

THIS
REVOLUTIONARY
LIFE

Women of the Kachin Liberated Area



○ Project Maje
○ ○ 14 Dartmouth Rd.
Cranford NJ 07016 USA

March 1995

INTRODUCTION

A woman who is a medical doctor, rebel army officer, shopkeeper, mother, and woman's organization activist. A 64 year old woman who, living alone, raises animals and vegetables to support her husband in the military and her children -- who were born when she was in a Burmese prison. A 21 year old army volunteer who hopes someday to be "a political leader". These are three of the twelve extraordinary women whose voices are heard in this report. Here, these women, who live in an insurgent zone of one of Asia's most remote areas, speak freely and clearly to the outside world, about the many components of their lives.

The twelve women interviewed, all living in or near the headquarters of the Kachin Independence Organization, were asked essentially the same set of questions. Topics covered included politics, culture, health, violence, and religion. The picture that emerges from their answers is one of strong, independent women, functioning confidently amid considerable hardship. Although this is an isolated region (the Kachin State of Burma borders mountainous tribal areas of China, Tibet, and India, and has been in a state of war with Burma's central regime for decades), the role of women in Kachin society has seemed to change in pace with that in the more "modern" countries of the outside world. While Kachin men may still patronizingly speak of a person being "only a woman" as if it was a handicap of some kind, the Kachin women tend to shrug off such affronts and see their only obstacle in a "shortage" or "weakness" in education as compared to men. As is true throughout Burma, the acquisition of education is seen as the best way to improve the self and the society.

It should be noted that in Burma, rebel-held "liberated areas" often give rise to utopian communities, planned that way or not. The influx of educated ethnic people from the towns and cities, to the frontier mountain war zones, where they interact with indigenous relatives who know the ways of the forest, creates attempts to form ideal societies. Great emphasis is placed on schools and health facilities, even if they are located in dirt-floored bamboo huts. Indigenous culture, language and art forms are often encouraged. Also, a safe-zone, where the human rights abuse for which the Burma Army is so notorious will not occur, is established.

The interview area, being a revolutionary headquarters, is dominated by military concerns, military personnel and their various dependents. Even female civilians are often retired soldiers themselves, and more often than not, married to currently serving Kachin Independence Army soldiers. The KIA is very formal and hierarchical, but it coexists with a certain social mobility and democratic inclinations within Kachin society itself. These factors seem to contribute to the sense among the women interviewed that women are not only safe from abuse, but politically upwardly mobile and socially equal in this particular liberated zone.

The outside world's image of women's status in ethnic areas of Burma is that of total victimization, due particularly to the SLORC regime's continuation of the use of systematic rape as a counter-insurgency tactic. The women interviewed present the same viewpoint -- that in "Burma", the place outside of KIO control, such terrorization is rampant; but that within the KIO area, violence against women, forced prostitution, etc. are not only not tolerated but unknown. At the time of the interviews, the KIO/KIA was observing a ceasefire with the SLORC regime, but considered itself still very much in a state of revolt, retaining all arms and keeping frontline positions vigilant. While people from the KIO area could now occasionally travel to the towns and cities of "Burma" for family visits or trade, the fear and distrust of "Burma" and its "wicked" regime were still very much in evidence among the women interviewed.

The military nature of the interview area has its effect on many aspects of the interviewee's lives. For instance marriage age is much higher -- and, consequently, family size smaller -- than elsewhere in Kachin State, as many of the women had to finish their military service before receiving permission to marry. Female entrepreneurship is certainly common throughout Burma (a nation of lady shopkeepers), and it is a major trend in KIO liberated areas because military personnel are paid minimally. Therefore, the burden of family support often falls on the wives, who approach their economic task in a variety of creative ways, ranging from rabbit-wool sweaters to the risky but lucrative jade trade.

These women may possess a certain personality type -- adventurous and adaptable -- which led them into the revolution, either as volunteers, or as conscripts who "stayed on". During the ceasefire, forced conscription by KIA has been suspended, but in the past, families could supply the rebel force with either a son or a daughter. Women in the KIA served as combat troops, as medical officers (doctors, nurses, field medics), and in support roles (clerical, intelligence, supply, etc.) At present, the highest ranking women are those who have served a long time as doctors. The KIA is slow to promote men or women; there are few in the force who rank above lieutenant (the highest rank currently held by women). This affects women's political power, in that most posts in the civil administration -- Kachin Independence Organization's Central Committee, and Kachin Independence Council -- are held by military leaders. The one woman on the Central Committee is Madam Brang Seng (Kwa Mai), the politically sophisticated and much admired widow of KIO Chairman Brang Seng, who died in 1994.

Madam Brang Seng founded the Kachin Women's Association, which began in 1962 and became particularly active from 1987 on. The KWA operates in liberated areas of Kachin State, including the regions bordering India and the Shan State, as well as the eastern, China border territory which includes Pajau, the interview area. The membership is roughly estimated around 5,000. The KWA functions as a development organization, implementing various health, education, and village income-generation projects, with little or no help from the outside world. Like other indigenous women's groups of Burma's ethnic war zones, the KWA began as an officers' wives' charity effort; and has now enlarged to include women from all walks of life, as participants and organizers. The KWA operates fourteen kindergartens (an important supplement to the primary schools the KIO provides); maternal health clinics; and a rehabilitation center for disabled soldiers. A number of self-help programs have been implemented by KWA, notably training in sewing and livestock-raising for women.

Personal responsibility is a strong theme for the women interviewed. They seemed to find their roles in the revolution, and as family providers, clearly defined. At a time when, in neighboring China, a national public opinion poll determined that 60% of Chinese had as their goal in life, "to work hard and make lots of money"; it was difficult to get the women of the KIO area to focus on personal goals at all. There was widespread agreement that the personal and political were inextricably plaited together. Only after the KIO's aims of autonomy, federalism, their own "nation", were achieved, could the cherished result of safe, happy, well-educated children be realistic. The ceasefire was apparently judged another aspect of the ongoing state of war with central Burma's regime, and the wished-for "real peace" waited somewhere off in the future.

Aside from the political and military challenges of an armed, uneasy standoff with the SLORC, the Kachin State is deeply threatened by the AIDS pandemic. As far back as 1991, extremely high rates of HIV infection were found in cities of Kachin State (90% infection among intravenous drug users in Bhamo, according to one study). As elsewhere in Burma, conditions for public health crisis are in force: IV heroin use, prostitution in cities and neighboring countries, poor medical care with unsterile equipment. The relatively small population of Kachins and other indigenous people are especially threatened. Fake "injection doctors" still roam the hills with their dirty needles, heroin use is rife even in small villages, and condoms are basically unknown.

Lacking any concerted effort at AIDS education in ethnic languages, by the SLORC, the Kachin people have made attempts on their own. To some extent this has made people aware of the disease and its means of infection. In the KIO areas, the hospitals and clinics rigorously sterilize their equipment, and there are attempts to discourage use of "injection doctors" for vitamin shots in the villages. Trading centers such as Laiza (liberated area) and Hpakant (government controlled jade mining area) are seen as AIDS danger zones. But treatment and perhaps prevention are hampered by the KIO medical personnel's complete inability to diagnose AIDS cases, not to mention HIV conditions. They do not yet have the equipment/training to perform blood or saliva tests for AIDS; so they can only guess at particular sets of symptoms, and in some cases, send patients over to China for proper diagnosis and treatment. A Kachin health officer, basing his estimate on AIDS-like symptoms, recently guessed that as many as 20% of liberated-area hospital patients may have AIDS/HIV, most of them women. As few women are IV drug users (heroin) in Kachin State, this indicates that the infection is through sexual contact or unsterile "injection doctor" cure-alls.

If the indigenous people of the Kachin State are to be saved from the auto-genocide of AIDS infection (to which the SLORC is quite callous), women's efforts in education and health care will be crucial. The KWA has shown repeatedly that it is capable of carrying out large scale projects with the tiniest funding and encouragement from overseas. The KIO itself astounded world narcotics experts by, since 1991, wiping out opium cultivation (the raw material for heroin) throughout the area of its control -- with no foreign assistance. But there is only so much that overworked people in an extremely impoverished area can do on their own.

The women in this report have taken the time to tell the outside world about their lives, which are spent trying to bring about a better life for their people. Those who wish to help the Kachins should not be swayed by a SLORC "bait and switch" effort to convince donors to operate through the regime. While some such projects may be able to assist very worthy causes in government-controlled parts of Kachin State, they have not been at all effective in reaching the rebel, rural, frontiers. Until the "real peace" comes, overseas donors must continue to establish direct contact with the indigenous Kachin development workers. Such efforts, however small-scale, would be immensely appreciated, and -- judging from past examples -- implemented with great efficiency and enthusiasm.

When asked to name women she admired, one interviewee simply said, "the Kachin women who can make a life in the jungle." This report, in revealing their lives to the international community, should serve as a tribute to such brave and worthy women.

Notes on the Research

The interviews in this report were conducted by the Project Director of Project Maje, at Pajau (Kachin Independence Organization general headquarters) and nearby Zup Ja village, in the Kachin State, northern Burma, in February 1995. In all but one of the interviews, an interpreter was used. Essentially the same set of questions was asked of all the interviewees. The questions are abbreviated in the report as follows:

- . age, where born, ethnicity
- . level of education
- . married or not; if married, age when married; number of children
- . work/economic status: what type of work the interviewee does, and other ways of finding income.
- . when/why came to the KIO area
- . women's role, Kachin culture: how the interviewee perceives women's status in traditional and current Kachin culture
- . political power: do women have political power within the KIO; how can they obtain more?
- . health: health conditions of the interviewee and women in the area.
- . AIDS: awareness of the AIDS epidemic by the interviewee and in the area.
- . violence/abuse: cases of violence against women, abuse of women (including rape and forced prostitution) which the interviewee has been aware of.
- . religion: the interviewee's religion and its role in her life.
- . goals: the interviewee's own personal goals.
- . admired women: women, local or international, whom the interviewee particularly admires.
- . next generation: how do you think women's status and conditions in general will change for today's little girls in the area by the time they grow up?

Abbreviations of organizations used in the report:

- . KIO: Kachin Independence Organization; revolutionary political group active in northern Burma.
- . KIA: Kachin Independence Army; the armed force of the KIO.
- . KWA: Kachin Woman's Association.

Kachins are an ethnicity comprised of the Jinghpaw, Maru, Lisu, Lishi, Rawang, Azi, and Nung peoples. Shans, and other ethnic groups (including Chinese, Burmese, Gurkhas, Palaungs, Nagas, and Chins), also live in the Kachin State; and Kachins live in the Shan State as well.

The schools in the KIO area use the Burmese system of "standards": primary school for age 5-6, then 1st Standard at about age 7, going up to 10th Standard (about age 16), when a matriculation exam is given.

Useful books on the Kachins are: Political Systems of Highland Burma by Edmund Leach; and Land of Jade by Bertil Lintner.

Project Maje is an independent information project founded in 1986 to encourage awareness of the political situation in Burma, particularly the frontier war and related human rights, narcotics, and environmental issues. The contents of this report are solely the responsibility of the Project Director.

The Project Director thanks S, R, W, J, Z, G, and the KWA, for their assistance during the researching of this report.

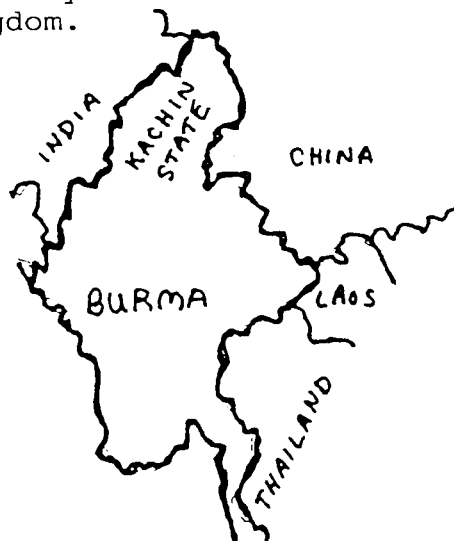
=====

What You Can Do

. Both small and large donations of material and training would help the Kachin Women's Association to implement projects, and could also help other indigenous Kachin groups like the Kachin Relief Committee and the Pan-Kachin Development Association. For information on contacting these groups, please write to Project Maje (14 Dartmouth Rd., Cranford NJ 07016 USA) or Kachinland Foundation (1490 Smithville Rd., Bloomington IN 47401).

. The SLORC junta, which routinely encourages its army to commit violence against ethnic minority women, and either attacks or chokes off "liberated areas", is largely financed by foreign investment in Burma. Companies doing business in Burma are under pressure to withdraw, including international boycotts of their products. The multinational oil companies, especially those involved in the gas pipeline scheme in southern Burma (Total of France and Unocal of the US) are especially crucial to the SLORC's continued grip on Burma. For information on the campaign to remove these backers of SLORC, contact: Coalition for Corporate Withdrawal from Burma, c/o Franklin Research, 711 Atlantic Ave., Boston MA 02111 USA.

. Amnesty International has launched a campaign spotlighting abuse of women worldwide, including the SLORC's female political prisoners. For information, contact Amnesty International, 1 Easton St., London WC1X 8DJ, United Kingdom.



Maran Roi Ja

(age, where born): I am 64 years old and I was born in Kutkai, in Shan State (Jinghpaw ethnicity), and I entered this KIO area in 1963. After not very longer I got married and from then on I spent in this revolutionary area.

(education): I learned until 9th Standard in Kutkai and then I attended theological school in Kutkai, and after that I was in religious service for nine years. After that, in '63 I joined this revolutionary life and after that, not much longer, my husband and I were captured by Burmese troops and we were put together in jail for four years, because he was in KIA. And in the jail we got two children. When my younger one was three months old, we were separated. I was put in the women's jail and I escaped, and my husband was left in for ten years.

(how old when married): 28 years old.

(why came to KIO area): At that time I was in religious service in Kutkai. In our KIA area, such work was needed also, so some officers asked me to come up.

(women's role, Kachin culture): It is really needed for our Kachin people, for every woman it is a basic responsibility to participate in Kachin life. All the women are very active and very important for political and social affairs. We try our best in this case.

(work/economic status): I am especially raising livestock such as pigs, chickens, and some goats. From this I get some family income. Also, I do household work and support my husband. And I'm taking responsibility for the KWA rabbit project (raising rabbits whose fur is combed for yarn fiber). I look after them. From this I get 50 yuan a month, from the rabbits. I collect a little bit here, a little bit there, and manage for my family. And also growing some vegetables.

(health): In this area, this is a cool place, so we haven't very serious sickness for most families. In the winter time or monsoon time, some people get sick, get colds. One thing is, in our jungle life, we have to struggle very hard for our family, for ourselves. So when we're pregnant, when we have the baby, we can't do any program for this -- we go back to work right away. Then, after 20, 30 years, we get some sickness, like "today it's cold, I can't walk, today I got pain," something like that.

(AIDS): We're not sure about that, because we're never sure which person is getting AIDS and he dies. Who has these symptoms, we don't know. So we never heard in this area, which person, which family, got AIDS and they died.

(MRJ)

(political power): In the (Kachin) government policy, they never prohibit that if you are a woman you can't participate in politics. If you have ability, any kind of works you can do freely. But especially in this jungle area -- because after they get married they have to take responsibility for their own family, women soldiers also-- so they have to retire from the army and politics, and they have to struggle for their own lives. So that's why it is a little bit difficult for the women. But we can do it.

(goals): In the past I have already tried my best for our Kachin society and our revolutionary life. Now I'm already an old lady and now my goal is for my children and grandchildren -- my intention is to further educate these second and third generation. I want to support them as much as I can.

(violence/abuse): About ten years ago, I had a friend who told me she had this experience. She was from Myitkyina but she was camping in the jungle, for trading, half way. She was taken by the Burmese troops to be a slave and carry their things. And on the way she was raped by those soldiers. But especially the officers, one by one for a month. And very terrible things she has been experiencing. After she had been released by those Burmese troops and came back to Myitkyina, she intended to try and prosecute them, she was waiting to, but those troops were totally destroyed in the battlefield by their enemy, maybe the KIA.

(religion): My religion is Baptist. In my life I got so many blessings from God, I can't count it. I stay by myself only. My husband is in (army) camp, I have no helpers, no runner, but I can do so many works daily and I never got sick. Just the last three months, some skin irritations, just for one month -- that's as sick as I've ever been. So I want to give my gratitude to God for blessing me and taking care of me in my life.

(next generation): In the future, if there is real peace in our country, then we can give more modern education to our next generation, and then I hope that our Kachin women's social standards may be more higher and higher. I hope for that.

Dr. Bawk Lu (Lieutenant in KIA)

(age, where born, ethnicity): 40. In Shan State. Jinghpaw.

(education): My basic education was in Shan State, after that, my middle school was in Kachin State, my high school in Myitkyina to 9th Standard. After that I joined the revolution. In 1975, I got basic medical training in (KIA) 1st Brigade area. In 1983, I got my doctor's training in Baoshan in China.

(Dr. BL)

(married?): I'm single. It's unusual for Kachins.

(work/economic status): I am serving as a doctor in this military hospital, that is KIO service. And for my pocket money, I participate in the KWA sewing project. And from the last two or three months, I've begun raising livestock, some pigs and goats, a little bit.

(when/why came to KIO area): In 1974, when I was still attending my 9th Standard in school, the people of this area called me to join here.

(women's role, Kachin culture): In this Kachin custom role, we women are very important persons. We are not very educated people, most of the Kachin people are not very educated. So we have to try our best for our Kachin culture.

(political power): Now it is very hard to say if our political status is stable or not. But for a woman, if we can work more, we will progress from our status now.

(health): Just common colds, not many other serious cases. Sometimes pneumonia and influenza appear here, and in the rainy season, diarrhea. Men and women are not very different in health conditions here.

(AIDS): In this area, we don't know that there is AIDS. But one soldier from 11th Battalion was the first diagnosed for sure.

(violence/abuse): In my school days, I heard that an officer from the Burma Army said, "you Kachin people, when you're educated, you will surely join KIA". So they will try to use Kachin women for forced prostitution. It was very common for them to do that.

(religion): I am Baptist and religion is very important for a person's life.

(goals): I am always dreaming that in the future, our country will have real peace between the whole country. And after we got the real peace we can stay together, we can work for our country, for our area, and we hope that we can promote our area to more prosperity. Now I am still in the status of the revolutionary life. I can't do as much as I want for myself.

(admired women): In the world I know that some women are very brave and very well-known people. But in our country, because of our status, we women are just trying for our families' daily survival. That's why we can't do as much. I hope that after we get our country's peace, in the future, our children can learn more, after that we women can progress to such status.

(next generation): In this wartime, we can't send children to far away areas for their education. So only after there is real peace, we can do it.

Dr. Chang Lawm (2nd Lieutenant, KIA)

(age, where born, ethnicity): 38. Myitkyina. Kachin.

(education): In my village, to 10th Standard, State High School, then I volunteered to this revolution in the jungle. I got my medical training in Baoshan (China) in 1981, and again in 1983.

(age when married, children): When I got married I was 29 years old and I bore three children, two boys and one girl, but only the one girl is left, the two boys died.

(work/economic status): Now I serve in this military hospital as a doctor. As well, I serve as KWA leader at this camp level. Also I find money for my family by selling goods at a shop.

(when/why came to KIO area): In September 1977 there was a meeting from the township level of KIO. There I heard, they said "all have responsibility for all Kachins", so we Kachin women also have responsibility for this revolutionary work. That's why I decided to come here.

(women's role, Kachin culture): I think that our Kachin customs, we have good customs in Kachin tradition and we must maintain it and modernize it.

(political power): As for me, I will serve in this military hospital as a doctor, under the leadership of this military hospital committee and also this camp committee, and under the leadership of KWA central committee. So we do our duty also, day by day and night by night. And when we have a chance we hope we can participate more in this political role.

(health): It is a cold place, windy place, so that is why not very serious illness. But sometimes colds and sometimes when they go to Laiza, Myitkyina, Hpakant, they get illnesses like influenza.

(AIDS): Here, probably, we can't diagnose AIDS at this hospital; so til this time we don't know if anyone has AIDS or not. But we did find out -- from 11th Battalion a soldier came here and we suspected that he must have such AIDS, so we brought him to xxxxxxx Hospital (China) and they found that soldier had AIDS. So they treated that soldier.

(violence/abuse): In this area there aren't any rape cases. But in this society there are affairs between women soldiers and men soldiers, who fall in love before they got permission to marry, and getting pregnant.

(religion): Baptist. God is most important for all things you want to try.

(Dr. CL)

(goals): I have been in service a long time, so some day I'd like to retire and take care of my family.

(admired women): The Kachin women who can make a life in the jungle.

(next generation): We hope for peace, as in our leaders' speeches. So I hope the future can be better.

Dr. Nem Ram (2nd Lieutenant, KIA)

(age, where born, ethnicity): 38. I was born in Indawgyi, Kachin State. My nationality is Rawang.

(education): I attended until 10th Standard in Putao, and I got my midwife training in Myitkyina. After that I joined this KIA service and I got my doctor's training in Baoshan, China.

(age when married, children): I was married at 27, and I have three children.

(work, economic status): I serve as a doctor at this military hospital, and for my family I opened a little shop in Zup Jo village. For the shop I hired a person and also I'm raising livestock a bit. Chickens and pigs.

(when/why came to KIO area): In 1979, 1st January, I joined this KIA and the reason is that I knew we women must also do this real struggle, ourselves.

(women's role, Kachin culture): We have had our traditional customs for long, long years, since we were named Kachin people. So we women must protect our customs.

(political power): In our political state, we women have political power, but according to our struggle, for our hard times -- even if we stay in the KIA, the (Kachin) government cannot support us, that's why we must earn by ourselves for our family. Most of the women, they got a discharge from KIA after they're married. The only exception is the doctors, because we are professionals and the government cannot let us go. They did not give them discharge. But in the future, if we got more political status, higher and higher, after that, like Western countries, or other countries, if the government gives some salary to women who are in service to the government, then we are sure to get political power at that time.

(health): Just common colds, common illnesses. Here sometimes we face childbirth problems. Because we have a lack of medical equipment, we face problems with a child not born the normal way. Before the hospital was in this area, we did some operations for childbirth. But now we don't have facilities. So if we assume it will be difficult, we send them to China.

(Dr. CL):

(AIDS): In this area that was rare, not common. But once we knew that a soldier from 11th Battalion had it. We never can diagnose which people have AIDS, as we never had such AIDS tests in this area. There is also not much general education about it.

(violence/abuse): There are not such cases here.

(religion): I'm Baptist. I believe that religious beliefs are very important.

(goals): We have no chance to do for ourself. We have only to serve here until we get our own nation.

(admired women): For our society, we can name our former Chairman's wife (Madam Brang Seng) for our area. I don't know about other areas.

(next generation): I don't know how it will be.

Layang Hkaw Mu

(age, where born, ethnicity): 34. The opposite side of river from Myitkyina district. Shan.

(education): Until 4th Standard.

(age when married, children): I was 27 years old (when married) and now have three children.

(work/economic status): I take part in the KWA sewing project and from there I earn my family income, and also individually I got a contract from the (Kachin) government for extra sewing, short pants.

(when/why came to KIA area): In 1982 I was conscripted by the KIA. So I joined KIA troops and after that I served in the hospital as a nurse.

(women's role, Shan and Kachin cultures): If you compare Shan society and Kachin society, women have more chance to work and to speak out and anything they want to do, they have a better chance in Kachin as compared with the Shans.

(political power): Yes, we have it.

(health): I'm healthy.

(AIDS): I've never seen in this area which person is getting this AIDS disease. But by reading and seeing pictures, I know it's international, and how this disease may come here, and how we can protect against it.

(LHM)

(violence/abuse): I did not see such cases, but I heard, in the villages, whenever the Burmese troops pass by the villages, they command the women, even old ladies, or the very young, to go with them, and they have done such cases.

(religion): In the past, I was Buddhist. But now I am Christian Baptist. I accept that only Jesus can save our lives.

(goals): Now I am already a married woman, and now I have the three children. I intend for my children to be great learned people, and I shall try for that. And now, I was in KIA service, and whatever happens to our politics, and however long my husband is in the KIA troops, I will never desert my husband, I will try to support my family by my own efforts.

(admired women): I admire both our former president's wife (Madam Brang Seng) and our new president's wife (Lu Ra, Madam Zau Mai), because both are the real examples for our jungle area life. They can give us love when we are in trouble, and they can also urge us which way we can follow in our believing.

(next generation): I see that there will be really good political changes in my children's time.

Ja Seng Hkawn

(age, where born, ethnicity): 32 years old. Born in Myitkyina. Jinghpaw.

(education): I got my Bachelor's Degree in English Literature at Mandalay University.

(age when married, children): When I got married I was 27, and now I already have two children.

(work/economic status): I do any job if I think I can earn money for my family. First I had a shop, and closed it, and after that, my coffee shop. And after that, now I'm doing some jade business.

(when/why came to KIA area): I came here in 1986, March, because at that time, I'd gotten my degree in '83 and had served as a teacher in Myitkyina for two years. Anyway, because my father (Chairman Brang Seng) and mother and all my family was totally in this revolutionary group, so I knew one day I must also participate in the revolution. At first when I came here, I had not gotten my basic military training, but I worked as a general clerk for my father. And after that, in '86 December to '87 April-May, I got my military training and I shifted to the KIA War Office as a clerk, rank of Sergeant-Major.

(JSH)

(women's role, Kachin culture): I think that in the past, really, we must stay at the low level if compared with men, but nowadays it is quite free for we women, we can lead in any social way. But still we must try very hard to get the leading part, even nowadays. Because the Kachin men, they are thinking of the women that they are still at the low stage. In this KIA area it was not always very open to the women. But we still work, try hard.

(political power): That is according to their state and their situation, and according to their rank. Because this is the military area, that is why we must follow only to the more high ranking officers. Still, in some departments, such as the women doctors, in their department, if they have responsibility they make their own decisions.

(health): In this area, some are very healthy, but not all are the same. The young people, the majority are healthy. But after getting married, after they give birth one or two or three times, and then they have some ageing in some parts of their bodies, and they have some anemia and at nighttime they can't sleep very well, they eat less than usual, and also some weakness.

(AIDS): In this area there is some difficulty in spreading awareness because this area is a very hard area for a family's living standard, we have to struggle for our family. So it's difficult for anti-AIDS activities. Still, we hear some information about that AIDS by seeing TV and by movies and by reading some books, so we got some information about that. But we haven't got information that some persons in this area have AIDS.

(violence, abuse): So many we have of this kind of abuse. We collect the stories and our Reverend keeps such lists. Women victims in wartime and particularly the way the Burmese troops, they abuse the people, by just going around and if they see anybody they abuse them.

(religion): Christian, Baptist. I believe Jesus Christ is the Saviour for the person, for the human being.

(goals): Because we are still -- we haven't yet got our country's self-rule, it must be combined with our self-goal and our national goal. If we do not get our national goal, if we never get peace, then we, personally never can do many things, that's why. My own personal goal also -- I want to have comforts for my family, like people in free nations. I want to do my best for my family as well as for my country.

(admired women): Internationally, there are so many women, like Indira Gandhi, or now Benazir Bhutto, any political leader, I admire them, because they are women and they try their best for their country. So I really pay my respects to them. Also Aung San Suu Kyi, she left aside her own welfare, trying for democracy. Any woman trying for her country, I admire that.

(JSH)

(next generation): Until now, we cannot say that things will be changed to good or to bad, or worse -- we don't know. But we are still trying to change to the better stage. But about this Burmese regime, we don't know, because their sins -- we can simply say they are very wicked. That's why we are trying for the better side, but we don't know if it will happen to the worse or to the better situation. But anyway we are forever trying for the best for our children.

Lamai Roi Ji

(age, where born, ethnicity): 31. In Shan State. Jinghpaw.

(education): To 8th Standard in Kutkai.

(age when married, children): At 25 years old, I got married, and now I have two children and I'm expecting another.

(work/economic status): Shopkeeper. I sell food goods, and we serve noodles. Since I've had my shop, I used only that for my family income. It's not very good business, since we have to get goods from the Chinese (side of the border) on consignment, and after we sell it, give them back the price for that, so the profit for our family is quite small.

(when/why came to KIA area): In 1988 I was conscripted to serve in KIA and I worked in the canteen.

(women's role, Kachin culture): I don't really know.

(political power): In these politics, we women are much less involved in it. Though we serve as KIA soldiers, when we are single, when we get married, we have to ask for a discharge and to search for our own family income on our own, that's why.

(health): I just get colds, nothing serious.

(AIDS): I heard that in some areas there have been these AIDS diseases, but not in our area. And I also know some information about AIDS.

(violence, abuse): When I wasn't joined in the KIA, I had heard about it happening in other places. My relatives, two girls, teenagers, they were told by Burmese soldiers to carry their loads in the forest, they have been raped by all the Burmese troops. And one girl became paralyzed at the time.

(religion): Baptist.

(LRJ)

(admired women): I want to say our former president's wife (Madam Brang Seng), because she was indeed giving us love and also when in deep troubled times she gave us food and that kind of love, and also she tried to get some food for the villages and help from outsiders. Until now she still works guiding us. As in the KWA. Guiding and leading us.

(next generation): I think the changes will be good.

Labang Htoi Rin

(age, where born, ethnicity): 29. I was born nearby Bhamo, then, since my father was a KIA soldier, I followed my father where he happened to live. I'm Jinghpaw.

(education): I learned til 8th Standard both in Bhamo and Myitkyina.

(age when married, children): At 27 I got married, I had a child but it happened to die.

(work/economic status): I have a shop -- some packaged foods, and noodles. It's both a goods shop and a restaurant.

(when/why came to KIA area): My birth area, Pan Htan, is a KIA liberated area.

(women's role, Kachin culture): In the past we heard that our women's status is really low if compared with Kachin men, but these days everything is changing, so we women can do whatever we have an idea to do. And we can speak freely.

(political power): Now, in this liberated area, what we women can do depends on our ability. For example, our former Chairman's wife (Madam Brang Seng), she is participating and vigorously joining in our political service. So by that fact, other women can do like that.

(health): I am healthy.

(AIDS): Along this area, I did not hear that anyone was having such diseases, but in the world, we heard that so many people are suffering from this AIDS disease. And even in nearby areas like Laiza, there are some symptoms of AIDS, so we can assume that in this area AIDS is beginning.

(LHR)

(violence, abuse): Because I was born in this liberated area, and also grown up in this area, I never have seen or had any experience of such things. But from hearing other people's talk, I've heard that it happens in the Burmese area.

(religion): I'm Baptist and I believe that it is very important for us to place religion in the first place, even if the problem is small or big, we must give believing in Jesus the first priority.

(goals): In this area, we have to try very hard for our life. I can't say what is my goal, it is not very sure. I think, according to the political changes, we might try our best. And only depending on that.

(admired women): For me, I've never been to the outside world, so I don't know about it. I just know, from our KIO liberated area, I want to point out our former Chairman's wife (Madam Brang Seng), because she has been a role model for us in everything.

(next generation): I'm not sure if it will be more difficult, or happy.

Lahtaw Seng Tawng

(age, where born, ethnicity): 29. I'm from near Laiza. Jinghpaw.

(education): I learned until 7th Standard in Myitkyina.

(age when married, children): When I got married I was 19. Five children, all alive.

(work/economic status): I keep my home and also take part in the KWA sewing project.

(when/why came to KIA area): My husband was a KIA soldier, and my village was in the KIA liberated area, administered by KIA, and so I got married to my husband and came here.

(women's role, Kachin culture): We have the chance to work the same as men in our Kachin culture. But there's a shortage of education for Kachin women, that's why there's still a little weakness.

(political power): It just depends on the woman's ability. If the woman has the ability to work more, if she can work the same as the men, we'll have the same rights.

(LST)

(health): I'm healthy until now.

(AIDS): I never saw it. I never heard of it in this area. I know you can catch AIDS from sexual contact.

(violence/abuse): I never heard of such things happening within KIA liberated areas. But in Burmese areas I heard that it is likely to happen.

(religion): I'm Baptist and I believe that only Jesus Christ can save an individual's life and can save our Kachin people for freedom.

(goals): I'm intending to try very hard for making my family more prosperous, to get a higher living standard.

(admired women): Aung San Suu Kyi. Democracy -- she is the real symbol of democracy and she struggles for that.

(next generation): It will be changes to progress.

Laphai Hkawn (Corporal, KIA)

(age, where born, ethnicity): 25. Myitkyina. Jinghpaw.

(married?) Single.

(education): In Myitkyina #2 State High School, then I got my medical training in this KIA.

(work/economic status): I serve as a nurse in this hospital, and I'm on duty in surgical.

(when/why came to KIA area): In 1991, I joined this KIA service, I was called here, but I decided to join, myself -- half-volunteer.

(women's role, Kachin culture): I don't know how to say it, but in our Kachin custom there is a little bit of difference between men and women.

(political power): Yes, we women have such political power here.

(health): I just get colds.

(AIDS): I heard only about one soldier who had AIDS here.

(violence, abuse): I don't know of any.

(religion): I'm a Baptist and it is very important for my life.

(goals): I'm just a newcomer in this revolution and I just enjoy the service. That's why I'm intending to do this work until the end. But for myself I never thought about it.

(admired women): I admire all the women who are joining the KIA service.

(next generation): I hope it will be better.

Zung Lwi (Corporal in KIA)

(age, where born, ethnicity): 24. Myitkyina. Jinghpaw.

(education): I attended to 10th Standard.

(married?) Not married.

(work/economic status): I serve as a clerk in the War Office.

(when/why came to KIA area): In 1991, I was interested in this revolutionary party, that's why I joined here. Some relatives in my family were in the KIA, just my grandfather and uncle.

(women's role, Kachin culture): These days, in Kachin culture, the women and men are the same, and not any difference.

(political power): In the political service, we women have been given the chance to do so many works. But our Kachin women have some shortage in education, that's why we may have some problems here.

(health): Because this area is too windy and too cold, so very often we get colds.

(AIDS): In this area I haven't seen it. I know by reading books how one can catch that.

(violence, abuse): I never heard about it.

(religion): Baptist.

(goals): My goal's for the whole country. Because I'm already a KIA woman soldier, so I hope for the country's freedom, because after that I hope there will be more good status for me and for my family and my nation, for my Kachin people.

(ZL)

(admired women): Aung San Suu Kyi. I think -- by hearing Aung San Suu Kyi's speaking and by reading Aung San Suu Kyi's writing, I think Aung San Suu Kyi is really thinking of her people, not for her own self. That's why I think she is important and I admire her.

(next generation): It only depends upon our political situation.

Laphai Nang Mun (Private in KIA)

(age, where born, ethnicity): 21. Near Bhamo. Jinghpaw.

(education): Til 10th Standard.

(married?) Single.

(work/economic status): War Office clerk.

(when/why came to KIA area): Just last year -- April '94, because I was quite interested, so I volunteered. My only relatives in KIA are some cousins.

(women's role, Kachin culture): We Kachin women in our Kachin culture are nowadays not very different from men.

(political power): Yes, we have political power.

(health): Some women soldiers are healthy, some are not; I am very healthy.

(AIDS): In this area I never saw it, but I heard such disease happens in the Hpakant area.

(violence, abuse): I didn't ever hear about it.

(religion): Catholic, and it is important to me.

(goals): I want to be a political leader.

(admired women): I don't know right now.

(next generation): I hope for progress in their time.