

THE VICTIM ZONE

Recent Accounts of Burmese Military
Human Rights Abuse in the Shan State



JUNE, 1988

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PROJECT MAJE

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The contents of this report are solely the responsibility of the Project Director, Edith T. Mirante.

Project Maje is an independent information project designed to encourage American awareness of the political situation in Burma, particularly the frontier war and related issues. For more information on human rights in Burma, the 2,4-D program, narcotics trade, and other related topics, please contact Project Maje. A previous report on human rights abuse in the Shan State, "Adrift in Troubled Times" (1987 publication) is also available from Project Maje, as are several background and survey reports.

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Title page photograph: An Akha tribe farmer in his field which was sprayed with 2,4-D in late December, 1987. Kengtung Province, near Mong Long.

INTRODUCTION

The human rights abuse recounted in this report has taken place in the context of the ongoing war of attrition between the Socialist Republic of the Union of Burma and numerous ethnic minority insurgents and political resistance groups. This conflict has been fought in the frontier areas since Burma's Independence (1948). The Shan State is the largest state in Burma's union, located in the northeast of the country, bordering Thailand, Laos and China. In the Shan State various factions have fought the Burmese government and each other since the 1950's. These groups include ethnic separatists, communists, Chinese nationalists, and narcotics trade armies.

In the Shan State, insurgents finance their efforts by taxing, protecting and escorting black market smuggling activities. Commodities smuggled into Burma on insurgent controlled routes include consumer goods such as clothing, medicine, machinery, textiles. Commodities smuggled out include rice, livestock, forest products, gems and minerals, and opium/heroin. Lack of development and socialist constraints on production and trade have resulted in the black market being the dominant economic system in the Shan State.

The Burmese Army has sought to suppress the insurgency by discouraging civilian support for the rebels. Military efforts in this regard have been so heavy-handed as to often result in civilians turning to insurgent groups for protection from the Burmese military forces. Burmese government programs such as the establishment of "strategic hamlets" (in which entire villages are relocated in confined areas to deprive insurgents of their support) and conscription of civilians for service as porters for the Army, have resulted in large scale displacement of population in the Shan State. Many inhabitants of the Shan State are hill tribes, who are traditionally semi-nomadic, and when confronted with warfare and abuse, they have become refugees. Also, Shan and Chinese villagers have fled their permanent villages, many as far as Thailand. These displaced persons are not welcome in Thailand and many have been harassed and exploited. They are not officially recognized as refugees, and do not receive international relief aid.

Burmese military abuse of civilians in the Shan State matches a pattern of abuse prevalent throughout the frontier war zone. The military tactics of forced labor, systematic looting, strategic hamlets, torture, destruction of villages, occur in all the frontier areas. This appears to be institutionalized abuse aimed at either bringing the ethnic minorities under complete government control or causing them to leave Burma. Such abuse is especially prevalent in the "gray areas" (also referred to as "brown areas") that are under neither firm government control nor firm insurgent jurisdiction. The "gray areas" are sporadically contested by the Burmese military and various insurgent factions. Civilians caught between sides in these areas, generally impoverished hill tribe farmers, are frequent targets of abusive Burmese government programs. Insurgent groups are also guilty of abuse of civilians, such as forced labor and conscription. Human rights abuse by insurgent groups has been limited somewhat by the fact that they are for the most part indigenous groups dependant on the good will of the local people for support, while the Burmese military forces are outsiders with different strategic considerations.

In recent years, the Burmese government has been able to justify campaigns in the Shan State and win foreign aid for them by portraying these efforts as narcotics eradication campaigns. The United States Government has donated 2,4-D herbicide (an ingredient -- 50% -- of Vietnam era Agent Orange) and loaned spraying aircraft to Burma for narcotics eradication. This 2,4-D program has been conducted primarily in "gray areas" of the Shan State, particularly Kengtung (south of Kengtung town, north of Mong Hsat) and Kutkai (east of Lashio, west of the Salween River), during December 1985 - February 1986, December 1986 - January 1987, and December 1987 - January 1988.

The spraying campaigns have generally been of brief duration, concentrating on limited clusters of fields. Saturation spraying appears prevalent, far above the amount needed for opium eradication. Redeployment of spraying helicopters for other military usage such as evacuating wounded troops from battles, has been common. Burma has avoided spraying in major opium growing areas such as Kokang and Wa as those areas are protected by insurgent anti-aircraft capabilities. Other opium growing areas are protected by deals with and payoffs to Burmese military and police forces.

The 2,4-D spraying program has had little, if any, effect on the Shan State's opium production level. It has, however, devastated numerous hill tribe, Shan and Chinese villages. Opium has been grown in the Shan State for over 100 years. Growers depend on their opium fields to provide the minimum trade income necessary for survival. Opium is bartered for necessities such as clothing, tools and medicine, and is often used to obtain cash necessary to meet Burmese government taxes and rice quotas. At present there are few alternative trade crops. To eliminate opium production in the Shan State, alternative crops must be provided, with the means to market them. This would require the development of trade networks, transportation, and other commercial infrastructure. At present commercial infrastructure of this sort exists only for one crop: opium.

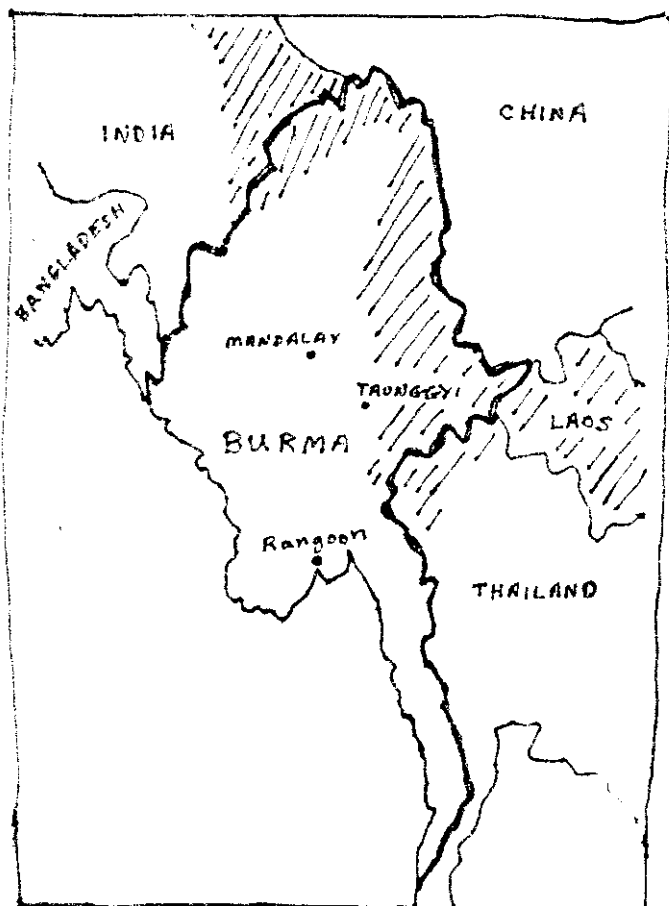
The 2,4-D spraying program appears to be carried out in a manner that endangers civilians in the spraying areas. The herbicide and spray drift have ruined and contaminated food crops as well as opium crops. Spraying has been done close to inhabited areas. Illnesses and deaths due to ingestion of sprayed food, contact with spray and inhalation of spray, have been reported. Both humans and livestock have been reported to have adverse health effects from the herbicide. Such effects, and rumored/perceived effects of the spraying program have contributed to displacement/migration in the Shan State.


Nineteen of the twenty interviews contained in this report were conducted in Kengtung Province, in a "gray area" where 2,4-D spraying had been carried out. In addition to accounts of 2,4-D effects, the interviewees recounted experiences of forced labor, looting, and other abuses by Burmese military forces. The southern region of Kengtung Province has been undergoing steady depopulation since World War II, as hill tribe people flee the continuous warfare and abuse. One elderly Akha tribesman summed up his tribe's current predicament: "Back during World War II, when the Japanese came, they killed a lot of people. And then when the Kuomintang came, they killed people and they also killed animals. But these Burmese come and they kill people, they kill animals, and now they're even killing the vegetables!"


The tribal people in the remaining villagers are considered hold-outs, making a last stand. This may cause them to be particularly resented by the Burmese government, who counts such stubborn hill tribes as "the enemy", whether or not they actually have any insurgent connections. Most of the tribespeople are completely politically unsophisticated and have no awareness of the roots of the policies that affect them. They wish only to be left in peace. Burmese operations in these areas are a show of power with easy victims. The tribespeople are fair game for systematic looting that destroys their frail margin of survival. The 2,4-D program is a high-tech variation on the same theme, showing the government's power by its ability to rain death from above. Again and again, in this unending war, the Burmese military demonstrates its ability to operate in the "gray areas" with harrowing sadism. There is often an exaggerated image of areas of the Shan State being "under rebel control". The insurgents offer scattered protection at best. Most of the time the civilians are vulnerable to exploitation and terror. For the most part, these are not insurgent zones, they are simply victim zones.

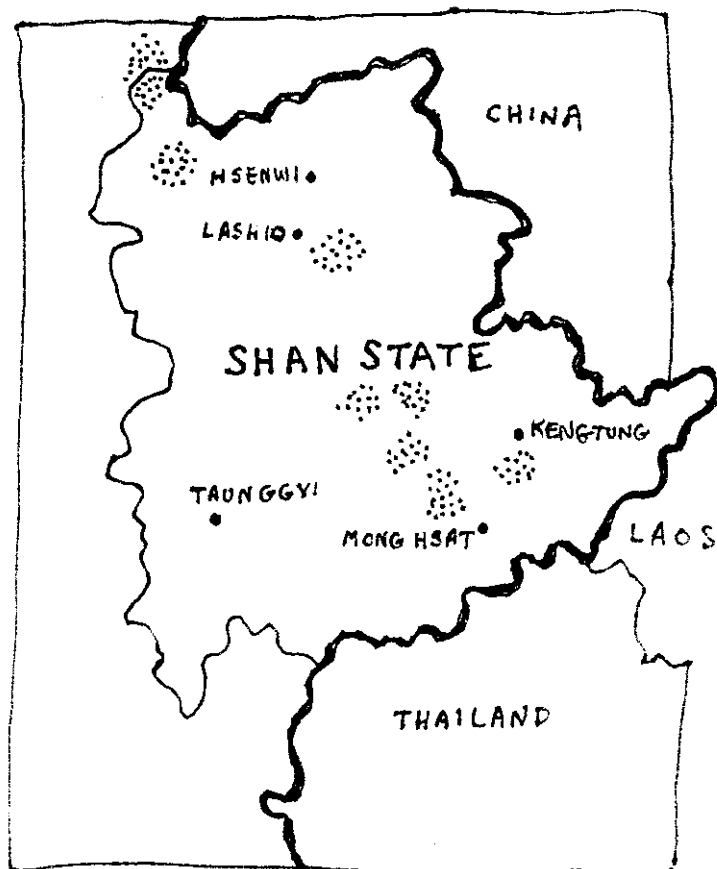
Palawng tribespeople,
Kengtung Province -





 OPIUM CULTIVATION AREAS

 - AREAS WHERE
2,4-D WAS SPRAYED
DECEMBER 1987 to
FEBRUARY 1988



RECOMMENDATIONS

There are three main courses of action to follow once one is aware of the ongoing human rights abuse situation in the Shan State:

1. Keep informed about Burma and investigate the situation further.
Investigatory missions may be refused entry by the Burmese government, but significant investigations can be conducted in border areas where refugees and traders from Burma enter neighboring countries. The Far Eastern Economic Review provides in-depth coverage of Burma's political, economic and human rights situation. Project Maje can provide background information and planning advice for investigatory missions.
2. The pattern of human rights abuse by the Burmese government and military must be condemned and protested by the international community. Every effort should be made to expose the fact that seemingly peaceful Burma has been waging a brutal war against its own minority groups. Pressure must be brought to bear on the Burmese government to safeguard the civilians in the war zone, rather than victimizing them. Military aid and anti-narcotics aid that can be used militarily (such as the 2,4-D herbicide spraying program) should be withheld. Development and relief aid, and anti-narcotics crop substitution programs should be extended to the frontier areas. International relief organizations such as UNICEF, UNHCR, and the International Red Cross must demand to enter the frontier war zone. Human rights organizations must demand to be allowed to enter Burma to monitor and substantiate accounts of human rights abuse.
3. Encourage a solution to the conflict in Burma. This war has gone on for three generations, killed an estimated 250,000, and brought with it poverty, disease, population displacement, and a massive trade in narcotics. Past attempts to negotiate a settlement failed due to bad faith on the part of the Burmese government, and severe factionalism on the part of the opposition. In recent years there has been a marked consolidation of the opposition, and at present a coalition is ready, willing and able to negotiate. To ensure safety and good faith, negotiations must be held under international aegis, sponsored by the U.N. or an interested country such as China, Singapore, Malaysia, Australia, Great Britain, or Japan. A satisfactory solution may be found through a cease-fire, troop withdrawal and a return to the autonomy granted the frontier areas in the Independence (1948) Constitution. With peace, all of Burma can develop and thrive, and the Burmese and other ethnic groups can learn to coexist -- as neighbors or as compatriots. In the long run, this is the only way to stop this Southeast Asian tragedy, to ensure that no more victims are enslaved or tortured, that no more children disappear, that no more villages are burned to the ground.

LOCATION D, INTERVIEW 1 (male)

Q: What are the conditions like in your area?

A: How much do we earn per day? This we want the authorities to know. Can we live, eat day by day? How we the hilltribe people suffer. When the Chinese came, we didn't have money, and during the Japanese time, we didn't have animals. Now it is the people that suffer. We are like animals, like a dog or pig. When I lived at the lower village, the fighting was only at Pha-phai. The authorities took us to town. We didn't have any food or water for two days. When the newly caught people arrived for seven days and nights, they had to drink urine. The faces are marked from cigaret burns during interrogation. They said one person was a little better because he told them what the authorities wanted to know. Each day they took one and did this. One day they finished away with one. After that they didn't beat us anymore. But if the big men came they beat us all the more. Concerning the government, there was a lot of forced labour. 600 soldiers used our horses when they came to fight. This has happened twice. The trouble was, although the horses could not carry the heavy loads, the horses were forced to carry them. One horse could carry 40 joi (1 joi = 1.6 kilos) only but the horses had to carry almost double that. Suffering is very terrible. Food, money, everything. If you have a bit more money, do a little trading, wear good clothes, they say you are a rich villager. Then they take your rice, food and horses. When they came I don't know why they didn't bring their own food. There is no suffering that the Shan State has not known. The tradition of the Akha is that you must do no harm to other people. So we the Akha have to suffer alone. I have known this place for three years. When I came to know this place the first time, the jungle animals were touched by this chemical. You will notice that there are no sparrows here. The children are also touched by this chemical. They coughed a lot, and after 18 or 20 minutes the children vomited blood. Their faces were bloated all over. Cows, buffalos, wild fowl and children were all touched by this chemical the first time. After a year passed the sick were not cured. Then the pigs started

to die. There are no more pigs. Before, we had 5 to 6 pigs to a house. Our village is famous for pigs. Now we cannot eat them any more. Sorry we cannot entertain you with pork anymore. First it was the cattle, wild fowl and children. Then the second time the pigs. The pigs were dying all over the place. Nothing has happened as yet from this third year, but the past two years there was a lot of death.

Q: Because of this, is there anyone, like relatives, friends, neighbours, who have moved to other places?

A: Yes, a lot. What is left here is just a tenth of the original. Nine out of ten people have moved out. They cannot bear to stay anymore. The girls and boys who are left cannot get married because our custom is that you cannot get married with near relatives.

Q: Where have they all moved to?

A: Some go to Kengtung, and some to Taunggyi. You stay where it is right - where the authorities say is right - and safe to stay. You can go and look. Nobody is living in the hills anymore.

Q: Have you seen or heard Burmese planes fly over the village?

A: Yes, 2 or 3 years ago.

Q: From the planes that flew over, did you have any experience of chemical spraying?

A: Yes, 2 years ago.

Q: Can you explain or describe what happened?

A: When I came to know about this, the domestic and jungle animals were all touched by this chemical. Jungle fowl, sparrows were all killed. At Noe-Ek, people also died. They coughed for 15 to 20 minutes, and they vomited blood. Their faces were bloated.

Q: Was the poppy field near your village?

A: Now very near.

Q: What did the chemical look like? The smell, colour?

A: The chemical looked like rain. Like lime. The smell was like poison. The kind you spray on plants. The colour is greenish.

Q: What happened to the vegetables?

A: All the vegetables in the ground were rotten. The white radishes were rotten, and when we fed them to the pigs, the pigs had a lot of trouble with their stomachs. When the chemical touched the vegetables, you could not eat them anymore. All were rotten. You could not eat anything at all.

Q: You have talked about children. What about adults?

A: Adults were also sick. And after the sickness death followed.

Q: Did any large animals die?

A: No, I didn't see any.

Q: Did the chemical touch much?

A: Yes, a lot. Last year there was a lot.

Q: How far is the poppy field from your village?

A: The chemical spraying reached our village. The poppy fields are almost 3 or 4 miles away.

Q: Before the Burmese government came to spray the chemical did they warn you in any way?

A: No, they didn't give any warning.

Q: After the spraying, did the Burmese government help you in any way?

A: No, nothing. We didn't get anything.

Q: Have there been any problems with the government?

A: We live here because we didn't know how to live in the city. Our problems are with rice, forced labour, and trading. When we go around, if we meet with soldiers, they capture us. They never listen to you if they want you.

Q: When the government came to spray the chemical was there any fighting in this area?

A: No, there was no fighting. It is like fish live in water. Fish cannot live without water, and we cannot stay if we don't plant our

Q: All this happening, how do the people feel about it?

A: Whether it is good or bad, you must bear it. You cannot go anywhere. You don't have any knowledge. No learning. Like a rock, you stay where you are. No knowledge, and learning is short, so if you travel you cannot go far. What I told you, I want this to reach the authorities' ears.

LOCATION D, INTERVIEW 2 (male)

Q: What ethnic group are you, and how old are you?

A: I'm Akha, and I'm 63 years old.

Q: What work do you do?

A: I grow rice, maize, and vegetables such as chilli and egg plant, that you can eat.

Q: What ethnic group are the people in your area, and what work do they do?

A: All the people in my village are Akha, and everybody makes a living like me.

Q: Is there Burmese government in your area? Are there any Burmese schools or hospitals?

A: No, there are no government officials living in my village. Also there is no school or hospital.

Q: Does the Burmese government charge tax in your area?

A: When the Burmese troops come, they don't ask for any kind of money. Only we have to give them 10 kilos of rice - for each house that is in the village.

Q: Do any other groups charge tax in your area?

A: No, I don't see any other armed forces.

Q: When was the last time Burmese troops came to your area, and what happened then?

A: The Burmese troops? I saw them 3 months ago. Oh, I'm an old man so I don't go near the troops very much and I cannot say whether they harm people or not. But if you meet Burmese troops on the way when you go from place to place, they force you to carry things. They make you their porter, and unless you run away they make you carry their things all the time.

Q: Have you seen Burmese planes spraying chemicals?

A: Yes, I saw three planes fly very high, and also I saw them spray a chemical at this village.

Q: What did the chemical look and smell like?

A: It looked like rain, and when it touched the plants, it looked greenish. The odour was poisonous.

Q: How did it affect the plants?

A: All the plants became rotten and dried up. The food in the ground also rotted, and you could not eat anything. You cannot plant rice anymore where the chemical touched.

Q: What crops were affected?

A: Poppies, rice, maize, soya beans, taro, everything. Everything.

Q: Were people affected?

A: People coughed a lot, and there was also swelling. Then the blood came out.

Q: Were animals affected?

A: The pigs and cattle became sick, and then they started dying. The dogs also died. Some even died when the wind blew. The grass that was touched by the chemical was eaten by the horses and cattle. These also became sick.

Q: Were the sprayed fields near the village?

A: The spraying was done near and far.

Q: Was there any warning before, or any help afterwards?

A: No, there was no warning before and no help from the government after the spraying.

Q: Will you plant the fields again?

A: We just left the field. Nobody went and looked at it after the spraying. Sure we will plant everything all over again. What are you going to eat if you don't do any kind of planting?

Q: How do you feel about what happened?

A: What the government did is not good. And the things that I have told you now, I want them to reach the authorities. Will it reach them? Whatever we do, they don't see us as human beings. We are looked down on like dogs and pigs. The government is useless. There is trouble all over the country. I'm very sad and downhearted. Come rain or sun, we must stay here. We must bear it all

LOCATION D, INTERVIEW 3 (male)

Q: How old are you, and what is your ethnic group?

A: I'm 65 years old, and I'm an Akha.

Q: What work do you do?

A: I work in the field, and all the Akha in the village do the same.

Q: Is there Burmese government in your area? Are there any Burmese schools or hospitals?

A: There are no Burmese government officials in my village. There is no Burmese school or hospital.

Q: When did Burmese soldiers last come to your area?

A: I saw Burmese troops last year, but not this year. They didn't come this year.

Q: Have you seen Burmese airplanes spraying a chemical?

A: The planes did not come this year. But they came last year. Last year they sprayed so much again that I didn't want to work. I really lost heart and just didn't want to work anymore. And this year when you look and don't see anything growing, what are you going to do? How are you going to live? I usually grow a lot of mustard greens myself, but this year I just didn't plant them in good quantity anymore. For 2 years they came to spray and spray. And when the plants all get killed you really lose heart. Last year I lost 3 cows because they were and ate the grass. The grass was wet from the chemical, so when the cows ate it, they died. The whole village lost about 7 cows. Mules also died.

LOCATION D, INTERVIEW 4 (male)

Q: How old are you, and what is your ethnic group?

A: I'm 45 years old, and I'm an Akha.

Q: What work do you do?

A: I just work in the field.

Q: Is there Burmese government in your area? Are there any Burmese schools or hospitals?

A: No, there are no government officials in the village now. They do come and go, but they never stay long. There is no school or hospital in my village.

Q: When did Burmese troops last come to your area, and what happened?

A: Government forces came, but not to spray this time. They came last month. When they came, there was no problem. Only they ate our pigs and chickens. Some asked for them, some just shot them to eat.

Q: Did the Burmese troops take people to work for the army?

A: Yes, there was forced labour. They told us to make roads and repair bridges. Sometimes we had to work 3 or 4 days, sometime 9 or 10 days. The Burmese troops would ask for 8 persons from each village to work on the road, to gather stones and to hammer the stones. Payment depended upon how many persons went and worked for them. Payment of 8 Baht was paid by the length of the road you paved with the rock. For an arm's length we were paid 8 Baht. The first time they gave you this payment of 8 Baht, but not now. We had to take our own food to eat, they didn't give us anything.

Q: Have you seen Burmese planes spraying a chemical?

A: I cannot quite remember when the planes came. The planes came last year. First there was a helicopter, and then 2 or 3 days later these planes came and sprayed. I saw it from the village. I was not in the field at the time.

Q: What colour were the airplanes?

A: I don't know because it was far, and with the sun in my eyes it looked dark.

Q: What was the chemical like?

A: When the chemical started to fall from the plane, it was like smoke, but when it reached the ground it was water. Some of the children became dizzy because of the chemical, and some vomited.

Q: How did the spray affect the crops?

A: All the plants and grass touched by the chemical died. If the rain falls, it is worse, but if the sun shines, then it is a bit better.

Q: Did the spray affect people?

A: Well, the children go to the fields in the early morning around 7 o'clock. I think the planes came around 9 o'clock. The planes went back in the afternoon. Those that touched a large amount of the chemical got sick very quickly. Those that were touched with just a small amount got sick after some time. Some had bowel disorder, and some became thin.

Q: Were animals affected?

A: After eating the grass, the horses died. The fowls and the pigs also died later. There was sickness all over; not one person was in good health. The girls in the other village were a little better. When we fed the animals with the vegetable plants from the field, the animals all died. All the pigs in the village died. I myself lost 8 pigs, small and large.

Q: Was drinking water affected?

A: Of course we have to drink the water that we use every day. If we don't drink the water here, what else are we going to drink? Of course the water was touched by the chemical.

Q: Were the sprayed fields near the village?

A: The fields are scattered all over the place. Some are near and some are far away from the village. The fields are 2 hours to 1 hour's walk away.

Q: Was there any warning before the spraying, or any help afterwards?

A: There was not any kind of warning before, and after the spraying there was no help from the Burmese government either.

Q: Was there any problem with the Burmese government at that time?

A: I cannot say there is no problem. We are just simple citizens and don't know what to do. When they come to spray like this, we are very unhappy, but we can do nothing about it. Because they are the authority, we cannot do anything to them.

Q: Was there any fighting in the area at that time?

A: When the planes came to spray, there was no fighting.

Q: Will you plant the fields again?

A: This year we won't be working. Next year, even if we do plant, it won't come up good. We do rotational planting, like planting maize one year and other vegetables the next.

Q: How do you feel about what happened?

A: It is not good, but what can you do? It is the same like you beat pigs and dogs. They can do nothing back. If we don't work, we don't know what to do. We don't have any kind of education. After we work, we just want to buy food to eat and clothes to wear. Not only do we have to supply them with rice, meat and fowl, but now they come to spray these chemicals

Q: Will you move to another place?

A: Yes, we do want to move. Although we want to move, we don't know where to go know. Everybody wants to move, but when you to other places, you must have money for eating. At least here you have something to eat. It is like we are closed in on all sides with nowhere to go. We came from different places. I came because I heard that life here is better. So I said to myself I had better come and see for myself. Nobody from my family stays down in Thailand. Only some stay in Kengtung. They moved because the living there is better. You stay where you can get a good harvest.

LOCATION D, INTERVIEW 5 (female)

Q: How old are you?

A: 55 years old.

Q: What is your ethnic group?

A: Akha.

Q: What work do you do?

A: I'm just a simple farmer. I work in the field.

Q: Is there Burmese government in your area? Are there any Burmese schools or hospitals?

A: No, there are no government officials, no school or hospital in my village.

Q: When did the Burmese troops last come to your village?

A: The last time I saw the government troops was about 3 months ago. Mostly they don't harm us. They only ask for food.

Q: Have you seen Burmese airplanes spraying a chemical? When?

A: Yes, Burmese planes flew over our village two months ago, but I cannot remember the date. I counted that they flew over my field 5 times.

Q: What colour were the airplanes?

A: The colour of the planes was black. I think there were 2 planes because they were flying back and forth. Counting this year, it is the third consecutive year that I have not been able to get a good harvest. This year was a little bit better. Last year and the year before last we couldn't get anything. All the banana plants that were put in the ground died.

Q: What was the chemical like?

A: Everything the chemical touched turned black, and the smell was like the smell of poison. When I saw there was a lot of spray, I ran away into the jungle because I was afraid.

Q: What happened to the crops?

A: The spraying took about 2 or 3 hours. After that all the vegetables died. Some dried up, some rotted, some just fell down.

Q: What crops were growing there?

A: Poppies, soya beans, onions, and all the vegetables you need every day.

Q: How much opium would you have normally got from the field that was sprayed?

A: If I'm lucky enough I get about 2 viss (1 viss = 1.6 kilos) from my fields. Before they came to spray the field, I earned enough to feed myself and I could also buy clothing. I cannot say how much I earn, because I don't have any kind of learning.

Q: Did the spraying affect the drinking water?

A: After the spraying I was very sad. All the pigs were killed, and I really lost heart. But I didn't know what to do. I didn't dare drink the water after they sprayed the chemical. I don't know whether the chemical fell into the water or not. We were afraid we would die from drinking that water.

Q: How many children do you have?

A: One daughter and two small sons.

Q: Did the chemical affect people?

A: After the spraying there was coughing, the eyes watered, and there were stomach disorders.

Q: Did it affect animals?

A: For the animals, some died very soon, and some were sick. Some of the animals died after stomach disorders. Four of them died. All of the vegetables that were touched by the chemical died, rotted, dried up and fell down. So we dare not eat them.

Q: Were the sprayed fields near the village?

A: The fields are not far from the village. You can see them from your front door. They just sprayed and sprayed the poppy fields. Sometimes there are down winds.

Q: Was there any warning before the spraying?

A: No.

Q: Was there any help after the spraying?

A: No.

Q: Will you plant the fields again?

A: Yes, we will plant again. Only rice this time, but not opium. Because there is no use planting the poppy when you don't get a good return. So we are afraid to plant it again.

Q: How do you feel about what happened?

A: It is not good. I'm very sad. You want to eat decent food, wear decent clothes, but you cannot. I am very downhearted. There is nothing to feel good about. Even if we wanted to move to another place, we wouldn't have anything to eat. An opium smoker doesn't die from smoking it, and I myself only harvest opium. I eat only rice. I want to die, but I don't really want to die. I feel like I want to die, but I cannot die as yet. I just feel sick at heart. This government is very foolish. I think it is extremely stupid. I am very, very angry.

Q: How old are you?

A: 57 years old.

Q: What ethnic group are you?

A: Akha.

Q: What ethnic group are the people in your area, and what work do they do?

A: All the villagers are Akha and do farming. This is what we Akha can do.

Q: Is there Burmese government in your area? Are there any Burmese schools or hospitals?

A: No, nothing.

Q: When was the last time Burmese soldiers came to your area? What happened?

A: The last time the Burmese troops came to this village was about 2 months ago. I myself have not experienced any ill treatment from the Burmese troops.

Q: Have you seen Burmese airplanes spraying a chemical?

A: Yes, I saw Burmese planes about 1 month ago. I don't know how many planes, because they flew back and forth, and I didn't count them. They were planes with fixed wings. The colour of the planes was black. I don't remember the date. The time was about 8.30 in the morning. The planes went around until 2 or 3 pm.

Q: What was the chemical like?

A: When the planes came to spray, it was like rain, and the colour looked green. It smelled like oil.

Q: How did it affect the crops?

A: After the spraying had been done, nothing was left standing straight. All the plants were crooked and bent in all kinds of shapes. All were dead.

Q: What crops were sprayed?

A: There were all sorts of vegetables in the fields that were sprayed. Mustard greens, tomatoes, white radish, sweet potatoes, all kinds, and they all died.

Q: Did the chemical affect people?

A: As for the people in the village, there was pain and sickness, but no one died.

Q: Did it affect animals?

A: Animals like mules, cows and dogs did not die, but all the pigs died. Not one is left.

Q: Did people eat sprayed food or drink affected water?

A: When they sprayed the chemical, it touched all our fields which were planted. I don't know about the water. In the fields are all the food that we have.

Q: Were the sprayed fields close to the village?

A: The fields are near and far.

Q: Was there warning before the spraying, or help afterwards?

A: No, there was no warning given beforehand, and after the spraying there was no help either. When the planes came to spray nobody - neither the children nor the adults - dared go to the fields. We just watched from our houses.

Q: Will you plant the fields again?

A: Yes, we will work in the poppy fields again. If we do not work in the fields, I don't know what to do. Our fathers and forefathers all worked in the fields. The food and clothes all come from the fields. I don't work in the rice fields. I have just ended up with poppy fields.

Q: How do you feel about what happened?

A: I cannot say the government is good. The government did not help us in any way, so I say the government is not good. Since I was born and have grown up, I have never seen the government bring any kind of help.

LOCATION D, INTERVIEW 7 (male)

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Q: What is your age?

A: 40 years old.

Q: What is your ethnic group?

A: I'm Akha.

Q: What work do you do?

A: Mostly I work in the fields, planting rice, maize and other vegetables to feed myself.

Q: What ethnic group are the people in your area, and what crops do they grow?

A: All the people here are Akha like myself. Most of them plant rice and vegetables. We don't know how to trade or travel.

Q: Is there Burmese government in your area? Are there any Burmese schools or hospitals?

A: No, there are no government officials here now, but before there were. There is no kind of school or hospital.

Q: Does the Burmese government charge tax in your area?

A: No, the government forces do not ask for any money from us, but if they come they ask for food like rice, chickens and pigs. Sometime there is forced labour.

Q: Does any other group charge tax?

A: I don't see any other armed forces.

Q: Is there any fighting in your area?

A: No, I have not seen any fighting recently. There was some before, some years ago, but I don't remember between what forces.

Q: What happens when the Burmese Army comes?

A: When they come, mostly they ask for food. They didn't pay for the food. The Burmese troops didn't harm us. Well, up to now, since I have come to live here, the soldiers haven't done anything to us.

Q: Have you seen Burmese planes spraying chemicals?

A: Yes, I have seen planes. Not this year. Last year and the year before I saw three planes. One was flying higher than the other two planes. The higher plane just flew around and around. The two lower planes flew very low. They sprayed and flew away. Then the planes came back and sprayed again. The planes just sprayed and sprayed. The chemical was all over the place. That was the past two years, but not this year.

Q: What colour was the chemical, and what did it smell like?

A: If you looked from below, the colour of the chemical looked greenish. And the smell was like poison. Those that breathed in a big amount felt dizzy. The chemical, the first time it fell from the plane, it looked like smoke. And when it reached the ground, it had a rotten kind of smell.

Q: What happened to the plants?

A: Some plants rotted, some plants just dried out. All the poppies, green vegetables and tubers were destroyed.

Q: What crops were growing there?

A: Like our fathers and grandfathers, we plant what they have planted. Poppies, mustard greens, radish, taro - we plant everything that we can use.

Q: Did it affect the people?

A: There was no instant death. But after some time there were two deaths. There was sickness in the village. Especially children below 13 years of age. They coughed and coughed for 15 to 20 minutes, and later there was blood from the mouth. The eyes swelled up.

Q: Did it affect animals?

A: The cattle, when they died, they shivered all over. When the cattle got sick, we took them to the government vet, but some died. And when the cattle died, we also could not eat the meat. The pigs also died from diarrhoea after we fed them food.

Q: Did it affect the water?

A: The water was also touched by this chemical. Birds, chickens and pigs, when they drank the water, some got sick and died. You cannot grow rice anymore. If you plant it now, the plant just won't come up. The villagers that drank the water also got sick.

Q: Are the fields close to the village?

A: The fields are far and near, all over the place. Some are 1 hour, and some are 1/2 hour's walk. There are some that you can reach within 15 minutes' walk.

Q: Was there any warning from the Burmese government?

A: There was no kind of warning from the Burmese government before they came to spray the chemical.

Q: Was there any help after the spraying?

A: No, there was no kind of help from the government after the spraying.

Q: Was there any problem with the government at that time?

A: I don't know anything about this. I cannot say the government abandons us or doesn't abandon us. I don't even know the law of the country.

Q: Will you plant those fields again?

A: Yes, we will plant again. But even if you plant, it is the same as if you don't plant. You can say it is not good, but nobody is able to argue about it.

LOCATION D, INTERVIEW 8 (male)

Q: How old are you?

A: 21 years old.

Q: What ethnic group are you?

A: Akha.

Q: Is there Burmese government in your area? Are there any Burmese schools or hospitals?

A: No, nothing.

Q: Does the Burmese government charge tax in your area?

A: The Burmese troops don't ask for money, but we do have to give them rice and meat.

Q: Does any other group charge tax in your area?

A: No.

Q: When did the Burmese troops last come to your area?

A: They last came 2 months ago. The soldiers never caused any big problems.

Q: Have you ever seen Burmese airplanes spraying a chemical?

A: I never heard any news before that the plane would come. All I know is that it was spraying the field. That was 2 months ago. I think it was around 9 o'clock in the morning, and it was quite late when the plane went back.

Q: What was the chemical like?

A: The colour of the chemical was blue, and it was like rain when it came down. The smell was like oil.

Q: How did it affect the crops?

A: After the spraying, within days all the plants died.

Q: What crops were growing there?

A: All kinds of vegetable were in the field: radishes, tomatoes, chili green beans, soya beans.

Q: Did the chemical affect people?

A: Nobody died from the chemical spraying, but there was a lot of sickness.

Q: Did it affect animals?

A: Animals like chickens and pigs died later. Cows died later, too.

Q: Did the chemical affect drinking water?

A: Right after the spraying we dared not drink the water, but 3 or 4 days later we had to drink it. But when we knew it caused death, we were afraid to drink it.

Q: Were the fields close to the village?

A: The fields are far and near.

Q: Was there warning before the spraying?

A: No.

Q: Was there help after the spraying?

A: No.

Q: How do you feel about what happened?

A: We want to be left alone.

Q: Was there any fighting in the area at that time?

A: No.

Q: Will you plant the fields again?

A: Yes, we will have to plant again, but only rice. To plant poppies is impossible now.

Q: Will you move to another place?

A: To go to other places is impossible, because I don't have food and cash. I must stay here.

LOCATION D, INTERVIEW 9 (female)

Q: How old are you?

A: 30 years old.

Q: What ethnic group are you?

A: Akha.

Q: Are there any Burmese schools or hospitals in your area?

A: There is not any kind of school or hospital in my village.

Q: Does the Burmese government charge tax in your area?

A: No Burmese troops come to ask for funds of any kind, but they do ask for food, like rice and meat.

Q: Does any other group charge tax in your area?

A: No.

Q: Are there any problems with the Burmese troops?

A: Sometimes there are problems, and sometimes not. One problem is beating. Besides that, there is forced labour. We had to act as porters. If we could bear heavy loads, they forced us to carry them and beat us. You don't get enough sleep. There were those that died, and some became sick. We had to make roads and carry rocks. They didn't pay us for the work.

Q: Have you seen Burmese airplanes spraying a chemical?

A: Yes, I saw government planes about 2 months ago. I don't know how many, but they flew back and forth.

Q: What colour were the airplanes?

A: Black and green.

Q: When did they spray?

A: They came and sprayed for 5 days. I don't remember the time. But I think between 9 am to 4 pm.

Q: What colour was the spray?

A: It looked like rain, and the colour was whitish.

Q: What did it smell like?

A: The smell was like the smell of oil.

Q: How did it affect the crops?

A: This year you could not go near the sprayed things or you would get dizzy. Every plant and anything edible was all dead and rotten. Nothing was left. My field was also sprayed.

Q: Did it affect people?

A: After the dizziness, the sickness followed. I'm still sick up to now.

Q: Did it affect animals?

A: Animals like horses and pigs also died. The pigs died after we fed them chopped banana plant and white radish.

Q: Did it affect drinking water?

A: Of the water we use every day, some is affected a lot, and some is not.

Q: How close are the fields to the village?

A: The fields are one to half an hour's walk away.

Q: Was there any warning before the spraying?

A: No.

Q: Was there any help after the spraying?

A: No. All the poppies died. The pigs and dogs also died. We could not even get a sack full of food for eating.

Q: Were there Burmese troops in the area during the spraying?

A: When the troops came here, they just came for rice and meat. Then they went up the hill to higher ground, so I don't know if they were there or not.

Q: Will you move to another place?

A: We stay here because we don't know where to go.

Q: Was there any fighting in the area at the time of the spraying?

A: No.

Q: Will you plant the fields again?

A: Yes, I will have to go on planting. I don't see anything good that comes from the government. I will not move to another place. All the pigs, chickens and vegetables are destroyed. We have almost nothing left to eat. But if we stay here, at least we still have houses. We don't have the strength to move to another place.

LOCATION E, INTERVIEW 1 (male)

Q: What ethnic group are you from?

A: Palaung.

Q: What work do you do?

A: I work in a hill field. I don't work in a valley field. It is just a small one: there is not enough space. We Palaung plant only a small amount of poppies, but the Burmese are always disturbing us.

Q: How old are you?

A: I'm 30 years old.

Q: What ethnic group are the people in your area?

A: All the villagers are Palaung.

Q: What crops do you grow?

A: I work in the field for rice, some corn and poppies. I buy salt and chillies. We must buy this, so we grow the poppies, just a small amount.

Q: Is there Burmese government in your area? Is there a Burmese school or hospital?

A: No, nothing. We live too far away.

Q: Is there any fighting in your area?

A: No.

Q: What happened when the Burmese troops last came to your area?

A: The Burmese troops came here last year, and they put up camp at the village for two nights and 3 days. The soldiers killed pigs and chickens and ate them. The soldiers took us all the way to carry their things. Even the horses cannot carry the things. We just walked and walked a long, long way. Later some of us ran away. If you don't run away, they don't let you go.

Q: Have people been sent to new, walled villages?

A: No, there was no grouping of various villages into one village. We mostly are down south; we dare not go up north, because the Burmese are there.

Q: Have you heard of Burmese airplanes spraying a chemical?

A: No, we have not seen any spraying as yet. But yes, in other places they do. Here there are not enough poppies to spray. Like I told you, we just grow a small amount. They said Ung-karn was sprayed but I didn't see for myself. Here is not worth spraying. Mostly we work in the hill fields. We make a living by planting the hill fields, so we are safe. A bit better off. But then even the rice harvest is not good some years.

LOCATION E, INTERVIEW 2 (male)

Q: How old are you and what is your ethnic group?

A: I'm 50 years old and a Palaung.

Q: What work do you do?

A: I work in a hill ricefield and plant some poppies. I have to plant them because I must buy clothes, salt and chillies. We Palaung don't have the skill to do other kind of work.

Q: What happened when the Burmese troops last came here?

A: The Burmese troops came once last year. The soldiers didn't go to the village. They were here at my house. They came to stay 3 days and 2 nights. The way the Burmese soldiers were to me, I just couldn't bear it. I was very surprised, really surprised by their behaviour. They took away everything: blankets, mattress, all my clothing. Even the small pigs, that they didn't eat, they killed.

Q: Is there a Burmese school or hospital in your area?

A: No, there is no school or hospital set up by the Burmese. Anyway we Palaung are different from the Burmese.

Q: Did the Burmese troops take people to work for the army?

A: We had to work as coolies or porters. We had to carry their ammunition, and other things that followed behind later. So you had to run away, because it is not for just one day or two days. They took you all the way, like 4 or 5 days. So you could not bear it. You had to run away, and that depended on how clever you were. When Burmese soldiers come to our village, we usually run and stay in the jungle. Farther away is better off. Sometimes one may reach other villages. If you stay too near, the government soldiers may find you. And when the soldiers leave the village, then we come back again.

Q: Have you heard of Burmese airplanes spraying a chemical?

A: I've only heard about the spraying. But I've seen its effects. My brother stayed in Sarng-karn, and they came to spray there

last year. His cow died. My brother was very sad for two months and almost died. They had no mustard greens to eat for 2 months.

Here, they have not sprayed since I came to live here. I'm very surprised at the way the government does all this. Every moment I think about it I'm surprised. I don't have any education. We only know how to plant poppies. I don't know about soldiering or selling. Only poppies. Then the government comes and does this. I'm very surprised and I cannot understand why. We can put up with a lot. But what really troubles me at the moment is what the government is doing to us now.

They once caught me in Sarng-karn and beat me up until I fainted. I'm really sick of these government soldiers. I don't even want to look at their faces now. The Committee Men took my brother to be a coolie and tied him up. But my brother managed to run away during the night. In the morning the Committee Men came to me and said I must work as a porter. There was no replacement and I look like my brother. The Committee Men took me to the soldiers and said "This was the man that ran away last night". The soldiers beckoned me to go with them. They had guns, so what could I do? And before I could say anything, they beat me and kicked me rolling on the floor. They kicked me so that I fainted. I was wearing three layers of clothing. My only 5 kyats they took away - when I don't know. They threw away everything I had with me. When I came back to my senses, everything was broken. I said I would report their doing to the commanding officer. Then the soldiers told me to go back and warned me not to do any kind of report to their authority. If I didn't listen to them, they said they would kill me. With tears running down my cheeks I went back home. I told my friends not to send horses for carrying the soldier equipment. My experience of how the soldiers treated me was that I fainted and almost died. This is my first and only experience of the soldiers. Now I just don't want to see them. Me, my brother and the headman have all met with their mistreatment. Just think about my age. From our own soldiers we were never ill-treated. My brother and I like them, although sometimes they may not listen

to us.

Then when we stayed here, I met the Burmese soldiers again. I don't know where exactly they came from. My brother killed pigs and fed them. They didn't give a cent for the pigs. They took away everything in the village: pots and pans, blankets. I estimate all the cost at about 40,000-50,000 Baht. I'm really surprised and puzzled by their behaviour. I don't know if they are really government soldiers or not. I just ran away. I had this bad treatment before, so I am afraid. I will never forget that experience for the rest of my life.

The headman that lived at Barn Kharn, the soldiers beat and beat him without listening to his begging. He demanded to see the commanding major, but the soldiers just scared him by telling him he would be even worse off. I'm surprised at the way they acted. Frankly speaking, we couldn't take all these ill-doings year after year. You couldn't just stay there. The village is not a village anymore. Everybody is afraid.

LOCATION E, INTERVIEW 3 (male)

Q: How old are you?

A: I'm 40 years old.

Q: What is your ethnic group?

A: I'm a Palaung and all the villagers are Palaung.

Q: What work do you do?

A: I work in a hill field, growing chillies and egg-plants.

Q: Is there Burmese government in your area? Is there a Burmese school or hospital?

A: No, there is no Burmese school or any kind of hospital. The Palaung monks do teach at the temple, but only scriptures of Buddha and old Shan language.

Q: Is there any fighting in the area?

A: Up to now there has been no fighting.

Q: What happened when Burmese troops came to your village?

A: When the Burmese came here, they mostly looked for porters. Then they took food like rice, pigs, chickens, vegetables and salt. They just took everything they saw. Even pots and pans. Blankets too. My young brother had to come to me for pots and pans later because the soldiers took them all away.

There are two things the soldiers do that they shouldn't. One is taking our belongings. Pots and pans and whatever is necessary in our house. The second thing is they shouldn't take us as coolies for a long time. I don't know for how long or for how many months they take a man to be a coolie. Mostly we just ran away.

When the Burmese soldiers came, we never fled to another village, because they themselves were doing the same thing. Mostly we hid in the jungle for 4-5 days and nights, and listened. Sometimes for a whole month. During the night we sneaked back to the village to look for rice. The soldiers never put up camp in the village.

Q: Have you heard of Burmese airplanes spraying chemicals?

A: Yes, I see airplanes. Once every month, but they just fly over. I heard about the spray, but not this year. They never come to this part, because mostly it is still wild forest.

Q: How do you feel about what has happened?

A: I'm afraid of being taken as a coolie. You have to hide your oxen and horses. If you don't hide them, the Burmese soldiers will take them to carry things. We have to depend on the oxen to plough the fields. Without them you are poor.

As for my family and relatives, their feelings are like my heart is feeling now. They are just very afraid of Burmese soldiers.

Q: What do you eat each day?

A: I have 3 meals a day. I eat rice with chillies and salt. You cannot do without salt.

LOCATION E, INTERVIEW 4 (male)

Q: How old are you and what ethnic group are you from?

A: I'm 38 years old and I'm a real Palaung.

Q: What work do you do?

A: We do only farm work.

Q: What ethnic group are the people in your area and what do they do?

A: All the villagers are Palaungs and they all plant hill fields. We plant corn, sweet potatoes and taro. Just enough to eat.

Q: Is there Burmese government in your area? Is there a Burmese school or hospital?

A: There are no government officials. No school or hospital in the village. No kind of nurses. When we are sick we just boil herbs that we can find and drink the water.

Q: Has there been any fighting in your area?

A: There has never been any fighting between any kind of armed forces.

Q: What happened when Burmese troops came to your village?

A: When the Burmese soldiers came last year, the whole village - children, women, old people - all had to flee and hide in the jungle. We had to stay in the jungle up to 20 days. But they didn't enter the village. Mostly they just patrolled around the village.

Q: Did they take people to work for the army?

A: Yes, we had to work as coolies. Every village had to contribute 2 or 3 people. We had to carry their things, like ammunition. If we heard news that the Burmese were coming, we fled. If not, they will come and take everything. Even the very clothes you are wearing, if they like them, they take them. We fled only last year. Not this year. We only heard that the Burmese came, but they didn't reach our village. We never fled to another village. We mostly fled and stayed in the jungle.

Q: Have you seen Burmese airplanes?

A: About once a month we see airplanes. The planes come from Kengtun

Q: Have you seen Burmese airplanes spraying chemicals?

A: No, I've never seen the spraying, but only got the news. Last year they came to spray at Kaw Huay Hoo.

Q: How do you feel about what has happened?

A: My family, all the villagers, the children, all alike met with difficulties. Like - when you heard news that the Burmese are coming, you are afraid. If you are taken as a porter, you are forced to carry ammunition and other things. If they take you, sometimes it takes up to 1 or 1½ months if you are not clever enough to run away.

Some who work in the hill fields are able to feed themselves. Some are not. As for me, I'm a new arrival, so it is not enough. I came from Kengtung last year. Staying in Kengtung the Burmese always trouble you. Now it is like fleeing from the hot place and coming to a cool place. They said that our armed force is here, and there are no Burmese soldiers that bother you.

Q: What food do you eat each day?

A: We eat 3 meals a day. Maybe some days 4 meals. We Palaung eat mustard greens and chillies only.

Q: Are things getting better or worse in your area?

A: When we hear news that Burmese soldiers are coming or around the area, we are afraid. We just don't feel happy and easy at heart.

LOCATION E, INTERVIEW 5 (male)

Q: How old are you and what is your ethnic group?

A: I'm 50 years old and a Palaung.

Q: What work do you do?

A: I work in the hill fields.

Q: What ethnic group are the people in your area?

A: All the villagers are Palaung. We don't mix with other tribes.

Q: What kind of work do they do?

A: Mostly we don't know other kinds of professions, only farming in the field. Long ago, when the country's condition was good, we lived up-country. When the Burmese soldiers came in, trouble started, so we moved down here. We heard that here was better, and the soil was still rich. Again the Burmese caught up with us and came to trouble us every year. Villagers mostly planted rice and cucumbers. To go and sell the cucumbers in the town is quite difficult. We don't live near the town like the Shan. We work in the poppy fields - but only a small quantity. With the cash we get from the opium, we buy food and things that are necessary.

Q: Is there Burmese government in your area? Is there a Burmese school or hospital?

A: There is no government official in our village, only our (insurgent) soldiers. But government soldiers do come once in a while. Then we run away. There's no Burmese school in our village, but even if there was, we won't learn their language. There is no hospital in our village. We have only our own soldiers that come and go. And when we are sick, they help us. We are satisfied. Some people get better, some don't. If you don't get better, you die. That's all.

Q: Does the Burmese government charge tax in your area?

A: No, the Burmese soldiers don't ask for protection fees. But this year they asked for rice tax. Depending on the size of the village. You have to send them 25 to 30 tins (1 kerosene tin = about 20 kgs of rice per village. You have to send the rice all the way to

Tachilek.

Q: What happened when the Burmese last came to your area?

A: The last time Burmese soldiers came to visit us was last month. I don't know their destination, they just passed by our village. We were very afraid. The only problem is that they take pigs and chickens from us. Also clothes and blankets. Anything beautiful, they just sweep it away. The last time they came, they took away 18 pigs and the temple's scripture printing presses. If they saw pigs, they killed them. If they saw hens, they killed them. I cannot say that is good. They asked for things, and you had to give it to them. This too I cannot say is good.

Q: Did they take people to work for the army?

A: The problem is the soldiers take you as porters to carry loads. They never give you wages for the work. And if you don't run away on the way, then there is no way of getting back home. It depends on how clever you are.

Q: Have people been sent to new, walled villages?

A: There is no grouping of several villages into one village as yet. But I don't know for the future. Not in our village. But yes, I heard that occurred at one place. A Palaung village. The soldiers were afraid the villagers would join "the people in the jungle". The village is Muang Poo. They moved the villagers down to the plain. Well, we Palaungs are used to the cool climate. And when you had to move to the plain, it is hot. Some could not stand the heat and died. The people that fled and reached our village told us this with tears running down their cheeks.

Q: Have you heard of Burmese airplanes spraying a chemical?

A: I only heard about that, but did not see it. They said it was at Muang Hsat. Last year at Narm Nang too. But at our village not yet. I don't know whether they will spray or not. Before, they did it at Narm Nang and our old village.

Q: How many people are in your family?

A: Altogether there are 12 people in my family. And in this village there are altogether 30 households. I don't know exactly how many people altogether.

Q: How much land do you have for crops?

A: We have no paddy fields, only a little bit. Mostly we have hill fields. If you talk about food, to us our main dependence is on opium to trade for it.

Q: How do you feel about what has happened?

A: Lady and gentleman that come here to observe and study the country situation, you wanted to ask about us Palaungs - how we are faring. We Palaung have been working in the poppy fields for a long time - since our forefathers. It is not that we just started planting recently. I saw my own father working in the poppy fields. Now they said the Burmese government won't allow us to work in the poppy fields anymore and will spray chemicals to wipe them out. We the Palaungs are very sad to hear this bad news. If we are able to work in the poppy fields - I don't mean a large amount, but just enough to feed ourselves and to buy clothing - then we are satisfied. I hope you will do your best and come to a conclusion - so that we Palaung will be able to survive - on how we can still work in the poppy fields. I'm not asking for a big amount, just enough for everyone and I will be happy. Thank you.

LOCATION E, INTERVIEW 6 (female)

Q: How old are you and what is your ethnic group?

A: I'm 30 years old and a Palaung.

Q: What ethnic group are the people in your area?

A: All the villagers are also Palaung.

Q: What work do you do?

A: I work in a hill ricefield and grow a small amount of poppies. Most of the villagers also work in the fields.

Q: Is there Burmese government in your area?

A: No.

Q: Is there a Burmese school or hospital in your area?

A: No, there is no school in my village. No hospital either. But sometimes there is a group of people that come to give medicine. With this alone I'm satisfied.

Q: Does the Burmese government charge tax in your area?

A: No Burmese or other armed forces come to ask for protection money. Burmese soldiers do come, but they didn't reach our village.

Q: What happens when the Burmese soldiers come to your area?

A: When I hear the Burmese are coming, I run away. Since I run away, I don't have any opinion about whether they are good or bad. I have never seen them, and before they could ask me to work I fled away.

Q: Have you heard about Burmese airplanes spraying a chemical?

A: I heard that all the vegetables in the hill fields died. When the people got the smell of the chemical they became dizzy. I don't know what kind it is. When the chemical touched the cows and the chickens, they all died. After the spraying had been done, you could not eat the vegetables if the rain didn't fall and wash the chemical away. There was no warning before the

spraying, and after that the planes just flew away and disappeared. The planes came in from the north and the Burmese soldiers went down south.

Q: How do you feel about what happened?

A: I'm still puzzled by the spraying. If I plant again I'm worried. And afraid. If I don't plant I won't have any money to buy the necessary things. I will plant again a little bit - just enough for the food. The government will not be able to satisfy all the people. But to be cruel to the people and make them poor - this is not right.

Q: How old are you and what is your ethnic group?

A: I'm 27 years old and a Lahu.

Q: What work do you do?

A: I work in the hill fields.

Q: What ethnic group are the people in your area and what work do they do?

A: All the villagers are Lahu. Now we plant a little bit of opium, and vegetables to eat.

Q: Is there Burmese government in your area? Is there a Burmese school or hospital?

A: I've never seen government officials. There's no school and no hospital.

Q: Does the Burmese government charge tax in your area?

A: No, there is no protection fee. But before, at my former village they did collect fees. Although I have a house, I could not stay in the house. I had to flee and go out from the village from time to time. Life is very hard to live now in our village.

Q: Does any other group charge tax in your area?

A: No, there is no other force that comes to our village to collect protection fees.

Q: What happened when the Burmese troops last came to your area?

A: The last time Burmese soldiers came to our village was last month. They came to take villagers to work as coolies for them. All the villagers had to run away. The soldiers took everything that they could eat. Nothing good came out of the soldiers coming to the village. Mostly the soldiers come to look for coolies. We wouldn't go and work for them on the road or whatever if they didn't come for us.

Q: How much land do you have for crops?

A: I don't have a paddy field. I only have a small hill field, and it is in the village that I left. Since I have to flee from

the Burmese, going back and forth, I cannot work in my hill field anymore.

Q: What do you eat each day?

A: I eat three meals a day, mostly mustard greens and chillies.

Q: How do you feel about what has happened?

A: For me the Burmese soldiers are not good. The place I'm staying at this time is good. I don't want to see the Burmese. I could not ~~stay~~ stay at my village, because I had to flee all the time. I'm very hard up now.

LOCATION F, INTERVIEW 2 (female)

Q: How old are you and what is your ethnic group?

A: I'm 35 years old and a Lahu.

Q: What work do you do?

A: I work in the hill fields.

Q: What ethnic group are the people in your area and what work do they do?

A: All the villagers are Lahu. The villagers also work in the hill fields. Mostly we just plant mustard greens and some poppies.

Q: Is there Burmese government in your area? Is there a Burmese school or hospital?

A: No government officials come and live in the village. There is no school and no hospital.

Q: Does the Burmese government charge tax in your area?

A: No.

Q: Do other groups charge tax in your area?

A: No.

Q: What happened when Burmese troops last came to your area?

A: Burmese soldiers last came more than a month ago. If they come, there is trouble, like taking food from us. Then they take the people as coolies. I don't have any kind of learning. All I can do is flee when the Burmese soldiers come. I hope you might be able to help us.

LOCATION F, INTERVIEW 3 (male)

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Q: How old are you and what ethnic group are you from?

A: I'm 37 years old and a Lahu.

Q: What work do you do?

A: I work in the hill fields.

Q: What ethnic group are the people in your area and what do they do?

A: All the villagers are Lahu and work in the fields. We plant a small amount of poppies and mustard greens.

Q: Is there Burmese government in your area?

A: No.

Q: What happened when Burmese troops came to your area?

A: Burmese soldiers come and go, and when they come to the village they usually take pigs and fowls. The Burmese soldiers are not good. But they never asked us to work for them.

Q: Have you heard about Burmese airplanes spraying a chemical?

A: I heard that they came to spray for 4-5 days. What I heard is that after the spraying all the vegetables died. The people that touched it died.

Q: How many children do you have?

A: I have 2 sons and 3 daughters.

Q: How much land do you have for crops?

A: I can work just in a small plot of the hill field, because there is no water.

Q: What do you eat each day?

A: We have 3 meals a day, and the dishes are just mustard greens and chillies. Now we are finding it even difficult to eat 3 meals a day. The Burmese soldiers trouble us so much that we cannot work in the field. We villagers are finding it very hard to live.

LOCATION F, INTERVIEW 4 (male)

Q: How old are you and what is your ethnic group?

A: I'm 45 years old and a Lahu.

Q: What work do you do?

A: I work in the fields.

Q: What ethnic group are the people in your area and what work do they do?

A: All the villagers here are Lahu. The people here plant mustard greens and chillies.

Q: Is there Burmese government in your area?

A: No, there are no Burmese government officials in the village, but when the Burmese soldiers come they take everything they can find.

Q: Is there a Burmese school or hospital in your area?

A: No.

Q: Does the Burmese government charge tax in your area?

A: No, the Burmese soldiers don't come to ask for protection fees, but they do come for coolies. I never go.

Q: Do other groups charge tax in your area?

A: No other armed force come to ask for fees either, but they come to make life difficult for the Burmese soldiers.

Q: What happened when the Burmese troops last came to your area?

A: Burmese troops last came more than a month ago. When they reached here they took away everything. Pots and pans, food, blankets, and clothing. We were left with nothing except the clothes on our bodies. The pigs and chickens were all taken.

Q: Did they take people to work for the army?

A: What they do to you is they force you to work as porters. And when you can't carry the weight they ask you to carry, they just do away with you instantly.

Q: Have people been sent to new, walled villages?

A: There is no grouping or gathering of several villages into one village. Only when they come they drive out the people.

Q: Have you heard about Burmese airplanes spraying a chemical?

A: When I was in Mung Thoon, I heard they came to spray. There were three planes and they came early in the morning around 8 o'clock. They did the spraying in only one day. The plane's body was white. Akha and Lahu lived in the area where the spraying was being done. They sprayed the whole day. They sprayed until it got dark. They said that after the spraying everything died. Poppies, mustard greens, chillies. Nothing was left standing. Villagers that were touched by the chemical became dizzy and sick. Those that touched a lot, blood came out from their nose. This is what I heard, but I never got to see the effects.

Q: Is there any problem with the government in your area?

A: The government does not leave us alone. The government soldiers are always coming and going. They take things when they come, like rice and meat. Even the women if they don't flee from the village are taken away to carry loads. There is no fighting when the Burmese soldiers enter the village. In the opinion of the people the Burmese soldiers are not good. Once they take you away they never let you go. They tie you up during the night, and during the daytime they train their guns on you all the time.

Q: Have people been sent to new, walled villages?

A: If the Burmese soldiers came, I fled into the jungle - so I don't know if they force the villagers to move from place to place.

Q: Have people you know left the area because of the situation?

A: Yes, they almost all fled to Thailand. Our village had 30 households before, and now there are only 6 left. The Burmese come and trouble you every 6 months, and how can you live when you have to flee to the jungle every time?

Q: Why don't the Lahu in this area wear traditional Lahu clothing and ornaments?

A: How can we have all those clothes when I cannot sell pigs and cattle? Every year the Burmese come to take the animals as food. I have nothing left.

Q: How many children do you have?

A: I have one daughter and 2 sons.

Q: How much land do you have for crops?

A: I have no paddy field. Only a hill field. I can just work only a fraction of the field. Even then because you have to flee the Burmese all the time you cannot harvest your rice. Also when it is time to plant you cannot do so.

Q: How do you feel about what happened?

A: We moved down here from near Kengtung town because we couldn't stand the forced labour anymore. We have been here for 2 years and the Burmese soldiers caught up with us again. And every time they come they take away all our food - pigs and chickens that we breed. We don't have the chance to sell them for cash.

LOCATION G, INTERVIEW 1 (male)

Q: What was your occupation before you came to Thailand?

A: Student. Now I'm 20 years old. Matriculation examination, after this I came here. I passed already.

Q: You're from which ethnic group?

A: Jingphaw. (a Kachin tribal group)

Q: Were you born in Kachin State?

A: No, near Lashio -- Shan State.

Q: Have you heard about Burmese airplanes spraying some chemical on the fields, maybe in Kengtung, Kutkai? Maybe last year, this year, before?

A: Concerned with the opium?

Q: Yes.

A: Two years ago, three jet planes. Two years ago, once, I saw. This year also.

Q: You saw, yourself?

A: Yes.

Q: What place did you see it happen in?

A: Loi Dao province, Mung Yaw village.

Q: What time of the year? What season?

A: In 1986 and 1987, I saw it. January.

Q: What kind of people live in the area -- what ethnic, tribe?

A: Palaung, Jingphaw (Kachin), and Chinese people.

Q: The place where the planes sprayed, was it on the flat side or was it on the mountain side?

A: Before they sprayed, they have a security guard around. So in the mountains, high mountains, like a rock, when they got a security, they came -- the planes. Came in and sprayed. So if they have a lot of opium but they don't have security, they don't go.

Q: What kinds of crops were the villagers growing in the fields that got sprayed?

A: Mostly, before they grow opium, corn and sesame. After, opium. And kinds of beans. They can sell a lot of beans and corn and sesame. They can make money. So opium is only November to February. And corn, if it's rainy season, they can plant.

Q: At the time when the planes came, what crops got sprayed?

A: The beans, long ones. Mustard, lots of mustard -- for the whole year. That one also, the same time they grow in with opium. So it's all useless.

Q: What was the spray like? What did it look like or smell like?

A: One Palaung man, he doesn't have very much crops that year. He tried to earn money for only a little small place he had. So his place also, all is poisoned. So he was so shocked and got angry. He has a gun, like a gunpowder -- Kachin made powder gun -- so he took his gun and fired to the plane. But the same time the spray came and then he was fainted, also.

Q: Is the spray wet, or thin or thick? Color?

A: Gray color. Like a snow, like a smoke.

Q: When they sprayed the crops, was it close to the house or not?

A: The villagers don't plant near their houses. Farther than their houses. So they don't worry about that.

Q: What about the animals?

A: I don't think so.

Q: When the planes came, how long did they spray for?

A: They have to stop in near Lashio and then they fill their spray chemical. And the whole day they spray, and if they have finished, they come and refill again, whole day something like that.

Q: In the same field -- for one field, how long?

A: Maybe 2-3 days' walk, but by plane it's a whole day, that area. So if they, this area, they have to camp in Lashio.

Q: To spray one field, how long did it take?

A: Something like, I can imagine, from this part to that part, like a very good quality, they can get 10 viss or 15 viss of opium after harvest. So it depends on how many viss they can grow. They don't know how to weigh it. I know that for the whole haul, some parts are very good quality, like a fertilizer, and then they can get 15 viss for this place. Some are very large, but not so fertile, so they got less.

Q: If they came to spray this one field, how long does it take?

A: Fifteen minutes.

Q: The villages where you saw the spraying -- are they controlled by the Burma government? Do they pay tax to the government? Do they pay tax to the revolutionaries? Or both? Do they have a school from the Burma government, or hospital? What's the government's relation to this village?

A: That place, it's only the revolution army tax they have to pay. Sometimes they came and deliver, then they have to pay. And then, like a K.I.A. (Kachin Independence Army) 4th Brigade area, they have a school from the K.I.A. And like a midwifery, like a clinic. Sometimes, if they have some problem with the health, they get help from Kachin Independence Army. But like the N.D.F. (National Democratic Front, refers to Shan and Palaung forces in this case) area, right now they just started in NDF, so they don't have a school, they don't have anything yet. They have a school, but that's not concerned with the NDF. They have their own committee, the villagers' committee. They have their own, not from Burma.

Q: Is it an in-between, "gray area" or not?

A: Palaung, Shan, Jingphaw forces.

Q: Could the farmers, if they had some money, pay the troops to go away, or not to spray the fields? Could they do anything to stop it?

A: They spray by plane. They can't do anything, the villagers, even if they have money. But, some Burmese troops, they came and burned, something like that. Before burning, they have to discuss with the leader of the troops. And then they gave to them like a cow, like a pig, something like that. Then it stops. Like a bribe.

Q: The people in the village that was sprayed, did they say what they were going to do, did they say they'd try to plant again, or they'd move away? Or if they're angry, they'd go and join another group? Or did they think "oh we'll wash it off and plant again here"?

A: They have nothing else to do instead of those crops, like corn or beans or opium. Once they spray, only that year they have nothing. Next year they have to do again. Because of, they don't have anything else to earn money. So they try again. Even the schoolteacher -- not from the government -- the schoolteacher also for the extra money, they have to do that. The crops again. In the same place.

Q: You told about the old man who tried to shoot the plane. Did anyone else feel sick afterwards, or did anything unusual happen?

A: They faint, but not die. The poison after maybe 10 minutes or something like that.

Q: What happened if they got sick?

A: Only faint. Not vomiting, I didn't know about it, or they didn't have.

Q: How did you happen to be in the place to see it, two years, at two different times?

A: Only 20 days after I was born, my mother died. So my grandma, my father's mother, raised me. And my grandma was in that village. So I have to stay with my grandmother. Now she's 70 years old. So I thought, maybe only a few years she will live. So those days I had to go and visit with her. That's why every year I went to this village.

Q: What did the villagers think this was about? Did they say why these planes came and sprayed there or where it came from? Were they angry, were they sad? Did they think of a reason for it?

A: Somebody said -- last year also the same happened -- the first time they sprayed, they don't have knowledge, what is it. But next year, the next year, maybe from somebody they heard "oh, this is from America". American support, they heard. Some people said "oh, the pilots are from America."

Q: Do they feel angry about it or not?

A: Even if they got angry, they don't know what to do.

Q: In general, do you think people from this area, the mountain area, do they try to leave Burma? Or do they try to stay?

A: Some people have money, but they don't know how to get out of Burma, for example to Thailand. They don't know how to imagine it. They know only near Kutkai or near Lashio, they have to move. Only some have money. But some are poor people, they don't know how to do it. They can't shift, they can't do anything. "Until we die we have to live here."

The people sometimes they have to flee the village, to the fields or far away. Sometimes the (Burma Army) troops they have to stay 3 or 4 days in a village. They don't know when they leave. Until then, they have to live in the field. In the field they don't have anything to eat. Even nothing to eat, they have to stay there. So it's very dangerous.

Because if they saw them, then they'd be like a porter to somewhere. And then when they have a fighting with the KIA or NDF, when they ambush, the porters are in front of them.

Last year, 1987, January, when I was there, that time when they wanted to spray, the troops are coming. And they stayed at the villages and they just killed the pigs and cows and just took and ate all. And the rice field, it was after harvest but not finished yet. They don't bring their rations, the Burmese soldiers, they just kill the pigs and chickens and cows. Every village. And then the rice also, they just eat, themselves, everywhere. So this is very difficult to live, for the villagers. Last year it's more serious than before.

Q: When the soldiers came, and then the planes came, after, did the soldiers tell the villagers anything about what would happen with the spray? Or give them any advice?

A: No, never.

Q: Did anybody help them afterwards?

A: Never.

Q: At that time, was there fighting with the KIA or NDF or BCP (Burma Communist Party)? Were the Burmese fighting in the area?

A: Even ambush, no. The Burmese came with at least 600 troops for security. That area's KIA, NDF, BCP and SUA (Shan United Army) also. So four different groups around there. So that's why, when they came, at least 600 soldiers came. So that's why they don't ambush them.

Q: After the spraying, did the people change their mind because of it? Are they loyal to the government, or the BCP or NDF?

A: Some people, they are downhearted. Very few are downhearted because of spraying. But even if they never sprayed, one from each family has to go into KIA or NDF. This is their rule. Even if they don't have a boy, young man, they have a girl also -- one person, each family has to go to KIA or NDF. Some family, they have two -- it's their own decision. Happy to go.

Q: Sometimes you hear about the Burma government, they try to get the people who live up in the mountains to come down, the whole village, and stay in a new village. Do they have it in this area at all?

A: By force, they make them shift, and then they burn all the village.

Q: Do they put them somewhere new?

A: Even if they don't have money, even if they don't want to leave, they have to leave to the new place. They never pay. Sometimes they go just nearby the village, to another village. Close to the village, stay with another family. And then later on, they have to try their own. Build their house, their own.

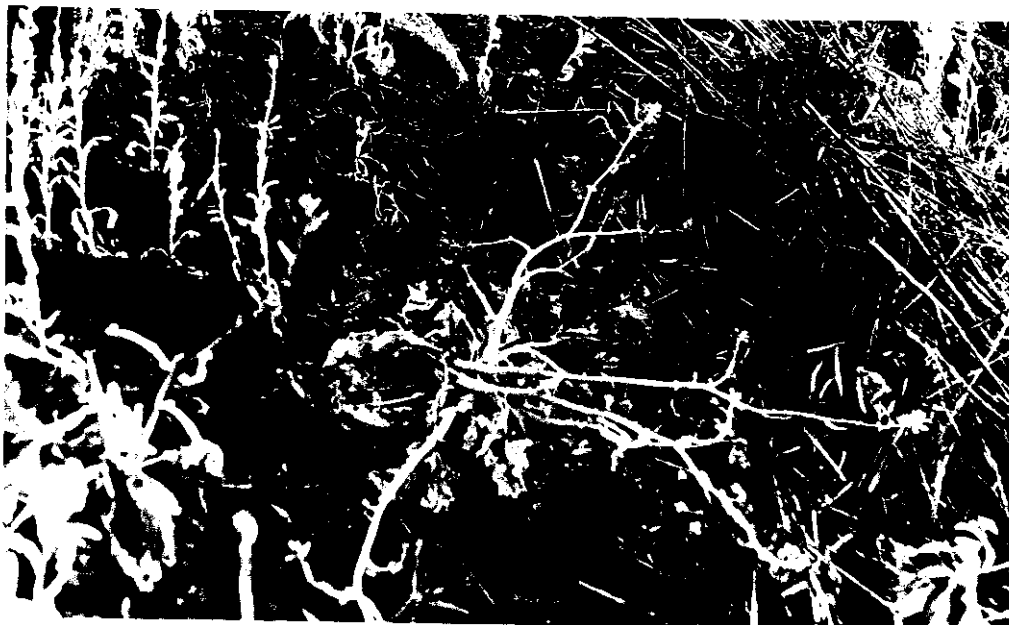


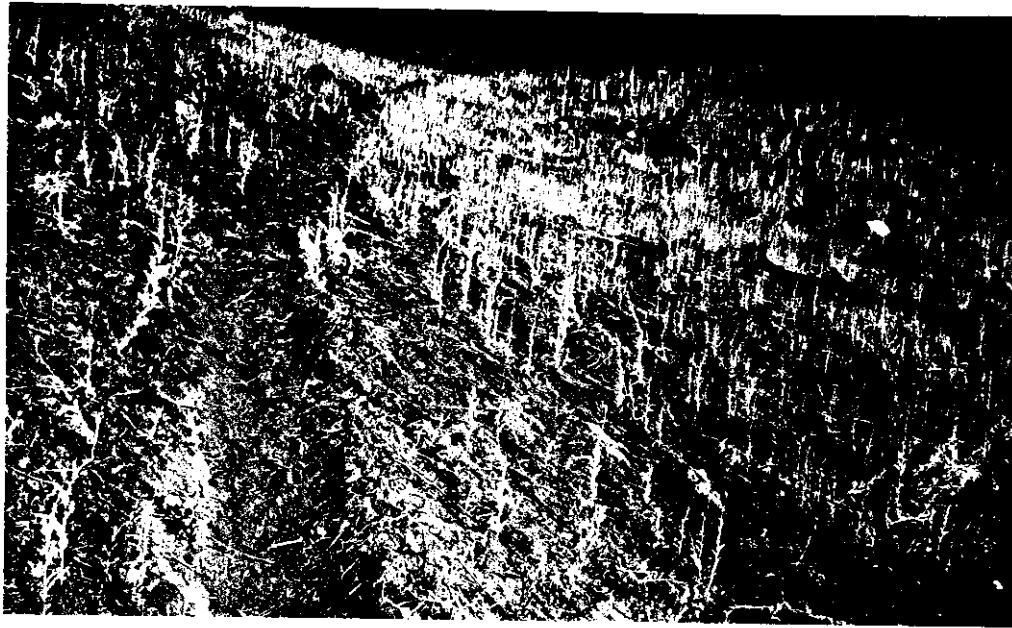
Crops destroyed
by 2,4-D
sprayed in
late December,
1988, Kengtung
Province near
Mong Long.



2,4-D causes
plants to
grow tall and
spindly as
they die. The
color bleaches
out and they
collapse.

Pictured:
mustard greens
and opium
poppies.





Akha hill tribe
field sprayed
with 2,4-D
in late
December, 1988
Kengtung Provin
near Mong Long



Crops destroyed
by 2,4-D



spraying. In
foreground:
bean plants.
In background:
opium poppies
and mustard
greens.

RESEARCH METHOD

The interviews in this report were conducted during January - February 1988.

There were 20 interviewees:

sex: male 16 female 4

age range: 20 to 65 years old

ethnic groups: Akha, 9. Palaung, 6. Lahu, 4. Kachin, 1.

Locations:

D - an Akha village, Kengtung Province

E - a Palaung village, Kengtung Province

F - a Lahu village, Kengtung Province

G - a city in Thailand

The Project Director conducted all interviews. The village interviews were conducted by reading/asking questions in Shan.* The ~~tape recordings~~ were transcribed and translated from Shan to English by a person not affiliated with opposition forces. The city interview was conducted with a person not affiliated with opposition forces interpreting Kachin/English, and the tape recording was transcribed by the Project Director.

Travel within Kengtung Province was possible due to the logistical assistance of a group whose stated aims are in opposition to the Burmese government.

All photographs were taken by the Project Director.

* The Shan language is used as a "lingua franca" by various hill tribes in Kengtung Province.