stay in a jail cell for eight days. Then, I was sent to Myitkyina Prison on September --- 2005 after I was charged. I was sentenced to imprisonment on January --- 2006 and my prison number was 9----. After that, I was taken out to Naypyidaw Kin-tha Stone Production Camp. I was ordered to work, breaking and carrying stones there. We had to begin work in the morning but we were not allowed to eat until 12:30 pm. After that, we came back and cleaned our plates only for 5 minutes and then we had to go back and start to work again. We could not take a rest. They fed us twice per day. They said they would give us payment, 50 kyat per day, for our work but that they would save it for us and give us cash later. I do not trust them anymore. If I had not been imprisoned, I would have continued to attend school and would have been a soldier.

What kind of food did you have to eat in prison?

In Myitkyina Prison, they fed us yellow bean curry in the morning and, for the evening, we had to arrange curry on our own. If we asked them and if we had money, we could buy vegetables in the prison garden and they let us to take them to eat or cook them ourselves. In Naypyidaw Kin-tha, we were fed only yellow bean curry at lunchtime after we worked. In the afternoon, we had to eat fish paste and curry. We were fed meat four times per week. For prisoners who did not eat meat, they could get eggs for their meal.

How did they take care of prisoners' health?

There was a clinic there. Prisoners could go and get medicine when they were sick. They provided health care there.

Were prisoners even tortured in prison?

No, there was no torture, but in Naypyidaw Stone Production Camp, U Win Bo was the one who antagonized us. We were not allowed to keep bottles of water or oil in the barracks. He came to open the barracks in the morning. We had to keep them all on the floor. If he saw that any one kept them on the wall, he yelled at them and beat that prisoner's head.

Were prisoners allowed to listen to a radio, to read and to write a letter?

We were not allowed to listen to a radio in prison, but we were allowed to in Kin-tha Camp. We were allowed to read newspapers in prison, but we did not have time to read in Kin-tha Camp because we had to work. We were allowed to write a letter to our family too. They allowed us to meet with our family once every 15 days for five to ten minutes. Our family had to pay money to see us. In prison, in the mornings, some prisoners had to work in the garden and some who were on cleaning duty had to clean and we had to wash our own clothes ourselves. I had to stay in prison for over three years and then was sent to *yeh beh* Camp. The police came to take me there and then sent me on the railway. We got into a train. I had to sleep in Mandalay Prison a night and then to *yeh beh* Camp. During the trip, they chained our legs along with another prisoner. I was taken out to porter on October --- 2009. I was sent to Toungoo Prison along with 200 prisoners from the camp. Then the army came to take us in the evening at 4:00 pm or 5:00 pm from the prison and called us to follow their battalion.

What did the army order you to porter?

They ordered us to porter sacks of rice and their rations. I portered for the army battalion that was coming to rotate with the previous battalion. The oldest porters were over 50 years old and the youngest porters were around 20 years old. The porters had to walk between two soldiers. Three porters had to carry two sacks of rice. We travelled through Kyauk Kyi to Tan Bo and then to Baw Hser Koh and Pla Koh.

Have you ever seen the army torture porters?

Yes, I saw the army torture porters for myself. They ordered the porters to carry the rations and commanded them to tie the rations with ropes and they shouted at the porters *"*Hain kaung *[animal], do that carefully. Piece of bullshit, I will kick you and shoot you dead with my gun".*

Did the army provide enough food for porters?

No, they did not feed us enough. They fed us twice per day, but sometimes we were not allowed to eat twice per day. We had to eat only once for morning and evening. Sometimes, they gave us only small amount of rice to eat and we had to follow them very long distance. They only gave us rice and a little fish paste to eat without curry.

Did the army give medicine to the porters who felt sick?

They gave medicine to the porters who were sick just sometimes.

How did porters have to sleep?

We had to sleep on our own. We had to make a plastic sheet on the ground and cover ourselves with a very thin blanket and then we slept. The army watched us when we slept or took a rest because they were afraid that we would run away and, without us, they would not achieve their duty. During the trip, they did not allow us to take a rest. They forcibly ordered the porters who could not carry the rations to walk. They hit them with their guns and kicked them to walk. We had to walk between two soldiers. During the trip, we also encountered a battle and some porters got injured.

How did you escape to here?

I fled at night when it was about 10:00 pm and I slept in a jungle. When I fled, the sentry knew, but he did not shoot at me. It took three days to arrive here. It was getting dark when I went to sleep in a hut. I saw no one in the hut. In the morning, I was very hungry and thought to follow the owner of the hut. However, the owner of the hut did not come back so I continued to walk and saw another hut and went there. Karen villagers saw me and came down to the hut and I told them about myself. Then, they sent me here step by step.

What was the situation in your town?

People in my town have to buy meat, vegetables, and fishes to eat. Some people run their business by lending money on interest. Some people have good welfare and some do not. Most people have good welfare. Some people are poor.

What do you think of the SPDC army?

I did not think anything of the SPDC army. The soldiers just did their own duty. I had to work for them as I was imprisoned. Their action is not fair.

Were there any porters who ran away before you did?

Yes, I heard there were other porters who ran away before I fled. The porters who the army recaptured were beaten and kept in custody.

What is your future plan?

I really want to go back home, but I do not know how to go back. I have not had communication with my family in Myitkyina for a long time.

Interview | Kaw Kay, 41 (January 2010, Papun District)

Address prior to arrest: H--- Section, M--- Town, Shan State
Ethnicity: Chinese
Religion: Christian
Occupation prior to arrest: Tractor driver
Marital status: Married; six children
Reported reason for arrest: Transporting drugs
Date of arrest:
Reported sentence:
Reported date sentence began: January --- 2008
Prison(s): Lashio; Kin-tha
Date sent to labour camp:
Labour camp:
Date taken to porter:
Size of group taken to porter: 150 from Kin-tha ; 200 from Kin-tha (2); 350 from both
Area/ location portered: to Baw Hser Koh
Battalion: LIB #56
Number of soldiers and porters (exact, not a ratio): 13 porters
Date of interviewee's escape: December --- 2010
Number of porters escaped (not including interviewee):
Location of interviewee's escape:
Location of interview: Papun District
Date of interview: January --- 2010
Future plans:

How many children do you have?

I have six children. The oldest child is 20 years old and the youngest one is about 10 years old.

Why did you have to come here?

I was forced to be a convict porter for the army and I could not suffer so I fled here.

Have you ever been in prison?

I was imprisoned due to crimes relating to drugs under article 19/K. As I was a driver, people hired me to go and get drugs for them, as they needed drug tablets. I went to get it only once and I was arrested. These tablets were for selling. I was imprisoned for 15 years. The Drug Special Protection Group came to arrest me. They said they were informed so that is why they came to arrest me. I did not know the people who came and hired me. As I drove a tractor, I trusted them and helped them. After I helped them, I was arrested. I was in my house when they came to arrest me. They beat me and tortured me. They made me follow them to their office. They beat and tortured me while they asked me questions. I had to stay in a jail cell for five months. I was sentenced on January --- 2008. Then, I was sent to Lashio Prison on January --- 2008. My prison number in Lashio Prison was 8---. The last prison number was 00---. I got it when I was taken out to be a porter for the army. In Lashio Prison, I had to stay at No (1) barracks. The jailers and the jail warden ordered us to work. Prisoners who could not work had to pay money monthly. For those who could not pay money, we had to carry fertilizer and pick tobacco leaves. We had to picking tobacco leaves every day. They did not give us any payment for our work.

What kind of food did they feed you in prison?

They fed us rice and *ta la bpaw* curry and they fed us meat once per week. It was very little meat.

What was the health care situation in prison?

There was no health care in the prison. There was a clinic, but they gave medicine and cured only the prisoners who could pay money. As for us, we did not have money so we could not access medical treatment and we did not get anything.

Have you ever seen prisoners being tortured?

Yes, the wardens or the police beat and shouted at prisoners when the prisoners did not work or did not finish our work quickly or when we went to drink water or went to do something, like peeing while we were working.

Were prisoners allowed to listen to a radio, to read and write?

The prisoners were not allowed to listen to a radio or to read. We could write a letter if they gave us permission to. We were not allowed to write a letter secretly. We were not even allowed to touch pens. If we wanted to write a letter to our family, we had to inform the office. Our family was allowed to meet us in the prison only for 10 minutes twice per month. We had to pay 3,000 kyat for a single visit. Some who were friendly with them [the prison authorities] bribed them with another 3,000 kyat and then they could continue to meet for another 10 minutes. For us, we were not friendly with them so we dared not try. In the prison, they only fed us *ta la bpaw* and ordered us to work. Some prisoners who did not want to work gave money as a bribe monthly and did not have to do anything. For those who could not afford that, we had to pick tobacco leaves and carry fertilizer every day. I had to stay there for over seven months. We also had to pay money to eat rice. Each prisoner had to pay over 2,000 kyat per month. They cooked rice in small steam pots and big steam pots. Those who paid money were allowed to eat rice cooked in the big steam pots. The jailers and jail wardens worked with prisoners who were rich and corrupt. The major jail warden came to take us out and sent us to Yeh Bak Camp. Prisoners who could pay money were left and those who could not afford to pay money were taken out. I was sent to Mandalay Prison by train. They chained our legs in pairs. There were 100 prisoners from Lashio Prison taken out. We had to sleep two nights in Mandalay Prison. Then, the truck carrying prisoners came to pick us up to Kin-tha No (1) Stone Production Camp. I had to work for over a year. Then, I was taken out to be a porter for the army. I did not know that I would be taken out to porter. If I knew that, I would not have come because it was very dangerous and risked my life. At home, I have children, a father and a mother. They also would not want me to go to very dangerous places. I did not know that. I understood I was being sent to a new camp because they only told me that they opened a new camp and we had to go and work there. They were going to build a vehicle road from Nay Pyi Taw around the country. They did not tell us that we had to go and be porters for the army. They chained our legs on August 8th 2007 and sent us to Toungoo Prison on August 9th 2007. Now, I feel a lot of hatred because we had to follow the SPDC army and fight with them when the battle occurred. I really hate the SPDC army's action. I had to follow LIB #56. When I arrived to Toungoo Prison, I knew that I had to be a porter for the army. In Toungoo Prison, we were told that we had to follow the army and be porters for the army. We had to follow the army and fight for the army. I had to sleep there for three nights and the next early morning the army came to take us out. We had to sleep a night in an army camp.

What did the army order you to porter?

They ordered me to carry rice, fish paste, dried fish and bullets. Some porters had to carry mortar bullets. But I had to carry small bullets. When I portered to Baw Hser Koh with LIB #56, there were about 100 soldiers. When we were first taken out to porter, there were 200 prisoners

from Kin-tha No (1) and 150 prisoners from Kin-tha No (2). The total population of all the prisoners was 350 from both of these camps. We were all divided when we arrived to Baw Hser Koh. There were only 13 prisoners in our company. Porters were all prisoners. Each porter had to carry loads that weighed over 20 viss. When I came to carry it to the front, it was very heavy and I could not carry it and continue to walk, but I dared not tell them because we were not allowed to tell them. Sometimes, they beat us and shouted at us when we told them. Sometimes they swore at us. *"You are not humans. You are prisoners. You came here for your crimes."* They felt a lot of hatred for us, the prisoners. They did not value prisoners to be worth as much as an animal.

What were your experiences in the army?

There were many porters who could not continue walking in the front. The SPDC army beat, kicked and hit them with guns. We could not count how many times they shouted or swore at us. They were shouting and swearing a lot. I myself was tortured too. I was beaten three or four times. I was beaten with sticks and I was hit with guns. They tortured us because they do not have any sense of humanity and they are inhuman. Their action is not right. They cannot feel sympathy and pity for us because they do not see us as being human. *Bo Mu, Bo Gyi*, the officers and the soldiers are all the same. They all abuse the convict porters. Even though *Bo Mu* and *Bo Gyi* saw their soldiers torturing the porters, they would not say anything to them. Nothing is different between *Bo Mu, Bo Gyi* and the soldiers. They commit abuses together. I heard that, in other companies, even *Bo Mu* and *Bo Gyi* beat the porters. I saw there was a porter who got beaten and could not walk after he was beaten. Then he was left. I did not know whether he would die or not. He was a Chinese man. The army also shot dead the porters who tried to flee. On the same day that I fled, two porters, one Shan and one Burmese, were shot dead because they could not carry the loads and decided to flee. They did not care about their lives anymore, whether they were dead or not. I knew only the Shan man. His name is Saing and he was from Nan Kaing in northern Shan State. He was about 28-30 years old. As for the Burmese man, I do not know him. This happened on December 30th 2009.

Did the SPDC army provide enough food to eat?

They only fed us a limited amount of rice. They fed us twice per day, once at nighttime and another time in the early morning. They cooked at night and kept it for breakfast in the morning. Then we kept that same rice for another day. We had to work for the whole day and eat the rice that was already leftover from the day before. We did not have to cook it again. They only fed us fish paste and yellow beans. The food that we ate and the food the army ate was different. For them, they brought a lot of cans of beef and fish to eat. But they did not give the porters any of that to eat. *Bo Mu* and *Bo Gyi* [officers] ate cans of fish, yellow beans and beef. They had meat to eat.

How did the SPDC army take care of the porters who were sick?

They did not give any medicine to the porters who were sick. My waist hurt when I carried the loads. I told them but they did not give me any medicine to drink and I had to continue carrying the loads every day.

How did you have to sleep at night?

They sat up doing sentry duty at night in the camp where they kept the rice and they ordered us to sleep in the middle without blankets. They always watched us when we took a rest or slept because they did not trust the porters. They did not allow us to take a rest when we were very tired during the trip. They forced us to carry loads until they reached a place where they wanted to go. They forced every porter who was sick or tired to carry the loads. Sometimes, the loads were very heavy to carry, but we dared not tell them because we would get beaten, kicked and

hit with their guns. Sometimes, they took ropes and beat us. A soldier walked between two porters.

How did you escape here?

I prayed every day to God for safety and discipline. I also believe that God saved and disciplined me. It was a very strange day for me. Usually, I would not see this opportunity. I prayed to God to show me a way every single time. On that day, the soldiers who were on security talked to each other and they did not care about me. Then, I fled when I walked across the camp. It was about 12:00 pm, at lunchtime. They shot at me five or six times but it did not hit me because I had already walked further from the army camp. I fled from the convict porters on December --- 2010. I met with Karen soldiers on December 31st 2010 at lunchtime. They asked me questions and I told them that I was a good man and a convict porter for the SPDC army. I had not eaten rice for two days. They helped me and they called me to follow them to a village and then to another village. They fed me as much rice as I could eat, because I was hungry, and they let me sleep well. The next day, they sent me to a camp and then to another camp. Then, I arrived here. I am very thankful to them and I also recognize it in my heart.

What was your family livelihood?

We opened a small shop and sold goods at home. I drove a tractor. Our family's welfare was good and we lived happily with our children.

Is there any school in your village?

There are schools in my village. We have a Chinese Christianity School which is a middle school supported by the Chinese Buddhist Church. The Burmese School is a primary school. The teachers who teach for the Church have enough food to eat.

What was the situation in your village?

The villagers' livelihoods were good and they have good welfare. There were a few villagers whose livelihoods did not go well and they faced welfare problems.

What do you think of the SPDC army?

Based on how the SPDC army acts, I believe that they do not love civilians or other ethnicities. They do not value prisoners to be worth as much as an animal. When we carried the rations, we saw that they provided medical treatment and gave injections for energy to the mules. For us, although we went to ask for medicine when we felt sick, they said there was no medicine. They did not even give us tablets to drink. They do not act right or fair. They do not have any sense of humanity and are not willing to help others. They only do what they want to do. As we are civilians, we cannot do anything and dare not to tell them because they hold guns and have power and control over us. So we feel very sorry in our heart.

Do you have anything to say about the SPDC army?

I feel so much hatred for them. When I came to carry the loads this time, we encountered fighting. I never had an experience like this. I am not a soldier and I did not have a gun either. The SPDC army ordered us and forced us to run in front of them and they followed us from behind. When I think about it, it was very dangerous for us and I feel so much pain. I also have parents who are very old, a wife and children at home. The most important thing that I want to say is that they do not have any sense of humanity for civilians. So they do not act right.

Were there any porters who fled before you did?

Yes, there were porters who deserted before we reached the camp. In LIB #56, the SPDC army did not catch the ones who tried to flee. But we heard that other battalions recaptured some porters who tried to flee.

What is your future plan?

I want to go home, but I do not know how to get back. So, I cannot get back unless the Karen soldiers help me.

Interview | Hla Min, 24 (January 2010, Papun District)

Address prior to arrest: A--- Town, Mandalay Region
Ethnicity: Shan
Religion: Buddhist
Occupation prior to arrest: Labourer
Marital status: Single
Reported reason for arrest:
Date of arrest:
Reported sentence:
Reported date sentence began:
Prison(s):
Date sent to labour camp:
Labour camp:
Date taken to porter:
Size of group taken to porter:
Area/ location portered:
Battalion: LIB #47, Aung Win
Number of soldiers and porters (exact, not a ratio): 50 -60 porters
Date of interviewee's escape:
Number of porters escaped (not including interviewee):
Location of interviewee's escape:
Location of interview: Papun District
Date of interview: January --- 2010
Future plans: Home

Why did you come here?

I fled from the convict porters because I could not continue to carry and suffer.

Why did you become a porter?

I came to do gold mining in Yamethin from my home. It was about 9:00 or 10:00 pm at night when the army came with a truck for us and told us to follow them. They said we had to work for our country and nation. We have to help and be volunteers. We replied that we did not want to follow them because we came to do our own business. Then they told us *"No, you must follow us. If you do not want to follow us, we will beat you and torture you. We will shoot you dead."* We were forced to follow them as we were afraid of them. They did not ask us anything and they recruited us to be porters for the army. They came and arrested me when I was on my way back from work. They hit my head and said *"I told you in a nice way. But you do not agree so I had to hit you and shout at you."* When they arrested me, I was alone. But, I saw there were many people who were recruited. They were recruited one by one. No one had committed a crime. They called us to follow them to their army base. There were many porters, about 200 porters, including the prisoners. They divided 10-20 porters into each battalion. In the morning, the military truck came and picked us up. We had to work for them for free and they did not feed us well. They beat those who could not carry the loads. We could not pay money to bribe them not to be porters.

What were your experiences in the SPDC army?

We had to do whatever they ordered. We had to carry sacks of rice and porter rations for them. When we came back to the army camp after we carried the rations, we had to cook rice for them and carry water. They fed us curry, rice and fish paste. For the curry, they fed us yellow beans that were already rotten and eaten by bacteria. The rice was not good.

How did the SPDC army take care of your health?

We had to work whether we were sick or healthy. Sometimes they gave us tablets and if they did not want to give us any, they did not give us medicine.

Have you ever seen the SPDC army torture porters?

The SPDC army tortured porters a lot. We told them when we could not continue to carry the loads. But, they did not allow us to take a rest. They forced us to continue carrying the loads. If we put down the loads when we could not carry them, they beat us and tortured us to carry them.

Did the SPDC army allow you to listen to a radio, read and write a letter to your family during carrying the loads?

They did not allow us to listen to a radio. They allowed us to read, but they did not allow us to write a letter to our family. They did not allow us to visit our family. We were able to go back when the battalion finished their duty, operating in the front. Until the battalion finished their duty, we had to follow them. We did not know how long it would be.

What were your experiences as a porter?

It was very dangerous and we had to work very hard for them. We were very tired from carrying the loads. The bombs were exploding and guns were firing. We were very afraid of that. They did not tell us anything about where we had to go when they first recruited us. We came all the way to Baw Hser Koh army camp by truck. They slept there a night and then we came to Pla Koh and then we continued to walk to Mu S'Lin and slept there for a night. We continued walking to Thit T'Bpin and then to Pyu Ha Gone. In Pyu Ha Gone, we were told to carry rations for them. So, we had to carry rations back to Pla Koh. They had a small army camp between Pla Koh and Mu S'Lin. We had to send the rations and stay there. They had a lot of rations. There were 70, 000 sacks of rice. They said it would last for two months. There were 50-60 porters along with me when we had to carry these rations. I had to porter for LIB #47, led by battalion commander Aung Win.

What did the army order you to carry?

They ordered us to carry sacks of rice, fish paste, tins of milk, etc. We had to walk between the army along with the mules and horses. They ordered us to carry a sack of rice. It was very dangerous for us because we had to walk very carefully because there were landmines.

Have you ever seen the SPDC army torture porters?

Yes, I saw some porters could not continue to carry the rations and the army forced them to carry them. They also beat, punched and kicked the porters when they tried to sit down on the ground. Some porters could not continue to work and tried to flee. The SPDC army shot them when they tried to flee.

Did the SPDC army provide enough food for you to eat?

They did not feed us enough food to eat and we could not sleep well. They fed us only a small amount of rice twice per day. It was not enough for us. The army ate enough rice and cans of meat also. They ate good curry.

Did they provide medicines when porters get sick?

Sometimes they gave medicines when porters felt seriously sick.

How did you have to sleep?

We had to line up and sleep in the same place together. The soldiers watched us when we took a rest or slept. We were not allowed to take a rest when we were tired. We could only take a rest when the soldiers took one. Two porters had to walk between two soldiers, one in the back and one in the front.

How did you escape here?

On that day, we were ordered to carry water. We, two people, had to carry (10) gallons of water. They also asked us to wash rice and yellow beans. We fled when we came down to carry water. The soldier who was waiting for us on the hill shot at us when we fled. We ran very fast and brought the rice and yellow beans with us. I have fled for four days already. We ran, following and wading through a stream, and we crossed mountain ranges and saw a big stream. We slept there a night. In the morning, we cooked and ate. Then we waded through the stream and saw cows and buffalos in a field. Then, we saw a man and he helped us. He showed us the way.

What was your family's livelihood?

My family sold things in a shop.

What was the common livelihood in your village?

In A--- village [in Mandalay], we did gold mining and earned some money. We supported our life with the money that we earned.

What do you think of the SPDC army?

The SPDC army is bad. We had to help their work, carrying their equipment. But, they did not feed us well or let us sleep well. Moreover, they tortured us, scold and beat us. I feel hatred on them very much. I am not satisfied with them, but I cannot do any thing because they hold guns. Before I fled, there were 4 or 5 porters fled. They run into bushes. The army shot at them behind. Some were dead by shooting and landmines. Some porters would escape. They warned us not to desert when we first came with them. They warned us *"Do not run away, if you run away, we will shoot you dead. We have plenty of bullets. We are not miserly and afraid to waste the bullets. Even if you escape from us, you will step on landmines and die. If not, the Karen soldiers will kill you."*

Did the Karen soldiers torture you?

No, they did not torture us. They treated us nicely and help us with whatever we want. They sent us where we wanted to go. They feed us enough rice. Living with the Karen soldiers is more peaceful and safe. It is not safe to stay with the SPDC army. I feel very stressed living in the SPDC army. Here, I feel free and happy that I escaped from the SPDC army.

What is your future plan?

I want to go back home. My parents did not know that I was recruited to porter because I was just doing my own business. Now, they will feel angry. They will be worried about me and wonder where I am. I have not had communication with them for a long time, over a month.

Do you have anything to say about the SPDC army's action?

I do not want to talk about their action. I feel hatred for them. As long as they exist, Burma will not be developed. I saw there were many children in the SPDC army. They were about 20-30 soldiers under 17 years old. There were about 20 porters who were the oldest people, they were over 50 years old. For them, two people had to carry a sack of rice. The army did not respect them and tortured them all like other porters when they could not carry the loads during the trip.

Interview | Aung Zaw, 28 (January 2010, Papun District)

Address prior to arrest: T--- Town, Magwe Region
Ethnicity: Burmese
Religion: Buddhist
Occupation prior to arrest: Peasant
Marital status: Single
Reported reason for arrest: Murder
Date of arrest: April --- 2009
Reported sentence: 2 years
Reported date sentence began:
Prison(s): Yamethin; Toungoo
Date sent to labour camp:
Labour camp:
Date taken to porter:
Size of group taken to porter: 200
Area/ location portered:
Battalion:
Number of soldiers and porters (exact, not a ratio):
Date of interviewee's escape:
Number of porters escaped (not including interviewee): 3
Location of interviewee's escape:
Location of interview: Papun District
Date of interview: January --- 2010
Future plans: Home

Why did you come here?

I came here because I fled from the convict porters. I was very tired and I suffered from starvation because the SPDC army did not feed me food.

Have you ever been imprisoned?

I was imprisoned due to the crime of murder within article 326. I was coming home after cutting firewood and I encountered a group of drunken men. They blocked me and did not let me go. I argued and fought with them and cut them. There were three drunken men and I was alone. It occurred on April --- 2009 in Naypyidaw at about 3:00 pm. The two police came to arrest me. At that time, I stayed in Pyin Ma Na. I had to stay in Pyin Ma Na jail cell for about a month. I was imprisoned for two years. After I was sentenced, I was sent to Yamethin Prison and my Prison number was 00----. In the prison, I had to stay in No #2 barracks. I did not have to do anything in the prison, but I had to work carrying stones in *yeh beh* camp. They gave us 100 kyat per day for our work.

What kind of food did you have to eat in prison?

In the prison, they fed us meat twice per week.

What was the situation of health care in prison?

In the prison, they opened a clinic. They sent us to the clinic when we were sick. It does not matter.

Were prisoners allowed to listen to a radio, to read and write?

We were not allowed to listen to a radio, but we could read novels and magazines about health. We were not allowed to write a letter to our family. Our family was allowed to visit us in prison whenever they were able to come. We could meet for half an hour. We did not have to pay money for that.

How long were you in prison?

I had to stay in prison for ten months and then there were 200 prisoners taken out. When we were taken out from the prison, the jailers did not tell us anything. Then we were sent to Toungoo Prison by the [Tatmadaw] army. We had to travel there by truck. I did not know which battalion I had to porter for as there were many soldiers. I saw LIB #320, LIB #47 and LIB #376. I knew only one of the officers who was named Taw Win.

What did the SPDC army order you to carry?

The SPDC army ordered porters to carry rice, cooking oil, fish paste, sugar, salt and tins of milk. There were 200 prisoner porters, along with me. Three porters had to carry two sacks of rice. Each porter had to carry two big tins of rice. Each porter had to carry 16 bowls of rice. The oldest porters were over 50 years old. They were forced to carry the loads, even though they could not carry the loads. Even the porters who were sick were forced to porter. When we were taken to the front, we had to come through Kyauk Kyi and Than Bo by truck.

Have you ever seen the SPDC army torture porters?

Yes, they shot porters who tried to run away. They kicked me twice, too. They kicked me because I could not give way to allow them to pass as I was carrying heavy backpacks. I saw them shoot two or three porters who tried to run away around Pla Koh army camp. They were about 30-40 years old. It occurred this month [January 2010].

Have you ever seen child soldiers under 18 years old when you were a porter?

There were many child soldiers who were about 14 or 15 years old. There were about (20) of them.

Did the SPDC army provide enough food to eat?

They did not feed us enough food to eat. They fed us rice gruel in the morning and rice twice per day, during the day and at nighttime. The food that porters ate and the food the army ate was not the same. The officers, *Bo Mu* and *Bo Gyi*, ate cans of meat.

Did the SPDC army give medicine when the porters were sick?

Yes, they gave medicine to porters who were sick.

How did you have to sleep at nighttime?

We porters had to sleep in a field. Whenever we slept or took a rest, the army watched us because they were afraid that we would run away and escape. They allowed us to take a rest for 10 or 15 minutes when we carried loads and got tired. A soldier walked between two prisoners.

How did you escape here?

I fled when I went to the toilet. I ran away along with three friends who were porters. They were Nay Lin Oo, Tin Moe and Pyit Pyo. We deserted a week ago. When we first fled and entered

Karen State, we encountered the Karen *Sa Ya Gyi* [Officers] and then they sent us here. They did not torture us and they fed us food well and helped us to reach here.

What was your family's livelihood?

Our families are peasants.

What was the situation in your village?

There were villagers whose livelihood situation was good and those whose livelihood situation was not good.

Was there any school in your village?

Yes, there was a school in my village. I think the teachers' salary was not enough for them because there were teachers whose salary did not get enough for them, because things became expensive.

What do you think of the SPDC army?

The SPDC army's action is not right. They are Burmese and oppress their own Burmese people unfairly. I can't tell how much civilians suffer under SPDC control as I do not understand much about politics. I saw that they did not oppress and torture the civilians very much. If we make mistakes, we have to suffer. It does not matter for those who do not make any mistakes. However, someone who commits crimes has to face punishment. They have to come to be porters. Moreover, the SPDC army does not do forced recruitment of porters. All porters are prisoners.

Were there any porters who tried to run away before you fled?

Yes, there were porters who deserted before me. None of them were recaptured.

What is your future plan?

I want to go home. I dare to go home but I do not know how to go back. I want to look after my parents as they are old. There are no people who will look after my parents.

Interview | Myint, 36 (January 2010, Papun District)

Address prior to arrest: H--- Section, Loikaw Town
Ethnicity: Pao
Religion: Buddhist
Occupation prior to arrest: Trader
Marital status: Married; 2 children
Reported reason for arrest: Gold mining
Date of arrest: April --- 2007
Reported sentence:
Date Reported sentenced: April --- 2008
Prison(s): Yamethin; Kin-tha 1; Toungoo
Date sent to labour camp:
Labour camp:
Date taken to porter: 3 years after imprisonment
Size of group taken to porter: 500 from Kin-tha
Area/ location portered: Baw Hser Koh area, from Pla Koh to Thandaung Shit Ya
Battalion: LIB #237
Number of soldiers and porters (exact, not a ratio): 50 soldiers and 80 porters [only 40 porters left when escaped]
Date of interviewee's escape: January --- 2010
Number of porters escaped (not including interviewee): one
Location of interviewee's escape: Pla Koh
Location of interview: Papun District
Date of interview: January --- 2010
Future plans: Home

How many children do you have?

I have two children. The oldest child is 13 years old and the youngest one is 7 years old.

Have you ever been imprisoned?

I was imprisoned for five years due to illegal gold mining within article 61/9. They came to arrest us and said we had done gold mining illegally. They told us to follow them to a [police] station and they would let us go free. When we reached to the station, they did not question us about anything and just put us into a jail cell immediately. Then, they sentenced us to a five-year prison term. They also arrested many people, about 40-50 people, on the same day when they came to arrest me. We had to stay in the jail cells for a year and then we were sentenced to imprisonment. We were arrested on April --- 2007 and were sentenced on April --- 2008. They sentenced those who were mining gold illegally to five years in prison. Then, we were sent to Yamethin Prison and my prison number was 0-----. If we did not want to be imprisoned, we could bribe them, but they rotated their group to another group again and again. When a new group comes, they demand money from us again. We could not bribe the new groups anymore and they put us in prison. In the prison, I had to stay in No. (1) building.

What did you have to do in a prison?

In the prison, we had to do cleaning and work in an agricultural field. Then, we were sent to Kin-tha (1) Stone Production Camp. In the camp, we were ordered to break stones and carry big stones. We had to do whatever the jailers asked. They told us they would give us payment for our work. But they did not give us any payment for our work.

What kind of food did you have to eat in prison?

They fed us rice well. But the curry was not good. They fed us *ta la bpaw* curry. They cooked beef once or twice a week for us and fed us a limited amount, 5 kyat *tha* [worth] of beef [approximately 81.6 grams].

What was the health care situation in prison?

They gave us medicine when we were sick, but they did not give us a lot of medicine. It was better if we had money and asked the staff [in prison] to buy medicine from outside. What we had to eat and the work we had to do were not balanced or equal.

Have you ever seen prisoners tortured?

Yes, they tortured the prisoners. They treated differently the prisoners whose family was able to visit and prisoners whose family was not able to visit because the families who can come to visit their prisoners can pay them money. They tortured prisoners who did not have money.

Were you allowed to read, to listen to a radio and to write a letter?

We were not allowed to read and listen to a radio. They allowed us to write a letter and hey would send it through the post office for us. And our family was allowed to meet us in prison. They allowed the families who lived in distant places to meet three times per month and the families who lived near could meet twice per month. One time the families were allowed to meet for the whole day in the entrance of the prison. Our families could come and ask our prisoner number and meet with us.

What were your daily experiences in a prison?

In the morning, we paid homage and ate rice gruel. Then, we had to line up and went to Stone Production Camp and then came back in the evening. I had to stay in prison for three years and was taken out by the SPDC government to be a porter. When they came to take us, the jailers did not tell us anything. We prisoners guessed that we would be porters. So, I apologized to them [the jailers] and said that I did not want to go, but they said I must go because my name was included in the list. Therefore, I was forced to be a porter even though I did not want to come. I was sent to Toungoo Prison and then from Kyauk Kyi to Baw Hser Koh by truck. After that, we had to send rations to Pla Koh and then to Thandaung Shit Ya army camp in the east again. We were taken out by truck to the prison and then to another prison. They tied us, over 50 prisoners, with a rope and we had to get into the truck. We were not allowed to turn up our heads. They told us *"No one is allowed to turn up your heads. If you turn up your heads, we will shoot you dead."* There were 500 prisoners taken out from Yamethin Prison along with me. Before I escaped, I was portering for LIB #237. I had to porter for other battalions too but I don't remember which ones because they rotated with each other. I only remember the most recent battalion. As we were porters, we had to do whatever they asked and stay wherever they ordered. I had to carry rice, sugar, tins of milk, cans of beef, cooking oil, and fish paste. There were about 50 soldiers in the army who I had to carry this for and there were about 80 porters in Pla Koh army camp. Before I escaped, there were only 40 porters left because the other porters had already deserted. All the porters were prisoners. They ordered us to carry rations, which weighed as much as two sacks of rice. The rations contained six big tins of rice. They did not feed us enough and forced us to carry very heavy things. It was not balanced, what we had to do and what we had to eat. We could not carry the rations anymore when we were out of energy. So, we fled here with the hope of help from *Sa Ya Gyi* [Karen soldiers][85] group when they [the SPDC army] couldn't see us anymore.

[85] Throughout this interview, the interviewee refers to the Karen soldiers in respectful terms as *Sa Ya Gyi,* which means 'Big Teacher'.

Have you ever seen the SPDC army torture porters?

Yes, I have seen that for myself. They threatened to shoot and kill us when we could not carry what they asked. Therefore, we were afraid of them and ran away. They threatened us in many different ways and told us not to run away from the SPDC army. They said the Karen soldiers [KNLA] would kill us when they saw us and we would step on landmines and die. But we were not the enemy of the Karen soldiers. We are good people. So we decided to depend on Karen soldiers and to ask for the Karen soldiers' help and we ran way from the SPDC army. What they said is not right. Karen soldiers do not torture prisoner porters. They treated us as brothers. They have a lot of sympathy for us and they feed us enough rice. They helped me with everything that I reported to them.

What was the youngest age of soldiers in the SPDC army?

I saw that there were many children in the army. When I was a porter, I asked one of soldiers how old he was and he told me that he was about 17 years old. I asked him why he joined the army and he answered *"I was not interested to join the army by myself. I argued with my parents and went to another city. Then I was persuaded to join the army."*

Who committed abuse against the porters?

Everyone in the army, officers and soldiers, commits abuse on the porters.

Did the SPDC army provide enough food to eat?

They did not feed us enough food to eat. They only give us a limited amount of rice. When we told them that we did not have enough rice to eat, they swore at us *"This is not your father's house."* So, we were afraid to tell them, even though it was not enough for us. They fed us only fish paste provided by the State government. Two porters had to eat a milk tin of rice. It was not enough for us. The food that the army ate and that we ate was not the same. The army ate good curry and good rice. They had enough rice to eat too. For the porters, even though we did not have enough rice and we told them that, they did not give us any more.

Did the SPDC army provide medicine to porters?

No, they did not provide any medicine to the ones who were sick or were not sick. We had to drink only medicine that we brought with us from the prison. If these medicines were gone, we would have no medicine to drink.

How did porters have to sleep?

We had to sleep on the ground, as if we were dogs or pigs. We dared not to light a fire, to smoke or to cough. The SPDC soldiers watched us when we slept or took a rest because they were afraid that we would run away and escape. They did not allow us to take a rest when we were tired on the trip. We were forced to follow them wherever they went. As we were out of energy, we could not follow them all the time. There were porters who were sick, but they were forced to carry as much as they could. If they could carry 1 milk tin of rice or a sack of rice, they had to carry it. A soldier walked between two porters.

How did you escape here?

I fled to depend on the Karen group [KNLA or KNU] because I could not suffer the SPDC army's torture and we did not have enough food to eat. I fled on January --- 2010 at 9:00 pm at night from Pla Koh army camp. We did not see anything at night and we held hands and walked. We

wished in our mind that whoever we saw would be our friends. Then we encountered *Sa Ya Gyi*'s group and asked for help. They welcomed us and helped us. They fed us food and let us take a bath. Another porter named A--- and I fled together. The SPDC army was sleeping when we ran away. I informed them that I wanted to go to the toilet. I broke the fences quietly beside the toilet and ran away. We deserted seven nights ago. Firstly, we met with villagers and then they sent us to *Sa Ya Gyi* for our security. The members in *Sa Ya Gyi* group encouraged us very much and helped us.

What was the situation in your village?

My family was doing well with its own livelihood. Our livelihood was quite good. There were villagers in my town whose livelihoods are good and there were villagers whose livelihoods are not good too.

What do you think of the SPDC army?

The SPDC army oppresses and tortures us. They also threatened us that they will kill us if we cannot do what they ask. Therefore, we were afraid of them and continued carrying the loads even though we could not carry them. Their action is not right and fair. I think they would probably be good to people of their own ethnicity, but they are not good to other ethnicities because they are the ones who committed abuse on us. I never saw that they were nice to us.

Do you want to say anything else?

The SPDC army ordered us to carry loads forcibly. I have never carried these kinds of heavy loads when I stayed outside. When I was under the SPDC army control, I had to carry this on my own. They did not feed us enough rice to eat and they did not even give us water to drink. We could not take a bath for many months. When we came to meet with people in Sa Ya Gyi group, we were allowed to take a bath, wash our clothes and eat rice until we were satisfied. Before I fled from the army, there were other porters who ran away too. An old porter man from Mone Ywa village could not continue to carry the loads and apologized and asked the army to reduce the rations that he had to carry. But the army did not allow him to take a rest and forced him to carry them. The army told him *"It is your duty to carry it. You must carry it."* The man decided to flee as he thought to live or die makes no difference. Then he put the rations down on the ground and fled away in front of me. The army shot him dead. He fled in an area between Pla Koh and Thandaung Shit Ya army camp. It happened during this month [January 2010].

What is your future plan?

I want to go home and I dare to go back. I want to go back home and see my family as quickly as possible. I will be very happy and thankful if the *Sa Ya Gyi* group [KNLA or KNU] helps me to go back to my home. I appreciate and am proud of the *Sa Ya Gyi* group too. I have not had communication with my home for six months.

Do you have anything to say about the SPDC army?

As I told you before, we were tortured in the army by the SPDC army a lot. Our parents did not ask us to do these things, but I can never forget the SPDC army forced us to carry loads like we were buffalos and cows.

Interview | Khaing Khat, 39 (January 2010, Papun District)

Address prior to arrest: Th--- Town, Yamethin Township, Mandalay Division
Ethnicity:
Religion:
Occupation prior to arrest:
Marital status: Single
Reported reason for arrest: Trading wood illegally
Date of arrest: October --- 2006
Reported sentence: 15 years
Date Reported sentenced: October --- 2006
Prison(s): Yamethin; Toungoo
Date sent to labour camp:
Labour camp:
Date taken to porter: December 2009 to Toungoo
Size of group taken to porter: 200
Area/ location portered: Pla Koh
Battalion:
Number of soldiers and porters (exact, not a ratio): 30-40 soldiers; 25 porters (80 porters first, then 13 ran away)
Date of interviewee's escape: January --- 2010
Number of porters escaped (not including interviewee): none at the same time
Location of interviewee's escape:
Location of interview: Papun District
Date of interview: January --- 2010
Future plans: Home

Why did you come here?

I fled here because I could not continue walking and carrying what the Tamadaw army asked. I was a porter for them.

Have you ever been imprisoned?

I was imprisoned due to crimes under 61/ABK. It was a crime that related to trading wood. I was sentenced to be imprisoned for 15 years. The police came to arrest me on October --- 2006 along with one of my friends. They arrested me when I was in the market. They called me to follow them only for a moment to the police station. But, when I arrived there, they did not let me come back and I had to stay in a jail cell for 14 days and then I was sent to Yamethin Prison. I faced the court on September --- 2007 and I was sentenced on April --- 2008. I did not remember my prison number there [Yamethin Prison]. I only remember my prison number here [as a porter]. It is 0-----. In the prison, I had to stay in building No. (2). We had to respect jailers and jail wardens in prison. We had to do the cleaning every day. In the mornings, sometimes they fed us rice gruel and sometimes they fed us fried rice.

How did they take care of health care in prison?

We had to inform them when we were sick. There was a clinic in prison. If the prisoners were seriously sick, they were sent to the hospital.

Do they allow prisoners to listen to the radio, to read and to write a letter?

We were not allowed to listen to the radio. We were allowed to read newspapers, journals, novels, etc. We were not allowed to write a letter secretly. They allowed us to write officially. Our relatives were allowed to meet us in prison once every 15 days for 5-10 minutes.

When were you taken out to porter?

I was taken out to porter in December 2009. The army came to take us. We were sent to Toungoo Prison. We were tied up with ropes in a truck and we were ordered to lift up our hands and turn down our heads. There were 200 prisoners taken out along with me from Kin-tha (1) Stone Production Camp.

What did the Tatmadaw army order you to carry?

They ordered us to carry rice, sacks of sugar and yellow beans. I think there were 30-40 soldiers. But I don't know the exact numbers of the army. There were 25 porters along with me in Operation Command Camp. There were over 80 porters when we first left Pla Koh army camp. On that same day, in the morning, there were 13 prison porters who ran away. So there were only about 60 porters left. All the porters were prisoners. Three porters had to carry two sacks of rice. Each porter had to carry rations that weighed about 20-25 viss. They forced porters who were not seriously sick to carry the rations. They gave the ones who could not walk any more permission to take a rest for only two or three days. When we first came to the front, we had to travel to Kyauk Kyi and then to Baw Hser Koh. Then, we came to Nyaung Pin Gone and then to Pla Koh. After that, we had to come to LIB #380 army camp and continued walking to Yun S'Lin and then to Thit Ta Pin. Finally, we reached Operation Command Camp.

Have you ever seen the SPDC army tortured porters?

They beat us when we could not continue carrying rations. They treated us cruelly. They did not consider whether people were older or younger. When they got angry, they kicked us immediately. They also shot a porter dead. Actually, this porter did not try to run away, he just could not continue carrying rations. So the SPDC army said he tried to run away and shot him dead. All of them tortured the porters together.

Did the SPDC army provide enough food for porters?

No, they did not provide enough food for the porters. They fed us twice per day. They gave us rice to eat with fish paste.

Did the SPDC army provide medicine for porters who were sick?

At first, they provided medicine for us, but I do not know whether they continued providing medicine later or not.

How did you have to sleep at night?

At night, we had to line up beside the fences and we slept. We had to put our plastic sheet that we brought with us on the ground and we slept on it. We were wet when it was raining and cold but we could not do anything. They also watched us whenever we slept or took a rest because they were afraid that we would run away and escape. We were not allowed to take a rest when we carried the rations and got tired. We had to follow them as they went on. Each soldier walked between two porters. The oldest porters were about 60 years old. These porters had to carry the same weight as other porters. They were shouted at and beaten when they could not carry it.

How did you escape here?

I deserted here because I could not continue to carry rations. I fled at 9:00 pm at night when I went to the toilet. We made the hole through the fences wider and we fled. I slept a night in the jungle when had gotten far from the army camp. I was alone when I left the army. One of my teachers already fled the day before I deserted. The soldiers did not know when I fled because they were asleep for a moment. I fled seven or eight days ago. I fled on January 12th 2010 from Pla Koh. When I walked through the forest, I saw a field and buffaloes in the field, but I saw no one in the field. I sat down in the field. One of the grandmothers was frightened when she saw me. I called her, but she ran away. There were two Karen soldiers in a hut and they came to question me. Then they called me to follow them to the hut and they fed me rice to eat. They did not torture me. They were nice and looked after me very well. I met with four other porters there who had fled and I met with Karen soldiers.

What was your family livelihood?

My family was peasants.

What was the situation in your village?

Villagers' livelihoods in my village went well. Some villagers faced problems with their welfare and some had good welfare.

What do you think of the SPDC army?

I feel it is not right because I struggled in order to eat.

What is your future plan?

I want to go back and stay with my parents because I want to look after them.

Interview | Nyain Chan Oo, 31 (January 2010, Papun District)

Address prior to arrest: Th--- Town, northern Shan State
Ethnicity: Ko Kan Chinese
Religion: Buddhist
Occupation prior to arrest: Labourer
Reported reason for arrest: Using opium
Date of arrest: November --- 2001
Reported sentence:
Date Reported sentenced: November --- 2002
Prison(s): Lashio; two years in Mandalay; 5-6 years in Myitkyina; one year in Kin-tha; Toungoo
Date sent to labour camp: Eight years after imprisonment
Labour camp:
Date taken to porter: October --- 2009
Size of group taken to porter: 500 in Toungoo; 80 trucks (25-30 porters per truck)
Area/ location portered:
Battalion: LIB #223, #56, #387 and #602
Number of soldiers and porters (exact, not a ratio): 70 soldiers
Date of interviewee's escape:
Number of porters escaped (not including interviewee):
Location of interviewee's escape:
Location of interview: Papun District
Date of interview: January --- 2010
Future plans: Dares not go home; will work and send money home

Why did you come here?

I was tortured when I stayed with the army [SPDC army]. I could not continue to suffer and stay because I knew that if I continued to stay, I would die so I deserted from the convict porters.

Have you ever been imprisoned?

Yes, I was imprisoned due to the crime of using opium within article 15/19K for a 20 year prison term. The Township police came to arrest me and saw only a little opium, but they exaggerated and said that they had arrested me with a lot of opium. They also said I was trading it so they charged me with 15/19K. I was accused in Th--- Police station and I had to stay there for 27 days. I was sent to Lashio Division No. (1) Police station. They arrested me alone on November --- 2001. They tortured me in many different ways when they first arrested me. They ordered me to kneel on sand in a bowl. I had to go to the court in Lashio again and again. I was sentenced on November --- 2002. I had to change many prisons so I do not remember all my prisoner numbers. My prison number from Toungoo Prison was 0-----. I was sent to Mandalay Prison from Lashio Prison and I stayed there for two years. Then, I had to move to Myitkyina Prison and I stayed there over five years, maybe about six years there. Again, I was taken out to Naypyidaw Ta Gone [Kin-tha] Stone Production Camp. I had to stay there over a year. Then, I was called to be a porter for the army and was sent to Toungoo Prison. In Lashio Prison, I had to stay in No #4 building. When I arrived in Mandalay Prison, I had to stay in building No #2. Then, when I arrived in Myitkyina, I had to stay in building No #2. When I arrived at the Stone Production Camp, I had to stay in building No #3 of the prison.

How did jailers and jail wardens treat you in prison?

When I was first imprisoned, I was tortured in many different ways. They did not feed us enough rice to eat. They beat us and tortured us in different ways. Later, when the

International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) came to the prison and we told them that we did not have enough food to eat, they helped us and we had enough rice to eat.

What did you have to do in prison?

There were many different tasks in prison. There were prisoners who had to cultivate hill fields, who had to make gunny sacks, who had to make fragrant candle incense, who had to make tobacco cigarettes and who had to do embroidery. They did not pay us any money for our work.

What kind of food did you have to eat in prison?

In the prison, we had to eat red beans boiled in water in the morning. They fed us over half a milk tin of the cooked red beans for each prisoner. In the afternoon, they boiled morning glory with other things and fed us that.

How did they look after health care in prison?

They cured only the prisoners whose parents were able to come and pay for money behind the back [bribes]. They did not cure the prisoners whose parents could not come and they just let them die. Many such prisoners died. There were more prisoners whose parents could not come and so they had to die. They decreased abuse on us after 2006 but, between 2002 and 2006, they tortured us a lot. The prisoners felt starvation. They beat the prisoners and many prisoners died from being beaten. There were prisoners who died due to illness too.

Were prisoners allowed to listen to the radio, to read and to write a letter?

We were not allowed to listen to a radio. We were allowed to read newspaper, journals etc that ICRC came to distribute to us after the ICRC came to visit us. They allowed us to write a letter to our family, but the letter never arrives to our family even though we wrote. Our family was allowed to meet with us in a prison twice a month, once every 15 days, for 15 minutes. Our family had to pay at the entrance of the prison in order to meet with us. Our family had to bribe them to get permission at the entrance. If the family could not bribe them, they found different reasons to get money. Sometimes, my parents came to see me in prison and it cost about a million kyat in order to be able to meet with me. They had to give 20,000 kyat to a government official to get written permission to see a prisoner. Then, they had to give 20,000 or 30,000 kyat in front of the main door. They demanded more money from other ethnic groups such as Chinese, Shan and others. They cheated other ethnic groups that they were not allowed to bring in this thing or that thing. They could only bring it if they could give money. If they could not pay money, they [the prison authorities] took it all. Then the place where the family had to get written permission checked the things brought by the family again. The family had to pay them money. If the family could not pay money, they could not bring anything to the prison. I had many daily experiences in prison. The only thing that I feel hatred about is that they tortured and oppressed us brutally in prison. I had to stay in prison for over eight years and then was taken to *yeh beh* Stone Production Camp. I had to stay there for over a year and was sent again to Toungoo Prison. I was taken from Toungoo Prison on October 18th 2009 for the army porters. There were 500 prisoners in Toungoo Prison taken out to porter for the SPDC army that night. There were 25-30 prisoners in each military truck. On the same night, we came to Karen State with the army. There were 80 military trucks when we came. They tied the porters with ropes and ordered us to stay in the middle of the truck and then we left. They tied four, five or ten porters' hands together and we rode like that in the truck. When we arrived to Baw Hser Koh army camp, they untied our hands and ordered us to carry rations. Each porter had to walk between two soldiers and they ordered us to porter forcibly. The SPDC army collected 500 prisoners from Toungoo recruitment centre. 150 prisoners left before us and there were 200 prisoners with us when we left. There were 150 remaining prisoners who were ready to leave too. I had to porter for many battalions. So I don't remember them all. I only

remember LIB #223, #56 and #602. After I stayed in Baw Hser Koh [camp] for over a month, the LIB #387 came there. We had to porter again for this battalion. As for the names of the officers, I only remember the Sergeant [three chevrons] named Gyi Mg, under the battalion commander of LIB #223.

What did the SPDC army order you to carry?

The SPDC army ordered us to carry bombs, dried fish, rice, milk, cooking oil, fish cans, etc. Each porter has to carry rations that weighed over 20 viss. No one had to carry rations that weighed less than 20 viss.

How many soldiers were there along with you?

There were about 70 soldiers in the last battalion that I fled from.

What is the SPDC army's purpose coming here?

The SPDC army told us nothing would happen to us. Although we could not carry the rations, we had to continue carrying them because they came to fight against insurgents. When we first came, they came to rotate [with the previous SPDC army battalion]. Then they called us to carry the rations.

How many prisoner porters were there along with you?

There were 200 prisoner porters in the same group with me when we first came.

Have you ever seen the SPDC army torture porters?

Yes, I have seen the army point at us from behind with their guns. Even though we could not carry the rations, we were forced to carry them. If we did not continue to carry them, they would shoot us dead. We told them that we really could not carry anymore and to kill us, but they were not allowed to kill us. They pointed at us with their guns here and there. They threatened us with knives and pointed their guns at our ears. Although we could not carry the rations, we were forced to carry these. They also hit me twice with their guns after I told them that I could not continue to carry the rations because they continued walking without taking any rest. They replied *"If you do not want to die, you must carry it."* I was afraid of them and even though I could not carry it, I had to continue carrying it. To climb mountains, I had to bend and climb the mountain. Lance Corporal, Corporal, sergeant and soldiers tortured porters the most. They tortured us in many different ways when the officers did not see. For the officers, they told them that they took care of us well and waited for us when we were tired. However, the soldiers excused themselves and said the porters tried to run away so they shot these porters dead. The army shot a young boy who was a porter in front of my eyes on the branch line of the Baw Hser Koh vehicle road. The boy could not carry the package because it was very heavy as he was small and thin. He carried it and we had only passed two curves when the boy told the army that he could not carry the package and please, reduce a little weight from my package. But the army forced him to continue carrying it. When we arrived to the third curve, the boy could not carry the load anymore and sat down. He told the army *"*Sa Ya*, you ordered me to carry a lot of weight. I just have to die. Nothing will be different. If you want to kill me, you can kill me now."* They tortured and beat the boy and forced him to carry it. But the boy could not carry it anymore. Then they said *"Leave your package and go wherever you want."* They showed three or four ways for the boy to flee. When he ran away only three or four steps, the army shot him dead from behind. The bullets hit under his ear and his mouth was broken in two parts. He did not die immediately. He died when he was sent near Baw Hser Koh hospital. He was buried in the Ah Za Nee area. His ethnicity was Yaw and he was about 27 or 28 years old. He was shot at the end of October 2009 when we first came to carry the rations.

Did the SPDC army provide enough food for porters?

No, they did not provide enough food for the porters. They only gave us one or two handfuls of rice. Even though it was not enough for us to eat, we had to eat only the amount of rice that they gave us. We had to eat only rice and they did not feed us any curry. They fed us only once when they patrolled [on the frontline]. When they came back to the army camp, they cooked rice and fed us twice per day. Sometimes, we had to eat only once in two days during their patrols. They did not feed us a mess-tin of rice. They gave us only rice. They did not give us any other things. They mixed fish paste with salt to make it saltier and gave it to us to eat with rice. The porters' food and the army's food were very different. The porters had to eat rice only with fish paste. But the army ate good curry, fish cans and cans of beans, etc. The oldest porters were over 50 years old. Big battles occurred twice when we came in October and then four or five small battles happened. There was a porter who got injured the day before we fled. The bullet was still in his lung. They were only patrolling and walking through bushes in mountainous areas. They did not dare to enter any villages. I did not see any villages during the whole trip and I did not even see any villagers on the trip.

Have you ever seen any child soldiers in the army?

When we first came through Shwegyin, Kyauk Kyi and Tan Bo, all the soldiers who kept guard were 16 or 17 years old. They used more children there. They forcibly recruited the child soldiers in the cities to join the army and attend military training for six months. After that, they did not keep these soldiers in the cities and sent them to rural areas. They recruited seven or eight child soldiers out of ten child soldiers forcibly. Some child soldiers were persuaded to join the army in railway stations, on the street, etc. and they did not understand anything. Then, they were sent to attend six months of military training and they were taught how to use guns, etc. After that, they were sent to the frontline.

Did the SPDC army provide medicine to porters who were sick?

They provided medicine to the porters who were sick only for few times. Once or twice, when we reached an army camp and took a rest, if we felt sick, they gave us medicine. During the trip, whether we were sick or not and whether we would die or not, we must carry their packages.

How did you have to sleep at night?

During the trip, we had to put down our package wherever we were when it was getting dark at 8:00 or 9:00 pm. Then, we had to sleep beside our package. The army watched us when we slept at night, one by one around us at the corners, until it got to morning. They watched us because they were afraid that we would run away and escape. We were not allowed to take a rest when we got tired during the trip. We did not even dare to say that we wanted to take a rest. They would hit us at once if we told them that. They forced porters who were sick to carry the rations. Although the porters who were sick could not carry, they continued carrying them because they were afraid to die. Each porter had to walk behind each soldier.

How did you escape here?

After the battle occurred, we traveled for the whole day and did not eat or drink water for the whole day. When we arrived near Toungoo, every soldier slept on the road when we reached it. It was after 10:00 pm at night and we two, called each other and talked to each other. We must run away. If we did not run away, we would die. We did not want to die by their hands. Then, we crawled quietly and slowly and then we fled away. Only we two fled when I ran way from the convict porters. Before we ran away, they warned us along the trip not to run away. If we tried

to run away, they would kill us. Even if we escaped from them, the Karen soldiers would not kill us immediately when we arrived to them. They would tie us with ropes and slice our meat and eat it. They would slice us dead. They threatened, not only us, but also the younger soldiers who were not of age yet, because they were afraid that the porters and the soldiers might run away and escape from them together. There were many soldiers who were not of age and their Lance Corporals and Corporals watched them. Wherever they went, they had to go with their officers. They were not allowed to go alone anywhere without their officers. They watched new recruitments that had just finished the military training even during the patrols. They always watched each other and the porters because they were afraid that we would run away from the army. We fled for three days. The night that we fled from the army, we slept halfway through the night when we were far away from the SPDC army. We walked only for two hours and slept beside the path at about 1:00 am. In the morning, we continued walking for about two hours and reached the Karen who rescued us. They asked who we were and we replied them that we were porters and faced trouble. We had not eaten rice for two days. Then the Karen soldiers called us to come quickly and they gave us rice to eat. Then they sent us there to where we are staying now. We did not believe the SPDC army when they had threatened us. So, we fled from them. But many porters are still there because they believe the threats. In the early morning when we followed the path, we saw footprints in the path where Karen soldiers traveled. Then we thought to find them and reach where they stay in order to be safe. We did not know other places to go. We continued walking through the path and saw a hut, but we did not see any one. We saw footprints in front of the hut and walked forward following the footprints. We walked for half an hour and cried *"Help us, help us".* When we arrived on this side, the Karen soldiers asked us who we were from a distance. We replied that we were porters and faced troubles. They continued asking us, how many we were. I replied that we were two people. They let us to come and fed us rice. We told them that we had not eaten for two days. Two Karen soldiers came to send us to a hut and we met with one of our elder brothers. The soldiers went back. This brother came to send us here again.

What was your family's occupation?

My family sold things from China and toured around. We bought things from China and sold them around from a tractor. In my area, a tractor could sell things for five days and rotate around one by one.

What was the situation in your city?

Before, we used to stay in rural villages. Then the SPDC army forced us to relocate to a city as they would not allow us to stay in the rural areas. We bought land and built a house in Thein Nee Town when Kachin lives and fled to stay there. I do not know about the situation of villagers' livelihoods because I was imprisoned for about 10 years so I do not know the current situation.

Do teachers or government staff in your city have enough salary?

Teachers teaching in Chinese Schools are supported well by Ko Kan [a kind of Chinese ethnicity]. They participate with Na Ya Ka and run the school. The teachers have enough salary. I do not know about teachers teaching in the Burmese schools.

What do you think of the SPDC army?

They do not have any sense of humanity. They only want to torture humans. They have no sympathy to the same people. They are totally bad. Their action is not right. We have known it for a long time. Not only we alone know it, the whole world also knows it. I have suffered their inhuman actions until I am over 31 years old. Many civilians have to stay under their control full of fear. We have to be patient and continue to stay, as we dare not say anything in response. If

the civilians say anything, they make many different troubles, such as destroying the businesses of the civilians, separating couples like this, etc. They call a person from each household to attend the meetings without fail. If we did not go, they put us in prison. If they call two people from each household, each household must provide two people to go. They also often come to demand tax for this and that. During the 2010 election, when I was in prison, my family, parents, brothers and sisters came to visit me and I asked them about it. They told me that they are forced to vote without fail. They were threatened if they voted the sign of cross, they would be imprisoned. They must vote only the sign of check. They must give ballots to the box that they were ordered to. If they put them in the other box that they are not allowed to put them in, they would be in trouble and would be imprisoned.

Do you want to say anything else?

The SPDC often broadcasts on the TV and in the media that they are nationalist. In reality, they are not nationalist in my mind anymore. We know it and we want the world to know it too. They do not have any sense of humanity and they create many different ways to do genocide. Now, we are lucky that we met with the Karen group. They help us, they take care of us very well and they feed us enough food. I am very thankful to them and I will never forget their help as long as I am alive. They are my benefactors. They do not torture us and they help us with what we need. Now I know that the Karen are very nice. Before, I did not think that they would be nice like this. Before I fled, there were four porters who ran away during the battle. There were nine porters left in the army after we fled. One of them got injured, but they [the SPDC army] did not carry him and asked him to walk. I thought the army would shoot him dead when he could not continue to walk. I became afraid of dying because I realized that they would shoot me dead when I could not walk anymore, too. Another patient among our porters was shot and the bullet hit him and stayed in his lung. It was bleeding. They did not carry him and cure him well. They forced him to walk at the back until we arrived at the place where they went. His name is Kyaw Soe, a Burmese man. He was about 45 years old.

What is your future plan?

If possible, I want to contact my parents. I want to go back home but I dare not go back. I am very afraid that they will arrest me again. I want to go somewhere to find a job in order to earn some money and give support back to my parents. Due to the current situation, I dare not go back home yet. I did not have communication with my parents after I was forced to come for porter.

Do you have anything to say about the SPDC army?

I have many things to say about the SPDC army that I want to tell. Although I have told, it will not end it, because they are not humans and they do not have humane feelings. I feel very much hatred when I talk about them.

Interview | Khin Paing, 28 (January 2010, Papun District)

Address prior to arrest: K--- Town, Kachin State
Ethnicity: Shan
Religion: Buddhist
Occupation prior to arrest: Hill field
Marital status: Single
Reported reason for arrest: Drugs
Date of arrest:
Reported sentence: 13 years
Date Reported sentenced: August --- 2006
Prison(s): Myitkyina (three years); Kin-tha (over a year); Toungoo
Date sent to labour camp:
Labour camp:
Date taken to porter:
Size of group taken to porter: 500 Toungoo
Area/ location portered: Baw Hser Koh; Kyauk Saung
Battalion: LIB #223 and #387
Number of soldiers and porters (exact, not a ratio):
Date of interviewee's escape: January --- 2010
Number of porters escaped (not including interviewee): three others
Location of interviewee's escape:
Location of interview: Papun District
Date of interview: January --- 2010
Future plans: Want to go home but dares not so will work and send money home

Why did you come here?

The army called us to be porters. I ran away from the convict porters and arrived here.

Have you ever been imprisoned?

I was imprisoned due to crimes relating to drugs within article 15/19K. My family faced welfare problems and we had no money to do other business. We faced serious business problems. So, I unexpectedly committed the crime. The Secretary General policeman, Ko Ko Lwin, came to arrest me along with other police at night. They also arrested the landlord who rented the apartment to me. Firstly, they called me to the Section office. Then, they sent me to a police station. I had to stay in a jail cell for four months. The landlord was imprisoned for 13 years too. I was sentenced on August --- 2006. Then, I was sent to Myitkyina Prison and my prison number was 0-----. We could pay money to the court if we did not want to be imprisoned. They asked me whether I had money to pay since they came to arrest me. If I could afford for money, they would let me free. They demanded a lot of money, so much that I could not afford it. They asked me to pay two or three hundred thousand kyat. If I could afford this money, they would let me go free. In prison, I had to stay in No #37 room. We had to respect the jailers and jail wardens. We had to work in an agricultural field and in other workplaces. If we did not want to work, we could bribe them money. Then, we were sent to *yeh beh* Camp. We had to break stones and carry the stones. They did not give us any payment for our work. We had to work for free. In prison, they fed us a small piece of meat twice per week.

How did they take care of health care in prison?

They came to look after us in order to fulfil their duty. They did not take care of us effectively. If we had money, we could cure our disease and get better. If we did not have money, we could not cure our disease.

Have you ever seen prisoners tortured in prison?

They did not torture us openly. In *yeh beh* Camp, they tortured us subtly. For example, they ordered us to work over the limited time. They ordered us to break more baskets of stones than the limited number of baskets of stones.

Were prisoners allowed to listen to the radio, to read and to write a letter?

We were not allowed to listen to a radio. They allowed us to read and to write a letter to our family. They also allowed our family to meet us in prison once or twice a month as our family was from a distant place. Our family had to pay at least 10,000 or 15,000 kyat in order to meet us in prison for 15 minutes. If our family wanted to meet us for longer than 15 minutes, they had to pay more money. The longer I stayed in prison, the more bored, depressed and weak I became. I had to stay for three years in Myitkyina and then I was sent to Stone Production Camp. I stayed there for over a year and then was taken out to porter. When I was first taken out from the prison, the jailers and jail wardens did not tell us anything. I was sent to Naypyidaw Kin-tha Stone Production Camp. In Kin-tha, they did not tell us anything when we were about to go to porter. Our names were called out and we were sent to Toungoo Prison. When we arrived there, we knew that we were going to be army porters. Our parents did not know that. They chained our legs and unchained us when we arrived to Toungoo Prison. We were tied together with ropes when we left there. There were 500 prisoners taken out from Toungoo Prison. Then we had to carry rations and travel through Kyauk Saung, Saw Muh and Lweh Muh. We continued walking through Htee Muh until we reached Operation Command camp. Firstly, I had to porter for LIB #223 and I stayed in Baw Hser Koh for two or three weeks. We had to carry injured Tatmadaw soldiers there. Then, I had to porter for LIB #387. The army ordered us to carry their rations and equipment, such as bullets, .5 guns, machine guns, bombs, etc. We encountered battles along the trip. The battles occurred in Kyauk Saung and in other places. I encountered four to six battles through the trip. We heard a porter got injured but we had already run away. The army beat and tortured those could not walk and shot dead those could not walk anymore. They shot a porter dead because this porter could not walk anymore. There were many porters in the army and only four of us escaped. The total number of the remaining porters was about 40-100 porters in the army camp where the porters were collected. Including me, there were 15 porters sent to Baw Hser Koh[army camp]. There were many porters taken out when we first came. They were all separated and divided into each battalion. In the army battalion that I had to porter for, I saw the soldiers shoot a porter dead last month, in December 2009. The oldest porters were over 50 years old and the youngest porters were about 14-17 years old. These people were imprisoned even though they had not reached the age [18 years old] and they were sent to adult prisons. They [SPDC authority] have no laws. They send people wherever they want and they charge them with whatever they want. There were many children in the army. These youngsters were child soldiers. They were younger than my younger brothers. They had just finished the military training. They were about 14-16 years old. They were very young. They said they were forced to join the army by the recruitment group. There were more forced recruitments. I never heard that they had been interested in joining the army by themselves.

How much weight did the SPDC army order you to carry?

I had to carry a lot of weight. It was very heavy. We could not even carry it.

Have you ever seen the SPDC army torture porters?

They punched and hit with their guns the porters who walked slowly and who could not carry the loads. The officers, sergeant, lance corporals and soldiers all committed this abuse against us. They treat us as they want. There were only a few small soldiers who were nice to us. They

are all the same. Even when *Bo Mu* or *Bo Gyi* [officers] saw their soldiers torturing us, they did not tell them anything.

Did the SPDC army provide enough food for porters?

When they began the offensive, they did not provide enough food for the porters. Sometimes, we did not eat for the whole day. Sometimes, we had breakfast to eat in the morning and we did not have dinner in the evening. Sometimes, we did not have breakfast to eat in the morning, but we had dinner to eat. Even though we were out of energy and could not continue to walk, we were forced to do so. They do not have any sense of humanity. Some nice officers came to give us the remaining curry for us to eat with rice, after they had already eaten. Some officers, who are not nice, did not give us any curry to eat. They only gave us rice to eat. We had to eat it in order to survive, even it was only rice, because we were already facing starvation. We suffered secretly and ate to be able to work because we had to carry rations for them.

Did the SPDC army provide any medicine to porters who were sick?

When they began their offensive on the frontline, I never saw them provide medicine to the porters who were sick. When we came back to Baw Hser Koh army camp or other camps in the rear, they gave medicines to porters who were sick when we took a rest for a moment. On the frontline, they beat and tortured those who were sick or who could not carry rations and they killed those who could not carry the rations anymore. So, we porters had to help each other by carrying some of their rations so they could reach the army camp.

How did you sleep at night?

At night, they collected all porters to sleep in the same place. We had to use what we brought, such as a plastic sheet. We put it on the ground and slept on that. Even if we reached bushes and a muddy place when it was time to sleep, we had to sleep. The army watched us when we slept or we took a rest because they were afraid that we would run away and escape. We were not allowed to take a rest on our own during the trip. We had to take a rest when they took a rest. Each porter had to walk between two soldiers.

How did you escape here?

We, four porters, went together and fled across bushes when the soldiers were laying down after the battle happened because they did not dare to go anywhere. We fled on January 19th 2010 in the morning at about 8:00 or 9:00 am. The other friends are K---, L--- and S---. We fled for a day before we got here. When we continued walking after we hid in the bushes, we encountered the KNU officers. They did not torture us and they fed us well with food. They are really nice and love other ethnicities. They have a sense of humanity and they are really good. They helped us and gave us medical treatment when we were sick. They sent us to a [KNLA] camp safely.

What was your family occupation?

After I was imprisoned, I did not know how they were doing. Before I was imprisoned, my parents supported me. We were fairly well-off. Even though we were not rich, we were able to live well.

Are there any schools in your town?

Yes, there are schools in my town. But the teachers do not have enough salary because things are expensive.

What was the situation in your town?

There were people whose welfare was good and people whose welfare was not good. Due to the current situation, more people are facing welfare problems. Some are very rich and get richer, but some are very poor and become poorer and face starvation and die like this.

What do you think of the SPDC army?

I see the current SPDC government works for their own benefit. I mean that, whether civilians face starvation or die, it does not relate to them. Their action is not right. The civilians are not happy and wish the government to be withdrawn secretly without letting them know. I have had to suffer this since I was born. I have grown up under their control. It is not something new for me. I am already familiar with this. The civilians face poverty as the government does not look out for them.

What do you think of the 2010 election?

For the 2010 election, they will elect only their own people. They forced the civilians to vote without fail. My mother told me when she came to visit me in prison that they [my family] had to go and vote without fail. The SPDC authority threatened them in many different ways.

What is your future plan?

I really want to go back, but I dare not go back. So, I want to work in a distant place and support my family.

Do you have anything to say about the SPDC army?

I have many things to say about them. They are inhuman. They do not see humans as humans. We did not get any rights that a person should get.

Interview | Kyaw Soe, 35 (January 2010, Papun District)

Address prior to arrest: S--- Street, M--- Section, Yangon
Ethnicity: Indian
Religion: Hindu
Occupation prior to arrest: Labourer
Marital status: Married; one child
Reported reason for arrest: Burglary
Date of arrest:
Reported sentence: 24 years
Date Reported sentenced: January --- 2003
Prison(s): Insein (1 year); Tharyawaddy (2 or three years); Kin-tha 1 (2 Years); Toungoo
Date sent to labour camp:
Labour camp:
Date taken to porter:
Size of group taken to porter: 200
Area/ location portered: Kyauk Taung
Battalion: LIB #387
Number of soldiers and porters (exact, not a ratio): 50 soldiers; 15 porters
Date of interviewee's escape: January --- 2010
Number of porters escaped (not including interviewee): 2 others
Location of interviewee's escape: Kyauk Taung
Location of interview: Papun District
Date of interview: January --- 2010
Future plans: Unsure, doesn't dare go back but will go back if sent

How many children do you have?

I have a child, a 7-year old daughter.

Have you ever been imprisoned?

I was imprisoned according to article 457/380, due to the crime of burglary and stealing. I came here because I fled from the convict porters as the Burmese soldiers forced us to carry for them. I was imprisoned for 24 years. I was sent to Insein Prison and moved to Tharyawaddy Prison. Then, I was sent to Naypyidaw Kin-tha (1) Stone Production Camp from Tharyawaddy Prison. I had to break stones there and was taken out to porter from there. Firstly, the police, Kyaw Naing and La Soe came to arrest me as they suspected that I had burgled a house and stole things. They tortured and beat me when they came to arrest me. I could not suffer their torture so, even though it was not true, I confessed to all the crimes. [I think he was forced to confess to the crimes.] They tortured me brutally. They dripped hot wax on my dick and on my head. They burned my dick and beat me with No (1) stick. They beat me without leaving any wounds, but I was bruised. The crimes that I committed were not worthy of this torture. I could not suffer the beating and they submitted the case to the court. Then, they put me into a prison. They came to arrest me at home when I was sleeping. It was at about 8:00 pm at night. They besieged my house and arrested me. Then they called me to follow to Ta Lan police station. I had to stay in a jail cell for a month and they questioned us. Four of my friends were also arrested. They are Ma Ha Bu, Zaw Min Naing, La Aone La and Pa Pa. They are all Hindu. One was imprisoned for 10 years, one was imprisoned for 11 years, one was imprisoned for 35 years and I was imprisoned for 24 years. We were all from the same village. I was sentenced on January --- 2003. After we were sentenced, we were sent to Tharyawaddy Prison. I do not remember my prisoner number there as I have now been to three prisons. I only remember my last prisoner number here. It is 0---. Many people used to give money [bribe] in prison. A few people were freed from charges and a few were not freed. If we could give money for a small

crime, we would be free from charge. Those who did not have money to pay had to be imprisoned. People could bribe them depending on the crimes. For my crime, even if I had been able to pay thirty million kyat, I would not be completely free from charge. I could only have reduced the sentence to half imprisonment of the prison term. I had to stay at No #3 building, No #4 room in the prison. In the prison, we were ordered to cultivate hill fields. When we did cleaning duty, we were ordered to carry baskets of shit and piss. We had to clean the drains and carry rice. We also had to weave and make fragrant candle incense. We did not get any payment. We had to work for free. For food, they fed us only yellow beans and fish paste. For health, we had to call the guards when we were sick. They usually did not come even though we called them. If we called them for an hour, they came after about two hours. They tortured prisoners who made mistakes. They did not torture those who did not make any trouble.

Were prisoners allowed to read, to listen to the radio and to write?

They were not allowed to read novels. The higher officers told us we could read and listen to a radio, but actually we were not allowed to listen to the radio or to read, even when we collected money together and bought a video cassette and video player. They took it all and it became the office's own. They showed it to us, only in a limited time between 8:00 to 9:00 pm. They did not buy it for us. Prisoners from each room collected money and bought it. They did not allow us to write a letter to our family secretly. We could not write letters on our own. We had to write what they told us in our letters. We had to write that they fed us well and that they let us stay comfortably. Then, they would send it for us. We could not write that we were in trouble and we did not have to eat good food like that. We could not say the true things. We had to write only good things about them. Our families were allowed to meet us in prison for 15 minutes. Our families had to pay them 20,000 or 30,000 kyat for their tea. They were also corrupt when it came to the families who came to give money to their prisoners. They took 1,000 kyat out of every 10,000 kyat. Prisoners are not officially allowed to use money. So, the families had to bribe them [the jailers] and give it to their family secretly.

How long have you stayed in prison?

I had to stay in Insein Prison for a year. Then, I was sent to Tharyawaddy Prison. I had to stay there for two or three years. I was sent to Naypyidaw Kin-tha No(1) Stone Productions Camp again. I had to stay there in that camp for two years. I had to break stones and carry stones. The outside truck came to buy it. In the camp, there were nine buildings including a guesthouse to sleep at night. They built it to sleep with women [women here probably means their wives.] The army camp is beside this camp. Then, we were sent to Toungoo Prison for porters. The army came to take us from Toungoo Prison to be army porters. We had to follow them to their barracks. We had to travel with the military van. They came to take us at about 9:00 pm at night and it was after 1:00 am when we reached their army camp. They tied us up during the trip to Baw Hser Koh. They also put chains around our legs with a partner. We faced problems when we went to pee and throw our shit. The total number of prisoner porters taken out when we first came was 200. Then we were all divided into battalions. I had to porter for LIB #387. The army ordered us to carry everything such as bombs, hand grenades, rations etc. These were very heavy to carry. If we could not carry them, they beat us with their guns. There were about 50 soldiers and 15 prisoner porters. One of the porters got shot in his arm during a battle beside Kyauk Taung field. The bullet stayed in his arm. But even if the soldiers got small injuries in their legs, they made a stretcher and ordered us to carry them. If we could not carry them, they hit us with their guns. For the porters, they asked the one whose arm got shot to walk. He was very old and could not walk. Each porter had to carry loads that weighed more than a sack of rice containing 24 or 28 bowls of rice. It was a rice sack that contained over a basket of rice. The package was very big. They forced us to carry it even though we could not carry it. They ordered us to carry rations and follow them to the places where they wanted to go. The officers told us if we encountered rebels [KNLA soldiers] in the jungle, they would kill

us. The SPDC army tortured me a lot when I could not carry the loads. They hit me with their guns and kicked me with their military boots. They did not feed us enough and ordered us to work extremely hard. Therefore, we could not suffer it anymore and deserted. The corporals, sergeants, soldiers and officers tortured us. They all were the same. They had no sympathy. They cared only that their patients and their packages reached the camp safely. They kicked us when we could not carry the loads and they kicked us when we could not walk. They did not let their military boots rest. They ordered us to walk forcibly. We could hear guns firing in front of us. There were porters crying because they could not continue to follow in the front before us. They [KNLA soldiers] did not fire those guns without any reason. They [SPDC] hit porters who could not walk. Sometimes, if the porters met with bad officers, these officers would shoot them dead or cut them with their knives. There were two porters shot to death by the SPDC army. One died in Kyauk Taung. Another was shot at the side of the Operation Command Camp when he carried rations. The soldiers shot him dead by themselves. I did not witness it, but the soldiers brought back his slippers to show us and they told us *"We shot a porter dead there. If you do not trust us, you can go and look there."* They brought back slippers of those who were already dead and showed us. After that, they gave us those slippers to wear.

Did the SPDC army provide enough food for porters?

They did not feed us enough food. They gave us a mess tin of rice for three porters. There were many days that we did not eat or sleep. We had to go at night to carry patients and their rations. We had to travel at night. We were at the frontline for over 40 days, but we did not stay well on any of these days. We faced problems and worked very hard for them. Sometimes, we starved for two nights. We could do nothing even though we could not continue walking. We were forced to walk because we did not have anything and they held guns. They fed us twice per day. They fed us fish paste and banana trees. They cut banana tree and fed it to us with water and fish paste. It was like curry, but it was not exactly curry because they did not put any salt or seasoning in it. It had no taste. We had to carry their rations for them to eat. We did not carry rations for us to eat. We had to carry noodles, dried fish, rice, packs of corn mix, tea, etc. for them to eat. There was nothing for porters to eat.

Did the SPDC army provide medicine for porters who were sick?

There were porters who were sick but they did not give medicine to those who were sick. I never even saw medicine. As we were under their control, we were not allowed to say that we could not continue to walk. We, the porters, had sympathy for each other and helped to carry things for each other. If they knew that that porter had no rations to carry because the other porters had helped him to carry his rations because he could not carry them, they gave rations for him to carry again.

How did you sleep at night?

We had to sleep in bushes or forests like this. We never slept on the floor or in a hut any night. We had to sleep only in the forests. At night, soldiers and porters had to do sentry because the army was afraid that we would ran away and they could not carry their rations if we ran away. So they did not allow us to run away. We were not allowed to take a rest when we carried rations on the trip. Each porter had to walk between two soldiers.

How did you escape to here?

We [some porters] left our loads and fled during a battle. During the battle, we were separated from soldiers. There were only three porters left in the army now. There were five porters in the army who were over 40 and 50 years old. They had to carry the same weight as us. When we had to climb a hill, those porters could not climb the hill anymore. Even we, the youths, could not climb it either. But, we had to climb it.

What was the youngest age of soldiers in LIB #387?

The youngest age of soldiers in LIB #387 was 15 or 16 years old. Even those soldiers came to discuss with us about fleeing because they could not suffer anymore. They told us to call them when we deserted. Before I fled, there were two porters who ran away and a soldier. They were in the same round as me, but we were separated. We were friendlier with those soldiers than with the others. I asked them and they said they did not join the army out of their own desire. Some were sent by their parents and uncles to join the army. Those who send soldiers to the army got money from the army. I fled along with two porters. They are N--- and M---. We fled on January --- 2010 to the Kyauk Taung area at about 7:00 am in the morning when the army asked us to carry water. The soldiers did not follow us when we went to carry water. We had to sleep one night in a jungle. We had no food to eat. We only ate a kind of gooseberry that grew in the jungle and drank water. This kind of fruit became sweet when we drank water. After that, we went to find a village. Finally, we saw a village on the second day. We saw *Pah Dee* [uncle] taking a bath and we went to tell him that we were porters and had deserted from the convict porters. Then, this man fed us rice and we took a rest. He gave us cigarettes and cucumbers for us to eat. The SPDC army told us if we met with Karen soldiers, they would shoot us dead, beat us and kill us with knives. They did not do that to us. We have known more since we came here by ourselves. Living here is much better. Everything here, such as living and the food, is good.

What was the situation in your village?

The situation in my village is that people have food to eat if they can work. We, the porters, fled because no one could feed us. Here, *A'Ba* [the Burmese word for uncles] and *Pah Dee* [the Karen word for uncles] feed us. We cannot give them any help and support them. We can only access their help. Now, we can speak.

Is there any school in your village?

Yes, there is a school but the teachers do not have enough salary because things are very expensive. They can't buy good food to eat. There is no good food in Burma. They have to export it to other countries. Now a bunch of morning glory costs at least 50-100 [Kyat] and eggplants, etc. are very expensive. I have been imprisoned for eight years and I do not know the current situation now. If we want to cut our hair, we now have to bring at least 1,000 Kyat. I think the villagers will not be doing well with their livelihoods anymore. I say this comparing it to my family's situation [before I was imprisoned].

What do you think of the SPDC army?

They oppressed and tortured us brutally. None of the SPDC army's actions are right. Because we are civilians, we cannot do anything. The public also feels something in their mind. What they feel is that people in other countries are able to stay well and live happily. They can travel, stay and work freely. But that does not happen in our country. We have to stay in our country's crisis. When it gets dark at 6:00 or 7:00 pm, they arrest people. They accuse them of staying in a dark place and they put them in a jail cell. We cannot say that this is a proper situation or a good situation.

Have you ever seen other porters that fled before you?

Yes, there were other porters who fled before me. All the porters in the same group that I was in escaped but porters in other groups before me tried to flee and were recaptured. The army shot them dead or beat them and ordered them to carry loads again. They shot two porters dead. There were three other porters who tried to flee too. One escaped and two other porters

were recaptured. The [SPDC] army beat and tortured these two porters and forced them to carry rations again. They came by themselves to tell us that they killed two of our porters.

What is your future plan?

Now, if *Pah Dee* [this is what he called the interviewer] sends us back, I dare to go back because I dare not to go back by our own desire. If I encounter the [SPDC] army again, they will shoot me dead. We cannot say that we will never meet them again.

Interview | Bo Bo, 41 (January 2010, Papun District)

Address prior to arrest: Section ---, Lashio Town
Ethnicity: Chinese
Religion: Buddhist
Occupation prior to arrest: Hill field; gold-mining
Marital status: Married; 3 children
Reported reason for arrest: Heroin use
Date of arrest:
Reported sentence: 12 years
Reported date sentence began: January --- 2008
Prison(s): Kin-tha (1) for two years
Date sent to labour camp:
Labour camp:
Date taken to porter:
Size of group taken to porter: 300
Area/ location portered:
Battalion: LIB #602, 307
Number of soldiers and porters (exact, not a ratio): 700 (1000 people and 50 trucks total) in Toungoo; 50 soldiers and 15 porters in the battalion
Date of interviewee's escape: January --- 2010
Number of porters escaped (not including interviewee): 1
Location of interviewee's escape:
Location of interview: Papun District
Date of interview: January --- 2010
Future plans: Home first then leave

How many children do you have?

I have three children. The oldest child is 13 years old and the youngest one is 9 years old.

Why did you come here?

I came here because I was taken out from prison to be an army porter. Then I deserted from the army porters again because I could not continue to suffer.

Have you ever been imprisoned?

I was imprisoned due to the crime of heroin usage within article 1516/G. The police came to arrest me because I used heroin. They sent me into prison. I was sentenced to 12 years in prison on January --- 2008. They arrested me along with my landlord. I was in my apartment. They called me to follow them to No (1) Police station. I had to stay in a jail cell for eight days and then they sent me to a prison directly. My prison number is 0---- now. If we did not want to be imprisoned, we could bribe them before we had been sentenced. It would cost a lot of money. Even just to bribe our medical check, it would have cost one or two million Kyat. If they arrested us with the opium in our hand, it would cost about ten million. If we could afford this amount of money, we would be free from imprisonment. In prison, I had to stay in No #6 building. The jailers and jail warden did not come to restrict us. They only came to check the rules. The major thing is that the prisoners themselves, their soldiers, the leaders of the prisoners and people without any positions restricted us a lot. They asked us to do that, to do this every day. We had many daily tasks to do. Some prisoners had to carry baskets of shit, some had to dig, some had to make tobacco, some had to sew clothes and some had to peel tea fruit [leaves or bud]. They did not give us any payment. We had to work for free. In the prison, they fed us meat twice per week. They fed us one egg for each prisoner. If they did not

feed us meat, they fed us small blocks of fish as big as our toe. For health care, they did not take care of those who were sick. They kept patients in a separate room. If those patients' family could come to look after them, they could do it. If their family could not come to look after, they had to die. Whatever we had to do, if we could pay money, we did not have to work and we did not need to do it anymore. Prisoners who could give money could stay in the prison as officers. Prisoners who could not afford to pay money were tortured a lot. They ordered us to do that and do this. Prisoners who could afford to pay money even had the chance to be separated and use the good toilets.

Were the prisoners allowed to read?

What is allowed to read? I don't know. They gave us the newspaper that they had already read but they didn't give us a new newspaper. They gave what they had already read. They let us read that.

Are prisoners allowed to write a letter to their family and relatives?

To write a letter, the first step is that we have to get permission from them and get money to send the letter. If we have it, then we can send it. We can't write what we want by ourselves. They let us meet our family if they are able to come. We can meet for 15 minutes each time. They don't let us meet anymore when the time is up. They ask family visitors to go back but, if you pay money, they gave one hour to meet again. The family members have to pay 3,000 kyat. When I was in prison it was 3,000 kyat, but I don't know now.

What were your experiences in prison?

Actually, I did not stay in prison for a long time. I stayed in prison for 6 months. I had no experiences. But I stayed two years at a rock production camp. There is a *lam* [bribe fee] and if you *lam*, then you don't need to work. If you don't *lam*, every day you have to separate rocks and carry rocks to the truck. If you can't work, they beat you. They do not give permission to take a rest while working. The porters who came here were all from rock production camp. I stayed in prison for around six months and then they sent me to rock camp in Hay Tha. The police came and took us. They sent us to rock production camp and we had to separate rocks everyday and put them in the trucks. The prisoner commander didn't tell us where they were sending us exactly, but only said we are sending you with the police. They come and call however many people they want. We went by police car then by train and then by police car again to rock production camp. They locked our hands and legs in chains, together with another prisoner.

What military camp did you arrive at and what is their military unit?

It is called Kin-tha (1) rock production camp. Then we stayed there. When they came and called porters, they sent us to Toungoo prison. They came and took us from rock production camp and sent us to Toungoo prison. We slept there for three nights. Then they sent us with the troops to be a porter. They called the troop LIB #602, but there were many troops. When we came, there were about 50 trucks and more than 1000 people. There were 300 prisoners. The troop we escaped from is LIB #307. We had to carry their rations and Tatmadaw soldiers who got injured in the war. We had to carry the soldiers who were shot but didn't die, here or there. If there were no patients, we had to transport rations. There were many rations, like dried fish, rice, milk and canned meat, and we had to carry it all.

How many young soldiers were there and how old were they?

The youngest were 15 or 16 years old and there were about three or four of them. They were very young.

How many soldiers did you come with? You said there were 1000.

That was when we were all together in Toungoo. Now, when I came with LIB #307, there were about 50 soldiers and 15 porters, so there were over 60 in total.

Were there any villagers included with the porters?

No, the porters did not include any villagers.

How much weight did you have to carry?

It was about 20 viss, but sometimes it was more. It was around 30 viss if it included our things [clothes and other equipment]. It was very heavy. The older porters are about 50 years old. They had to carry the same weight even though you are old. Even if you can't carry it, they said no you have to carry it until you can carry it. If you have to go on all fours, you have to carry it. One time when we came, one porter couldn't carry it, so they shot him and he died. We saw it, right in front of us. I didn't know this man. He was Burmese. He was also from the rock production camp but I wasn't friendly with him. We didn't know each other's names. There were 300 prisoners.

Do you remember the date they shot him?

No, I don't remember. It was in December 2009, not after December 20th. It was on the other side of Nwa Na Pu, after we had been riding in the car. When we stopped riding in the car, we started carrying things and they sent us to camp. We hadn't reached the camp yet, but he couldn't walk anymore, so they shot him with the gun. It was over Nwa Na Pu, on the front side of Hsaw Ko camp. He couldn't climb up the mountain, so they killed him in front of my eyes. The soldiers were talking to each other after they killed the porter. They didn't want their leader to know and said we shot him because he tried to escape. They talked to each other and said, don't let the leader know. If they know just say we shot him because he tried to escape. During this time, I was not tortured and oppressed by them. But I had to carry the loads. We could carry them because we still had strength. I wasn't beaten.

Who beat the porters? Did they have a rank or no rank?

The people who beat porters have no rank. People who have ranks don't beat a lot. Just the people with no positions beat a lot.

Do they provide enough food to porters?

In camp they fed us fish paste and dried fish. Sometimes they fed us dried fish but mostly they fed us fish paste and beans twice a day. We got good enough food when we stayed in camp and didn't travel. If we had to travel and something happened on the way, we didn't drink any water or eat any rice. For them, they ate what they brought with them. For us, they say, here, here, you guys eat this. They fed us fermented beans and dry noodles. One pack for two or three people. It is just a little.

Soldiers food and porters food is not the same?

No, not the same.

What about the officers?

Oh, for them, they eat good food.

Do they provide medicine if porters get sick?

Yes, they provide medicine.

How did they let you sleep?

During this time, how they let us sleep was not the same every night. When we were at a camp, it was very tight. At night they asked us to do sentry duty with them. Also sometimes they do sentry duty so we don't need to. We have to walk between them with a porter between two soldiers. The time I came here, they were not so tight and that was why we could escape. When we slept at night, there was no torchlight, no smoking, no matches. Also when we slept, the porters slept here, and the soldiers slept there. So we could escape. When we went on trips [patrols] and when we stayed in groups [at camp] it was not the same. Sometimes they guard us tightly; sometimes not so tightly and no guards. They also had to sleep. But usually they guard us because they are afraid the porters will escape.

Do they give [porters] a rest when they are tired?

If they take a rest or, when all the porters can't walk anymore and there is no important mission, they let the porters rest for a while. If they have an important mission, we cannot take a rest.

How did you escape to here?

We escaped when there was fighting. They were busy fighting so this is a good chance for us to run or at night when people sleep. When we stayed a long time with them, they also trusted us. When we became a person they trusted, we made a little plan to escape.

Did they tell [you] not to escape?

Yes, they did. They said "*Don't escape, you guys can't escape. If you escape and meet with Karen soldiers you will die or you will die by stepping on landmines or you will starve in the jungle, they said. So don't escape, you guys*." But we can't stay anymore the way they said. We will die because of them if we don't run. It is very tiring. At night we didn't get to sleep and we still had to work. We had to work during the day and at night. We didn't eat regularly and we didn't get enough sleep so we couldn't suffer anymore. Then it was dangerous. We are not soldiers; we are porters. I always wanted and planned to run.

Did you believe what they said?

I didn't believe it but I didn't have any experience. We ran because we didn't believe what they said. When I escaped, I planned to find Karen soldiers. If I didn't find them, I wouldn't have food because I can't go home. I didn't believe what they said, so I escaped.

How was the situation when you were with the Karen soldiers?

It is very good for us. Yesterday morning we came and saw no one in the *chan* [plantation]. We knew there were people. So we sat and waited. We thought, we will explain to the Karen soldiers when they come. We sat and waited. Before we saw them, they saw us first. They said "*don't run or move; raise your hands*." When we looked, it was Karen soldiers. Nothing was going to happen so we raised our hands. They came and checked us. They questioned us politely. We also politely explained to them. Then they called us to follow them. Then they fed us rice. They were good to us.

When did you escape and how many friends escaped with you?

Two of us escaped. We escaped on January --- 2010 at midnight. We escaped in the darkness. We walked slowly and slowly. For food, I took a plate and rice because they asked us to carry rice. I stole some rice and dried fish. We cooked in the jungle. It took us five days to arrive here.

Who did you meet and who helped you during your escape?

We slept three nights in the jungle. The next morning, we met with Karen soldiers. The Karen soldiers helped us.

Did they do any torturing?

No, they were so good to us.

What is your family's occupation?

When I was in prison, my parents were old. They did nothing. My wife traveled to Malaysia to work as a housekeeper. I have a young brother. He is a driver, driving a line car for supporting our parents. For me I was in prison, so I couldn't support them.

How were the villager's livelihoods?

They do what they can. They can still make a living. There is work; some people build houses, do hill fields, plantations and open small shops.

How do you view the SPDC?

The things they do are unjust; not right. They think what they do is right but, actually, they don't think of other people.

How are the civilians suffering under the government?

I have been to China. There is a huge different between China and Burma. In China, if there are not enough houses or food, they [the government] gives support. If they build a good and big house, the government supports it with 10,000 yuan. If they build a normal, not-so-big house, the government pays 5,000 yuan. The houses are not allowed to carry thatch; all are built with a zinc roof and with cement, so as not to cause a fire. But, in Burma, people who have money can't build buildings the way they want. They have to get permission from the government and then they can build when they get permission. If we build whatever we want, they confiscate it and order us to stop. They don't allow building. They have to keep for a year. People who don't have money have to leave and stop building and they can never build again. There is no support. If people have money, the government eats it. If they don't pay money, they can't continue to build. When I look at this again, the government of Burma is wrong they way they do this.

Are there any porters who escaped before you?

No. Before we fled, four porters escaped. No one was re-arrested by soldiers [SPDC]. All of us who escaped are here with the Karen soldiers.

What are your future plans?

My plan is, actually, I want to go home but there is a danger. So I will look at the situation and I will go back home some time. As this troop [that I portered with] has not changed [rotated] yet,

the news will not have spread yet that I have escaped from prison. So I think I can go home quickly. After that, I have a plan to travel and find money. There is [phone service] connection in the city because there are phones but right now there is no connection.

Interview | Hla Maung, 43 (January 2010, Papun District)

Address prior to arrest: T--- Town, Kachin State
Ethnicity: Kachin
Religion: Christian
Occupation prior to arrest: Farmer
Marital status: Divorced
Reported reason for arrest: Selling drugs
Date of arrest:
Reported sentence: 16 years
Reported date sentence began:
Prison(s): Myitkyina (one and a half years); Kin-tha (1); Toungoo
Date sent to labour camp:
Labour camp:
Date taken to porter:
Size of group taken to porter: 200 (50 or 60 military trucks)
Area/ location portered:
Battalion: LIB #223
Number of soldiers and porters (exact, not a ratio): 30 soldiers, seven porters (three had to cook)
Date of interviewee's escape:
Number of porters escaped (not including interviewee): Two before him
Location of interviewee's escape:
Location of interview:
Date of interview: January --- 2010
Future plans:

Note: Hla Maung was interviewed separately by two different KHRG researchers. Both interviews took place on January --- 2010.

Interview 1: Hla Maung, 43 (January --- 2010, Papun District)

Why have you arrived here?

I am here because I escaped to rely on the Karen. I was a porter, following the troops.

Were you in prison and what was the case?

Yes, it was a drug case. *Boh ma* [article] 15/19 for 16 years.

Tell me step by step how did you get in prison?

When I went and sold drugs in Myitkyina, I had to pass a police checkpoint and they stopped the car. They are two kinds of police: the regular police and the drug police.

Did you ask them why you came and arrested you?

Yes, I asked them. I argued that there were many people and it [the drug] was not mine. It just appeared. I put my bag there. There were many people sitting there, it was not mine. I argued but I couldn't argue. They arrested me based on the car. They checked it after they stopped the car. They asked each person to walk down and they checked. After all the checks, they said, "*take your old bag*". Then I was arrested.

Did they torture you when they arrested you?

Oh, they tortured me a lot when they arrested me. They asked where did you buy it, from whom. They sent me to the drug police office. In the drug police office, they beat me with a metal stick. After they beat me and questioned me, they sent me back to the police station. I lived in jail for 20 days and, after that, they sent me back to Myitkyina. They kept me alone, with no friends.

When did you have to go to prison?

I arrived at Myitkyina prison on May --- and I was imprisoned on June ---. I forget my prisoner number. Oh no, I haven't forgotten. It is 8----. The number registering my prison entry at *yeh beh* camp is 0----.

How do the prison commanders treat prisoners in prison?

When *lu gyi* [international leaders or visitors like the UN] came and checked, they fed us bean curry with *hsea kyaint* [fried onions]. But when they [the visitors] left, they fed us nothing but *ta la bpaw* [rice boiled in water with vegetables]. It was very black, so that even pigs wouldn't like to eat it. They fed it to us and we had to eat it.

What do you have to do everyday in prison?

Nothing, but some people did plantations [to make a profit]. They have to pay money to do plantations. The people who could afford to go out to work did plantations for food and they fed prisoners the things that were produced from the plantations. If people can't pay money, they can't work on the plantations. People who don't have jobs stay in the prison like this. We had to pay money to be allowed to work.

Do they pay money when you work?

Money, how can they pay it? In prison they don't pay but in *yeh beh* camp they pay. They gave 50 kyat per prisoner. At lunchtime, for food, they gave us rotten beans and black [rotten] *ta la bpaw*. For healthcare, if people have money and are able to pay, then they treat them well. For the people who don't have money, they keep them just like they are, even until they die. Before they oppressed prisoners, but now they don't do a lot. No radio, no reading, no writing are permitted.

Is there permission for their family to meet them?

Yes, there is permission for 15 minutes. You have to give them 500 kyat for 15 minutes. If you asked for more time, you have to pay 1,000 kyat.

What was your experience in prison?

Oppression and a little discrimination between Burmese and Kachin, then depression. I had to stay in prison for about one and half years and then they sent me to *yeh beh* camp, Kin-tha 1. Then they took us and sent us to Toungoo. Then we followed the army. The army came and took us off. The prison commander said, "*Hey my sons, when the English were governing, they did much torturing. Now there is no torturing because we are the same. Don't worry."* That was what they said. But when we came out to follow the troops, there were many kinds of torturing. If they asked us to do something, "*Hey man, do this. Is that right or not?*" We had to say "*yes, it is right*." "*What is right*?" they replied. Or if we say it is wrong, they say "*why is it wrong*?" They call us *lee* [an offensive term for penis]. They swear when they speak. If we say no to anything, they beat and kick us. We could do nothing so we couldn't suffer anymore. I would die if I still stayed there so I relied on the Karen and escaped. I wanted to see them [the Karen].

How many prisoners were there with you?

They took 200 prisoners. They transported us in a truck. They fastened [restrained] us on the way. They unfastened us when we carried loads. The battalion we arrived with is LIB #223. I don't know any of the leaders. They took off their entire ranks [badges and insignia denoting rank], even the corporal.

What did you have to carry?

I carried a big pot for cooking rice. Some people had to carry boxes, bullets and rice. For me, I had to carry a big pot. I had to cook and the pot was full of rice. I carried the pot and the rice. It was very heavy. It weighed around 20 pounds.

How many soldiers did you come with?

I don't know. Just porters, there were 200 people. There were many soldiers. There were many trucks; I thought 50 or almost 60 trucks. The next village was the place where they gathered the trucks but I don't know the name of the village. There was a football ground full of trucks. I thought when I followed the battalion commander that there were about 30 soldiers. I don't know all. There were seven porters. Out of the seven porters, they put three people in charge of cooking.

Were villagers including with the porters?

No, all were prisoners.

What experiences did you have on the way?

Nothing.

You ran because the soldiers tortured porters?

Yes.

Did they kill porters?

Yes, but I didn't see it with my own eyes. My friend told me. They shot them in the face.

Why did they do this?

If a porter can't carry, they put their bag that they carry on them and they order them to run. It also depends on the case. People get shot and it is murder. It is worse than murder and rape. For us, we are drug cases, so we are worst. If the prisoner is Burmese, they give a little understanding. But for ethnic groups like us, they discriminate and want to torture more. They asked questions and if you can't answer, I suffered their torture. One time they talked to me and I didn't hear very well. They said "*hey guy, you fucker, Kachin, Kachin slicker, you hear it right if I tell you like this.*" Yes, I hear it, yes, yes, quickly, yes, what yes, *lee*, yes. They beat us after they said it. If they say you know, you had better know. If you know, they beat you and if you don't know, they beat you. They tortured all prisoners; no one was free. For me, I had a chance to eat because I followed the Battalion Commander. For my friends, the sockets of their eyes became like holes, because they didn't have a chance to eat, but they were still asked to carry. Any time when they saw me, both of them didn't have a chance to eat. They are both Kachin. They were fed just a little rice. Later, I told *Sa Ya* [the battalion commander], "*give a little kindness to me, two of my friends do not have food to eat. Look at them, their eye sockets*

have become [sunken] holes." "*Oh, so let them come and eat here*." They had enough when I called them.

Do they provide enough food to the porters?

It depends on the *sa ya* [battalion leader]. Soldiers of Burmese ethnicity have no kindness, they just tortured us. But some ethnicities who serve as Burmese soldiers, like Shan, Chin, Lisu and Rawa think about us but not if they are really Burmese ethnicity. They fed us twice a day. We ate in the early morning and at night we ate rice that we had cook in the morning. After we ate, we cooked again for the morning. They fed us just a little. If we ate outside with the soldiers one time, it was gone, just like a fist of fish paste. Some soldiers ate together with the porters but some didn't eat together. They don't even like us to eat rice. Some ethnicities serving as Burmese soldiers had pity on us. Those men ate together with porters. As for the officers, they had excellent food.

Do they provide medicine when the porters get sick?

Yes, they did. As I saw, the group I followed provided medicine to all people, because the *shay sa ya* [practitioner of indigenous medicine] was another ethnicity, not Burmese. He had sympathy.

How did they let you sleep?

The first time we followed the troop [to the camp], we were fastened with ropes and slept, but later [on patrol] when we had our *blain* [a container the porters have to carry], they unfastened the ropes but we had to *sa ya*. They slept around us. They were worried that we would escape.

Did they give you time to take a rest when the porters were tired?

How can they give a rest when we are tired? If they weren't tired, even if we were tired, we had to carry. Even if you are sick, they ask you to go, but they give a little care when you arrive in camp or when it is rest time. On the trip [patrol], they don't care even if you are sick.

How did you escape to here?

Here? When they set up the camp in Ler Mu Bplaw, I had to stay there for one month. I had to cook, find firewood and fill water. I stayed there for over a month, close to two months. We three people cooked. The other two were Shan-Burmese. They had the same language and they didn't tell me anything. They escaped and only I was left. Later, after a month, I went to carry water. As I carried the water, I put down the water containers and ran.

Did they tell you before you escaped that if you escaped the Karen soldiers would kill you or you would step on a landmine?

They said "*if the Karen know, they will kill you. Even if you don't see the Karen, you will step on a landmine. No one will help you. Also we will kill you if we re-capture you*". Even though they threatened like that, I relied on the Karen. If I arrive to the Karen, the Karen and Kachin are brothers. So I decided to rely on them. After that, I prayed and escaped. When I escaped, I was hiding and praying, God, show me the way, show me the way to the place where there is a village. I prayed with full faith, then I went out again. Some people had to sleep three or four nights on the way, maybe. But God showed me the way, I didn't need to sleep on the way. I arrived directly to the Karen village. They soldiers didn't know when I escaped.

How many days did it take for you to arrive here?

Directly in one day.

Who you meet and who helped you on the way when you escaped?

I saw no one; I arrived directly in this village. After I arrived in the village, the Karen rebel soldiers told me, "*Ha, you didn't meet with the KNLA soldiers?*" "*No, I saw no one*." "*Ha, you are very lucky.*" Maybe they talked about me, but I don't know. I was very happy when I arrived. They asked me have you eaten rice? I said I hadn't and they called me to eat. After that, they sent me here.

Did they torture you?

No, but they checked I was telling the truth.

What was your family's occupation before you were in prison?

We are famers, so we were farming.

What was the livelihood situation of your village/city before you were in prison?

I was a farmer. I prepared everything to do with the farm. To have enough money to hire people to work on the farm, I went and sold opium and I was arrested.

Do you have school in you village, government or village school?

Yes, there is a school in village, a high school. It is a government school.

Can teachers and government staff make a living with their salary?

For that one I don't know because I never cooperate with them. How can I say? We are farmers and we cooperate with farmers. Yes, it's fine but some are not fine.

How do you see the government?

At Ta Naing, I saw that they do nothing, just the movement of police. They are active in villages. They investigate, they go here and there, and they arrest people one by one.

Are there porters who escaped before and are they free?

Over one month ago, yes, two porters who cooked in the same group as me. They are free. In Kachin State, the SPDC doesn't burn our houses and farms, like they do in Karen State. In Kachin State we don't have those things.

Do you think the SPDC do right or wrong?

They do not do justice. They said they will have an election, but now we have heard nothing; no news. We escaped because if we just stayed and waited for it [the election], it is just one way to be dead. When they ask me to do things, they torture, beat and punch so that I can't suffer every day anymore. I have to be in prison for 16 years. I am sad and disappointed so I escaped. Not only me, it is the same with every Burmese. Now I heard they promoted the salary for the military. They don't want to have an election. This is my point of view.

Now what is your plan? Do you want to go home?

I want to go home but I have to follow the way that *sa ya* [Karen leaders] show me. From here, how can I go back if the trip is far and I have never been here? I know nothing, it is like walking in the dark.

Interview 2: Hla Maung, 43 (January --- 2010, Papun District)

You were in prison for what crime?

I went and sold opium. It was an opium case.

How much did you profit?

If you put in 100,000 Kyat, you get back 40,000-50000 kyat.

So if you want to become a rich person you can, in a short period of time?

Yes, that why I had to be in prison. I was arrested on April --- 2007, by special drug police in Y---- station, N---. They sent me back to T---. They kept me for over 10 days before they checked me and they sent me back to Myitkyina.

In which court were you sentenced?

Myitkyina district court. On June --- 2007, they sentenced me to 16 years. I lived in Myitkyina for over one year. My Myitkyina prisoner number is 1----. After a year, they sent me back to Mandalay prison. They kept me for four days in Mandalay prison, then they sent me to Kin-tha (1), *yeh beh* camp. I lived there for over a year. All together, it was over three years. They ordered us to carry rocks and beat [break] rocks. We got up at 5:00 am or 6:00 am in the morning and went to work at 7:00 am and finished the work at 7:00 pm or until it was dark. They gave us just 15 minutes to have lunch. I lived at Kin-tha (1) for over one year. I had to work the whole day, so some people can't suffer this and everyday people die. Many people died; sometimes, one or two persons a week. Sometimes, one by one they died. In *yeh beh* camp, they kept what was like a clinic. They treated people who had money; for those of us who didn't have money, when you get sick, it is just like this. For me, I came just a little close to dying. People thought that I was dying. This Kachin is dead. They said it like this. Later, I came back to life, because of God's help. When I was sick, people died everyday. I don't if it happened because it was a hot time. In our Kachin State, it is cold but here it is hot so we can't deal with it. As I told you a moment ago, if you have money they treat you but for the people who don't have money they just keep you like this until you die. I said '*help me, help me*'. They said, '*your life is better in there'*. They are like that. At that time, I decided in my mind, if I die, it is finished. I will go the way God shows me. Without expecting it, my brother came to me from Kachin State. At that time, I didn't expect it and he came so I cried and I was so happy. He came and gave me the money. I treated my disease with that money and I became well. On December 9th 2009, I was taken out from Kin-tha. They took out 200 people. The troop that I was with was #223. I don't know if it was a Light Infantry Battalion or an Infantry Battalion. I had to stay in Ler Mu Bplaw. There were 28 public service personnel when I stayed there. They stayed just like this. Yes, we had to carry rations to the places where the trucks couldn't go. We had to carry to Baw Hser Koh. How can we carry once a day, we have to sleep 2 nights on the way? They just walk at night; they daren't walk during the daytime.

What the different between working at Kin-tha and under the Tatmadaw?

Working with the Tatmadaw is the same. There is no difference because that [Kin-tha] is also governed by the [military government]. Here, it is more dangerous. Here, if you step on a landmine you will die and, at the work camp, if you can't carry anymore they shoot you to death.

I heard but I never witnessed. My friend told me they shot at his head because he couldn't carry anymore. I saw, that, even if they can't carry, the soldiers beat them. One time, one person didn't care if he died so he jumped down into a gorge and escaped. This guy is free. They shot a lot of guns.

Why did you escape?

I couldn't suffer anymore. We stayed on our own and did nothing, but they said '*hey Kachin*' and they speak with rude words. And when we say anything, they say '*hey guy, tell the truth. Prisons in Burma are kept not for freely because we have a liar guy like you*'. They say that and punch and beat us. If they asked '*is that right*?' And we say '*yes, that's right'*, they say '*what's right?*' and they beat us. If we don't know, they beat. There were two people included who had three chevrons. They were the worst. These two people were always rude to me when they saw me. One day, I decided I will escape even if I die. Then, when I was carrying water, I escaped. I escape alone. I escaped when the fighting was happening often. I thought there will be KNU. I can rely on KNU, so I escaped. I escaped at 1:00 pm. I escaped and after I passed over a mountain, I saw a hill field. I was happy when I saw the hill field. I went and saw the road. There were many hill fields but no people. I followed the road. I saw no one. I prayed on the way as I went. It was said that people step on landmines when they walk on the roads. I followed the road and God helped me, so nothing happened to me on the way. At night, after 8:00 or 9:00 pm, I arrived at a KNU hospital in a village. When I arrived, I called *Ahy Sein Doh* [house owner]. They were on alert and held up their knives and guns and one guy told me '*come to me, take off your clothes*'. I took off all my clothes. As you know, living in prison, we get tattoos. He said '*you are not convict porters, you are soldiers*'. '*No,* Pa Tee *[Uncle], I am Kachin. I was in prison for selling drugs*.' '*Is that true? Tell the truth. Later, they won't understand Burmese very well. For me, I know but I can't speak very well. Your pronunciation of Burmese is mixed because you are Kachin. Have you eaten?*' '*No, not yet'*. They prepared food and I ate. After eating, they brought me to the medic's office. When they sent me, there were Kachin guys there; you [the interviewer] will see them tomorrow. I was glad in my heart. In the morning, they came and asked, '*where is the Kachin guy who arrived last night*'? I introduce myself and he is my brother in law. He is happy and we are both happy.

What kind of army do you think the Tatmadaw is?

The Tatmadaw troops, how can I say, they have bad behavior. Even they who are the same soldiers, they are not good to each other. Sometimes I listened and heard. Sometimes they also are talking about escape. Whether they are Burmese soldiers or not, they tortured even even the same soldiers. Then there are many ethnic soldiers, Naga and Chin. For those people, they have kindness. The real Burmese are not easy. Chin and Naga [soldiers] saw when they [the Burmese soldiers] tortured me. '*It is not good to do, it can affect you*'. They had pity on me and said those words.

What is your future plan?

When I arrived to the KNU village, in my heart I felt like I can go back to my village. I want to go home so I escaped to here.

What was the difference between what the Tatmadaw soldiers said and the actual situation here?

Before we escaped, they said '*even if you escape and meet with* Ng'Bpway *[KNLA] they will not keep you alive. They will kill you. Even if you don't meet with* Ng'Bpway*, you will step on a landmine and die*'. But in reality, after I escaped, *Ng'Bpway* is good, the KNU. They [the Tatmadaw] have no kindness to human. Not even as if we were dogs. Dogs wave their tails when you feed them. They are worse than animals. That is what I thought in my mind. I will

hate Burmese until I die. When I arrived here, it was very different from what they said. Here, I was sent, village by village, until I arrived here. For food, house by house, they provided. On the way, I couldn't eat anymore. One by one, they came and gave me food. One came and introduced himself and said '*where are you from?*' '*Kachin State'*. '*Ha…very far'*. Some have heard of it but some have never heard of it. I went to church one night, I don't remember the village. The Pastor called me, come and sleep here if you don't go tonight. But I had to go so I couldn't sleep there.

Interview | Myo Myit, 45 (February 2010, Papun District)

Address prior to arrest: Insein Township, Yangon Division
Ethnicity: Burmese
Religion: Buddhist
Occupation prior to arrest: Seller
Marital status: Married; one child
Reported reason for arrest: Murder
Date of arrest:
Reported sentence: 7 years
Reported date sentence began: November --- 2002
Prison(s): Insein; Mote-pa-lin
Date sent to labour camp: December --- 2009
Labour camp:
Date taken to porter: December 10th 2009
Size of group taken to porter: 150
Area/ location portered: Kyauk Kyi (escaped, recaptured); Papun – from Ka Ma Maung
Battalion: LIB #707
Number of soldiers and porters (exact, not a ratio): 100-110 soldiers; 30 porters
Date of interviewee's escape: January 23rd 2010
Number of porters escaped (not including interviewee): four others
Location of interviewee's escape: Na Wa Ta camp
Location of interview:
Date of interview: February --- 2010
Future plans: Home

When were you first sent to prison?

On November --- 2002, I arrived at Insein prison. I was in prison because of murder. I had to be in prison for seven years. I had to go porter one time at Kyauk Kyi Township and I escaped. Next time, I had to go porter again and I escaped again. Then now, I was included again to go to Papun Township and I escaped.

Who arrested you after the case? Was it the military or the police and do you know their name?

They are police from the No. (1) police station, Insein Township. U Than Htun, the Camp commander in the township, and Kaing Kyat Oo, the *du yen aoht* [Deputy commander in the township] arrested me.

Did you ask them why they arrested you?

Yes, they said murder.

Did they arrest you before or after they got full or enough evidence?

They arrested me before they got adequate evidence. They arrested me two hours after the event [case].

Where were you at the time they came and arrested you?

I was in Insein, Yangon, at the back of the village. They locked my hands with fetters and called me close to the car. They arrested my father and kept him in the car. They asked me to sign,

then they called me to the police station. There was no beating and punching. They called me to the police station. The next day they called me to Insein Township court to give a statement.

You had to give a statement directly?

No.

Did they put you in prison?

They sent me to Insein prison.

Did they put you there just like this even though they hadn't checked and investigated the case?

They said there was a witness statement, so they put me in Insein prison, in building number 5. They arrested more than 20 people. Some people I remember but some people I don't remember.

Can you tell us who you remember? Can you remember the police and the people who were included?

My wife was included. Then, as for the police, there were many police; almost the whole camp of *naing htain yen* [local police] in Insein. Four, five or six *du yen aoht* [police officers], including Myaint Lwin, Kaing Kyaw Oo and Aung Myaint Thaing, led and arrested me.

How many years did the court order for the sentencing after the case was investigated?

The court sentenced me to seven years.

Have you completed seven years [in prison]?

No, I haven't completed seven years yet. Often, I was taken off to be a porter.

Did they take you directly from prison or after they sent you to *yeh beh* [work camps outside prison]?

After *yeh beh*, they took us off.

Can you tell me the first date you arrived in Insein prison?

November --- 2007. They sent me directly to Insein prison. I don't remember my previous prison personal number. My current prison number is 0-----.

Is there a system that you can give money and leave prison if you don't want to stay?

There is because you can in *yeh beh* camp, but not in a big prison. In *yeh beh*, you have to pay at least 50,000 to more than 100,000 kyat.

Can you tell me how the jailers treat prisoners in prison?

Like beating, it doesn't exist as before, but a few beatings and demands still exist. They ask for money if you don't want to work so you don't need to come. We would die if it was worse than that. It is not worse than that. They demand money from you if you don't want to go to *yeh beh*. For that, they ask 130,000 to 200,000 Kyat. I was doing farming.

What did you do when you lived in prison?

I was doing farming, I had to give back to them. We had to give [the produce] to the prison chief [the high-ranking one]. They sold it outside [the prison].

Do they give earnings to you?

No, they don't. I got nothing. I had to buy the seeds by myself. Even if we did, we can't avoid having to give to them.

How was food eaten in prison?

The situation in prison was that we can eat more watery bean soup until we are full in the morning. In the evenings, we had porridge and we had to eat it with more watery fish paste. Not a good diet. They fed us meat twice a week. In one time, they fed us three small pieces of meat. Now, I am not in good health, but they included me to go to *yeh beh* camp. I reported to the jailer, I am sick. When I reported it, the jailer cooperated with Htaw Kyat Yon and included me to go to *yeh beh* camp. At that time, I was vomiting blood. They just gave me one Paracetamol. As usual, we had to do what they ordered and eat what they told us. They locked the door in the day time.

You mean people were given punishment again and again?

Yes, like political prisoners and criminals, they put them in the cells. They are heinous.

Are prisoners allowed to read novels, cartoons, magazines or listen to the radio in prison?

Currently, people who come from home and ask permission to meet prisoners, they can't order them what to do. They [the visitors] bring newspapers and they [the prisoners] can read. But they can't listen to the radio or cassettes. They turn on TV for the prisoners. You can watch that one [TV]. They don't let prisoners and their families see each other freely. In a big group with just 10 minutes, we have to speak in a rushed manner. One time, you can see each other for just 10 minutes.

Can prisoners contact their friends and families by letter or mouth when they went?

In the current time, people who are far and people who don't have contact with home write letters. They just say, but prisoner are not allow to used so sometimes it delay. Twice a month you can meet with prisoners. They give 10 minutes to see prisoners each time. For me, I went from Insein prison to *yeh beh* camp. On December 10th 2009, they sent me to Mote-pa-lin *yeh beh* camp. Then on December 11th 2009, the police put us with LIB# 707 to porter. Since there, we arrived to this life. We started and came from Mote-pa-lin.

Did the troop go and take you off from *yeh beh*? Which troop?

The troop came and took us off from *yeh beh* camp. LIB# 707, led by the second in command officer came and took us off. They didn't say where we had to go. They just said we had to go and took us off. They just said this.

What about the jailers? Did they say where you had to go and for how many days?

The jailers didn't say anything. *"If you arrive there and if you have a chance to run, you run."* They said this.

Where did they send you after they took you off?

They put us with one of the Thaton armies at night. In the morning, we started walking out from there. Before we arrived at Thaton, we came by truck, until Myaing Gyi Ngu. After Myaing Gyi Ngu, we walked on foot. From Ka Ma Maung until now, we have walked on foot. They did not tie us but they surrounded us. They didn't let us go freely. They took off 150 people. After that, [they] divided us into two groups. One group of 75 people went to Bilin and the other 75 people went to Ka Ma Maung. They sent us to here.

Do you know the name of the Battalion Commander who brought you here?

I don't know the Battalion Commander's name. They just called him "*Aba, Aba*." I don't know the name.

Do you know the name of the Deputy Battalion Commander?

I don't know. They lived far away from us. The Battalion Number is 707. After 707 went back, they changed us again, to 708.

Do you know any leader who in 708?

They stayed with us for just four, five or ten days. We stayed at *kwey yo* [a patrol camp]. They called the *Bo Mu* [Major] Nyi Nyi Aung.

Where were you with the troop?

I arrived to upper Kaw Bpoh, near Starlin village. I started to run from there.

What did the SPDC army ask you to carry?

Things I had to carry were a load of 500 bullets, 2 RPG [rocket-propelled grenades], 10 bullets of 40 [mm mortars] and rations of rice, oil, salt and MSG. The weight is more than 15 pounds.

Can you guess how many soldiers strong was the battalion that you followed?

It was more than 101 or 110 soldiers strong, in the whole battalion. Just that amount.

Were there any child soldiers included there?

Yes, it included children. I saw 10 or 15 people around the age of 15 or 16. I saw both in 707 and 708.

How many staff were there that had to carry like you?

Now there are just eight people left. Two escaped first. They were included with Battalion 709 and they [all the porters] all escaped. For Battalion 710, they occupied the back line so I don't know.

Do you think how many staff in Battalions 707 and 708?

There were over 30 people.

All escaped to here are prisoners?

All are prisoners, no civilians.

Tell me again how you had to run and your experiences since you started to escape from there to here?

I ran from Starlin. From Starlin we arrived to Kaw Bpoh, when they ordered eight staff to go and carry rations for a month. After we arrived to Kaw Bpoh and carried four or five days, we couldn't carry anymore. I told the CQE [two chevrons in company and three chevrons in battalion], "*I can't carry these rice bags*." He said to me "*you can't stop, you have to carry them*." So I gathered the rest of the people and we ran together, all five of us, when we had a chance. When we ran, *Kayin Pa Tee* and *A'mon* [*Kayin* means Karen, *Pa Tee* means uncle and *A'mon* means mother] brought us to this organization. From there, we were sent to another camp. Then for us to go back, to find a way for us, they sent us to another group. So we arrived here.

Do our soldiers treat you badly when you were with them?

No, they fed us rice and they fulfill what we need.

What about the SPDC army? How did they treat you when you went with them as staff?

They asked us to find landmines, starting from Papun. They asked us to find landmines by striking with a pickaxe, but we had no materials, just people and pickaxes. If we can't sweep landmines, there is a beating.

Just beating? What about shooting dead when porters can't walk and go anymore and get sick?

For this kind, I haven't seen it yet.

How do they treat villagers when they go through the villages? What is their behavior and characteristics?

They pluck whatever they see, in hill fields and fruit. In Kee Mu Deh, they cut down even a bunch of the coconuts that weren't ripe yet. Sometimes when the villagers travel, they use their power and beg [take] from the villagers.

Did you see them torture villagers?

No, I didn't see that kind. I heard they shot them dead. In LIB #70, when they first when started to come, they shot two villagers, I heard. It was said to be close to Kee Muh Der.

You just heard? Can you guess why they shot them dead?

When they went, they bought alcohol and were drunk. When the villagers came back, the soldiers were drunk and shot them. They were really villagers, [not KNLA soldiers].

The battalion that shot them was 709 or 707?

709. As for 707, when the headquarter commander was coming, they were patrolling and I saw that they shot one young Karen whom they saw in a hill field. They took a hand bomb from the DKBA and they reported to the above [officers] that he was a rebel. The headquarter commander of *Bpyu Ha* [Operation Command] 434 came here. They commanded [the soldiers] to clean and when they climbed down the mountain, I saw them surround and shoot one young Karen. One bullet hit him and one lance corporal shot him again and he died. He was about 18 or 19 years old.

Was this east of Starlin or west?

This side, yes, east. They came down from the DKBA base at Gkown and turned around to the backside. They commanded them to do *ka gkaing* [patrol outside perimeter]. They didn't pass over Yoslin, they were to the east of Yoslin.

When you stayed with them did you have enough food?

Sometimes we had to eat one time for breakfast and dinner. Sometimes, when they have eaten, they give curry to us if they have extra, but it is not enough to make us full. They fed us rice twice a day, half of a mess tin. After you cook rice in a mess tin, they knock it down and cut it in the middle with a knife. Sometimes, when they are *saint bpawh* [in a good mood], we can ask; sometimes, we can't. We cut banana trees by ourselves and pick edible fern leaves. We eat together with soldiers, but not with *A Ya* [the officers]. They eat apart.

How do they let you sleep?

Sometimes, we have to go and take hay and sleep on it or under the bushes, where there are bushes. For them, we set up a hut. For staff [the prisoners], we slept as was suitable. They didn't tie us at night when we were sleeping. There was a sentry.

Do you think they will shoot if the prisoners run?

I have heard they will, if we really run. Their troops like killing staff by using sticks, like *Sa Ya Gyi* [big teacher] Than Htun. He beats them with a mattock and people die.

Don't they say that if you run they will shoot you?

Yes, they said that. Moreover, at Bawgali, they beat staff to death. They shot them dead with a gun and pounded them with a mattock, the soldiers beside them said. They said it is not to threaten. They will do it in reality, with a heavy weapon, like Lance Corporal Than Htun. They have done that. Now, of the people who escaped to here, one was pounded with the butt of a knife and gun and his head bled [the skin on his head separated]. They will really do it [as they say]. He was recaptured in Papun.

Did they give you a rest when you got tired?

If they take a rest, we can take a rest. But if they don't take a rest, we also can't take one.

When you follow them as public service personnel do they have health care?

They give us malaria medicine twice a week. For the rest, when we ask, they give it to us sometimes but sometimes they don't give it to us. Sometimes, on a road that people don't follow, they let us go first and sometimes they keep us between them. In dangerous time, they let us walk first in front of them. We started to escape on January --- 2010 at about 6:30 or 7:00 am in the morning. We said we were going to pick jackfruit. In the hill field, we saw *Pa Tee* and *A'mon* [*Pa Tee* means uncle and *A'mon* means aunt] and they brought us, not to an organization, but to people who cut down trees for hill fields. After that, one who was responsible brought us to the KNU, 5th Brigade. Then he brought us to the Township Officer. After we arrived there, they kept us free and let us cook and eat by ourselves. Then we went to go back and they brought us to soldiers on the frontline step by step.

How many people escaped?

Five people, including me. When we ran they didn't see us. When we had passed three or four hills, we heard the sound of a gun, three or four times.

Was there any situation that you had to run without resting to save your life when you escaped?

Just the time when we started to escape from Na Wa Ta [Tatmadaw camp]. After that, it was easy going. We go and eat and they [the KNU] send us.

When you escaped, who did you meet on the way?

We met with villagers and they brought us to the 5th Brigade, KNLA.

Have you ever met with your family?

In the current situation, I have never met them.

How do you think your family makes a living when you have to follow the army as [public service personnel] on the frontline?

They sell what they have. My wife is with one child so she can't work.

What were the common jobs that villagers did to make a living when you were still in your village?

People who have money make a living, because they have [money]. People who don't have money, like carpenters, masons, trishaw drivers and shopkeepers, are the people who are not doing well. People who have money become richer. Most were not doing very well. There is a school in my village. Children can study for free, at a grassroots level. Here, the people who can give money can sit in the front and people who can't give money sit at the back. The basic Education Department came and set up the school. There are quite a lot of teachers for students. The school in Insein has primary, middle and high schools. In Insein, there are many schools. One or two High schools, six or eight Middle schools and twelve Primary schools. There are quite a lot of schools.

Can the teachers, including school principals and volunteers, make a living with their salary?

No, not enough so they demand more from the parents; they want this and that. As for the parents, they want their children to have an education, so they give. There are many grassroots people, some families in Sh--- village, Insein Township, who have to eat one time for breakfast and dinner.

How much money do the richest people have?

There are quite a lot of people who are rich and have hundreds of thousands of kyat. People who have connections and trade with the SPDC become rich people. People who can deal with the SPDC are rich.

What is your point of view towards the SPDC?

They hold guns and abuse their powers and they can't control the public economy so the struggles, robberies and stealings are happening, because people don't have enough food. As for this, it happens at all levels.

How do you feel when you served as a public service personnel and you had to carry heavy things? Were you happy or confused? And what is your point of view towards the SPDC?

I got angry towards the SPDC government. We can't do anything because they have weapons. So we have to stay quiet and carry. As I saw in the current situation, the things they do are wrong.

How would you vote if you had the freedom to vote?

We will decide the right decision and we will vote for the right side in the 2010 election.

How do you think civilians will suffer as long as the power is with this government?

As long as the power is with the military, civilians will have food shortages. They are not satisfied that they have to stay like this because they [the military] have power and guns. The civilians have to bend down their heads and suffer. That is happening in 2010, in 80% of 100 demonstrations.

Anything else?

Sometimes, they often drive us from being a good person to become a bad person, like the when the police call and question us. They ask us questions like, are there any politicians and we have to tell them if there are. As this goes on longer and longer, we can't suffer anymore. Whatever happens, we will suffer, so we have to stay like this.

Were there any *wan saung* [public service personnel] who escaped before you?

Yes, many. When we came up with three battalions, there were 30 *wan saung [*public service personnel] included. We think we are the last group to escape. For the rest of the people, they couldn't suffer anymore so they escaped. One of those people, who they re-captured, is included with us. We escaped again and are free.

What is your future plan?

First, I will go back and get my ID card and some clothes and then I will stay outside of my village. If I stay at my place [village] and if the SPDC police see me, they will arrest me again. There is just one way. I can stay and trade outside my village.

Do you have contact with your family?

No

What more do you want to say about why you are not satisfied?

As the orders from the SPDC, like *Bpa Dot Myay*, on the radio. The things they said and broadcast, including U Than Shwe and other *A Ya Shit* [Generals], it is not fair. For the future, like KNU and KNDP, they are different ethnicity but they help us. For the future, don't beat and kill same Buddhists. That is what I want to say.

Interview | Kyaw Htike, 31 (February 2010, Papun District)

Address prior to arrest: S--- village, Bogale Township, Irrawaddy division
Ethnicity: Burmese
Religion: Buddhist
Occupation prior to arrest: Fisherman
Marital status: Single
Reported reason for arrest: Murder
Date of arrest:
Reported sentence: 10 years
Reported date sentence began: June --- 2005
Prison(s): Pathein; Mote-pa-lin
Date sent to labour camp:
Labour camp:
Date taken to porter:
Size of group taken to porter:
Area/ location portered: from Ka Ma Maung to Kaw Bpoh
Battalion: LIB #707
Number of soldiers and porters (exact, not a ratio): 70 soldiers; 30 porters (for 707, 708, 709)
Date of interviewee's escape: February 23rd 2010
Number of porters escaped (not including interviewee): 4 others
Location of interviewee's escape: Papun District
Location of interview:
Date of interview:
Future plans: Not home

When did you arrive to prison?

I arrived to prison on June --- 2005.

Can you tell me why you had to go to prison and your experience in prison step by step?

I was sentenced to ten years for murder. After that, from Pathein, I arrived to Mote-pa-lin *yeh beh* camp. Then I was called to be a porter on the frontline. Five police came and arrested me. I know two of the policemens' names. One is Nyaing Zaw Min and another one is Nyi Htoo; they are both from our local S--- village police station.

Did you ask them why they came and arrested you? Did they bring a warrant to arrest you?

I didn't ask, they said they arrested me because of murder. Yes that was really the case.

Did they check the evidence you before they arrested you?

No, I was arrested directly.

Where were you when they came and arrested you?

I was at home.

Was there any torturing when they came and arrested you?

No, they handcuffed me and fired the gun three times. And they said, we can arrest people who do murder. I am telling the truth and there was no beating. I slept at S--- police station one night. And they handed me over to Bogale police station. They came and arrested me only, no other people.

That case is logical. So for how many years did the judge sentence you?

They sentenced me to ten years. I didn't stay the full ten years. I stayed just four and a half years and I was sent to *Yeh Beh*.

Do you remember the date when they brought you to prison?

The date I was brought to prison was July 19, 2006. I arrived at Pa Thein prison and my Pa Thein prisoner identification number was 4----/C.

If we don't want to stay in prison, even if the case against us is true, can we pay an amount of money that they ask and get out and stay outside?

Some people who have to stay in for a short time and have money, they can stay outside. They can sell things and work at the pigsty outside prison for themselves. Some people pay more than 100,000 Kyat and some pay 40,000 or 60,000 Kyat. It depends on the location.

Do you have to pay the Jailer?

Yes, the jailer.

What is your barracks number?

Barracks number four, first cell.

How do the jailers act or behave to prisoners?

He just came to prison sometimes. He didn't say anything too much, he was easy going.

What is your responsibility?

My responsibility was feeding. If they brought beans from the kitchen for 50 people, I had to divide the beans to each person.

You had to do work everyday. Did they give you payment?

We don't have a salary.

Do they take care of the prisoners' health in prison?

I got malaria and went to clinic one time. They gave me one medicine for preventing malaria and another half of medicine. They wrote down many kinds of medicine names in my receipt but they give me just one and a half medicines. They wrote down many medicine names in the receipt, like medicine for injections and medicine for aches.

How did jailers and wardens in jail treat the prisoners?

There was no torturing. If people are guilty, they beat them, lock their legs and put them in a dark cell. Like in prison, there is a no smoking rule. If they see people smoking, they beat them

and put them in a dark cell. And there is no fighting each other and no stealing other people's property. If people fight or steal, they beat them and lock their legs and put them in a dark cell.

In prison, the prisoners are not allowed to have property, so what property would the other prisoners steal?

There is food like coffee mix that was brought when their family came and met them.

Is there an opportunity to listen to the radio and read a newspaper?

No opportunity to listen to the radio or read newspaper but they keep a TV for us but it is just the Myanmar TV channel.

Can parents and relatives get permission to come and see prisoners?

Before Cyclone Nargis, my mother and sister came to see me but after Cyclone Nargis, no one from home came and the communication stopped. I didn't know if they are alive or not. I wrote a letter to home, it was legal writing [the jail gave me permission to write it]. They provided pen and paper with a stamp. They even said they will send the letter to my home but the letter did not arrive to my house.

Was your village included in Cyclone Nargis?

Yes, our village was in Cyclone Nargis and my house. Until now, I knew nothing about Nargis.

Can the prisoners contact and write a letter to their families?

Sometimes for legal contact, they provide paper once a month but sometimes they don't. There were two times they asked permission to see a prisoner.

Can you summarize the time since you arrived at prison until you became a prisoner porter?

From Pa Thein prison, we arrived to Mote-pa-lin *yeh beh* camp. Then LIB #707 took us off to porter. Then, on this side of Myaing Gyi Ngu to Ka Ma Maung and to 5th Brigade and we had to walk along the way.

Who came and called you from prison?

The army, LIB #707, came and called us. They told us to build a road, but they didn't say how long it would take.

What comments did the jailer make?

As for the jailer, when we were taken off to porter, he said this is another place to be happy. If you can run, you will free. You will be free after you escape and live in a good way but if you are still in a bad mood, you will have to come in this place again.

Where did they bring you after they took you out?

From Mote-pa-lin *yeh beh* camp they took us to Thaton and we slept two nights at Thaton prison. The next morning, the army came and called us and then we slept at one military place for a night. And the next morning, we went by car to Myaing Gyi Ngu and passed with boat to Ka Ma Maung. Along, we walked for five days, slept at night and walked during the day, and we arrived to Kaw Bpoh in Papun.

How did you come, by foot or car?

We walked on foot. They didn't tie us up at night, but they did surround us.

How many prisoners were there who became public service personnel?

We were all ten people included in Battalion 707. Two people escaped from 707. We continued staying with them for about two months, then we were exchanged to 708. Eight people were left when we were moved to 708. We eight people gathered [food in the forest] when we had to carry rations. We discussed with each other and we five people escaped after we said we will pick Jackfruit. Three are still left. We stayed first with Battalion 707. I stayed in a column deployed to a battle office [camp]. We escaped when we took rations to Kaw Bpoh.

What did the army ask you to carry?

Things I had to carry were many beans, rice, cooking pots, garlic and onions in a big basket. The weight is more than 20 viss.

How many people were there in the troop that you came with?

The total strength is more than 100 people. I saw many people who were under 18. I thought, over ten people. There were over 30 public service personnel in the battalion. We were all prisoners. At about 7:00 am at Kaw Bpoh, we passed two or three mountains then we saw a hut and we entered the hut. We saw *A'mon* and *Pa Tee* [Aunt and Uncle] cooking. We told them "*Pa Tee, show us the way that goes back to Papun*". They couldn't speak Burmese very well. They brought us here. Then we saw a group of people who were cutting down trees for a hill field. He spoke to the group in Karen and asked them to send us. And we met with the KNU organization.

When you arrived to the KNU, did the KNU soldiers treat you in a bad way or torture you?

No, they treated us like brothers. They cooked for us. And they sent us the way we went, and took security for us.

How do the SPDC soldiers behave to villagers when they go through the villages?

They asked villagers the way. I have seen them ask like this. I didn't see them take chickens and pigs but they took all the fruit that they saw without asking permission from the owner. Not the army I stayed with, but the DKBA, made mistakes and shot villagers. They retold it that they thought the villagers were rebels so they shot them. I have heard that.

Did you have enough food when you portered for them?

We two people had to eat from one mess tin. It was not enough. They fed us twice a day, morning and evening. For curry, we just found things in the jungle. We didn't eat together, they ate their own and we ate our own. We had to set up huts and smooth the ground for them but for us, we had to roll out a waterproof floor [plastic tarp] and sleep on the ground. They didn't tie up us when we slept but the sentry always come and check us.

On the trip, did you have to go in the front, the middle or behind?

That depended on the area. If they thought it was dangerous and they dared not go, they said '*go, go, you go first, we will follow you*'. Sometimes, where it was a place that we could run or escape, they said '*hey you stay in the middle, stay behind me*'. They said it like this.

When did you escape and become free?

We escaped on February --- 2010. There were five people, including me, that became free. They didn't see us run. For so long, I thought they were following us. We heard two or three gun shots.

Do you have contact with your family?

The communication with my family stopped after Nargis.

What is a common job that people do in your village?

Mostly water jobs, like fishermen and *thay koh myaw koh* [transport logs by floating them in the river]. Most people are doing this job.

Is there a school in your village?

Yes, there is one high school. There is not much adequate support like they need blackboards in the school and drinking water pots. They take it from students and buy it. The school was not formed by villagers. It was set up from above.

Can school principals, staff and volunteers get enough salary and make a living with their salary?

No, the salary they get, they can't deal with their family. So they hold a teacher worship festival and a full moon festival and make donations. They just donate a little and for the rest they eat.

Are their raw lands for villagers to work and make a living?

There are not too many raw lands left. All have owners.

In your opinion, are the things the SPDC does right or wrong? Do they fix civilians problems?

Most things they do don't make civilians satisfied. They are dictators and do what they think. They ask people to do things without fail. I thought the things they do are wrong. They just view their side. I didn't want to do this job as a public service personnel. The way I went was dangerous and I worried that I would die. I thought about escaping all the time. I escaped once and I was re-arrested in Papun city. The Papun army arrested me and sent me to LIB #707 again. After they sent me back to LIB #707, about 20 people surrounded me and beat me. I got injured on my head and my legs. Even though I got injured, they didn't let me stay like this. The next morning I had to strike the roads to sweep for mines.

Anything else?

If the SPDC stays governing the country in this system, all good people will become bad people. I suffer in my heart because of Nargis. My house was taken away by Nargis. For this reason, I have not had communication with my family. I don't know whether they died or not. Even though I had to follow the army here, my family is in my brain. I thought about running, escaping and going back all the time.

How many people escape before you?

There are 10 porters in LIB #709 and all of them escaped. In our battalion, #707, there were ten people. Before we escaped, two had already escaped. I was the only one who was re-arrested. The rest of the people are free. If I went back from here, I would not go back to my city or village but to a suitable place for me to do a job for my livelihood.

Interview | Thin Paing, 42 (February 2010, Papun District)

Address prior to arrest: Mon Yaw City, Sagaing Region
Ethnicity: Burmese
Religion: Buddhist
Occupation prior to arrest: Farmer
Marital Status: Married
Reported reason for arrest: Incitement to murder
Date of arrest: August --- 2008
Reported sentence:
Reported date sentence began: December --- 2008
Prison(s): Mon Yaw; Kin-tha; Toungoo
Date sent to labour camp:
Labour camp:
Date taken to porter:
Size of group taken to porter: 200 from Kin-tha; 100 more from Toungoo
Area/ location portered: Pla Koh
Battalion: Operation Command No-2
Number of soldiers and porters (exact, not a ratio):
Date of interviewee's escape:
Number of porters escaped (not including interviewee):
Location of interviewee's escape:
Location of interview:
Date of interview:
Future plans: Back to Burma but not to home village

Now why did you arrive here?

I followed the Tatmadaw army as a porter.

Were you in prison?

Yes, for *lu thath ah pay* [incitement to murder]. My prison number was 6---. I had to be in prison for eight years.

Can you explain your crime to me step by step?

A person took a stick and hit another person and then he died. He said he got the weapon [stick] from me when the police questioned him, so it became *lu thath ah pay* [incitement]. I had to be in prison for eight years. The person who hit the other person got ten years.

Who came and arrested you?

I didn't know their names, but they are *Bo Lin* [2nd Lieutenant] and Corporal. They are police. Two of them came and arrested only me. For him [the murderer], it was different.

Where did they arrest you?

I was at home.

Did they torture you when they arrested you?

Yes, at the police station.

After arresting you, where did they call you?

From home to the police station. I had to stay in jail for an evening.

After they charged you, which prison did they send you to?

They sent me to Mon Yaw City prison on August --- 2008. I was imprisoned [sentenced] on December --- 2008.

What was your prisoner identity card number there?

2----.

Can someone pay money [to bribe the jailers] before they are put in prison?

No, you can't.

How did the jailers and wardens of the jail treat prisoners in prison?

They treated us unfairly. In prison, we had to *bpeh nyint* [squeeze beans]. They didn't give us money for this daily work. They fed us fish paste and bean curry. For healthcare, if it was serious, they sent us to the hospital but, if it was not so serious, they just gave medicine. There was no torture of prisoners. No radio, no reading was allowed but we could watch TV. No writing letters to our family but they let us meet once a week with our family, once every 15 days The time we had to meet with our family is 10 minutes. People who came and met us had to pay 500 kyat to the jailer. After 10 minutes is completed, they ask them to leave the things they brought [gifts and bribes for the jailer] and told them to go back.

How long did you have to stay in prison before you were taken out?

15 months. After 15 months I was sent to Kin-tha Camp. Then, after staying there one and a half months, I was sent to follow the troops as a porter.

When you came, did you come by trunk or on foot?

From Kin-tha to Toungoo we came by truck. They didn't tie us up but they fettered [shackled] us. They unlocked us when we portered with the troops. There were 100 porters from Toungoo and 200 from Kin-tha.

Did Jailer tell you where you were being sent?

No, but they said they will send us to *kyaunt tu* [rock production] camp. They came and called us at night time. They took us out [to porter].

Along the way, as a porter, what experiences did you have?

We were just in the truck, never walking down. They follow you even you go [to urinate or defecate]. We couldn't go anywhere. No prisoners died, but there was torturing by the Tamadaw because we couldn't do what they asked us to do. They said, '*you work so slow*'. They shot, but not directly at a person [as an intimidation tactic].

Did the soldiers tell you, '*don't escape, if you escape you will meet with* ta bo *[a rebel group] and they will kill you*'?

Yes, they said, '*don't escape, you will meet with* Ng'Bpway *and they will kill you*'.

Did you believe that?

I escaped because I didn't believe it.

How did they feed you in jail?

In the morning, fish paste and bean curry. In the evening, fish paste and morning glory curry.

Where did they send you and what military unit did you have to follow?

Byu ha [Operation Command] No-2.

What did they ask you to carry?

Rations, rice, beans and bullets but they didn't ask us to carry weapons. There were more than 100 soldiers and prisoners. No other villager porters were included. They divided the loads so that in one tin there were enough bags for two people to carry. If we walked slowly, they kicked us in the back. They ordered us to follow and catch each other. If we couldn't follow, they pushed and beat us.

What is the age of the youngest soldiers in the troop?

It included 16 year olds. As far as I know, there were four or five of them in Operations Command 2. They oldest age [of porters] was 55 years old. They had to carry the same amount of things. They asked you to carry even if you couldn't carry. No kindness.

Were you also tortured? Why?

Yes, I couldn't follow and catch the others. They hit me with the gun more than four or five times.

Was he a soldier or an officer?

No position, he doesn't have even a chevron. He is just a Private. Their officers know but they let them do it, kick and punch the porters, if they can't walk and carry. They tortured people who couldn't carry and walk.

Do they provide enough food to prisoners?

No, they just fed us sometimes. They fed us twice, in the morning and the evening. They fed us just one plate, whether you have had enough or not. We can't ever ask for more if we have not had enough. They just fed us fish paste, nothing else.

Do soldiers and porters eat the same food?

No, not the same. For them, they cooked canned beef and beans.

Are they not the same humans [rhetorical question]?

Yes, same humans but…… [trails off]

Do they give medicine if the porters get sick?

Sometimes when we go and ask, they give it if they want to give. Sometimes, they don't give. They pretend they forget.

How do they let you sleep at night?

We slept on the ground. As for them, they slept in a hut. They didn't give us a rest, even when we are tired when we are carrying. That why I escaped. They didn't let us rest and we can't even drink water. We knew they had water bottles, but they didn't give us when we asked. Even if you are thirsty, they didn't give them. Before we escaped, there was one person who got sick, but not so serious. They didn't give him medicine when he went and asked. They give it one day if the porters are seriously sick. After one day, whether you become well or not, you have to follow them. They kept us between two of them.

Where did you escape from to get here?

I don't remember the camp. The first camp was east of Pla Koh. They told me to follow and catch up with the other people. I tried but I couldn't catch up with them. I was tired and then they kicked me in the back and my rice bag fell down and they kicked me twice on my chest. I told him I was trying but I couldn't and he told me '*who are you, are you not here to satisfy me"*? I picked up my rice bag and tried to catch up but I jumped down into a gorge before I arrived to the camp. They besieged me and shot at me. I was not shot but they told their officer that I was shot. Just I alone, no other friends, escaped. I don't remember the date.

Who did you meet and who helped you on the way from there to here?

I saw no people on the way, no government soldiers. Then I saw one of Sa Ya's [honourable word to denote leader or teacher] soldiers. I don't know where. And I followed and came to their camp. I slept five nights on the way to here.

Where did you get food from?

I got nothing. I have a milk can. I took milk cans that they kept in camp. I ran with those milk cans. I brought seven milk cans but there are just one and a half left. I gave the rest to one of the soldiers who I met. I hadn't eaten until I met with that soldier.

What did you do before you were in prison?

I opened a shop and did a hill field. I sold curry, rice and potato, tomatoes and onions.

What was your village/city situation before you were in prison?

Just normal, some people did hill fields, some people repaired cars. There is a high school in my village.

Are the salaries for teachers and government staff enough for their family?

No, they also have to find a way on their own. For villagers, some people have a good situation and some do not.

What is your viewpoint on the Tatmadaw?

The civilians too are not satisfied. They have to stay quiet because they are afraid and dare not point to the Tatmadaw. The things they do are not correct. They torture and oppress. They have no humanity. They do things that are nonsense. They don't care for any others but themselves.

How do civilians suffer under the Tatmadaw's governing?

They are stressed.

Anything else you would like to say?

I want them to be dismissed.

Were there any porters who escaped before you?

Yes, no one was re-captured by the army. They are all free.

What is you future plan? Do you want and dare to go back home?

I will stay in some city. I dare not go back home directly to my village. They will re-arrest me if I go back. Now, I haven't had contact with my home. I will contact them by phone when I leave here.

Interview | Thant Shin, 48 (February 2010, Papun District)

Address prior to arrest: W--- Township, Bago Division
Ethnicity: Burmese
Religion: Buddhist
Occupation prior to arrest: Shop keeper
Marital status: Married
Reported reason for arrest: Robbery
Date of arrest: June --- 2006
Reported sentence: 20 years
Reported date sentence began:
Prison(s): Insein; Tharyawaddy; Kin-tha 1; Toungoo
Date sent to labour camp:
Labour camp: Kin-tha 1
Date taken to porter: December 9th 2009
Size of group taken to porter: 200 from Toungoo
Area/ location portered:
Battalion: Major Soe Aung
Number of soldiers and porters (exact, not a ratio):
Date of interviewee's escape: January --- 2010
Number of porters escaped (not including interviewee):
Location of interviewee's escape:
Location of interview: Papun District
Date of interview: February --- 2010
Future plans: Thailand

Until you had to follow the army, what law did you break?

Robbery. I was arrested on June --- 2006 in Bago district. They brought me to Bago No. 1 [military] camp. They kept me two and half months before they clarified the case. They questioned me, then they opened action. It hurt my nerves and my health became poor. The Bago District court [No. 1] sentenced me. I don't remember the name of the judge, but it was a woman. There was no bribing. They asked for what they needed. And they made appointments time by time. There was no demanding money. They sentenced me to 20 years and I was sent to Insein prison. I don't remember my prisoner number, because it changed from here and there. In Kin-tha, my number was 0----. After I lived in Insein for three months, I was sent to Tharyawaddy prison. And after three years at Tharyawaddy, I arrived at Kin-tha [No.1] camp. I stayed there for over two years. There were over 800 public service personnel in Kin-tha. As the orders come from above, we have to produce a limited number of rocks but, in reality, we had to produce 40, 50, or 60. That is how jailers and wardens of jails do it. People who can give them money don't need to work, do sentry duty and boil water. They give money to them so they don't need to work. It is different, some people give as they have, 200,000 or 300,000 Kyat. For the people who don't have money, they give 40,000 or 50,000 Kyat. There is no specific amount.

How do they treat you if you get sick or injured?

If you are sick, they give medicine, but the medicine is not enough. Even if you are not well after two or three days, you have to follow them and work.

Do people die when they work?

Yes, when they work, the soil and rocks are falling down. They die directly. People who didn't die but lost their leg or hand, they get sent to hospital. The rest job is hospital. After they

become well, they just leave them. They get sent back to Mandalay prison. For the food, in the morning it is beans and in the evenings it is *ta ler bpawh* [curry]. Brutally, they asked to work, as they order. They have to feed us curry and meat twice a day but sometimes they fed us just once. So that is how people thought we will run [escape] to a place where there is freedom.

When were you taken out to porter?

On December 9th 2009, they took out 200 people. They sent us to Thandaung and the army came and took us at night. They worried that people will know if they take us out during the day time. They brought us to a battalion on the mountain. Then, the next morning before dawn, we moved out. From there we went to Shwen Jail. They said it was *thamu* [at point] 60. We arrived there and slept one night. Then they sent us to Baw Hser Koh military camp, with troops and trucks. Then directly, we put down the loads and followed the troops. We followed three battalions in Operations Command. As I said a moment ago, we arrived at Kee Mu. Then we returned to Ler Mu Bplaw. They said we had to carry injured people.

How long did you have to stay with the Tatmadaw on the front line?

How long did I have to stay? Over one month. They ordered us to carry rations. If we can't do it, they kick and punch us. Sometimes they shout, and say, they will shoot us to death if we can't do it. Before I though, the army is from our own Myanmar. I don't think that they will be heartless like this. When I look at this, oh, the army is not easy.

How much fighting happened?

We faced attacks three or four times. When we went with *Byu Ha Moo* [the Operations Commander], he got injured at a rocky mountain and we turned back. His name was Major Soe Aung. I didn't know how many died but four or five people got injured. One was cut, when he stepped on a landmine. They don't transport their rations by truck to Ler Mu Bplaw because they are afraid of landmines. There is a vehicle road but they said landmines were planted so they use humans.

Why did you escape?

Because we can't eat until we are full. Sometimes, within two days of not eating, I lost my heart. If we say we can't do it anymore, they will beat us. Some they beat and kick in front of us. But I can't do that but I let them pull my hair. There were many people who escaped in front of us. I heard they shot them to death. Even they [the soldiers] said they did. If you dare to escape, you can but we will shoot and kill you. Even if you see the rebels, they will kill you.

When did you escape?

On January --- 2010, I escaped. There were four people, including me. About three hours after we escaped from there, we followed the road that is good. We saw a hut and we entered the hut. I called Pa Tee, Pa Tee and I entered the hut. Three of us were in front of the hut. I entered at the back. Then I stepped on a landmine. I told my friends, put me up in the hut. I will not go anywhere from this hut, people live in this hut. Put up me in the hut, also you guys don't leave me. They put me up, when I am in the hut, I made a noise '*hooo, hooo*' then about half an hour later, this organization arrived. They asked, '*are you guys Tatmadaw soldiers?*' They pointed at us with guns. We raised our hands and said '*no we are refugees and porters*. *We stepped on a landmine, don't leave us*'. '*Ok are you sure?'* They checked our loads and they said, '*we won't leave you guys'.* They make *dta bow* [a bamboo stretcher with a hammock] for us. They said '*here, carry with this one and follow us. The road is large, you don't need to worry'*. They waited for us in front and we followed them. They couldn't send me directly to the hospital. They made a place for me and lit up a fire. For medicine, at 8:00 pm, they called a

medical officer. The medical officer arrived. He hung up one medicine and injected medicine maybe twice and gave me medicine. He couldn't do anything about the wound. They will send me the next morning. Then they sent me to hospital the next morning.

How is it different between what the SPDC said and your experience?

The things they have said were that if *Ng'Bpway* [ringworm soldiers] see you, they will kill you. When I saw [the KNLA], I thought, Ah, it is reversed. *Ng'Bpway* is really them [the Tatmadaw]. This group [the KNLA] helps us with anything. We didn't know anything about this group before. Now this group, if I say, if I can shout to the international community, I want to shout. Their heart is worthy, they prepare everything for us. They want to feed us with what they have.

What did the medical officer say about the wound?

The medical officers said you don't need to cut it off, it will become better, don't worry. Stay here. They treat my wound and now it become well. I am very glad in my heart when It happened like this.

What are your future plans?

My future plan is, I will not go back home. I will go to Thailand. I have my daughter in Thailand and before I have been work there, doing agriculture. So I decided to go and stay there. I have a wife, she is at village. I will not go back.

What is your point of view towards the SPDC?

Before I thought that the SPDC army is the people's army. But when I came together with them, they said *Ng'Bpway* is them [the KNLA]. In reality, *Ng'Bpway* is 100 times better than them [the Tatmadaw]. That is my view, as I have experience and have seen. It is different from them. I want to say their army is the army that doesn't have kindness.

Interview | Pyo Ko Ko, 25 (February 2010, Papun District)

Address prior to arrest: M--- Township, Kachin State
Ethnicity: Kachin
Religion: Christian
Occupation prior to arrest: Farmer
Reported reason for arrest: Selling drugs
Date of arrest:
Reported sentence: 22 years
Reported date sentence began: January --- 2005
Prison(s): Lashio; Mandalay; Kin-tha (2)
Date sent to labour camp:
Labour camp: Kin-tha (2)
Date taken to porter: December 18th 2009
Size of group taken to porter: 150 from Kin-tha (2)
Area/ location portered: Gko Daw
Battalion:
Number of soldiers and porters (exact, not a ratio):
Date of interviewee's escape:
Number of porters escaped (not including interviewee):
Location of interviewee's escape:
Location of interview:
Date of interview: February --- 2010
Future plans:

What crime did you have to go to prison for?

Drugs. The drug police arrested me and sent me to M--- police station. I lived in the police station for one month.

You are in prisoner because of a drug case. Did you use it or sell it?

I don't use this drug, I didn't even know about it. My sister came and kept it there in my mother's house. I lived with my mother. When I came back from market, the drug police came and investigated and arrested everyone, including my sister. She is also in prison. *Ya ba* [amphetamines] was found in my sister's house and opium too. She also had to be in prison 22 years.

Do they ask money from your family?

No money. All the money was taken by police. Gold, watch, camera. They took everything, left nothing.

Do you know the judge's name?

No, they sentenced them to 22 years. On January --- 2005, the judge gave judgment. After that, I was sent to Lashio prison.

What is your prisoner number?

1---. After Lashio prison, I was sent to Mandalay prison and, after that, they sent me to *yeh beh* camp, Kin-tha (2). I worked there for two years. They took out 150 people from Kin-tha (2), on December 18th 2009.

How many prisoners in Kin-tha (2)?

There were about 800 prisoners. They chose 200 people but later they took just 150 people. They reject them because they were not healthy and couldn't speak Burmese. Some people gave money.

How many people gave money? And how much did they have and to whom?

I don't know how many people. They paid 400,000 or 500,000 Kyat to the jailer.

What was the troop who came and took you out when you arrived to Toungoo?

The troop I followed was called *K'late* [name] troop. I don't know their battalion number. From Toungoo, we travelled on trucks day after day until we arrived to Shwegyin. Then we had to walk on foot along a vehicle road for two days. We went and built a new camp, called Gko Daw. That place is in the jungle. There is a river. The road also is new. I don't know the battalion name. I lived with them not even a month. Three weeks, maybe not a full three weeks, just over ten days I lived with them.

Why did you escape?

They swore and tortured me a lot. I didn't want to live anymore. They beat you if you can't work.

Is there any one who escaped before you?

Yes, two people escaped before me. I don't know any of them. We three escaped in the early morning at 5:00 am. I don't know whether one was arrested. I met the other one on the mountain. He said he was shot. Before I met with revolution group, I went and lived in Shwegyin [town] for one week. Then this *A Ba* [Uncle] brought me here.

How many public service personnel did they shoot to death when you lived with them?

I didn't see public service personnel die. They beat us, swore at us and didn't give us medicine even when we were sick.

What did they say to public service personnel about running away?

They didn't say anything about that. Aw, yes they said that. You guys, don't escape. We will shoot you if you escape. But I ran because I didn't want to stay with them anymore.

What is your future plan?

I dare not go home so I will find work here. Can we go to a third country? I have a desire to go and work abroad.

Don't you want go back and see your child?

I want to see but I dare not go back. I will call when I can. If I have money, I will build a house and live here. I will stay here and don't want to go anywhere.

What about food? How did they feed you?

The food was not good. Sometimes, we cannot have enough food. No curry. Even if you don't have clothes and slippers, they kept you just like this.

What kind of army do you think they are?

Not good-hearted. They took 100,000 kyat and 5,000 yuan from me.

How much do they demand for you not to be in prison?

500,000 or 600,000 kyat. The judge demanded it by referral.

How do the civilians have to suffer from Tatmadaw abuse?

If you travel by day, they take people's money like thieves. They are the police, so no one dares to travel by night.

Interview | Yay Kan, 27 (February 2010, Papun District)

Address prior to arrest: M--- Road, L--- Township, Yangon
Ethnicity: Burmese
Religion: Christian
Occupation prior to arrest: Student
Marital status: Single
Reported reason for arrest: Murder; robbery
Date of arrest:
Reported sentence: 20 years
Reported date sentence began: November --- 2005
Prison(s): Insein; Kin-tha (2)
Date sent to labour camp:
Labour camp: Kin-tha (2)
Date taken to porter: December 14th 2009
Size of group taken to porter:
Area/ location portered: Bollkata
Battalion: #302, commanding officer Ba Htay
Number of soldiers and porters (exact, not a ratio):
Date of interviewee's escape:
Number of porters escaped (not including interviewee):
Location of interviewee's escape:
Location of interview:
Date of interview: February --- 2010
Future plans:

For what crime were you in prison?

I was in prison with a murder case.

Can you tell me about the murder. When was it and what happened?

I had four or five friends. One night, we went and sat in the B--- teashop that was open 24 hours a day. A friend of one of my friends quarrelled and they were arguing upstairs. We were downstairs. I had never seen the person who died. I just know they had an argument and he was killed by knife. I didn't know exactly what happened upstairs. So I didn't want to be questioned by the police. I thought it would be fine if I avoided police in Y---. The case occurred and they put many Sections of the Act on us: murder, robbery, invasion of territory and entering at an inopportune time. There were two girls who stayed with the person who died, Ma Sandan was one. I don't know the other one but it was only her friend. Those two said that they knew who was included. For me, I knew nothing about this case. I was arrested at Yin Na Chaw when I contacted home. I knew nothing about whether the person was dead or not. These guys, after it happened upstairs, when we were sitting in the restaurant, they gave me a ring, pretending it was their ring. They said sell it and pay the food cost and they went out. I thought it was simple and true what they said. I didn't think someone died. I also thought, it wouldn't happen like this. They were all students. I didn't think they would dare do this. I didn't think it was serious and that, in reality, someone had died. We were charged from Bpa Han police station for murder, robbery, entering at an inopportune time, invasion of territory and rape. How this can happen? They questioned two girls who are with the person who die. Is it correct or not, they asked many questions to get the answer. I thought they [the two girls] opened a new case of rape in the courts of law. There was a full list of actions under the Act [charges] when I arrived to the police station. In really, I have done nothing and was not clear about actions under the Act, when I first arrived. Then they questioned us. They locked our hands with three handcuffs. They interrogated me and I said I have never seen the person who died. When I

told the truth, they said no. And they talk about rape. They said it and I couldn't suffer anymore. I got angry. How could I get aroused if I had killed a person? After that, the camp commander took off the rape case. Then I faced the case in a court of law in the West District Township court. It included a girl who sat and ate with me in the restaurant. This girl was freed in the Township Court. We were charged, all five people [that were arrested]. They changed actions under the Act, from [article] 395 to [article] 394, rape and harm. They transferred us to the West District courts. We faced the case there. Finally, that still left articles 302, 394 and 568. They took off [the charge under article] 114 the day they passed judgment. We were sentenced to ten years under article 302, five years under 394 and five years under 568. The total was 20 years. There were four people in prison in this case.

You didn't kill [that man] so how did it come to you?

When they passed judgment on us, the judge read out for me, including murder and robbery. The lawyer told me, you can re-apply for appeal and it will reduce your sentence to ten years. It will cost money, he said like for the cost of paper. It will cost money and the person above will not negotiate with us. How can I say, they just sign and they have special power in their work. As for the rest, we have no chance to talk to a lawyer. I went out from prison, before I attended the West District court of law, and I had to stay at *See Tee Wet* [detention centre for prisoners awaiting sentencing]. When I stayed in *See Tee Wet*, they didn't give too much time for my family to meet with the lawyer. After we ate rice, we had to attend the law courts.

As with this situation, even if you don't kill someone, it becomes your crime. In the current situation under SPDC legislation, if you have money to pay for your freedom, how much money will it cost?

How can I say, some of our friends are *bpaw yaw* [dishonest]. They want their children free. Any parent wants their son or daughter to be free, so they hire a lawyer. At that time they hired different lawyers. For our case, each of the lawyers didn't negotiate with each other, we fought with ours, so we all have be in prison. Even if I hire the lawyer for the rest of the people, the people who want to be free, I heard what kind of reason they give. When I arrived in the court of law and took an oath, I thought it was just a paper, there was no trust about taking an oath because the real situation that happened and the answer that they give are not the same. They give reasons like that it was dark and their son was reading in his room because the exam was close. At the time when the incident happened, he was reading in his room, said one of the parents who wanted their son to be free. But the complainant who prosecuted us reported that we three friends were at the incident place during the incident to the court of law. One of us refused and it is like we all refuse. It became like I killed him or my friends killed the man because we were very close to the incident place. Then they said, the blood is on my shirt and trousers. I didn't go near the man who was killed, I have never seen him. But they said the blood is on it. I don't know how the blood is on my shirt and trousers. I don't know anything about their examination. In this case, they included us all together. They told us to make an appeal. If you make an appeal, th eten year sentence will decrease, said the lawyer. But I said I won't do it. Your name is already on the black-list when you have to be in prison. It the same as if a young man's foundations broke apart. No one will trust you. In our community, don't say anything about ex-convicts. You are just a bad person if you have been to the police station, we avoid them as a friend.

According to the SPDC legislation and the case you have to face, are you satisfied or not?

I am absolutely not satisfied because I had to be imprisoned even though I have never seen the person who died. I hate them very much. Finally, I hate every military uniform in Burma.

When was the last time you were in court and sentenced?

The last sentencing was held on November --- 2005. They passed judgment from the West District court of law. The date the event [murder] occurred is August --- 2004. I don't know the judge's name. First they sent us to the West Court (1), but there was no judge there so we had to face the case in Court (6). They passed judgment on me. Ten years for murder, five years for robbery, five years for breaking and entering other's property. The sentence passed was twenty years in total. Then they sent me to Insein prison. My prison entry number is 0----.

How long have you been in prison?

I was imprisoned and we stayed one or two years in prison and they took us out and sent us to *ye beh* work camp. They didn't keep us in prison like this, because they arrested and put many in prison. I will not more about that if I live in where I live in outside. When I arrived in prison, there were many people who were there for actions [crimes] under acts they passed. If you urinate beside the road, if you hide in the dark so the prisons are always full of people. They sent me to Kin-tha (2) rock production camp, Ta Gone, Naypyidaw division. In there, we had to do rock production. I had to live there since the camp was built. I have stayed there for three years.

Tell me about the work situation in Kin-tha?

The situation when we first arrived at Kin-tha, the prisoners with long sentences, above 10 years, were also sent from Mandalay prison. We were fettered with two chains. We had to work, hard work. When it is the rainy season, the fetter becomes rusted but we had to stay like this for 18 months. We had to work like this. If you get sick, but it is not serious, like a fever over 100 [degrees Fahrenheit], you can take a rest. If you just get a fever under 100, you have to work. If you have a small injury, they treat us, like with what we bought in Yangon from a small tin, red in color. It costs just 600 kyat. They put that red medicine and Chinese medicine, Datra or Paracetamol, just using Chinese medicine and cure it. There is no definite cure so there is a dead eve they should not be dead.

How did you feel when you lived in Kin-tha?

I suffered in Kin-tha. We had lower positions than beggars. Then they tightly rule. The rules are in their hands. Even if we follow the rules they set up, we have to suffer if they are dirty [use rude words] to us. Many suffered this chastisement. Always, many kind of dirty words that we have to suffer. It is worst for us, the prisoners with long sentences. They said there is no trusting us so they give many reasons and keep us in a bad place, a place where we have to work hard and where we have to work without resting.

When were you taken out to porter?

They took us out to porter on December 14th [2009] and then they sent us to Toungoo prison. In Toungoo prison, I slept two nights and went with *K'late* troop #302. As for them, they called us for service. I had to follow as *wan saung* [public service personnel]. When I followed them, they tied us up and they put us to work. There was a rope at our wrist when we carried things. They tied the rope with a solider who controlled us. If there is fighting, they can hide in a good place and, as for us, we can't run and hide and have to die bare [in the open] like this. There are many actions that I saw they did to stop porters from running and they can ask us to do what they want.

From Toungoo, step by step, how did you come with SPDC army?

The place that keeps troops which are withdrawing from the frontline and the troops coming up from the backline [where troops rotate] is T'ma Yon, past Shwegyin. The troops are gathering

there and make a line, at around 5:30 pm when the sun goes down. After we arrived at T'ma Yon, the soldiers lined up and stood at attention. In the morning, they divided people, over 150 people from our Kin-tha (2). They divided those people [to go with different battalions] and we who were included to go to Bollkata camp were 55 people. I though they divided the rest of people, because there were many battalions there. As soon as I arrived at Bollkata camp, I had to sleep one night. Then, they set up two new camps on the frontline. We don't know the military words they used for the camp names. There is the middle camp and the front camp. They called the leader I followed, Ba Htay. He was the highest-ranking officer on the way.

What is his responsibility?

His responsibility is, in our military operation campaign, he was the highest-ranking officer on this frontline trip. They didn't use vehicle roads and other roads. They use jungle roads and he was the one who organised it. As for the two-starred officers and the three-starred officers, after they talk to the front and to the behind, how can I say, for the troops backward and forward, he is the main organiser. Ba Htay organises it.

You said you were with #302. Which MOC is that under?

I don't exactly know the military words. The troop I followed is #302 *K'Late* troop. I was with section (1), following the artillery, so we had to go the camp that was the furthest in the front. It took three hours from Bollkata to the middle camp. From the middle camp to the front camp, I have heard they called it 'Ro Kiang So' [placename]. It took another three hours. I carried things from Bollkata, things they brought. I had to carry seven RPGs [rocket-propelled grenade launchers], two batteries and one tin of oil. I thought it weighed about 25 to 30 pounds.

How long did you have to stay with the Tatmadaw army?

I stayed with the Tatmadaw army for about one week. The curry is not good when there were many convict prisoners. They [the soldiers] would not eat like this. At that time, they just wrap up 15 milk tins of rice. We didn't have a chance to cook by ourselves. We had to carry the rice with us. The section I followed, I had to give back one milk tin to them after eating rice. I don't know how they divided it. For curry, we had to eat with the troop that we had to carry things for. Finally, they fed us dry fish paste. They fried it with oil and we had to eat it just like this.

Were there any public service personnel who died from their torture within the week when you stayed with them?

Among service porters who followed, for the present, people who were good to put to work and had good bodies came with #302, section (2) under Ba Htay. They brought just ten convicts. As for the rest of the people, they left them in Ballkata for building camp, they said, to repair. As for these ten people, I haven't seen them have trouble because our battalion just went up to the frontline. But inside the battalion, it included small soldiers. Some, don't even want the effort of carrying their pack. It had soldiers whose eye sockets became brown [sunken] and they said they can't follow anymore. These kind of soldiers have to follow. As for us, we are service porters. If they speak in a rude way amongst the others, we are the lowest. Even their small soldiers have to do what they tell them. For us, if we can't do, we already measured how big the punishment is that we will suffer. So, there is nothing that we can do. We try to be strong and try to do things for ourselves to be ready.

How many small solders?

With our section, including Ba Htay, it was around 50.

From your point of view, what kind of army are the Tatmadaw?

From my point of view, the Tatmadaw army will do as they are ordered from above. As for the rest, they don't care. They just know they follow orders from above. They don't even have social and humanitarian relations, in my opinion.

What are your future plans?

My future plans are to do work that is helping people. At present, I can't be what I want to be. I am happy when I help people. Not only doing what I want, but if others are happy, I am happy. I am happy to do work that helps people. I want to do that kind of work. But inside the government, where I live in Yangon, I have observed many organisations. There are no organisations which are helping people with heart and soul. For the benefit of our family, even in medicine and other sections, the government staff steal and take and bribe, just in those parts I saw. Me myself, I have no plan to figure out the government's task, I want to do work that helps other people. When I was a child and when school started, in our school, they called *Kyaik Chay Nee* [International Committee of the Red Cross]. I participated, but in reality, they just taught military parades and asked students to line up and work. They just did this. As for the rest, there was no helping. If I say honestly, there is no way [for me to go back]. I don't want to go back. There is nothing that makes sense, even if I go back. We were sentenced to 20 years. It is, how can I say, close to life in prison. We can say life in prison. So I don't want to go back. When you are imprisoned, I have seen and experienced it. People who are imprisoned four, five or six years, and even six months, die in *yeh beh* camp, because exhaustion kills. In *yeh beh* camp, *maw kyat* occurred. *Maw kyat* is overworking, getting tired and dying. They call it *Maw kyat*. I often saw people who *Maw kyat* and die. I am going to die if I have to be imprisoned next time, so I can't suffer from prison. Anywhere we live, we have to be good and we trust ourself. If we live a good life, we are not in trouble anymore. I have decided that I will not go back.

Is there anything else you would like to say?

Concerning the Tatmadaw army, it includes all staff that concern the government. In our GOC [General Operation Command], there were many injustices in Kin-tha (2) camp. We were imprisoned but our family could not follow and give support. I don't want to be imprisoned again. I hate the uniform that is concerned with the government.

Interview | Naing Naing, 25 (March 2010, Papun District)

Address prior to arrest: Myitkyina, Kachin State
Ethnicity: Kachin
Religion: Christian
Occupation prior to arrest: Plantation worker
Marital status: Single
Reported reason for arrest: Selling opium
Date of arrest:
Reported sentence:
Reported date sentence began:
Prison(s): Myitkyina; Kin-tha 1; Toungoo
Date sent to labour camp:
Labour camp:
Date taken to porter:
Size of group taken to porter: 200
Area/ location portered:
Battalion:
Number of soldiers and porters (exact, not a ratio):
Date of interviewee's escape: February --- 2010
Number of porters escaped (not including interviewee):
Location of interviewee's escape:
Location of interview:
Date of interview: March --- 2010
Future plans:

Now why did you arrive here?

Because I escaped.

Were you a porter?

Yes.

Were you in prison? What was the case?

Yes, for selling opium. My prison number was 5----.

Can you tell me how did you get to prison step by step?

I was in prison because I sold opium. I had to stay in prison for 15 years.

Who came and arrested you?

The drug police group.

Do you know their names?

No.

Did you ask why they arrested you?

Yes, the opium was not mine. Two of my friends came and stayed at my home. They [the drug police] busted us and investigated when they stayed at my home. They found opium. Then

they asked 'whose is it?' I said it was not mine. Those two guys said 'it is ours, it doesn't belong to him and he knew nothing'. But they said no because I am house owner, it was mine. Then they arrested me. They arrested all three of us. Their names are Zaw Htong and Daung Houng. They are Kachin ethnicity. I was in my room in my house when they arrested me.

Did they torture when they arrested you?

No.

Where did they send you after they arrested you?

To *moo yaint* [drug] office. Then they sent me to the police station. I had to stay in jail for 14 days.

All three of you guys had to be in prison?

One was freed because they follow the case. The other one had to be in prison for just four years. When follow A Yu Ka, it was extend to 11 years than he also 15 years.

When were you sentenced and after that where were did they send you?

On 3/8/2007, they sent me to Myitkyina prison. My prison number was 8167/C.

How did the Prison Commander treat prisoners when you are in prison?

I didn't see them too much. Just the prisoners led.

What do you have to do everyday in prison?

There was no work to do. They fed us *sa bpyot* [rice boiling with water] in the morning. They fed us twice a day. They didn't care about our health. They gave us just one Paracetamol or half if someone is sick. For all diseases, they give one or half Paracetamol. They do nothing. There is no torturing prisoners.

Are prisoners permitted to listen to the radio, to read a book or write a letter to their families?

There is no listening to the radio, no reading books. They don't allow us to write a letter. If we write we have to ask permission from them first. They [our families] can come and see us with *taung way sa* [permission to meet with prisoners.] I don't know about the lower prison but in our Myitkyina prison you can come everyday. You can meet just for a moment, about five minutes. They ask 500 kyat. They let people out and they go back after five minutes.

What experiences did you have in prison?

I had no experiences.

How long did you stay in prison before you were taken off?

About more than one year and I was sent to *yeh beh* camp, the Kin-tha 1 rock production camp in Ta Gone Township. I stayed there more than a year.

What did you have to do there?

I had to separate [break] rocks. They said they would give us money but it would be after we were released from prison. They didn't give us money when we came here.

You got nothing even after a year?

Nothing, all of us are the same.

Then where did they call you after Kin-tha rock production camp?

Here to porter. The police came and took us out. The prison commander told us nothing about where we had to go. They sent us to Toungoo prison. Then the army came and called us. The police sent us to Toungoo prison and the army called us from Toungoo to here. We traveled in trucks. They tied our hands. There were 200 prisoners.

Then where were you sent to camp and what was the battalion number?

I don't know the battalion number.

What other things do you know?

I had to sleep one night at a big camp before entering the jungle. I don't know the military unit.

What about the place where you escaped?

It was Point 2833, 21, MOC.

What thing did the troops ask you to carry?

Rice and beans but when we first came we had to carry Operation materials. Not bullets. We had to carry the box [of files and important papers] for Operation Commander No (1).

How many SPDC soldiers were with you?

Many, many. 200 prisoners. No villager porters, all were prisoners.

How much weight did you have to carry?

It was about 20 or 30 pounds heavy. We carried the boxes between two people. One fight occurred with our Operation. No prisoners died and also no soldiers died.

Did a porter die?

Yes, I don't know his name. He died at Point 2833. He was about 26 or 27 years old. He died because he got malaria.

No doctor? No cure?

Yes, but they didn't cure. They just gave medicine and they just gave one at that time. I don’t know about other prisoners. I just know about that one.

Do soldiers torture prisoners? Why?

Yes, because we couldn't follow anymore.

And you too? Why?

Yes, I was beaten. For nothing, even for a little thing, they beat. They slapped my face. Not with a stick. Also other people were beaten like us. They beat us when people escaped. They beat six of us. The person who beat me is a Lance Corporal. I don't know his name. Before, he was from LIB #47.

Do they provide enough food to soldiers?

No, they don't. The food they fed is not enough. They fed us two times a day. One plate, just a little. They fed us fish paste and dried fish.

Do soldiers and porters eat the same food?

No. As for them, they eat *hsi thot boo,* **[**canned fish or beef].

What about the officers?

They eat those things.

Do they [the Tatmadaw] give medicine to the porters when they get sick?

No, they don't. I don't know why.

How did they let you sleep at night?

Just like this. We slept on *kyan kin* [the floor].

Did the soldiers guard you when you slept and rested? Why?

Yes, they guard us. They worry that we will escape.

Did they give porters a rest when porters were tired?

Sometimes they give a rest but sometimes they don't. There were a lot of soldiers in front of me and behind me.

How did you escape to here?

I escaped when I went to carry water. The Tatmadaw soldiers didn't know.

When did you escape and how many people escaped?

On February --- 2010, two of us escaped. I escaped with one of my friends. His name is Z---. It took four days since we escaped to arrive here.

Who did you meet and help on the way?

We ran. That night we slept on the mountain. The next morning, we climbed down the mountain and arrived to one village at noontime. Then we asked *A Ma* [Sister] to show us the way. They cooked for us. After we ate, the A Ma's husband came back. They called us and we followed them. Then, about a 30 minute walk from that village, we came to the soldiers. Then they kept us there and feed us rice. We slept there at night. The next day we ate there in the morning and then we went out and arrived at another place. The soldiers sent us to another village. We slept and ate at that village. Then, the next morning, they sent us here. They sent us step by step.

Did Karen soldiers torture you?

No.

What is your family's occupation?

Doing orange plantations.

Tell me about the livelihood situation in your village or city before you were in prison?

It is just like this. Some people are rich and some are poor. There is a school in my village. There is a college school in Myitkyina [capital city of Kachin State].

Are the salaries for teachers and government staff enough for their families?

I thought they are not enough because the price of goods is so high. Because of high prices for goods, families face a problem.

What is your viewpoint on the SPDC?

They are bad.

How did you suffer when you had to porter for them? Do you think what they did is correct?

No, not correct.

How do the civilians suffer under the governing of the SPDC?

I don't know. I can't say.

Were there any porters who escaped before you?

Yes, the troops couldn't re-capture the two people who escaped before me.

What is your future plan?

I want to go back home. I dare to go back. I have a contact phone number. I can contact.

Interview | Thaw Shwee, 30 (March 2010, Papun District)

Address prior to arrest: Taunggyi, Shan State
Ethnicity: Pao
Religion: Buddhist
Occupation prior to arrest:
Marital status: Married
Reported reason for arrest: Drug trading
Date of arrest:
Reported sentence: 15 years
Reported date sentence began: Ten years before interview date (2000)
Prison(s): Taunggyi; Kin-tha
Date sent to labour camp:
Labour camp: Kin-tha
Date taken to porter:
Size of group taken to porter: 800 from Kin-tha
Area/ location portered: Baw Ka Htah
Battalion: Battalion #362, commanding officer Doe Thet Shwe
Number of soldiers and porters (exact, not a ratio): 45 porters
Date of interviewee's escape: February 28th 2010
Number of porters escaped (not including interviewee):
Location of interviewee's escape:
Location of interview: Papun District
Date of interview: March --- 2010
Future plans: Home

How did you arrive here?

Before, we were in *yeh beh* camp. I was taken to porter earlier this year. First, I was in Baw Ka Htah [area] brigade for one and a half months. Later I was with the group who operated in this area.

Do you know the names of commanders/ officers?

I don't know the battalion commander's name but I know the company commander's name. The company commander's name is Doe Thet Shwe.

How many porters came with you?

When we left Baw Ka Htah, there were 45 porters accompanied.

Which battalion did you accompany with?

Battalion #362

Where did you escape?

We escaped at the lower end of the hill that they are based on now. It is near the river and we escaped before the daylight came.

When did you escape?

We escaped on February --- 2010 directly to here.

How many porters escaped together with you?

Only two of us escaped.

What did they ask you to carry?

They asked us to carry their rations such as rice, milk, *a tha dtooh* (yam balls) and vegetable oil. We had to carry a heavy weight of rice. Sometimes we had to carry people [Tatmadaw soldiers] with injuries or who were sick. All the porters were convicts.

Did the soldiers torture or beat the porters?

Yes, they did. They will ask us [to walk] even if we are tired and they will beat us if we are not able to do it.

Did you see that for yourself?

Yes, I did. It was just in front of me. The porter, he was sick and couldn't eat. The soldiers also didn't feed us what they eat. They fed us very limited food. They also didn't give medicine to sick people and soon the sick people were unable to eat. Then sick people can't carry the weight they are asked to carry and get beaten.

Did they kill any porters?

No, we didn't see any yet. We only saw them torture.

Did they give you any medicine?

No, they didn't. They only ask us to carry and keep going.

Were there any porters who died amongst your battalion?

No, we didn't see yet.

Were you beaten by them?

Yes, just a few days ago. They ask me to carry a patient [Tatmadaw soldier] and I can not work then I ask for help because the road is not good and smooth. Then, they told me that you don't need to give us orders. You all just do what we ask and obey what we order. At the same time they started beating me and, the next morning I knew that I would be really unable to continue carrying the patient. So, I escaped before the daylight came.

What kink of patient did you carry?

A soldier injured by landmines.

Were there any porters who stepped on landmines?

No.

Did any battles happen on the way you came?

Yes, two battles happened on the way we came. But no porter was injured.

How long have you walked for this trip?

We started walking from Baw Ka Htah on December 30th 2009 and I escaped on February 28th 2010.

How did you feel when you arrived here?

It was very good and I was really happy for arriving here because people here have a very good relationship. And, in not very long, I think I will have contact with my family.

What do you think is the difference between the SPDC and the KNLA?

If I openly talk about this, the SPDC soldiers don't have any sympathy. We also do our duty as well that why I can say this. I don't know if the leaders will know the situation of the porters or convicts who accompany soldiers on the frontline. The soldiers order and force the porters and they never feed porters like human beings. So the porters have less stamina then they escape.

How about here?

Here is good. Everything is convenient. Everything includes food and accommodation.

How do you get in prison?

I was in prison because I was arrested when I was in the drug trade. I was charged for 15 years and now I have already been in prison for around 10 years. I was in Taunggyi for many years, then was sent to *yeh beh* camp. I was in stone production workplace when I was in *yeh beh* camp for one and a half years. After that I had to accompany the military as a porter until now.

Did they give you any payment when you worked in the *yeh beh* stone production camp?

They didn't give us any payment and more than that they forced us to work earlier in the morning. There are many dangerous in workplace. There are many people who were injured by the stone, many people blinded, broken legs/arms and also many immediately died.

Did you have contact with your family when you were in prison?

Yes I had.

Did they come and meet you?

Yes, they did.

Did you have any chance to listen to the radio when you were in prison?

No, we didn't have any chance to listen to the radio when we were in prison but we could listen to the radio when we were in *yeh beh* camp by making an understanding [offering a bribe]. Also we had the chance to read newspapers when we were in *yeh beh* camp but not when we were in prison.

How do you contact with your family?

We contacted our family by writing but some received it and some didn't receive it.

What was your relationship with the leaders like when you were in *yeh beh* camp?

The relationship with them was not too different. They are the same. They will force you to work and you just have to eat what they feed you for the whole day. We have no holidays when it rains and we also have no full-moon and new moon holidays. Only Sunday is our holiday.

What was the population of people who were working with you [as porters]?

From both Kin-tha *yeh beh* camps, all together were 800 people.

Did soldiers from the military or the police guard you?

No, it is the leaders of the prisoners [jailers] called *ah ka sa*.

Were there any women?

No, there were only men.

Who were you arrested by?

I was arrested by the police.

Did they torture you when they arrested you?

Yes, they did.

How many porter were left after you escaped?

There were only five porters left there in front of us [in the frontline].

Did they tell you about the KNU revolution group [KNLA]?

Yes, they did. They told us that they [the Tatmadaw soldiers] will shoot and kill us if we escape and we also will be killed if we are in the hands of the KNU revolution group. But we think we won't die in their hands and that's why we escaped from them.

How long ago did you arrive here?

We arrived here nine or 10 days ago.

What are you plans for the future?

I have a plan that I will continue to stay here until I get contact with my parents then I will go back home.

2009

Interview | Ah Si, 38 (January 2009, Papun District)

Address prior to arrest: W--- village, Shan state
Ethnicity: Akha
Religion: Animist
Occupation prior to arrest: Hill field
Marital status: Married; 4 children
Reported reason for arrest: Selling drugs
Date of arrest: December --- 2006
Reported sentence: 16 years
Reported date sentence began:
Prison(s): Kyaik Hto (3 months); Shway Bo (1 year);
Date sent to labour camp:
Labour camp:
Date taken to porter: around December 12th 2008
Size of group taken to porter:
Area/ location portered: Meh Wai camp
Battalion:
Number of soldiers and porters (exact, not a ratio):
Number of porters escaped (not including interviewee):
Date of interviewee's escape:
Location of interviewee's escape:
Location of interview:
Date of interview: January --- 2009
Future plans:

Why did you have to go to prison?

While I was sending drugs, a Shan organization arrested me. The organization was a political group, not part of the SPDC. I'd never seen them before. Then they released me and I came back to my home. After that, I went to visit my sister and, on my way back, they [the police] arrested me. I had to stay at Demining Department of the police office for 3 months.

How many years did they order you to be in prison?

They ordered me to stay in prison for 16 years.

Which prison did you have to go to?

They sent me to Kyaik Hto and I had to stay there for 3 months. Then I moved to Shway Bo and stayed there for a year.

What did you have to do when you were in the prison?

I had to work in the farm, planting paddy. Many people died in prison. At the time I arrived there, more than 30 people died in the prison every month because they [the SPDC] didn't have good medicine. Even though we got sick and became swollen they just gave us 2 tablets of Paracetamol. When I was at the police department I hadn't seen anybody die yet. I had to stay at the children's prison for a month. After that I was sent to Mon Ywa prison and then to Mandalay prison. And then they sent me to Toungoo prison. I was taken out from Toungoo prison and sent to the frontline.

What problem did you face on the way?

When some of my friends could not walk the SPDC soldiers struck them. We had to pass many military camps on the way. A man was left on the way because he couldn't walk any more.

How long have you stayed at Meh Wai military camp?

We arrived at there on December 12th 2008.

What do you think about the SPDC?

They are not good for us. They torture the prisoners, just like they torture their own people.

What is your future plan?

I want to go back to my home. I've planned that I will enter Thailand and go to my home because I do not have a Burmese ID card so I can not go back the way that I came before. I'm afraid of the Burmese police.

Interview | Htun Maung, 42 (January 2009, Papun District)

Address prior to arrest: L--- village, Kyaukphyu township
Ethnicity: Rakhine
Religion: Buddhist
Occupation prior to arrest: Hill field
Marital status: Married; 3 children
Reported reason for arrest: Murder
Date of arrest: October --- 2005
Reported sentence: 7 years
Reported date sentence began: April --- 2006
Prison(s): Kyaukphyu
Date sent to labour camp:
Labour camp:
Date taken to porter: November 30th 2008
Size of group taken to porter: 65
How many soldiers in operation:
Area/ location portered:
Battalion: LIB #219, under Soe Tun
Number of soldiers and porters (exact, not a ratio):
Date of interviewee's escape: January --- 2009
Number of porters escaped (not including interviewee):
Location of interviewee's escape:
Location of interview:
Date of interview: January --- 2009
Future plans: Home

Why did you have to go to prison?

When I went to find fish with a man in my village, he fell in the water and died. The police arrested me and accused me that I had killed that man. Then they sent me to prison, but I didn't kill him.

How long did you stay in prison?

I had to be in there for 7 years. If I paid them 200,000 Kyat, I would not have to be in prison, but I couldn't pay them so I had to go in there.

Could you explain to me about your experience while you were in prison?

The prisoners had to plant radish and other vegetables. We had to eat just salt and sometimes rice porridge. When we got sick they just gave us a tablet of [cold medicine] Bamedo. I was taken out on November 30th 2008 from Kyaukphyu prison. At that time 65 prisoners were taken out at the same time as me. We had to sleep at Toungup for a night on the way and then we slept another night at Bpyee Hto and then we went to the front line military camp. In the prison we had to get up in the early morning to work and then at about 11 or 12 o'clock we had to eat our lunch and then we had to take a rest for 30 minutes then continue doing the work. At 6 o'clock we had to take a bath. We didn't have much time to relax. Even though we were sick we had to be strong. If we couldn't work they shot and killed us. Recently, they shot and killed some prisoners. These prisoners had tried to escape and, when they [SPDC] caught them, they killed them. I only knew one person. I didn't know the others. That man's name was Noh Nyut Maung. He was in prison because he was a robber. They always tortured us by beating us, kicking us with their boots and also punching us.

How long were you in the SPDC frontline military camp?

I was there for 1 month and 6 days.

Why did you escape?

I realized that if I had to continue to stay in their military camp, I wouldn't be able to do it any longer therefore I tried to escape from them. Many porters escaped before me. Some porters managed to escape and free themselves, but some were caught by the military soldiers and killed.

What is your future plan?

I really want to go back to my family. When I reach any towns or villages, I think that I could go back by myself. Before I left I had to find money first and I saved it for my traveling fees. I don't have a Burmese ID card, so I will have to find a way to get back home. I really miss my family now because I haven't seen them for a long time. If I arrived at Mawlamyine I could get myself back to my village.

Do you have any other things to tell us?

Yes, the SPDC military soldiers are very cruel; they tortured us in many different ways. They beat us and we have to work and do things for them, as if we were cows or buffalos.

Interview | Htet Laing, 32 (January 2009, Papun District)

Address prior to arrest:
Ethnicity: Rakhine
Religion: Buddhist
Occupation prior to arrest: Flat field
Marital status: Married
Reported reason for arrest: Demonstrating
Date of arrest: July --- 2007
Reported sentence:
Reported date sentence began: July --- 2007
Prison(s): Kyaukphyu
Date sent to labour camp:
Labour camp:
Date taken to porter: November 30th 2008
Size of group taken to porter: 65
How many soldiers in operation:
Area/ location portered:
Battalion: LIB #219
Number of soldiers and porters (exact, not a ratio):
Date of interviewee's escape:
Number of porters escaped (not including interviewee):
Location of interviewee's escape:
Location of interview:
Date of interview: January --- 2009
Future plans: Home

How many people participated in the demonstrating?

There were about 80 people arrested during the demonstrating.

When did the demonstrating happen? And where?

It happened on July --- 2007 at Toungup.

Why were the people demonstrating?

People were demonstrating because of rising prices.

When were you released [sent to porter]?

I was released [sent to porter] on November 30th 2008 from the prison. There were 120 people taken out from the prison then, but only 65 prisoners had to go to the frontline. The other people paid money so they didn't need to come to the frontline. Each person had to pay 70,000 kyat or 80,000 kyat to be released. As for us [the other 65 prisoners], we couldn't pay them money so we had to follow them.

What did they feed you in the prison?

They fed us rice porridge. They didn't allow us to chew betel nut or smoke. We didn't have medicine in there. When we got sick they gave us medicine but we didn't know what kind of medicine, so we drank it all. When they took us from the prison we had to sleep many days on the way before we arrived in the frontline military camp. We also had to sleep at Mawlamyine

prison for a night. In the morning, LIB #219 came to the prison to take us. We came to the frontline by vehicle.

What did you have to carry on the way?

They ordered us to carry bullets and rations. We had to climb a lot of mountains on the way. When we arrived at their military camp, they ordered us to dig canals and rebuild their vehicle road. Sometimes, they tortured us by beating and punching us. On the way many prisoners escaped. Some were killed but some escaped.

What do you think about the SPDC?

They are bad, they torture their own people. We can't do anything, we always have to follow their orders and be patient with their actions.

Why did you try to escape?

I couldn't bear their torturing so I had to find a way to be free from them. If I couldn't work for them they would shoot and kill me. I didn't want to die by their hand; therefore I tried to find way by myself to escape.

What is your future plan?

I will go back to my village, if possible. I really want to see my mother and family. Maybe my mother heard that I am already dead. I've never been to this place, but if someone sends me to Thaton, I can get to my village by myself.

What did you do in the past?

I was married just three years, so I worked a hill field to raise my family. We were poor but we had to pay our flat field tax every year to the SPDC government. One acre of a flat field we had to pay for with one tin of paddy. I also did fishing work to get some income for my family after doing farm work.

Interview | Nya Aung, 26 (January 2009, Papun District)

Address prior to arrest: A--- village, Kyaukphyu town
Ethnicity: Rakhine
Religion: Buddhist
Occupation prior to arrest:
Marital status: Married
Reported reason for arrest: Murder
Date of arrest: May --- 2008
Reported sentence: 10 years
Reported date sentence began:
Prison(s): Kyaukphyu
Date sent to labour camp:
Labour camp:
Date taken to porter: November 30th 2008
Size of group taken to porter:
How many soldiers in operation:
Area/ location portered:
Battalion: LIB #219
Number of soldiers and porters (exact, not a ratio):
Date of interviewee's escape:
Number of porters escaped (not including interviewee):
Location of interviewee's escape:
Location of interview:
Date of interview: January --- 2009
Future plans: Home

How did the killing happen?

That man was always was doing drugs and bullying people. Sometimes, when he saw me he called me and slapped my face and then asked me "*are you afraid of me?*" and I said yes. One day my wife got sick and, when I went out to buy medicine, I met with that man on the way. He tried to punch me, then I tried to protect myself but he didn't stop approaching me. When he approached me, I stabbed him with my knife. After that I escaped and hid myself for three months. My parents asked me to come back and let the police arrest me. The man that was killed by me was named Maung Sh---. When I arrived at the court, I tried to explain to the judge about my case, but he just asked me to pay 700,000 Kyat. I couldn't pay him so he put me in prison for 10 years.

Who took care of your wife and children?

She had to stay with her parents.

How long did you stay in prison before serving as a porter?

I stayed in prison for a year then I was taken from prison. I was put in Kyaukphyu prison.

What did you do for the SPDC military soldiers on the way?

They ordered us to carry their things. When we couldn't walk and carry their things, they struck us. They killed the porters who tried to escape from them. When I tried to escape, one of my friends who tried to escape with me, whose name was Mya Maung, was caught by the SPDC military soldiers and then was killed.

Why did you try to escape?

We were afraid of them and we couldn't do things for them. We were also afraid that we would be tortured and killed by them. Before we escaped, they threatened us that if *Nga Bp'way* caught us, we would be killed.

What is your future plan?

If I have a chance to go back, I will go back to my village. First I will find a job and save money for my trip. I don't have a Burmese ID card so it will be quite expensive for my trip fees [bribes], I estimate it will cost about 40,000 or 50,000 kyat.

Did the villagers face any problems with their work?

They had to pay for their land tax to the SPDC government. They were disappointed with the government taxes. Even though the villagers farmed, they always ran out of their food. If the villagers couldn't pay the government tax, they were arrested by the governments' military.

Interview | Ye Ye, 29 (January 2009, Papun District)

Address prior to arrest: B---, Y--- town
Ethnicity: Rakhine
Religion: Buddhist
Occupation prior to arrest: Family owned farm
Marital status: Single
Reported reason for arrest: Murder
Date of arrest: 2007
Reported sentence:
Reported date sentence began:
Prison(s):
Date sent to labour camp:
Labour camp:
Date taken to porter: November 2008
Size of group taken to porter:
How many soldiers in operation:
Area/ location portered:
Battalion:
Number of soldiers and porters (exact, not a ratio):
Date of interviewee's escape:
Number of porters escaped (not including interviewee):
Location of interviewee's escape:
Location of interview:
Date of interview: January --- 2009
Future plans: Home

Why did you go to prison?

A thief came to my house to steal my chickens and, when I tried to catch him, he tried to hit my head so immediately I stabbed him with a knife.

How long did you stay in prison?

I stayed in the prison for one and half years and then I was taken out from the prison in November 2008.

What did they [the SPDC] ask you to do when you went with them to the front line?

They ordered us to carry their things. When we couldn't carry things or walk, they struck and kicked us.

Why did you escape from them [SPDC]?

If I continued staying with them, I would die so I tried to escape as soon as possible. The SPDC military soldiers were like cows, they didn't understand anything for people. They killed people, so they were animals. The SPDC military is bad. So we should fight them.

What is your future plan?

I plan to go back to my village to see my mother and brothers. I have 10 brothers and sisters.

Did you have your own farm? And how much rice did you get in a year?

Yes, we have our own farm but we let other people work on the land. After harvesting, the farm could provide 600 big tins of rice, so we took 300 big tins of rice from the people who did our farm. As for our family, we just bred chickens, none of us were experts on doing farmwork.

Interview | Lin Lin Oo, 32 (January 2009, Papun District)

Address prior to arrest: M--- Section, N--- town
Ethnicity: Rakhine
Religion: Buddhist
Occupation prior to arrest: Trader
Marital status: Married
Reported reason for arrest: Demonstrating
Date of arrest: November --- 2007
Reported sentence: 2 years 6 months
Reported date sentence began: December --- 2007
Prison(s): Kyaukphyu
Date sent to labour camp:
Labour camp:
Date taken to porter: November 30th 2008
Size of group taken to porter:
How many soldiers in operation:
Area/ location portered:
Battalion: LID 11
Number of soldiers and porters (exact, not a ratio):
Date of interviewee's escape:
Number of porters escaped (not including interviewee):
Location of interviewee's escape:
Location of interview:
Date of interview:
Future plans: Seek political asylum

Could you explain to me why you went to prison?

After the demonstrating in my village [September 2007 demonstration], the SPDC government tried to catch me and other people. When I knew about that, I tried to avoid them and hid myself in another place. At that time, there were around 22 people, including USDA workers, Master of Force workers, Police Association workers and VPDC workers, trying to catch me. During that time there were seven people arrested, but I was not arrested with them. When Gambari arrived in Burma and the SPDC government made an agreement with him to release the people who they arrested during the demonstration. So seven people were released. When people from my family told me to come back to my village, then I came back. Unexpectedly, one day, the VPDC chairman, who is called U San Htun, came to me and told me that they [the other members] wanted to ask me some questions and he asked me to come to his home at 9 o'clock in the morning. On that day, after they asked me some questions, the police camp Captain called U Thoung Gkyeh accused me that I had participated with the illegal organization [the demonstrating group] so I was arrested and then sent to prison. They decided to put me in prison for two years and six months. I arrived in Kyaukphyu prison on January --- 2008 and then on November 30th 2008 they took out some prisoners from the prison. Some prisoners could pay money to the jailer [U Mo Myit] so they didn't need to come to the frontline. Each prisoner had to pay 80,000 kyat and, as for me, I couldn't pay the money so I had to follow them [SPDC military soldiers].

Since you were arrested on account of the August – September 2007 protests, can you tell me how the SPDC soldiers treated you and what were their activities?

If we talk about from the viewpoint of human rights abuses, they are violently abusing human rights. I myself have experienced that. As I was a man who demonstrated against them, they had no sympathy for me. At the frontline, we couldn't take a rest. We had to carry water, cook

rice and we had no time to sit down. There were a lot of leaders and, if one officer didn't ask you to do work, another one would come and ask you to do it. For me, I had to follow the columns' officer. There were some soldiers and two porters included. They asked about me and I told them I was involved in the protest and they said, "*aha, you are a revolutionary against us*". I didn't say anything to them and I did whatever they wanted me to do. I was suffering from my waist aching. When I arrived there, I had to carry 20 mess tins, in weights between 25 to 30 viss. We couldn't sleepy punctually and the food had no taste. We woke up early in the mornings and cleared the bushes and, on the car roads, we had to dig out the car mines. If there were mines, we would die first. There is less chance of staying alive. For health care, I heard that if people were a little sick, they were given medicine and an injection but when people got sick seriously, they were killed. So I always cared for my health. I was not killed but I suffered many different kinds of oppression, even when I did whatever they asked us to do. I thought to myself, there will be no problem as long as I am healthy but there will be a problem when I get weaker. I looked for a way to run. If I stayed there, I knew they will kill me one day and so I took the risk and fled away from them. I will accept myself as a refugee at whatever place I arrive and, if I am not dead, that will be enough. When I stayed with them, if they saw a river, they asked the porters to build a bridge over the rivers. The porters had to roll the big logs to use as a bridge and the porters also had to dig the car mines' holes one inch deep and around. We had to carry the injured soldiers to the back and, when we came back [to the frontline], we had to carry rations. Even though we ate together with the soldiers, we can eat only when the soldiers give us something to eat. If we saw wild banana trees, we would cook and eat them. If we didn't see any, we ate salt. They said it was bean curry but we saw no beans in the dish. I want to say that the soldiers have strength to endure that but we don't need to sacrifice ourselves like this. I look at myself and I judge that I was not a criminal who should suffer these kinds of abuses. When we are killed, we are the only ones who will lose. There are no higher-ranking leaders that will take action on them. They also told porters that "*to kill you, we don't need to do anything, just pull the trigger and what cost is there to us to just pull the trigger? When the leaders ask us to kill you, we can kill you anytime. When you are here, there is no registration for the living, only for the dead. Just like that, you are dead and don't think about your life. You are 50 percent dead already*." They told the porters just like this. At that time, we were following LID 11 but when LID 11 went back, they would not call us to follow them back. We had to stay back with the new coming army and would have to stay for a year and then they would send back to prison. We heard this from old and experienced prisoners. So we knew that we were close to Thailand and there are armed ethnic groups here. We took the risk that we could be killed by landmines and, if we are not killed, that, when we meet with an ethnic group, we can tell them the reasons and hope they will understand. So we fled and we are here now.

They frighten the porters in many ways but do they also kill porters who flee or do they just re-arrest them?

Before we fled, they told us that they killed one porter who fled and they rearrested another but we didn't see it with our eyes. We couldn't go and have a look. They were always watching us and put the sentry soldiers to watch us. When we fled and arrived in the Karen revolution area, there was another group that fled and they told us that the SPDC soldiers rearrested one porter who had fled together with our group and they killed him. This is real and true. The person's name is Nu Nya Maung. He was also from Arakan state and I don't know his address. Before we left, we knew that they would kill everyone if people can't work and we knew that by watching their movement and actions. They always told us that they will kill people who run. "*If we can't kill you, the mines will kill you and, further than that, if the mines don't kill you and we can't kill you, the rebels will kill you anyway*."

What are your hopes and plans for the future?

I hope and would like to go back and stay peacefully together with my family but if I go back now, they will surely arrest me and imprison me again. For now, I will stay here and I will go back to my place when the country situation becomes calm and when I am safe to go back. If they promise that they will not arrest me, I will go back home.

If you go back to your home, how do you plan to go?

If I can go, I want to go back to Myawaddy or to Mawlamyine, then to Rangoon and then to Arakan state. But if I arrive there, they will arrest me. I know that for sure because they carefully watch people who were involved in the August – September 2007 protests, like where do people go and what do people do and who do people talk to, etc. For me, I have already confessed in the court that I was involved in the protest and for that they imprisoned me and put me in the prison system. In the prison, I have seen that they destroyed people's mentality and put people under the pressure of their minds. On the outside, they pressure people, especially those who are against them. They don't care even when people die. Now, even if I go back to my village with the help of people here, I will be imprisoned and, more than that, because I fled from the prison I will be imprisoned for 30 years. I want to go back and stay with my family but I dare not. Only if the situation becomes better and the country becomes a democratic country, I will go back there. For the current situation, I need political asylum here. I have two friends in Thailand who were active together with me when we were in Burma. I have their names. After I was imprisoned, they went to Burma.

As we all know that the SPDC is trying to breakdown civilians who lead in the protests and they try to arrest NLD members a lot, as they are doing like this, do you think they have already arrested most of the leaders or not and do you think this kind of event will happen again or not?

They oppress in many ways and impose economic sanctions. They restrict the work permission of the people who were involved or who led the protests or organizations against them. It was not only in Arakan state, it happened in all of Burma. In our area, most of the people earn their livelihood by fishing. For people who were involved in the protest or are NLD members, even when they say their livelihood is doing the fishing, they are still restricted in many parts of their work. They have been lying to the people of the international community step by step. The lowest-ranking people are lying to their higher-ranking officers and the officers above them are lying to the officer above them. They are lying to people just like this. In Mya Aung Town the police are more powerful than the military. Police are more oppressive than the military and we can say that the police control the area. For the unstable commodity price is happening the same as in the whole of the country. The civilians couldn't endure their oppression anymore so we protested. Actually what we actually did is only a little but the police report to the above that it is big. So our town has suffered from that. Now civilians have no rights to ask or to say anything. If they come and stretch out their hand to demand, we have to give, and if they distribute papers [work orders] and make demands, we have to give. We can't say to them this is right or this is wrong.

There are judges, police, doctors and jailers in the SPDC ruling system. Do these four groups have an understanding and work together and earn their income from the civilians or are they against the SPDC?

Their condition is hard to say. They are saying that people who give bribes and take bribes are our enemies. The Burma police logo is "*May we help you*". But for our civilians, the logo does not mean, "*may we help you*," it means, "*our civilians, may we take all your things?*" From what I know about the police in our area, they didn't get the full amount of their police salaries because the district police officer didn't give money to the Township officer and so that Township police officer couldn't give salaries to the police. When they are in that situation, the district and township officers have to look for funds to support the police. Now the police

received salaries and where did they get those money from? They get money from lottery owners, smugglers, gamblers, alcohol shop owners, prostitute [sex workers] houses and people who do all kinds of illegal work. There were such kinds of work existing in our township and in other townships too. If someone deals with the police, they can do whatever they like to do. With that money, they support the policeman's family or give salaries. If the officers above know and come to see, they will see nothing because they already prepare everything if there is surprise check and when the officers don't see anything, they say that there are no abuses. After the Arakan division officer went back, the local officer started demanding money from the civilians in order to refill the cost that division or township officer spent when they are in the area. They do the same when the police officer comes. Even if they have sign in the UN Security Council that they will not demand money and not make people work forced labor, they still do it in many secret ways. I know that they are doing this because I have worked in the Village Peace and Development Council [VPDC] and I myself have done these kinds of works. It started on the day that I stopped doing this kind of work; I started to have conflict with them until I was imprisoned. Even doctors or polices or judges in the court, if people give them money, it doesn't matter if the crime is big and serious, they can make it smaller and lighter. On the other hand, even if the crime is very small and they can't get money, they can make the crime bigger and heavier. They can make turtles become bed bugs and they can get money to make a bed bug become a turtle. The laws, such as the civil law and the penal code, are very different from what they practicing. The law is on the lip. They can free people who will be imprisoned and they can imprison people who are free from crime. The doctors are also the same as this. If people go to them, they will judge people first and, if they seem like people with money, they will treat them very well and talk to them with soft voice and smiling face. We can see that money holds a very important place in people's lives. People will do anything if they can get money and they don't care whether there is justice or injustice. These kinds of human characteristics and behaviors exist in both urban and rural area. The reason this happened is because the SPDC became the ruling system and people lost their human rights. People have no permission to trade state-to-state and we must trade within the price that they limit. In my opinion, whether a country is developed or not developed fully depends on the people who are ruling the country and the system that they use to rule the country. It may be right and it may be wrong but this is my opinion.

As far as prison is concerned, even in a division court, a township court or a state court, if people are already sentenced the jailer or the warden of the jail can do anything to free the person. The only way is to ask for appeal. We can do either inside or outside appeal. Outside appeal is when a family member hires a lawyer to file an appeal on his behalf. Inside appeal is when the warden of the jail has sympathy for the prisoners and appeals on behalf of the prisoners. This is called inside appealing. The warden of jail can reduce the sentences. People who are imprisoned with a political crime can't have their sentences reduced. If the prison officers want to make an inside appeal, they can and it depends on them. If we can give money to the jailer or warden of the jail, we don't have to work very hard and we can stay in a good room. The more we can give, the better we can live. People who can't give have to stay on the floor. When those people get sick, they say we can go to the clinic in prison. When we go there, to get just one Paracetamol and one cold medicine, we must give them at least a small package of coffee. The warden of the jail told the prison doctors or the medic that if the sick person is in danger of death, let them know half an hour before the death. The doctors are not qualified doctors, they are just people who opened a shop to sell medicine or people who walk in the hospital and some who serve in the military as doctors and the warden of the jail appoints all these kinds of people to be the doctors for the prisoners. They are not legally appointed by the government. They are not expert doctors, so they just look at people and guess people's sickness is caused by malaria or flu and they give medicine. The township doctors come once a month or twice a month and we can see they check prisoners but we didn't see them distribute any medicine. They only said "*don't worry, we will get support from the ICRC for medicine and then we will give it to you*." They told that to prisoners with the sweetest tones and comfort us. But then they didn't give us anything. The expenditure was 1,000 kyat but they

report to ICRC that it was 3,000 kyat. We can see that in the prison. If they were pitied by the jail, then each prisoner could live better but if they are not, they must suffer serious oppression and torture.

In one prison, the prisoners can live in comfort or discomfort depending on the prison authority's sympathy. If the prison authority has no sympathy for prisoners, the prisoners are very ugly and in bad condition. It doesn't matter whether the people in prison have done wrong things. But now there are people who have done nothing wrong in their lives but the police arrest them anyway. Even they themselves don't know what they were arrested for, but they were imprisoned anyway. Those kinds of people lose many things in their lives. These kinds of human rights abuses are happening a lot in Myanmar.

In the prison if the order comes to take out, for example, 60 prisoners from Kyaukphyu prison to porter or to do work at *yeh beh* camp, then the jailer or warden of the jail will take out 120 prisoners for medical check and they call doctors from the division to check the prisoners to see who is able to do work and who is not. When they make medical check, they just listen once to each side of the body with a stethoscope and then say you can go. They didn't ask what diseases we have or how much we weigh or if our hearing is good or not. Then we have to go back to the prison. The purpose of taking out 120 prisoners is to demand money from the prisoners. The jailers have the authority to do this. Then they will tell 120 prisoners that you all have to go for porters but if you don't want to go you can "block" it. [This is an expression the jailers usfe to demand money from prisoners. It means "protect yourself by giving money to me"]. The jailers already know who can give and who can't give. When they select people, they will select 60 prisoners who can give money and 60 prisoners who can't give money. Then the prisoners who can give money will contact their family members outside and ask for money. People who can give money don't have to go for porter. They will demand 50,000 kyat or 60,000 kyat from each prisoner who is selected. They demand it step by step.

How did they take you out?

Firstly, they thought that I could make a money block. Before that I asked people who have experience in the prison and the prison staff. They told me "*you can't be selected to porter because you are a political prisoner and you are not like the other prisoners. They can't send political prisoners to* yeh beh *Camp or to porter. If they ask you to go, that means they are demanding money from you and I'm sure that you have had that experience*." Yes, that is sure, I have experience giving money to them so I don't have to do the work. On the night of the 28th, one of the prison staff who I know, he came to me and said "*Ko Lin Lin Oo, it is real that you have been selected to go, so please block it.*" I asked how much I had to give, and he said they said that you must give 80,000 kyat. I told him, if it's 80,000 kyat, I think I can give it but right now I don't have that much money. In the prison we can't go outside after the door is closed. I will get that money tomorrow. I will get it from my friend who is outside and send him a letter and ask for the money. If I can get the money from him, I will block but if can't get the money from him, I can't block. He said you can't say things like this. I told him, I have no money in hand and I can't guarantee that I can give it to you. It is very hard to contact outsiders from the prison. We have to give at least 2,000 kyat just for the people to call a phone for us. Sometimes even though we give money, they don't phone and they just lie that "Your family member said they are busy and they can't come and meet you." They just lie to us like this. If we ask to buy something that costs 1,000 kyat but the prison staff says it costs 2,000 kyat, then we have to give that. If our family members send 10,000 kyat, we must give them 2,000 kyat. If they know that we have money, they are always looking for ways to get our money. The prisoners are always physically and mentally oppressed in the prison.

The next morning I wrote one letter and give 500 kyat to that staff member and asked him to go to send it to my friend. My friend replied to me that he would give me the money I needed. Then I went to the jailers and said I can make a block and told them that I have people who will

give me money and also that I have prison staff who gave a guarantee for me so that you can make it happen for me. Then they replied to me "*ok we will ask for you*." The jailers tried to help me but the highest-ranking jailer U Moe Myint said that he couldn't because he said "*I already included U Lin Lin Oo's name last night*." On the 29th, at 9 o'clock in the morning, they called us and they shackled us in pairs. I still asked for the jailers to help me but the jailers said *"you can't make a block because there is a written order from Burma's Department of Jails itself that said to send you to* yeh beh *camp*". So we can't do anything. Then I tried to find out why I had to go to a jailer who I knew and they told me that "*you have to go because they dislike you and it is because you talk or request things for the prisoners whenever the Ministers of prisons come.*" When I arrived in Mawlamyine prison, I realized that I was going to be a military porter.

What is future for Arakan state if there is a lot of oppression on people who have participated in the protest and in the NLD?

In our Arakan state, the civilian spirit of disagreement and dislike towards the current government and the local police already exists. There will still be some people who like them and deal with them. They try to drive and break down the Arakan people. They also have spies and we can't do anything. All the people in Burma have the same ambition and that is to make the military government collapse. I hope that non-violent protests will occur in the future. As the students' leader Ko Twin Gkyi said, even though we are not politician or leaders, if people are insulting our religious worship, we can not endure that pain." Then we participated in the protest. In the court also I said openly that I had participated in the protest. That is why I was imprisoned. There are a lot people in Arakan state who participated in the protest and who weren't imprisoned because they let the people out who they arrested in the first group. There were still some people arrested after I was imprisoned. For me, in the court they told me that if I can give them a witness who will say that I participated in the protest, they will let me free but I know that if I called for a witness, the witness will be imprisoned with me too. So I told them that no one that I know had participated in the protest. I am not politician and I am not an NLD member and I have no contact with them at all. But in August –September 2007 protest I had participated with my own desire and for my religion I must sacrifice my life so I entered and gave some speeches. Then NLD members and some political activists honored me and I was known by BBC and VOA. So for that I was seriously oppressed.

How brutally did the police interrogate you?

They told me that "*Wherever you hide, we have ways to find you. If you tell us everything, we can let you go. You and us, we are friends and sometimes in the past we were colleagues and it is only because you got involved in the protest that you are now part of the organization which is against us.*" I told them that since I dared to demonstrate, I dared to endure punishment for what I have done. I have nothing to lie you about and I have done nothing wrong to people that would make me lie to you. When the monks protested, I participated because of my own realizations and because I had been a temple boy. The monks should never be kicked with military boots, nor beaten on their heads with a baton or a cudgel, nor shot with a gun. We only give respect to them [makes a gesture of respect by putting the palms together and raising them to the forehead]. You can ask me what you want to know and, if they are right, I will say yes and, if they are not, I will say no. How many were people included in the protest? If I say 10,000 people, they will note down it was 300 people. I say only a few words and they write more. In the court the judge read out what I have said but what judge read out is different from what I said. So I told the judge that but they held up a hand to me and said "*you have no right to talk in court*." Even if I said no, I am not guilty, if the officer orders the court to imprison me, they must imprison me. Likewise, even if people say yes and admit that they are guilty, if the officer orders them to be freed, then they must be freed. It is in the hands of the judge at court. For me, the court decree sentenced me to hard work.

What more do you want to say about the lives of people under the military governments' brutal ruling system?

Nowadays in Burma if we look at the military governments' whole ruling system, corruption is there in the first place. Why does corruption exist? Because in every departmental or individual staff of the government, there will be no people who are working for a salary of just 30,000 Kyat. They can't survive with 30,000 Kyat. They are not able to send their children to school. One common expression among the government staff says that they don't need ranks, they only need places. Now all civilians and all staff know very well that they are alone when they get in trouble or in hunger. However the SPDC military government says many times that they are working hard for the people and to make Myanmar safe. They know what they are doing. Even if they can lie the world, they can't lie to themselves. Now if one person reported that this is not correct, that person would be fired at once and the same is happening in the staff everywhere. If they talk back to their leaders about what they were ordered to do, they will be demoted or fired. If they were ordered to do it, they must not talk back. There is no right or wrong. If they are asked to plant paddy in the summer time, they must plant it and even if the paddy produces no fruits, they must show the fruits to the upper leaders. If the upper leaders ask, *"is that successful?"* they must answer yes. They take videos and show them on the television and show that they have done a great job. I have been in many of their training or meetings, like the Village Peace and Development Council training for a month, the Township Peace and development council meeting and the police department meeting. I have seen that they are all lying. I have seen no legal or right actions. Lower people have to do as they are ordered and if people do as they order, there will be no problem. Nowadays everything in Burma is becoming worse and worse, such as the education system, the high commodity prices and the increase of fuel prices. However they broadcast how many bridges they build and how many schools, hospitals and clinics they build. We will see the difference in the current situation among the civilians, if we compare the commodity prices from 1988-89 and 2008- 2009 for one viss of pork. We will also see the value of currency. Now in Burma, it is not easy for people to earn 1,000 Kyat within a day. If people are having problems with that, mostly those people are imprisoned. If people don't want to be imprisoned, if they have land or a house they sell it and give the money as a bribe and only then they are not imprisoned. If they don't, they are all imprisoned. The number of prisoners in Burma's prisons is rising more and more. In September, they said they will free prisoners who were imprisoned under section #401 of the criminal procedure code in order to reduce the number of prisoners in the prison, but actually they lied the world. People were freed just because of a guarantee, not because the government freed them. There are some prisoners who were freed legally and some who were freed illegally by giving a bribe. But I don't know how they did it. As far as those cases, we have no rights to ask anything. As long as the SPDC government is ruling, corruption will always exist in the government's staff. All staff in the government, whether an officer or a lower-ranking staff member, they all always do bribery. Otherwise, they can't support their family with their salary.

As we know, the SPDC government is oppressing all ethnic groups in Burma and all the people of Burma, but I want to know is the oppression of the Arakan people any different?

They do not oppress the people who deal with them. For example, if people are involved in a USDA group there will be no oppression. If people are entering the police force, there is no oppression on those people. They are oppressing people who are not willing to deal with them, people who criticize what they are doing and people who revolt against them. They don't care whether it is lay people or monks; they oppress everyone violently or indirectly. Indirect oppression, for example, is when people need to go somewhere they ask for an ID card and when people show them the ID card, they will ask in which township did you get it and who did it for you, etc. and if people tell them something wrong they arrest them. People can't go freely and they can't trade freely. There is no freedom. But the people who deal with them can go anywhere freely and can do whatever they like. They can even demand other people's property

and there will be no problem for them and they can be a big man. For example, they ask you to plant castor and make sure it grows. Do what they ask and people will have no problem with them. Now in Arakan state everybody must plant castor and pepper, even though people are not interested in planting it. We can't do what we like to do and this is oppression. Some people are asked to plant sunflowers in their fields but the fields are good for beans. Even though people don't want to do it, they have to. When people do and are successful, they will be always watched, because this person has money and they want to know what they will do with it. For example, people will buy a motorbike and they won't be given a license so they have to use it without a license. When they use it without a license, they have to give money to the Township officer, or give to the Township Peace and Development Council, or give to the Traffic police or give to the regional officer and this is oppression. People must buy the motorbike from them because they are the only ones who deal in trading motorbikes and, if this is not legal, how can the civilians make it legal? The villagers didn't buy it from abroad. People steal the motorbikes from their own people. There is no work that is free from them. If people can give them money, people can do whatever they like to do. A shop owner can sell alcohol if he gives them money monthly. If people make a problem in the shop, they also arrest the shop owners. If they need money, they go and demand it from the alcohol shop owners. So people can't earn their livelihoods, they have to also be afraid that people will make trouble and they are afraid of them. Civilian could earn their livelihoods from what they do. But they oppress the whole country, especially our ethnic groups. For example, if Arakan villagers go into the military, they will not get appropriate positions. These same kinds of things are happening to other ethnic groups.

When I speak out these words, I know that if they knew that I was speaking, they would oppress my whole family who stay behind but I have to say it because I can't keep secret what they have done to me. I can never have a good feeling about them. I have suffered human rights abuses and lost many opportunities. Now I have already determined that I will work against them anyway and anywhere. So whether it gives me peaceful political asylum or arranges for me to meet with my family, I would like to ask the leaders here and the people who come and collect information, please try to help me as much as you can. You can share my biography to whatever organization you like with the name of Lin Lin Oo.

Interview | Kyaw Htet, 29 (January 2009, Papun District)

Address prior to arrest: B--- village, G--- tract, Kyaukphyu Township, Arakan State
Ethnicity: Arakhanese
Religion: Buddhist
Occupation prior to arrest: Flat field
Marital status: Married
Reported reason for arrest: Negligence with fire
Date of arrest: January --- 2007
Reported sentence: 5 years
Reported date sentence began: February --- 2007
Prison(s): Kyaukphyu
Date sent to labour camp:
Labour camp:
Date taken to porter:
Size of group taken to porter:
How many soldiers in operation:
Area/ location portered: Kaw Bpoo Tatmadaw camp
Battalion:
Number of soldiers and porters (exact, not a ratio):
Date of interviewee's escape:
Number of porters escaped (not including interviewee):
Location of interviewee's escape:
Location of interview: Papun District
Date of interview: January --- 2009
Future plans: Home

Why were you imprisoned?

I was imprisoned for the crime of being careless with fire. When I burnt my field, I couldn't control the fire and it burnt other cultivation fields and then I was imprisoned.

When were you arrested?

I was arrested on January --- 2007. The police from Myo Chaung police camp, under the camp commander Aung Mya Khaing, arrested me. Then he sent me to Kyaukphyu police camp. Then the Kyaukphyu Township judge sentenced me on February --- 2007. I was sentenced to be in prison for five years.

What did the fire burn?

The fire burnt rubber plantations.

After they sentenced you, where did they send you?

I stayed one year in Kyaukphyu prison and then the police from Kyaukphyu Township came and took me out from the prison. My prisoner number is 0----/-.

What did they say when they take you out?

They came and shackled us in pairs and brought us to Toungup and we slept there one night and then continued to Pyay prison and slept one night there and then continued to Yangon and then spent one night in Yangon Insein prison and then we were sent to Mawlamyine prison. We slept two nights in Mawlamyine and then the military came to take us to IB #44 at Bilin. They

separated our prisoners and some had to follow IB #44 and 15 prisoners, including me, had to follow LIB #219 [subordinate to LID (1)1]. We had to follow the troops. We had to carry rations and bullets. They weighed about 30 viss because we had to carry one big tin of rice, bullets, condensed milk and sugar. We had to walk the whole day and we could take a rest only during the nighttime. If prisoners couldn't walk, they were beaten to continue walking and some soldiers even punched them. I was punched one or two times when I couldn't climb up the mountain in Papun. It was when I got tired and they stood up and then they came and punched me.

Was it the soldiers who punched you or an officer?

The soldiers punched me.

Then where did you arrive and where did you continue to?

We walked for 10 days starting from Bilin and, after ten days we arrived in Papun and continued to climb the mountains again and then we arrived to Kaw Bpoo camp. Then we took out rations for one month and we had to follows soldiers who take care of road security for Na Taung and Dah Kway road construction. Then they ordered us to walk in front to be mine sweepers. If we saw a vehicle mine they asked us to dig it out with a mattock. When we were digging, we found two landmines. I saw three soldiers who were injured by landmines and we had to carry them to Kaw Bpoo camp. Two of them had to have their legs cut off.

How did you feel when you stayed with the SPDC?

When we stayed with the SPDC they didn't give us enough rice. When we worked, they didn't like it when we took a rest. If we did the work and they were not satisfied, they beat and punched us. We can sleep at night at nine o'clock and wake up at 4 am. We had to do whatever they demanded us to do.

Are you happy with them?

We were not happy with them. Our lives were in danger because they often say that they will shoot to kill us and they beat and punched us so that we were afraid of them. So to be able to stay alive, we fled away from them.

What is your plan for the future?

Currently, I dare not go back to my village. I hope to go to Mae Sot to work and earn money. We asked for help from the elder people and I hope they will send us some. If I earn money, I can go back to my village in about 2010. I will go back to Myawaddy and then to Rangoon. I have never been to Myawaddy. I have no ID card but I heard people say that if we arrived in Myawaddy we can have travel documents written.

How much will it cost you to get to Kyaukphyu?

It will cost 80,000 kyat.

How many children do you have?

I have one child. Now my wife is staying together with her mother. They don't know that I am here now. They don't know that I had to follow as an SPDC porter.

When you are in village, you said you do farming. Can you get enough food from your field?

Some years, I can get enough food and some years I can't get enough. I have a field and I get four or five hundred baskets of rice. I have to give some here and there and then later on can keep some for myself. Then I have to do fishing to get enough food. If we are faced with falling prices for fish and prawns, then we will have difficulties.

Are you satisfied with people putting you in jail because the fire burnt the rubber plantation?

Firstly, the Village Peace and Development Council officer came and demanded 500,000 Kyat to arrange to free me but I couldn't pay it so he sent me to the Township court.

What make you to flee away from SPDC?

When we stayed with them, they always demanded work that we can't do and they beat, punch and hit people in front of us. So we couldn't stay there anymore. They told us that if we step on a landmine but didn't die, that they would shoot to kill us and also if we get sick they will shoot to kill. So to be able to stay alive, we had to flee. They killed two people who came from the same prison as us. Their names were Nu Nya Maung and Maung Maung Sa.

How do you view the SPDC military?

I see that that the SPDC military is oppressing their own people and all the ways they are practicing now are wrong. I only see it like this.

Interview | Min Oo, 33 (January 2009, Papun District)

Address prior to arrest: S--- village, Kyaukphyu Township, Arakan State
Ethnicity: Arakhanese
Religion:
Occupation prior to arrest: Flat field
Marital status: Married
Reported reason for arrest: Smuggling cattle
Date of arrest: May --- 2006
Reported sentence: 7 years
Reported date sentence began: July --- 2006
Prison(s): Kyaukphyu
Date sent to labour camp:
Labour camp:
Date taken to porter:
Size of group taken to porter: 65
Area/ location portered:
Battalion:
Number of soldiers and porters (exact, not a ratio): 15 porters
Date of interviewee's escape:
Number of porters escaped (not including interviewee):
Location of interviewee's escape:
Location of interview: Papun District
Date of interview: January --- 2009
Future plans:

What crime were you imprisoned for?

I was imprisoned for the crime called #5153. It is illegal cattle smuggling to another country. I was arrested on May --- 2006. The police from Kon Chaung camp arrested me and then they sent me to Kyaukphyu police station.

Can you tell me the court that gave you the sentence?

Kyaukphyu Township state court sentenced me on July --- 2006 and my prisoner number is 0----/-.

How did it happen when you smuggled cattle?

Before the time they arrested us, when we smuggled cattle to India, usually we had to give 150,000 kyat to Kon Chaung police camp every time. The time when they arrested me, we just gave them 100,000 Kyat. They didn't like that and they arrested us and sent us to Kyaukphyu police station and then the police sent us to court. They judge said that we would have to give money but we didn't. We had our own lawyers too. The lawyer told them that we had documents that we got from Sittwe. The judge didn't accept them and sentenced us to seven years in prison.

Could you have gone free if you gave money to them?

Yes, we could have gone but on the way home we would have to avoid SPDC soldiers. If they saw us, we also would have to give them money. For me, I do the cattle smuggling when we have no work to do, especially during the time after we plant the paddy in the field but before it is time to harvest. We have to go long distances with no job. So I followed people to smuggle

cattle. I got 70,000 Kyat for one time. So during the time when I don't work, I am able to get more income I do it. It took three days to go and then get back home.

How many people were arrested together with you?

There were seven people and all seven were imprisoned. Only I was selected to be a porter, while the other six people stayed behind in prison because each of them gave 80,000 kyat to the jailer and the warden of the jail. As for me, I couldn't give so I had to follow and be a porter.

What were your experiences when you stayed with the SPDC military?

My experiences were, firstly, they took us out from Kyaukphyu prison and brought us to Toungup and then they sent us to Pyay prison and then to Yangon Insein prison and then to Mawlamyine. At each location we had to sleep one night but we slept two nights in Mawlamyine prison and from there LID #44 came and took 65 prisoners [originally] from Kyaukphyu prison. Then they separated prisoners into 15 people per group. Among our group they shot and killed one person in front of me below Kaw Bpoo camp. That man couldn't walk because we had to wake up early in the morning and walk and they didn't give us rice until noon. They also didn't give us enough rice. In the evening time, they ordered us to search for landmines or car mines. We were afraid of landmines. When people couldn't endure they fled. They arrested Nu Nya Maung and hit him with the butt of their guns until he was dead and then they threw him into the river. They did it in front of the prisoners.

How did you feel when you saw they were killing your friend?

We felt afraid of them and frightened too. We dared not see that the SPDC government soldiers are oppressing people and killing people so we had to flee away from them.

What is your plan for the future?

I plan to go back to Arakan State but we have no money for me to go back to them. I hope I will find money to go back.

If you go back now and they see you, can they arrest you because your imprisonment period is not completed yet?

I know that the police will arrest me when they see me. I will not stay in my village and I plan to move to another village and stay there. I have seen people who were always frightening people and imprisoning them again. The Burma police are usually making a small crime bigger and they imprison a lot of people. Half of the people in prison are there because of false accusation. Most of how the SPDC works is incorrect.

As you said you are not feeling safe to go back and stay in your village, so what will you do?

If I go to another village with my whole family and settle in that other village I can do that. Now in our area, we can't do our livelihood very well anyway because the police often come to demand money. In the long term, we don't have money to give them. Now if go back to my village, I will have to stay in other village.

As you stayed with the SPDC for a long time, how do you see the SPDC?

I see the SPDC soldiers as an army of butchers. They didn't ask us to work fairly. We had to start work at 6:00 am in the morning and go back for lunch at 12:00 pm noontime and at 12:30 pm they demand that we restart working again. Then we stopped at 4:00 pm in the evening

time and we had to wash the dishes that they used. Then we had no time to take a bath. If we didn't go and wash their dishes they called us and beat us. Then before we went to sleep, they asked us to go and massage them but if we don't want to do it because we worked all day long and we are tired of working then they called us and beat us. If the prisoners didn't do the SPDC government works they would usually punish us. I ran away because I couldn't endure their torture anymore.

Interview | Than Win, 35 (January 2009, Papun District)

Address prior to arrest: My--- village, N--- Township, Arakan state
Ethnicity: Arakhan
Religion: Buddhist
Occupation prior to arrest: Fisherman
Marital status: Married
Reported reason for arrest: Smuggling timber
Date of arrest:
Reported sentence: 7 years
Reported date sentence began:
Prison(s): Kyaukphyu
Date sent to labour camp:
Labour camp:
Date taken to porter:
Size of group taken to porter:
How many soldiers in operation:
Area/ location portered:
Battalion:
Number of soldiers and porters (exact, not a ratio):
Date of interviewee's escape:
Number of porters escaped (not including interviewee):
Location of interviewee's escape:
Location of interview: Papun District
Date of interview: January --- 2009
Future plans:

For what crime were you imprisoned?

I was imprisoned with the crime of smuggling timber. The SPDC Navy soldiers arrested us and sent us to Kyaukphyu camp and gave us to Kyaukphyu police. I stayed in jail for one or two months and then the court sentenced me to seven years.

How many people were arrested together with you?

Six people. All six people were sentenced to seven years like me. We were imprisoned in Kyaukphyu prison. My prisoner's number is 0----/-. The judge's name was U Kyaw Sien Hla. Then two of my friends and I came and followed SPDC [Tatmadaw] IB #216.

How much timber did you carry at a time?

We brought it on motorboats and it was about 20 to 30 tonnes of timber. It took us only three days to go and come back. We can earn 30,000 to 40,000 kyat for one trip.

Does the Navy often arrest people?

It depends because if they see it, they will arrest any group. There are many groups who smuggle timber to other countries.

If you have to give money as a bribe to free yourself, how much would you have to pay?

We couldn't pay the bribe because they took all the timber and then imprisoned us because they said that was the orders from above. After they arrested us, we couldn't give money.

Why are people smuggling timber even though the SPDC has forbidden it?

It is their business to solve their family problems. There are a lot of people who follow the motorboats for six to ten months. There are a lot of people who die in the sea when the SPDC Navy shells them with mortar when they can't catch them. Those people get no compensation.

You said your occupation is fishing, so why did you smuggle timber?

My occupation is fishing but, if I need money, I follow the motorboats that smuggle timber and we can get more money compared to fishing. So I follow the motorboats when I have free time in order to be able to get more income. We can't get much income from our fishing works because I am unable to catch many fish. If the weather is not good, we dare not go fishing. Only when the situation is good, we can get fish and, if the weather is not good, normally we only get prawns. When we get fish some of them we dry and some we use to make fish-paste and then we sell it for 1,500 or 1,600 kyat for one viss.

Do you have to pay tax?

Yes, we have to pay. For example if I own one fishing net, in one year if they demand 6,000 kyat. I have to give 6,000 kyat but that depends on how much they want to demand. There are some people who have two, three, four or five nets. As for me, I have two nets. I can earn about 40,000 to 60,0000 kyat per month and I can't live on that amount of money.

When the SPDC Navy arrested you, what did they do with the timber?

The SPDC took the timber but the boat owners got the motorboat back by bidding for it. The owner was not arrested. At that time, the owner was not on the boat.

Are people who smuggle timber usually imprisoned for seven years or not?

People who can bribe the judge have shorter sentences. The sentence becomes only five years. But people who can't give money will have a sentence of seven years or more. We couldn't give money to the army.

What is your plan for the future?

For now, if people ask me to go back to my village, I will go back, but if they give me political asylum here, I will stay here. I will follow the orders of the leaders here.

How many children do you have?

I have two kids and my wife is staying together with my brother in-law.

What kind of oppression happens in Rakhine state?

They demanded tax from villagers.

How many households are in your village?

There are around 1,000 households in the village.

What kind of work do most people do?

Some people farm and others run small shops. The ethnic majority in the village is Rakhine people.

Do you have a school?

Yes, we have a school and it was created by the SPDC military government. Some children have a chance to study, but the parents of some other children can't support them to attend school. And now the food prices are rising, so their parents are facing with more money problems.

Do you have a clinic?

Yes, we have a clinic and it was also created by the SPDC government. We say it is a clinic, but really there is just paracetamol. We do not have any other medicine in the clinic. We have to buy medicine from outside or cure ourselves at our own private clinics. The government can't provide the village with medicine. Therefore, many people die when they get sick because they don't have enough money to cure themselves. The number of people who have enough food is fewer than the number of people who do not have food.

Do the villagers have to do forced labor work?

There have been almost two or three years that we have not needed to do forced labor work. In the past years, we had to plant castor bean plants in our village but the plants can't grow very quickly and also do not stay alive for a very long period.

Do you want to say anything else to me?

Yes, I think that they [SPDC] should not take us out from the prison to go to the frontline and torture us. They should keep us in prison and we can do the prison work. In my experience, there were many people who died on the way to the frontline. They do not have any empathy for us.

Interview | Twin Nge, 35 (May 2009, Papun District)

Address prior to arrest: Section No. ---, Myitkyina
Ethnicity: Shan
Religion: Christian
Occupation prior to arrest: Farming
Marital status: Married; three children
Reported reason for arrest: Panning illegally for gold
Date of arrest: June --- 2008
Reported sentence:
Reported date sentence began:
Prison(s):
Date sent to labour camp:
Labour camp:
Date taken to porter:
Size of group taken to porter: 100 [only 60 still there]
Area/ location portered:
Battalion:
Number of soldiers and porters (exact, not a ratio):
Date of interviewee's escape: April --- 2009
Number of porters escaped (not including interviewee):
Location of interviewee's escape:
Location of interview:
Date of interview: May --- 2009
Future plans:

How old is your oldest child?

He is 15 years old.

How old is your youngest child?

He is 11 years old.

Why did you arrive here?

I arrived here as a person subjected to forced labor as a porter. I escaped to this village.

When did you escape from the Burmese army?

I escaped from the Burmese army on April --- 2009. It is already eight days ago.

How do you get into a group of SPDC porters?

I was arrested from Myitkyina by the Burmese army when I panned for gold.

Were any friends with you?

Yes, but one of my friends died when we were portering.

When were you arrested for portering?

I was arrested on May --- 2008.

Where were you sent after the arrest?

I was sent to this area for portering.

Did you have to go to prison after the arrest?

Yes, I was in prison for three months.

Why were you arrested?

I was arrested because I dug and panned for the gold.

What did you use for digging the gold?

We used a digging machine.

Who arrested you?

The Burmese police arrested me.

Do you know his name?

Yes, his name is Aung Aung.

Which prison were you in?

I was in Myitkyina prison.

Were you beaten by the Burmese army?

Yes, whenever we say we can't walk.

How many days did you have to travel from Myitkyina to this area?

We had to travel for five days.

How many porters were involved in this military operation trip?

There were around 100 porters.

How many escaped and how many were left?

There were around 60 porters left. Many died. Only some of them escaped.

Why did they die?

Some of them died from sickness and some were beaten until they died.

Who beat you?

The Battalion Commander himself.

Do you know the name of your friend who was beaten until he died?

Yes, I have two friends who were beaten by the Burmese army until they died. One of my friends was name Aung Ko Hla. He was around 20 years old. And another one's name was Thoung Deh, 25 years old. Later they were burnt and killed. All three of us are from Myitkyina.

How do you feel now that you have you arrived here?

I would like to go home to see my family.

How do you feel about the SPDC?

They ask porters to carry loads for the whole day and they don't give enough food to the porters. They torture the porters and also they don't give medicine to the sick porters. Later, if the porters are not strong enough to carry the loads, they are tortured and killed.

Interview | Lwin Kaing, 44 (December 2009, Papun District)

Address prior to arrest: T--- village, Sitwe, Rakhine State
Ethnicity: Arakhanese
Religion: Buddhist
Occupation prior to arrest: Trader
Reported reason for arrest: Using drugs
Date of arrest: July --- 2006
Reported sentence: 12 years [reduced from 20]
Reported date sentence began: January --- 2007
Prison(s): Insein
Prisoner number: 0----/-
Date sent to labour camp: July 2007
Labour camp: Kin-tha [Naypyidaw, Mandalay Region]
Date taken to porter: December 8th 2009
Size of group taken to porter: 350 from Kin-tha; 200 joined them in Toungoo
How many soldiers in operation: 10 battalions in 86 trucks
Area/ location portered: Baw Hser Koh to Plah Koh camp [Luthaw Township, Papun]
Battalion: LID #237
Number of soldiers and porters (exact, not a ratio): 25 soldiers and 12 porters
Date of interviewee's escape:
Number of porters escaped (not including interviewee):
Location of interviewee's escape:
Location of interview: Ler Baw Bper Koh
Date of interview: December --- 2009
Future plans: Refugee camp in Thailand

What are your parents' names?

My father's name is U --- and my mother's name is Daw ---.

What education level did you accomplish?

I finished grade seven.

What's your occupation?

I sell things.

What's your ID number?

I don't know.

Are you married or single?

I'm married.

How many children do you have?

I have three children.

What's your wife's name?

Her name is N--- .

What crime were you charged with?

Drugs

When were you arrested?

I was arrested on July --- 2006.

Which group of police arrested you?

Deputy security officer, Nay Myo, arrested me at --- Street, T--- Village.

Where did they send you after they arrested you?

They sent me to T--- Police Custody.

How long were you kept there?

Ten days.

Where did they send you after that?

They sent me to Insein Prison.

How long did the trial take?

The court issued the judgment on January --- 2007.

Which judge decided the case?

I don't remember the judge's name.

From which court does the judge sit?

He's a judge in the Eastern District.

What was the court judgment on that day?

It was 20 years imprisonment. The appeals court lowered the term of punishment by 8 years so I had to serve in prison for 12 years.

Where did they send you after trial?

They sent me back to Insein Prison.

What's your prison ID number?

It is 0----/-.

So did you really sell drugs?

No, I smelled drugs while driving a car and I gave the drug to someone. When they arrested him, they also arrested me.

How long did you use drugs?

Just over one month.

Why did you use drugs while driving?

To prevent me from feeling sleepy

What type of drug did you use?

I used *ya ba* [methamphetamines].

Where did you get that drug?

The drugs are from Taunggyi and Lashio.

So the car drivers can get drugs at anytime?

Yes, they can get drugs at anytime.

So the drugs are available in every part of Burma, right?

Yes, they are available everywhere.

How did they prove that you used drugs?

The doctor conducted a blood test to see if it contained drugs but my blood was clean. But if they find 33 tablets of Amphetamine in your hand, you will be sentenced to 20 years imprisonment.

So they found 33 tablets on you?

No, they didn't find any tablets on me. But if you sell up to 33 tablets, you will also be sentenced to 20 years imprisonment.

How many car drivers were arrested?

Another person who used the drug and I were arrested.

What is that person's name?

Her name is Gy---.

Was she a driver too?

No, I was going home so I gave the leftover drug to her. In Rangoon, many women use drugs.

Maybe she's a detective?

No, I don't think so because she was also arrested and sentenced to 20 years imprisonment.

When were you taken out from prison?

July --- 2007

How many people were taken out from prison?

30 prisoners were taken out from Insein Prison. There were more people from Toungoo Prison and other prisons. Tharyarwaddy Prison and Pyay Prison combined, there were 120 prisoners. But there were only 30 people from our [Insein] prison. In total, 150 prisoners were taken out.

How long did you have to work after you were taken out?

I had to work until I came here. It's been over two years.

What kind of work did you do there?

We had to work in Kin-tha mining site. We got up at 4:00 in the morning and had worship. At 4:30 am they let us use the bathroom and then at 5:15 am we had to arrive at the mining site. We had to work until 12:00 noon and sometimes after some minutes past noon. Again at 1:00 pm we had to start working until 6:00 p.m., sometimes until 5:00 pm.

Where is Kin-tha mining site located?

It is located in Naypyidaw in Ta Kone Township.

How many prisoners from different prisons were at that mining site?

There were around 1,000 people. There were 976 prisoners but there were some who died, or were sick or starving. If they needed more people, they would take them from Yamethin prison, Lashio prison and Mandalay prison. The number of prisoners they keep there is around 1,000.

Out of the 976 prisoners, how many prisoners were taken by the army to porter?

The first time, they didn't take anyone from Kin-tha (1) mining site, where we were working. They took 250 prisoners from Kin-tha (2) mining site. Then [the second time] they took 200 from our mining site and 150 from Kin-tha (2) mining site. In total, they took 350 prisoners at that time.

When did they take you out for military use?

They took us out on December 8th 2009.

When you stayed at the mining site, did they put shackles on your feet?

Yes, they put shackles on our feet even when we were working.

So did they unlock [the shackles] when they sent you to Toungoo?

No, they didn't unlock it until the next day.

When they sent you to the forest, were your still feet cuffed?

No, the soldiers tied us up with ropes.

After they sent you to Toungoo, where else did they send you?

They send us to Kyauk Kyi.

How many prisoners were with you at Kyauk Kyi? Only 350?

No, more than that. There are around 150 - 200 prisoners from Toungoo prison and Tun Boe prison combined and there are 350 people in our group [from Kin-tha mining sites]. So if their group was 200, then in total there were 550 porters.

In which military were you serving when you came to Kyauk Kyi?

I was with LID #237.

How did you travel from Kyauk Kyi to Baw Hser Koh?

We travelled from Kyauk Kyi to Baw Hser Koh by car.

How many military battalions were there at that time?

There were 10 military battalions.

Did all of them come by car?

Yes, there were 86 trucks to carry both the military and us.

What was their plan for this trip?

Their plan was to clear [KNLA] military bases and to enable the 2010 election plan.

Where did you go to after you left Baw Hser Koh?

I went to Plah Koh camp. This time we went on foot not by car. They asked me to carry mess tins. In one platoon, there are four to five soldiers. There are a lot of children in the army. In the next one to three months, the soldiers will recruit one person from each household. Each families who did not already have someone serving in the army had to provide one. They said they will do it like that.

When will that plan be implemented?

I don't know when it will be implemented because the commanders and the soldiers just told me like that. If you ask their age, most of them are 16, 14 and 15 years old. The oldest are 16.

So in the future, they will recruit one person from each house, right?

Yes, the commanders themselves said so and the soldiers also said the same thing. I asked some of them 'Do your family know that you are in the army?' Some of them said 'no'. Some of them were depressed so they don't want to go home and some of them just wanted to be soldiers. They get promoted from one position to another position. Some of them get money. It happens more among the high-ranking officers.

Can you tell me about your experiences when you carried things for the army from Baw Hser Koh to Plah Koh?

On the way, we had to cross a river. Before we arrived at the bank of the river, we saw a bulldozer upside down. The KNLA planted landmines there so the bulldozer was flipped upside down. After we crossed the river, on the way, there was a military camp. I don't know the name of it. There was another bulldozer blown up and it was flipped upside down. When we arrived at Plah Koh military camp, we heard fighting and two more bulldozers were blown up.

How many were injured or killed in that fighting?

We heard from a driver that a battalion commander lost both of his legs. K--- lost one leg. And one commander died in the fighting. Three other soldiers died. A helicopter came and took them. We could hear the sounds of the helicopter. That was what the driver of the truck that carries food said. He didn't tell us. He told the signalman and we overheard the conversation.

How about other places that the fighting happened?

Not long after that incident, at Plah Koh camp, we heard the shooting sound 'pong pong pong pong' and one person died there. They shot guns at the trucks. One day later, we were carrying food from the trucks. When we were going up to Plah Koh camp, we heard the shooting below us and when we had almost arrived at Plah Koh camp, the fighting was happening again. That time a person stepped on a landmine and, in the fighting that happened next, another one was killed. The next time [there was fighting], one person stepped on a landmine. Then we carried them to the truck. The paramedic at Plah Koh camp gave him some medicine then we loaded him into the truck.

How many nights did you sleep at Plah Koh camp?

I slept there for four nights.

Where did you put the rations?

We only kept the rations outside the camp. They hadn't put them inside the camp yet. At that time, there were 44 trucks that sent rations. They carried over 1000 sacks of rice and one truck of condensed milk and two trucks of vegetables, five cans of meat, canned taro, meat cans with BBES on them, five cans with BLTE on them and MVE something, which is canned potato and egg plant. There was another one which began with the letter F. They are canned taro and bamboo shoot. They also carry salt, fish paste and taro. There was both taro for donkeys and taro that people can eat. They also included two cans of medicine for donkeys.

How about Baw Hser Koh? Where did they keep the rations there?

I do not know about that. I slept at Baw Hser Koh just one night and I had to sleep outside the camp and in the morning I left.

Why did you escape from the military?

I couldn't bear the difficulties anymore.

So this time, you are the first person to desert, right?

Yes, this time I am the first person to desert. There were 12 porters at Plah Koh and I was the first to desert.

What the name of Plah Koh Camp's commander?

I don't know his name. I'm not quite sure if his position is lieutenant commander or battalion commander. He has one laurel wreath insignia and a big star. There are another two officers like him with a small star. In one platoon, there are only 5 people.

How many soldiers were there at Plah Koh camp?

There are 18 soldiers. Actually, there were 19 soldiers but one of them lost his leg so he was sent home. At Plah Koh camp office, there are 6 soldiers. So in total there are 25 soldiers.

How long did it take to travel from Plah Koh to Baw Hser Koh on foot?

We left Baw Hser Koh around 5:00 in the morning and we arrived at Plah Koh around 4:00 pm. I don't remember the exact time.

On the way, how did the soldiers treat the porters?

They treated each porter differently. I don't know about old people like me. I couldn't carry the load I was responsible for carrying. So other porters helped me to carry some of it. If they had to wait [for me], the enemy [the Tatmadaw soldiers] would come to us. One soldier said he had so many things to carry already. If not, he would help me carry some parts of my load. They treated other porters differently. Some boys were beaten by the soldiers because they couldn't carry their load. Some were kicked by the soldiers. For me, maybe it's because of my age so they didn't do anything to me but help me.

What's your plan now after escaping from the military like this?

I am not going back there again. If I go back, I would be arrested. I think I will stay here and go to Myawaddy. I used to live there before. I could go to a refugee camp through the Myawaddy road.

What's your opinion about the SPDC army?

I think they want to make the KNLA become a Border Guard Force and, if they can not do it, they will send more troops to launch an offensive. Now the troops that we had to follow will base themselves at the camp. I think the SPDC will look at the result of the coming 2010 election and launch more offensives. They will launch it again in the next few months.

Do you view the SPDC army as an army working for the country?

That's impossible. They do not work for the country. They just can not avoid the orders from above so they work in the army. From the high-ranking officers to the soldiers, none of them want to be in the army. Regarding this, they themselves say it again and again. The SPDC army is just themselves and it is just for a small group of people, not for the whole country.

You said you want to go to Myawaddy and I'm wondering that that might not be possible for us because of the security issues. Will it be okay for you if we send you to Mone Township instead?

That will not be okay for me.

If you want us to send you to Myawaddy, then it might take us some time to do that. We need to get approval from the leaders above and keep our ears open to the situation so it could takes months but if we send you to Mone we can do it the day after tomorrow or very soon. But there's our concern that you would be arrested again if you go Mone because you have no ID card and so on. There's also the financial problem if we send you to Myawaddy but we will try our best to arrange the best thing for you. Is there anything you want to add regarding the SPDC?

I think everyone in the country knows about them very well. There's nothing special I need to say about them.

Can you describe what life is like living in the city before you were sent to jail?

The living standard of the people is becoming worse day by day, year by year.

How long have you worked as a driver?

Not for so long. I got cars from Kawkareik and Myawaddy and drove to Taunggyi. When we arrived at Taunggyi the owner of the cars would sell the cars. The cars are from Thailand and they were brought to Burma and sometimes sent to China.

So is it a kind of black market?

To be able to bring in the cars, the traders have to bribe people at each gate. In the past the government was not so strict and did not arrest the traders so if five cars were brought in, you could still have three cars. But later, it's not safe to keep the car at the hotels or monasteries and they started to confiscate the cars. So the traders get the names of the high-ranking officers and give them money once the trade is successful.

How much profit did you get from car trade?

We bought at the price of 35 or 36 [hundred-thousand kyat] and we sold the cars at 110 to 115 [hundred-thousand kyat]. Sometimes we sold them at 90 or 85 [hundred-thousand kyat]. But many people are involved in this business so we had to share the profits equally and each of us will get a small profit.

What is the situation of the people in the city in general?

Only a few people are rich. Many people almost become like pigs and dogs. Some don't have food to eat. My friends in jail told me that there are some people in the city who are very poor. In the morning, a person will go and work with a lunch box and four family members stay at home. So one day's wages can not feed the whole family. The poor are very poor and for those who are rich, they can do what ever they want and throw away things if they want.

What is the average wage for one day?

The daily average wage is 1,000 – 1,800 kyat. I'm not sure about in Rangoon but in Yamethin and Toungoo area, we just get wages like that.

You said earlier that the SPDC will recruit one person from each house. Do you think the people will accept this?

Even though we don't want to accept it, we have no choice. Everything is in their hands and the power is with them. That will happen very soon. For those who don't want to send their family members to the army, they must give money.

Do you think there will be corruption among the leaders?

Yes, corruption will definitely exist.

Do you want to add anything?

People who are in the army know nothing about what is happening but people in the country and outside the country know how bad the situation is. The SPDC leaders will just hold onto power tightly as long as they can, regardless of what the internal or international communities

say. They don't care what people say. They will keep on holding the power and the day they will give up their power is the day they die. That's my opinion.

Can you tell us your background briefly regarding the revolution?

In 1987, I arrived at Three Pagodas in Mon State. Before I arrived at Three Pagodas, on the way, I went with two people. Then a monk in a house asked us, '*Where are you going? Now Mon and Karen are fighting with each other*'. We answered '*We are going to Three Pagodas'*. Then he said '*Don't go yet, stay here for a while'*. Then after a little while, the Karen soldiers arrived. The monk said '*We have two new people here. They are from the students' union and they are going to Three Pagodas*.' Then they asked me what my ethnicity was. I told them I am Arakanese. They told said '*There are some Arakanese people led by Kaing Yeh Lin Aung. There is an Arakanese organization and we will send you there*.' Then they asked us to follow them. We arrived at Ah Nai Kwin and stayed there for a few days. The there was fighting between Mon and Karen again. Then 1-2 days later, the Karen soldiers sent us to the Arakanese organization at Three Pagodas. Then the organization sent me to Meh Ka Tha No.5 with 3-4 more Arakanese including Khaing Soe Tun and Khaing Oo Maung. They sent us to Wah Kha and we stayed there for 19 days then we attended a military training course. Bo Hla Win was the trainer and Saya Aye Naing was his assistant trainer. We went to fight at Bpa Taik Kone and the place was seized. Then we went to Khay Bp' Loo Kone. Then we moved to 6th Brigade. We were under the leadership of Lieutenant Commander Sa Min and Secretary Bo Myote Min. Then Bo Myote Min had to go to Kachin area and we had to move to Mon area. I served in Mon area for 1-2 years. On 21 May, 1991, provided with a duty, I went to Western Command Headquarter. On 12 June, I arrived at Mon State again. I was told that I would have to attend training so I went back to Wah Kha. The training could not be conducted so I had to go to 7th Brigade and serve in Kyunt Lu Gaw Forestry Ministry. Later I attended a Youth Convention at Mar Ner Bplaw. After returning from the Youth Convention, I went back to Wah Kha again. I went to Kyunt Lu Gaw again and served there. Soon after that, the DKBA broke from the KNU so we had to go back to Wah Kha. The same thing happened at Wah Kha so we went to Maesot. I stayed there for 6-7 years, and then I went to work in Bangkok. In 2007, I came back from Bangkok. I worked as accountant in my organization and I lived there until there was a meeting. The chairman and the secretary came to the meeting. The chairman told me to find a woman secretary and I tried to find one. When the secretary found out about this, he got angry and kicked me out of the organization. Then a person from Bado Masha group met me and I told him that it looked like the secretary had kicked me out now. He brought me to his group and then they interrogated me and I stayed at Division #21 for a few days and they sent me to Military Intelligence #5 and we stayed there for 20 days. Then I went to Burma and I lived there with my family for over one year. No job was available for me in Arakan State so I came to Myawaddy. Then I started using drugs and finally I was arrested.

How many leaders do you know in Wah Kha?

Battalion commander is Major Taw Hla, battalion deputy commander is Than Maung and in the KNLA I know Sergeant Major Lay Baw, Bo Hla Win, Mahn Thaung Tin, Bo Ba Boo, Bo Kyi Brown. I know most of the leaders because I lived there for many years.