



**The Justice of Tamadaw (Burmese Army): Mass Execution of Minorities by the
Burmese Army**

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In 1975 the thump, thump, thump noise of a machine gun fire filled the air of the Northern Chin State in the Tiddim district, in the village are of Saizang, Saizang, Mualbeam, and Phunom. These gun shots were not fired during a battle of two parties, but it was rather the noise of gunshots being fired at handcuffed nationality revolutionary forces that demanded democracy, equality, and federalism: The murder of minorities by the Burma.

Except for a short-lived uprising of Chin Youth in 1963 there was peace in the Chin Hills since the British second World War, until the combined Chin and Arakanese Liberation Army (ALA), numbering over 100, was commanded by their Chairman Khaing Moe Lin. The Chin Liberation Front (CLF) was 20 men strong and headed by Major Sa Lian Zam of Zahau clan.

The ALA and CLF received arms from the democratic movement led by the former Prime Minister U Nu and military training from the Karen National Union at their headquarters in Manerplaw in Karen state. After their training they marched from Manerplaw to the Kachinland, crossing the Shan State, to be acquainted with the Kachin Independence Organization (KIO). After wasting two precious months in the Kachinland, precious because they wasted dry summer months, they broke out to travel to the Chin State only at the start of the rainy season. They were escorted by the Kachin Independence Army to the border of Nagaland, during which they did not have encounter any problems. But on reaching the Letha Mountains, the weather was cold, it was windy, and the rain caused them to suffer terribly because they did not have the right clothing and medicine. They were fortunate not to encounter resistance from the Burma Army, although a unit from Hpahkhan was sent out to chase them.

Before they broke out from Manerplaw the Arakan Liberation Army's representative in Bangkok, Thailand had approached the Indian Embassy and informed that the ALA group would be traveling to the Naga Hills and they would not be attacked. However, then the party crossed into India in the Letha mountains the Indian Army attacked them thus they had to proceed inside Burma's mountainous region of the Naga Hills.

The Burma Army received information on their movements when the party reached the Hkamti area. The Burma Army immediately sent a party from Hpakan once again to track down the Arakan and Chin liberation armies but the party could not intersect them.

The Burma Army was waiting for the arrival of the Arakaness and Chin freedom fighters

in the Chin state. Instead of following the border areas between the Burma and India the freedom fighter proceeded to interior of the Chin Hills. The party sent a small pilot group in front of the main body. This advance party had taken guides from villages such as Vapi village at the border areas. Instead of thanking the guide for fear that the guide would betray them. When the main party entered the Chin state villagers were eager to report their arrival to the BSPP authorities. Therefore the Burma Army was informed as soon as the freedom fighters entered the Chin state.

The Burma Army immediately dispatched four companies or about 300 soldiers of the 96 regiment from Kalaymyo and 3 companies from the 53 regiment stationed at Gangaw to the Chin hills to track down the Yakaing and Chin freedom fighters.

As the liberation army was traveling by night along Kalaymo-Tiddim road, they saw a Burma army convoy with the Brigade Commander Hla Tun traveling to Tiddim at Sapan (the ambush place). However the party refused to attack the Burma army because their aim and object was not fighting the Burma army at that time. The purpose of the liberation army's trip to the Chin state was to recruit Chin volunteers from the Falam and Haka areas and to pick up volunteers from Arakan. These recruits would have been trained in military warfare in Bangladesh or Chin.

A few miles from Sapan was the village of Phunom where the liberation army asked for food. A villager traveled to Thuklai (a 5 mile distance) where there was a police station and the presence of the "rebel" in their village.

The report was immediately sent to the headquarters of the Burma army at Kalaymyo. Colonel Mya Maung immediately passed the news to the Regional Commander Brigadier Hla Tun of the Burma Army Northern Command in Mandalay. Brigadier Hla Tun had recently suspended Colonel Myo Nyunt had failed to capture the liberation army before reaching the Chin state. Colonel Mya Maung also informed the Regional Party Chairman of the BSPP, Captain Thein Aung and the secretary Captain Sing Kho Khai at Haka.

The tactical commander Colonel Mya Maung led the chase by immediately proceeding to Saizang. Lt. Colonel Kap Cung Nung, the Regional Council President of the Chin state dispatched Mr. Vum Kho Tual, information Officers of the Chin Council as Liaison Officer. His duty was to bring good relations between the Chin People and the Burma army negatively effected the Chin's opinion of the Burma Army and effected Chin's reflection of the general Burman.

At the skirmish at Phunom and Saizang villages, the liberation army suffered three casualties. Although the liberation army was fully armed, they decided not to confront the Burma army but to surrender to the village administrators, who were appointed by the Burmese Socialist Program Party.

The first group, composed of three officers and their leader Khaing Ba Kyaw, the Vice Chief of staff of the Arakan liberation Army, saw the village Council of KhuaSak. The village BSPP council, having no experience of dealing with the Burma Army, encouraged

Khaing Ba Kyaw and his men to surrender to the Army. Khaing Ba Kyaw accordingly surrendered to the BSPP council, who informed the Burma Army and handed over the four officers.

The Khuasak village council was shocked when the Burma Army took the four men to the stream south of the village and shot them in cold blood after a short interrogation. (The Burma Army Officer shot them at point-blank range in the heads). It was the never tradition of the Chins to kill their captives, even during the days of headhunting, especially when the enemy surrendered. Therefore, educated individuals such as Pu Mang Za Khai and Pu Vai Cin Thang fo Khuasak village, Who eye-witnessed the captives challenged the rights of the Burma Army to murder the captives.

They threatened to report the matter to the United Nations. The Burma Army Officers pleaded with them so that the incident might not be reported the military intelligences service could retaliate. After the Burma Army left the village, Khuasak villagers gave the dead a Christian burial.

About 20 other man led by Major Sa Lian Zam surrendered to the village council and BSPP officers at headquarters. The 26 men were transferred to Saizang at the temporary headquarters of tactical Commander Lt. Colonel Mya Maung. They kept at the camp and were allowed to move and speak freely in the camp. The information officer was allowed to interview the freedom fighters. Although over 40 men had surrendered to BSSP Army.

Captain Maung Aye of the Army intelligence unit interrogated the freedom fighters for one day. In the morning of the second day all of them were stripped of their cloths except their under pants. Their Uniforms were distributed to the Burma Army soldiers of the Burma army. Major Sa Lian Zam had expensive Seiko watch, which cost him over 3000.00 Burmese kyats in 1974. This was taken personally by Captain Maung Aye.

The captives were then line up along a path, tied together with a rope. The Burma Army unit led by the intelligence officer moved down to captives using the M 16 that had belonged to the freedom fighters. The commander of the Burma Army contingent stopped the killing after 26 men were hit with a hand signal. (The survivors speculated that the officer must have received a message from Mandalay). The excutions order was given by Brig. Hla Tun of the Burma army Northern Command. The Burma Army brought nine wireless transmitters, which allowed constant contact with Northern Command Headquarters in Mandalay. The execution was carried out under the direction of Captain Maung Aye.

The firing squad left the bodies laying on the road where they fell to rot. Amazingly, an Arakaness Liberation soldier with the name of Vanna survived the massacre. A bullet strived his left eye, which made him fall unconscious. When he regained consciousness he went to the Sazaing Catholic mission nunnery by cover of night, where nurses found his eyeball dangling from his eye sockets. He was treated by the nurses and begged not to be delivered to the Burma Army unit. He would rather be hand handover to the village BSPP council. The Catholic mission informed the village party council. The party

Chairman Vung Kii Thang sent him to Tiddim township party Chairman. Fearing being accused of harboring a fugitive, the party chairman delivered the wounded soldier, escorted by Sub Inspector of Police Lam Cin Khai to the newly moved Burma Army tactical headquarters in Taingen.

From Taingen, the tactical commander Col. Mya Maung ordered the Battalion Intelligence officer Lt. Sein Win to escort the wounded liberation soldier, Vanna to the Army headquarters at Kalaymyo. However before departing, the commander reminded the intelligence officer that matter could be complicated if words broke out of what they did to the surrendered liberation army soldiers. He told him to do what he deemed necessary. The message was clear. The commander wanted the captive, Vanna, killed.

Lt. Sein Win and Vanna drove off in a jeep. At first Lt. Sein Win intended to kill Vanna by shooting on the side of the road. He made several stops along the road and asked Vanna whether he wished to relieve himself or get a drink of water. However, Vanna answered every time that he was fine and refused to get out of the jeep. He had no chance of killing the captive for about five miles. When they passed the village of Theizang it was close to the village of the construction workers at 9-mile. Lt. Sein Win had to devise his plan of killing the captive by shooting, the villagers would question the sound of gunfire and expose his crime. Therefore, when they reach a small dry stream the Lieutenant dragged his captive out of the jeep where upon the captive agreed to relieve himself. While the captive was thus relieving himself, Lt. Sein Win picked up a big piece of rock sand stone and smashed his head. Thus Arakaness soldier who was alive after the massacre was brutally murdered in accordance with the Burma Army tradition.

Maj. Khai Moe Lin, the commander of the whole liberation Army, with his medical officer and intelligence officer managed to evade the Burma Army for a week although the Burma Army had encircled the whole area. Thus, a reward of 300.00 kyats and a double-barreled gun was promised by the Burma Army as a reward for information leading to the capture of the fugitives. The villagers of the area were enthusiastic about receiving the reward. A veteran of the Burma Army found footprints along the Ngatan stream, which lead to the capture of Maj. Khai Moe Lin. The Burma Army, However, refused to honor their promise and gave 200.00 kyats as the reward.

The captive were taken to the tactical headquarters at Saizang where they were interrogated for over 12 hours. After the interrogation, they were taken to airfield used by the allies during the Second World War. They were made to believe that their pictures were to be taken for a photo session. While the information officer of the Chin Council Mr. Vum Kho Tuai aimed at them with his camera from the front, Captain Maung Aye, the Army intelligence officer, moved them down from behind with and M.16 captured from Maj. Khai Moe Lin.

Out of the 120 men who surrendered to the Burma Army, 46 men kept alive and sent to jail in Kalaymyo. They were the ordinary soldiers who had no knowledge of politics. Four were killed in the skirmishes with the Burma Army. Thus, 70 of the liberation army were brutally murdered by the Burma Army.

During the operation, the tactical commander and his assistants lived the life of luxury by demanding domestic animals and local beer from the villagers. However, the Chin Council information officer overheard soldiers complaining about the restriction of their movements. They complained that in the Kachin Hills, for example, they could rape the woman, kill any domestic animal, and loot the properties of the villagers. There in the Chin Hills, not allowed to act as they were used to. The bodies of members of the liberation Army were left where were killed. After a few days the bodies started to smell and the commander of the Burma Army ordered the villagers of Saizang to bury the bodies. The villagers of Saizang buried the bodies in mass grave. The action of the Burma Army unit was equipped with 9 wireless radios and had contact with the northern command at Mandalay at any time.