

TIMELINE INVESTIGATION

Residents forced to flee the symbolic ‘town of peace’

Violence, Airstrikes, Displacement and Refugees in Lay Kay Kaw - December 2021.

REPORT BY MYANMAR WITNESS, 17 August 2022

Executive Summary

Lay Kay Kaw (လေးကျွဲကော်) in Kayin (ကရင်) State, once designated a ‘town of peace’, has been the site of violent clashes between the Myanmar military and the Karen National Union (KNU), since December 2021. Instead of providing a site of refuge to Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), returning refugees and KNU families, fighting in Lay Kay Kaw (လေးကျွဲကော်) has forced many residents to flee for their lives.

This is the first in a series of reports which documents events in the region. It provides a detailed chronological reconstruction of the clashes between the military and oppositional forces between 13 and 28 December 2021.

Myanmar Witness has assessed claims found on social media and within Burmese news media that the military are responsible for the conflict in the region in this period. This includes allegations that the military used excessive force, including heavy artillery within civilian areas; has undertaken potentially unjustified arrests and; incited violence and fighting.

By the end of December 2021, [The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees](#) (UNHCR) reported that the violence had caused the mass displacement of up to 4,600 people. Many casualties have been reported, including at least one non-combatant journalist between 15-28 December 2022. The location of this violence is particularly contentious as it lies at the border with Thailand, placing a strain on cross-border relations.

Myanmar Witness believes with high likelihood that the Myanmar military were present in Lay Kay Kaw (လေးကျွဲကော်) during December. There is evidence to suggest that they were responsible for the violent clashes, and also for the resultant displacement of civilians, some of which crossed the border into Thailand. Violent clashes have since continued in this area, leading to further displacement and destruction. This will be explored further in forthcoming reports.

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Background and Context

‘Town of Peace’

Lay Kay Kaw (လေးကျောင်း) is located in Myawaddy (မြဝတီ) Township, Kayin (ကရင်) State, close to the border with Thailand (Figure 1). In 2015, the Burmese government and KNU [established](#) Lay Kay Kaw as a ‘town of peace’. The town was set up as a post-conflict reconstruction partnership between the Myanmar government and the KNU, forming part of the country’s wider peace process. It signalled the end to decades of fighting between the Myanmar military and ethnic Karen armed groups.

Following a request for external funding by the Myanmar government, Japan’s [Nippon Foundation](#) launched the reconstruction project using funds from Japan’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs. By 2017, 1,250 houses, 7 schools, medical facilities, bridges and wells across Kayin (ကရင်) State had been constructed, many of which were in Lay Kay Kaw (လေးကျောင်း).

The ‘town of peace’ provided safe housing for internally displaced persons (IDPs), families of the KNU, and those returning from refugee camps in Thailand. Over 60 years of conflict in the region had left many thousands of Burmese citizens in refugee camps across the border, some of whom decided to relocate back to Lay Kay Kaw after its establishment. Saw Pha Hta Yar, the Administrator of Lay Kay Kaw told [Karen News](#) that they had been optimistic about their future in the region. IDPs and refugees had relocated to the town, where they had initiated new agricultural projects, started small businesses and created plans to encourage recreational tourism in the area. The town’s status not only identified it as a site of refuge, but it was hailed as a ‘[model peace village](#)’ and held up by the government as an example of how Myanmar could engage with peaceful development.

Part of the peacebuilding process allowed the town to be [controlled](#) administratively by the KNU. However, due to their *de facto* control and the absence of military personnel, it became a popular location for anti-government forces, protestors, and those engaged in the civil disobedience movement. Following the 2021 coup d’état, many people belonging to these anti-government groups came to the area to seek refuge and humanitarian protection. As a result, an area that was once held up as a symbol of peace, became a site of resistance and a battle ground once more.

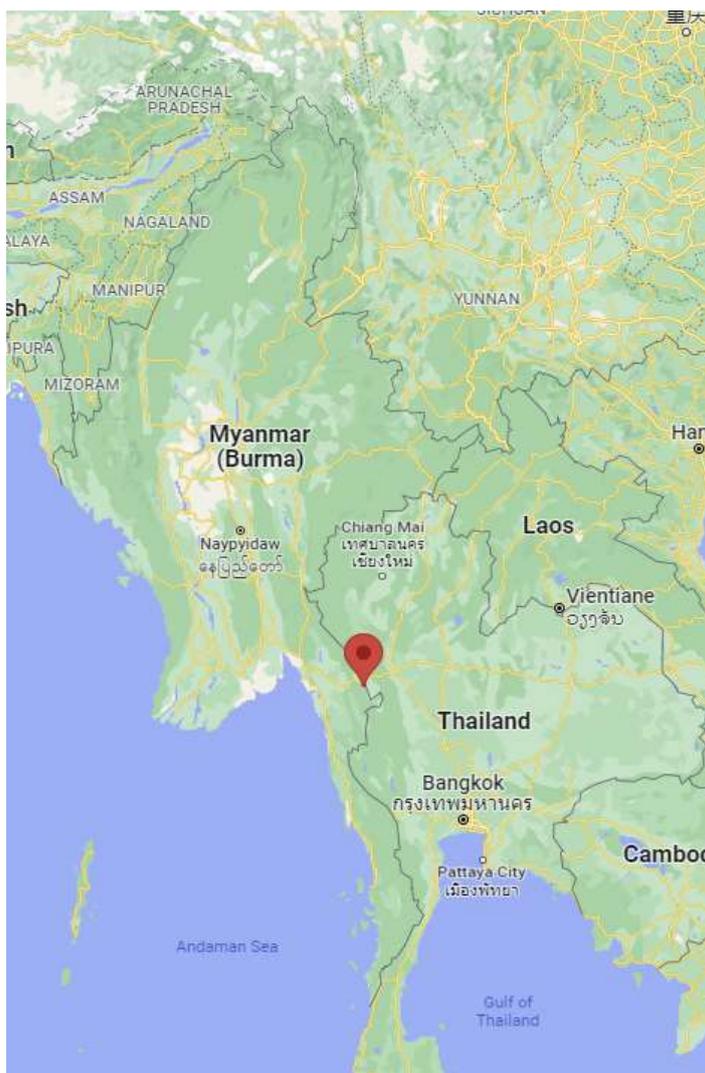


Figure 1: Location of Lay Kay Kaw (လေးကျောက်).

Pressure on Myanmar-Thailand relations

The Myanmar military is alleged to have conducted searches for those involved in the Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM) and groups aligned with the People’s Defence Force (PDF), which led to clashes in the area in December 2021. The proximity of clashes in Lay Kay Kaw (လေးကျောက်) to the Thai border has led to increased tensions with Myanmar’s neighbour.

According to the [UNHCR](#) these clashes resulted in the displacement of around 4,600 residents of multiple villages who fled across the Moei River, which marks the border with Thailand. Thai authorities allowed them to stay for several days before some returned. The state narrative [outlines](#) how this movement was the result of voluntary return. Alternatively, [Myanmar Now](#), on 21 December 2021, alleges that around 200 refugees with the ‘assistance of the Thai authorities’ returned to Myanmar, only to later return back to Thailand amid intensifying

clashes. The [BBC](#) reported that around 10,000 refugees fled Myanmar as a result of the clashes in and around Kayin in December; however, these numbers cannot be confirmed.

Following artillery strikes and air attacks on the town by the Myanmar military, the Thai military mobilised near the border and [allegedly](#) prepared to retaliate should stray shells land on Thai soil. At least two shells are believed to have landed across the border: one on a Thai sugarcane plantation, causing a small fire; and, another on a civilian's home, with no casualties. The military have, on several occasions, used jets and helicopters in the area and, it is claimed by [news media](#), used said aircraft to cause destruction. As a result, the KNU [appealed](#) to the United Nations (UN) to declare the airspace around Lay Kay Kaw (လေးကျေကျော်) a “no-fly zone”. However, by July 2022, the UN had not responded to this request.

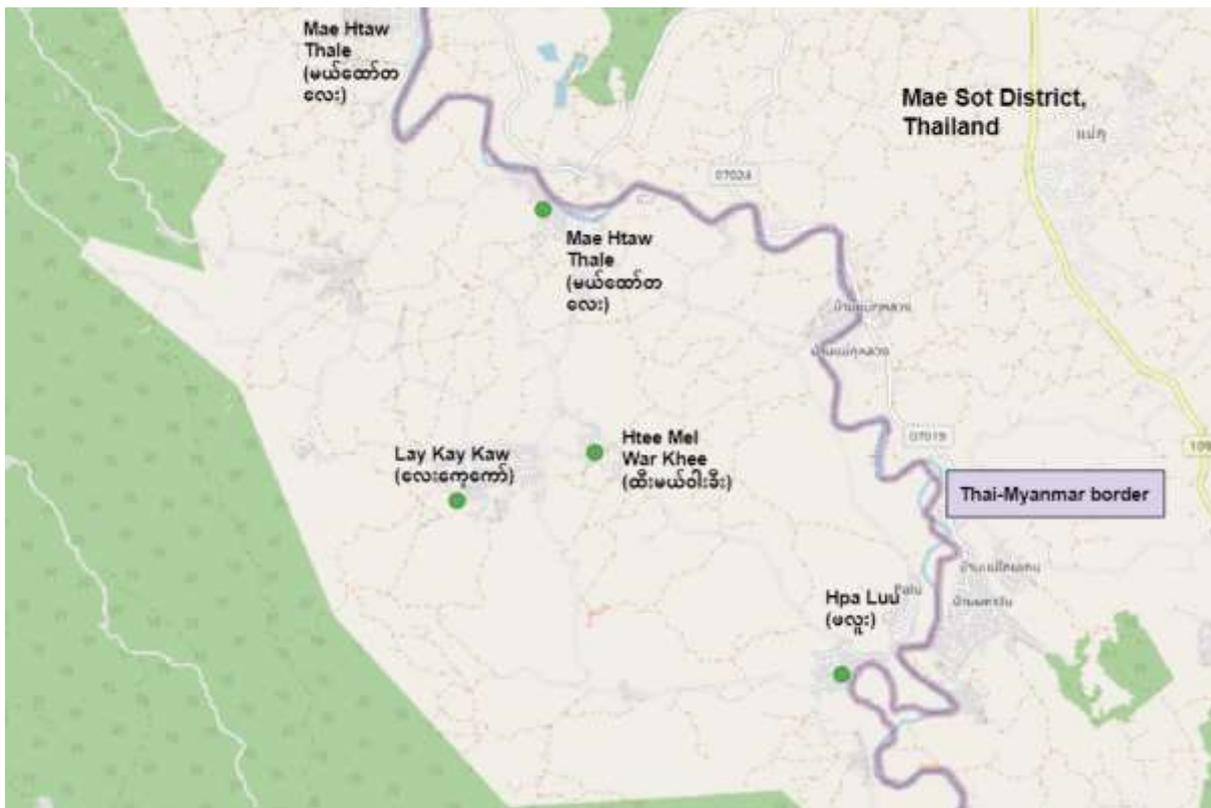
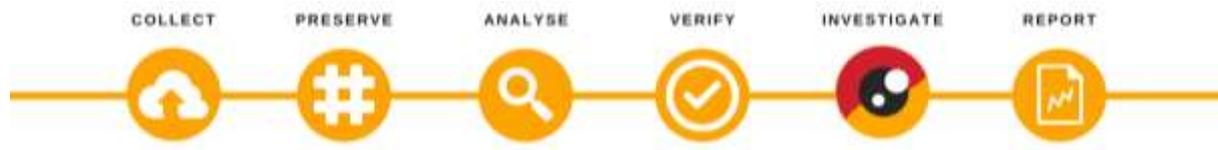


Figure 2: Map of Lay Kay Kaw and surrounding villages shown on Google Earth. The red line represents the Thai-Burma border.

Methodology

Myanmar Witness follows a methodology of digital preservation and rigorous, replicable analysis. Digital evidence is collected and archived in a secure database and preserved with hashing to confirm the authenticity and prevent tampering.



Myanmar Witness applies a four-tier classification system to describe the extent to which footage has been independently verified by Myanmar Witness. This is as follows:

- Fully verified: Footage independently geolocated and chronolocated by Myanmar Witness.
- Verified: Footage has been geolocated by Myanmar Witness. Other sources concur on the time and date of the footage, with no evidence following to suggest that the footage was taken earlier or later. However, it has not been possible for Myanmar Witness to independently chrono-locate the footage.
- Unverified / Under investigation: Myanmar Witness has not been able to geolocate or chronolocate footage at the present time.
- Inauthentic: The geolocation and chronolocation process has shown the location or timing of the footage to be inaccurate.

For the avoidance of doubt, this verification system only refers to Myanmar Witness' ability to independently geolocate or chronolocate footage. Incidents marked as unverified may still be substantiated by multiple eyewitness reports. Sources are cross-referenced in this report to indicate where this is the case.

This report contains a number of images showing how footage has been geolocated. In these images, white lines are used to represent the left and right arcs of vision. Coloured boxes are used to show how landmarks or distinguishing details in each piece of footage or data correspond with each other. All footage cited in the report is archived within Myanmar Witness' database. We have not included links to footage, when to do so would compromise an individual(s)' privacy or security.

Geolocation is conducted using a varied array of open source online tools such as Google Earth to match satellite imagery with visual features identified in the footage or images. A high burden of proof is required to match imagery and geolocations are required to be cross-checked and peer-reviewed before they are credited as verified and included in Myanmar Witness reporting.

Chronolocation is typically conducted by analysing user generated content (UGC) timestamps to determine hard end limits for the possible time frame. This can then be followed with contextual analysis, for example comparing against known indicators such as events or clocks visible, weather, and shadows. Shadow angle is determined after geolocation and its

orientation is used to determine the position of the sun and thus time. This is not always incredibly specific but chronolocation is included as specifically as possible without incorrectly attributing time in order to account for possible issues.

If dealing with unverified information, such as witness testimony or the inclusion of outside reporting, Myanmar Witness has made known that these inclusions are claims and have not been independently verified by Myanmar Witness, but their inclusion may still be relevant to include as context around the investigation. Following ethical standards, Myanmar Witness has obscured identifying information about individuals involved, censored private information and images where appropriate, removed links to private individuals and archived said information securely. Where appropriate, Myanmar Witness has also censored or avoided using graphic imagery in our reporting.

[Warning: Graphic] has been inserted ahead of links to sources which show graphic and distressing images of injured or dead persons

Limitations

The information obtained by Myanmar Witness comes from an area of ongoing conflict so it is assumed that there is a selection bias, due to several factors including fear of repercussions for uploading, unavailability of information from official sources and availability, or lack thereof, the internet. Myanmar Witness strives to eliminate as much of this bias as possible by using both focussed and broad search terms in multiple languages across open sources as well as identifying media from multiple sources. This includes social media and both pro and anti-regime news media to reduce the effects of this bias and ensure as much information from a range of sources is collected.

No UGC was identified depicting the direct use of artillery by the military in civilian areas and it is not known whether such footage may exist. However, media depicting the damage of artillery, eyewitness reports and the identification of a military base in a strategic position to deliver heavy artillery in these areas infers the use of artillery in the December clashes.

There were several instances of witness statements which had been reported by the news or on social media which cannot be independently confirmed by Myanmar Witness. Care has been taken to make this clear as well as to report this information as claims rather than verifiable fact. This report also includes evidence and content that remains unverified or partially verified. Where this is the case, it has been noted.

Gender Analysis

It is very difficult to identify the gender of those harmed by violence in and around Lay Kay Kaw (လေးကျောင်း). However, it is notable that many of the IDPs and refugees Myanmar Witness has recorded are women and children, who make up around 26% and 47% of Myanmar's refugees respectively - according to the [UNHCR](#). Female refugees face

intersectional issues, including the [risk of exploitation](#) or abuse. This is particularly dangerous for those who are unaccompanied, pregnant, heads of households, disabled or elderly.

The ongoing clashes in Lay Kay Kaw (လေးကျော့ကော်) and its surrounding areas, as well as the targeting of civilian areas by the military, is forcing the displacement of thousands of people and putting women in a more vulnerable position.

The December Clashes

Summary

In the months leading up to December 2021, tension in the region was [building](#) as authorities reportedly [inspected](#) Lay Kay Kaw. Myanmar Witness identified images of the military checking cars in Lay Kay Kaw (လေးကျော့ကော်) (Figure 3 and 4). While Myanmar Witness cannot determine the exact dates these photos were taken, one of the earliest uploads of the photos was in October 2021. An analysis of their uniform and badges suggests that these military soldiers appear to be part of the Coastal Region Command (ကမ်းရိုးတန်းတိုင်းစစ်ဌာနချုပ်) which controls the 43 Infantry Battalion (Figure 5).



Figure 3: Myanmar military soldiers checking cars in Lay Kay Kaw (လေးကျော့ကော်).



Figure 4: Geolocation of military stopping a car for a search [16.631028, 98.536159]

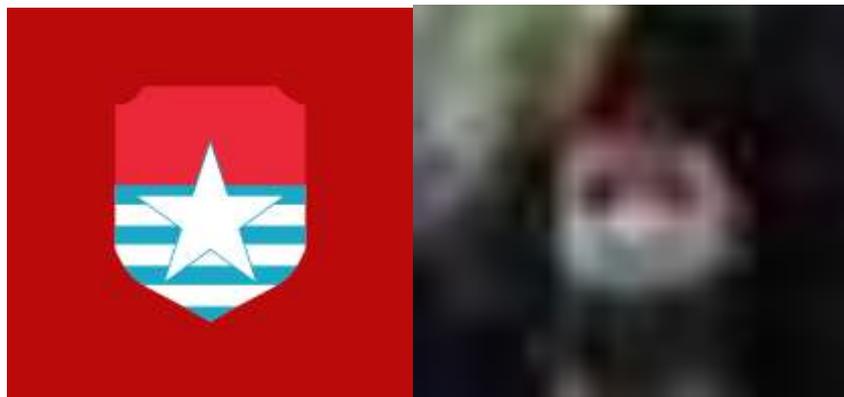


Figure 5: Badge of the [Coastal Region Command](#) (ကမ်းရိုးတန်းတိုင်းစစ်ဌာနချုပ်) controlling the 43 Infantry Battalions in comparison with the badge seen on these officers.

According to reports from the [Karen Information Center](#), it appears that locals were worried about the possibility of clashes in Lay Kay Kaw (လေးကျောက်) following the arrival of additional members of the Myanmar military at around 0900 on 13 December 2021. On 14 December 2021, news sites including [VOA](#) and social media users reported that the Myanmar military had begun arresting activists and members of the town’s government. On social media it was claimed that between 18 and 23 people, including a doctor, a local government official, and two police officers were arrested.

Additional images geolocated by Myanmar Witness to 16.602629, 98.531425, allegedly taken on 15 December 2021, appear to show the military in Lay Kay Kaw (လေးကျောက်). Claims

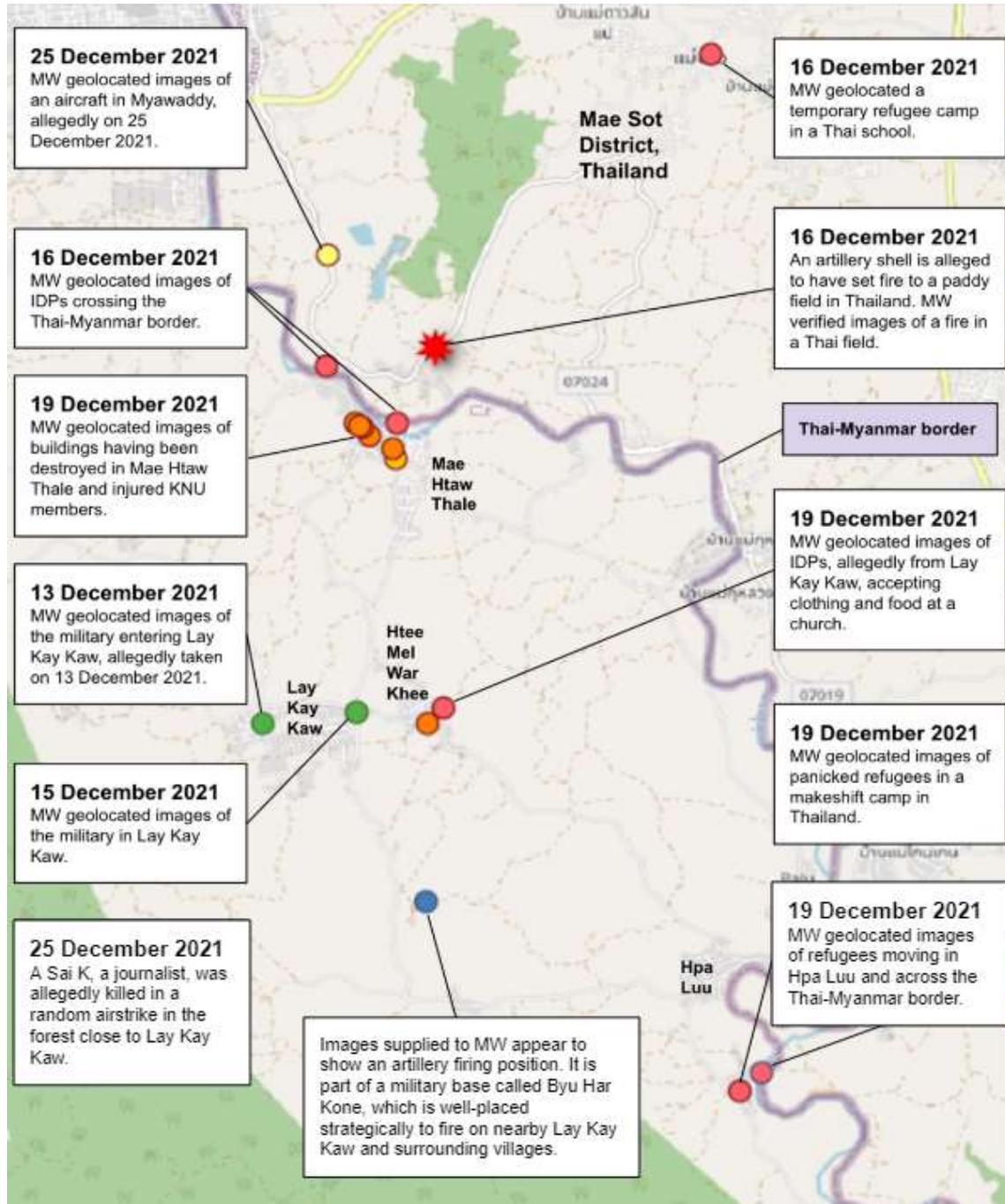
alongside the image suggested that more security forces were entering the village than were captured in the pictures. According to [Khit Thit Media](#) at around 1120 local time, fighting broke out between security forces and KNU forces. The clashes continued throughout December 2021 and heavy artillery was allegedly used by security forces in Mae Htaw Thale (မယ်ထော်တလေးရွာ); this is described in 16 December 2021 (page 25). Myanmar Witness has geolocated footage of smoke in Lay Kay Kaw (လေးကျောက်) which appears to signal a heavy artillery attack; however, this cannot be directly confirmed or attributed to the security forces (page 33).

On 15 December 2021, Myanmar Witness began identifying posts claiming that residents of Lay Kay Kaw (လေးကျောက်) and the surrounding villages were having to leave their homes due to the fighting in the area. For example, [RFA](#) claimed that around 1,000 Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) had left their homes to avoid the violence in Lay Kay Kaw (လေးကျောက်). What purports to be a witness statement uploaded by [Khit Thit Media](#) claims that as of 16 December 2021 more than 2,000 local people had already fled the fighting from the villages of Htee Mel War Khee (ထီးမယ်ဝါးခီးရွာ), Mae Htaw Thale (မယ်ထော်တလေးရွာ), and Bel Hi Kalaw (ဘဲဟိကလော်ရွာ), as well as Lay Kay Kaw (လေးကျောက်). This included around 700 people who had fled across the Thauung Yin river to the Thai border. Myanmar Witness has identified images and footage of people at Thauung Yin river, posted on 16 December 2021 (page 19). In the footage of refugees crossing the river there are noises in the background which sound like gunshots and artillery fire. Reports indicate that people continued to relocate throughout December, some of which took refuge on the Thai side of the border.

According to reports from [Khit Thit Media](#) and social media posts the fighting spread to Myawaddy (မြဝတီ) and Kawkareik (ကျောက်ရိတ်) townships, where almost 50 Myanmar military soldiers' deaths were reported. Myanmar Witness has also identified media geolocated to Mae Htaw Thale (မယ်ထော်တလေး) and Hpa Luu (ဖလူး) village throughout December which showed intensified fighting.

In the late evening of 23 December 2021, the military reportedly used an aircraft to bomb an area of Lay Kay Kaw (လေးကျောက်), before ground troops stationed on a nearby hill started firing heavy artillery towards the village of Mae Htaw Thale (မယ်ထော်တလေး). The KNU released a statement on the same night describing the impact of two airstrikes and reiterating its call for a no-fly zone in the area. In the following days and into the end of December airstrikes reportedly continued. Social media posts also reported on the frequent clashes in Lay Kay Kaw (လေးကျောက်) and the use of artillery by security forces, including those that landed on Thai territory.

Key Event Mapping



Figure

Figure 6: Mapping of the different events at varying levels of verification that are described in this report. For privacy reasons, a location was not provided for the 19th December report.

Media coverage of the clashes

The events in Lay Kay Kaw (လေးကျောင်း) have been reported on by a number of different media outlets, including [The Irrawaddy](#), [Myanmar Now](#), [Radio Free Asia](#) and [ABC News](#). The articles focussed on a range of different subjects including: the use of heavy artillery; citizens

leaving their homes for other geographically close areas; citizens fleeing across the Thai border en masse to escape the fighting; and the unjustified arrests of suspected pro-democracy activists.

Thai media outlets also reported on the fighting in and around Lay Kay Kaw (လေးကျောင်း) due to the concerning number of refugees crossing the border. Similarly, the UNHCR submitted an [inter-agency situation report](#) detailing the steps taken by humanitarian actors to support the Royal Thai Government's efforts to receive and provide aid to refugees fleeing Myanmar. The UNHCR states that *"conflicts between the Tatmadaw and PDF are increasing, resulting in more violence against civilians..."* due to the *"raids [by the military] and ensuing conflict"*. This investigation by Myanmar Witness has found evidence to support this statement. It is evident that the military's arbitrary raids and attacks in and around Lay Kay Kaw (လေးကျောင်း) have significantly affected the lives of civilians.

Myanmar state-run media takes a markedly different stance on events in Lay Kay Kaw (လေးကျောင်း) and the surrounding villages. [Global New Light of Myanmar](#) (GNLM) published a story claiming not only that the responsibility of the fighting here lies with *"CRPH, NUG, PDF terrorists"*¹ but that the military were arresting said individuals and attacking with airstrikes under their 'Rules of Engagement'. This confirms claims by locals that the military were using airstrikes during the clashes with local forces. On 30 December 2021, [GNLM](#) reported on the IDPs in Myawaddy (မြဝတီ), but framed their decision to leave as a way of escaping the KNU, who they claimed sought to break the National Ceasefire Agreement in this designated area of peace.

Chronological Reconstruction of Events in Lay Kay Kaw (လေးကျောင်း)

Using open-source investigative methods, Myanmar Witness has put together a detailed, chronological reconstruction of events in and around Lay Kay Kaw (လေးကျောင်း) during December 2021. By doing so, it has been possible to trace the shifts in violence within the area, reveal the targeting of civilian areas, and show the movement of IDPs and refugees.

¹ CRPH - Committee Representing Pyidaungsu Hluttaw; NUG - National Unity Government

Timeline of alleged and verified events

LAY KAY KAW (လေးကျောင်း) DEC 2021 KEY EVENTS

- 13 DEC 2021**
- At 0900, 200 troops reportedly entered Lay Kay Kaw, searched houses and took photographs. Troops also allegedly also entered the villages of Kwin Kale (ကျွမ်ကလေး), Pahikalaw (ပုဆိကလေး) and Hpa Luu (ဖလူး).
- 14 DEC 2021**
- Between 18-24 people were arrested in Lay Kay Kaw, including activists, a doctor, and an MP.
- 15 DEC 2021**
- Troops re-enter Lay Kay Kaw and fighting allegedly started between the military, KNU and local resistance forces.
- 16 DEC 2021**
- Fighting intensified between the military, the KNU and its allied forces across the Myawaddy (မြေဝတီ) region. 50 SAC soldiers reportedly died during the clashes on this day.
- Reports that thousands of people were fleeing Lay Kay Kaw, with hundreds crossing the Mori river into Thailand.
- Additional arrests reported in connection with the MPs. Artillery shell allegedly landed in a field in Mae Sot, Thailand.
- 17 DEC 2021**
- Fighting continued and more casualties on all sides reported. 8 SAC soldiers arrested by the KNLA.
- 18 DEC 2021**
- Fighting less intense in Lay Kay Kaw. A member of the NUG Southern Command killed.
- 19 DEC 2021**
- At around 1230 more than 200 BGF and Myanmar military forces reportedly marched towards Mae Htaw Thale (မယ်အောင်တလေး) village. Intense fighting in Myittar Lin Myaing (မေတ္တာလင်းမြိုင်) reportedly left 50 SAC soldiers dead.
- Civilian infrastructure, including homes, and places of worship allegedly hit by shelling in Mae Htaw Thale (မယ်အောင်တလေး).
- Fighting and artillery shelling came close to a refugee camp in Hpa Luu (ဖလူး) village, resulting in IDPs fleeing towards the Thai border.
- 20 DEC 2021**
- Allegedly 46 artillery shells fired in the Lay Kay Kaw area. the KNU called for a 'no fly zone'.
- 21 DEC 2021**
- The UNHCR report 3,900 refugees had fled into Thailand and the IDP number was significantly higher.
- 22 DEC 2021**
- Reports of continued heavy artillery fire. IDPs who could not cross into Thailand taking refuge near Hpa Luu (ဖလူး) village.
- 23 DEC 2021**
- Reports of aircraft being used in aerial attacks in Lay Kay Kaw, Mae Htaw Thale (မယ်အောင်တလေး) and Myittar Lin Myaing (မေတ္တာလင်းမြိုင်).
- 24 DEC 2021**
- More bombing and airstrikes beginning at around 1540 in Lay Kay Kaw (လေးကျောင်း), Hpa Luu (ဖလူး), Mae Htaw Thale, and Myittar Lin Myaing (မေတ္တာလင်းမြိုင်).
- 25 DEC 2021**
- Airstrike took place in the Lay Kay Kaw (လေးကျောင်း) area.
- Shell landed on a house in Maw La Chaing village, Phop Phra district, Thailand.
- A Sai K, a Journalist, died during fighting.
- 26 DEC 2021**
- More bombing and airstrikes beginning at around 1540 in Lay Kay Kaw (လေးကျောင်း), Hpa Luu (ဖလူး), Mae Htaw Thale, and Myittar Lin Myaing (မေတ္တာလင်းမြိုင်).
- 27 DEC 2021**
- Fighting broke out again near Mae Htaw Thale (မယ်အောင်တလေး) and FIRMs registered fires in this location.
- 28 DEC 2021**
- More bombing in Lay Kay Kaw (လေးကျောင်း). SAC encouraged refugees to return using megaphone.

13 December 2021

SAC enters Lay Kay Kaw (လေးကျွဲကော်)

The Lay Kay Kaw (လေးကျွဲကော်) 'town of peace', controlled by the KNU, was largely free of a military presence until the 13 December 2021.

On 13 December 2021 the Karen Information Centre [reported](#) that 200 troops from four military battalions entered Lay Kay Kaw. Images and footage of the soldiers were uploaded to social media (for example, Figure 7). Myanmar Witness was able to verify that one of the pieces of footage posted with this report - of soldiers marching along the road - occurred in Lay Kay Kaw (Figure 7). If the image was taken on the alleged date, using [SunCalc](#) it is possible to determine the time of the image as around 0900. However, some of these images were reposts of earlier footage; for example, some of the images were uploaded in October (Figure 3). According to the same report troops from the 560 Light Infantry Battalion (LIB) entered the villages of Kwin Kale (ကျွင်းကလေး), Pahikalaw (ပဟိကလော်) and Hpa Luu (ဖလူး). It cannot be confirmed what battalion the soldiers pictured here were part of, but their uniform matches those of the Myanmar Military and their patch, while not incredibly visible, does bear similarities to the Myanmar infantry patch (Figure 10).



Figure 7: At least 24 soldiers seen marching into Lay Kay Kaw (လေးကျွဲကော်).

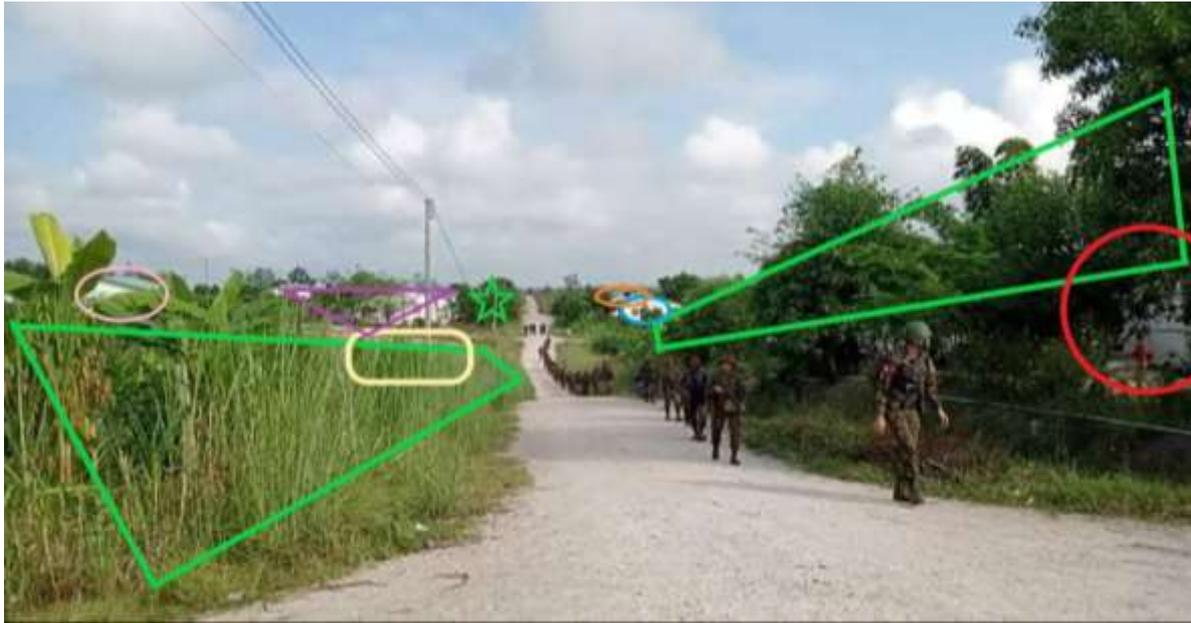


Figure 8: Geolocation of Figure 5 at [16.601332, 98.520990].

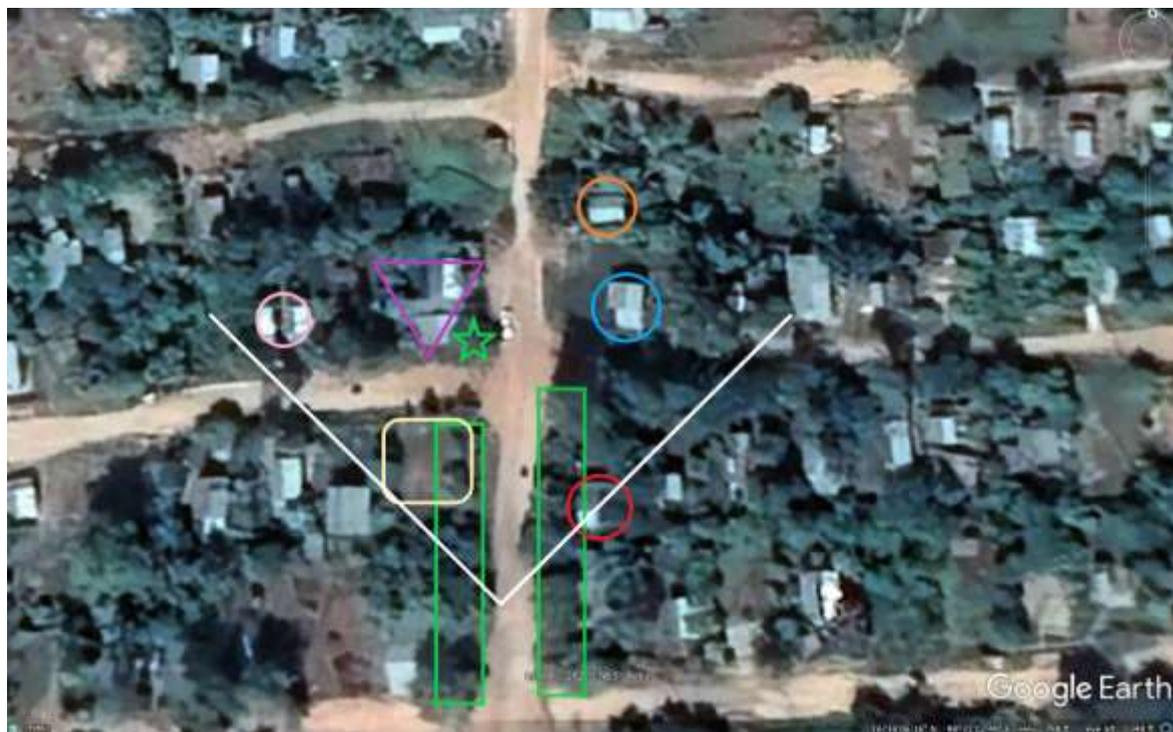


Figure 9: Geolocation of Figure 5 [at 16.601332, 98.520990]. [SunCalc](#) shadow analysis suggests a likely time window for this image as between 0900 and 0930.



Figure 10: Patch of [Myanmar's Infantry](#) and the uniform of an [Infantry soldier](#), with the Infantry patch on the right shoulder. This is similar to the patch and patch position of the uniformed soldier in Lay Kay Kaw.

The presence of the SAC soldiers in Lay Kay Kaw (လေးကျွန်း) led to social media users raising concerns that the military were looking for People's Defence Force (PDF) or Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM) individuals. After the soldiers entered the town, social media posts reported that they began visiting civilian homes and taking photographs. Locals [reported](#) fears that the troops were investigating the whereabouts of political activists. For example, there was an [alleged raid](#) in Lay Kay Kaw's (လေးကျွန်း) housing quarter which apparently sought to determine if there were any PDFs in the area. The military are also believed to have requested the release of two majors and a sergeant who were captured for being *Dalan* (informants) in the area. This influx of military forces within an area which had been controlled by the KNU and was a site of historical conflicts is said to have increased tensions in the region.

14 December 2021

Arrests by the Military

On the morning of 14 December, between 18 and 24 people were reportedly arrested by the military around Lay Kay Kaw (လေးကျွန်း), including young activists, an MP called Myaung Mya, a doctor, and two CDM police officers (the source has been withheld for privacy reasons). The arrests of activists and officers who were involved in the civil disobedience movement lends credence to claims that the military were looking for political activists in Lay Kay Kaw (လေးကျွန်း). [The Irrawaddy](#) announced that two more MPs were also arrested in Lay Kay Kaw (လေးကျွန်း) on the same day: the Pyithu Hluttaw Representative for Myaung Mya township, U Wai Lin Aung and the Ain Mel Representative (from 2015-2020) Dr.Pyae Phy. [Burma News Network](#) reported that they were taking refuge in Lay Kay Kaw (လေးကျွန်း) due to "the violent repression of the military council". Data obtained by [AAPPb](#) records Wai Lin Aung's arrest on 14 December 2021.



Figure 11: Dr. Pyae Phyoe, Ain Mel Representative (2015-2020).



Figure 12: Wai Lin Aung, Myaung Mya Pyithu Hluttaw Representative.

Claims posted on social media but withheld for privacy reasons, suggest that the raids were coordinated by the military, who blocked entrances and exits to the town before they began their searches and [disrupted](#) phone lines but Myanmar Witness is yet to see UGC which verifies that this took place. Social media users suggest that the raids had three main objectives: to make the KNU Brigades quarrel with each other; to create conflict between KNU and other revolution forces; and, to show that the Security Administrative Council (SAC) can capture PDFs and CDMs at anytime, in any location, including within designated ‘safe zones’, such as the housing quarter in a ‘town of Peace’.

15 December 2021

Troops re-enter Lay Kay Kaw (လေးကျွဲကော်)

On 15 December 2021, Myanmar Witness verified footage showing the military entering Lay Kay Kaw (လေးကျွဲကော်); they appear to be armed and spread out (Figure 13). It is claimed on social media, but withheld here for privacy reasons, that fighting between the military, KNU and local resistance forces began on this day.



Figure 13: The military pictured in Lay Kay Kaw (လေးကျောင်း) on 15 December 2021.

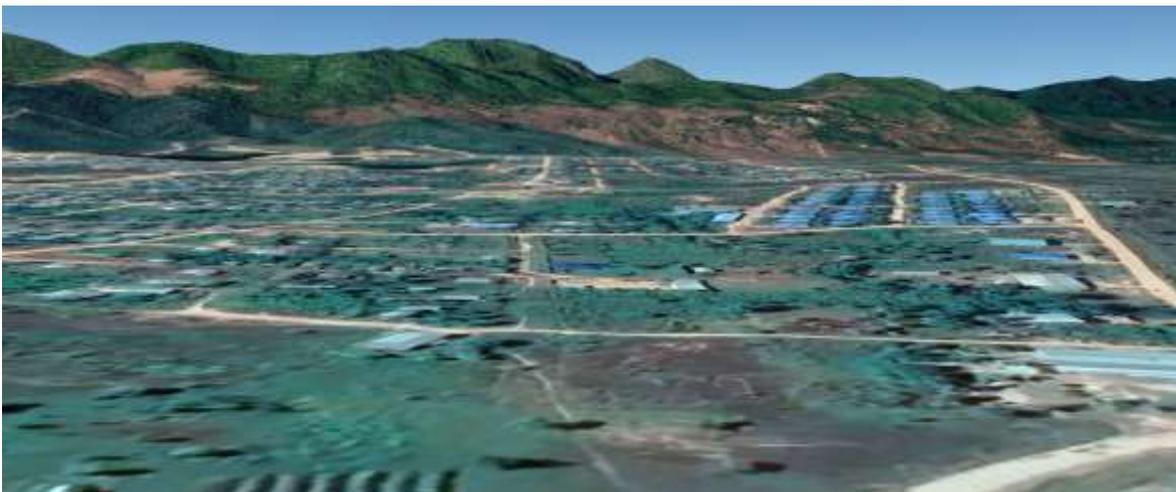


Figure 14: Geolocation of soldiers in Lay Kay Kaw (လေးကျောင်း) to 16.602629, 98.531425.

16 December 2021

On 16 December, fighting appears to have intensified between the KNU, allied forces, and the military elsewhere in the Myawaddy (မြဝတီ) region and footage of smoke in these areas - as well as claims that heavy weapons were being used - began to circulate. For example, Myanmar Witness also geolocated fighting in Mae Htaw Thale (မယ်ထော်တလေး).

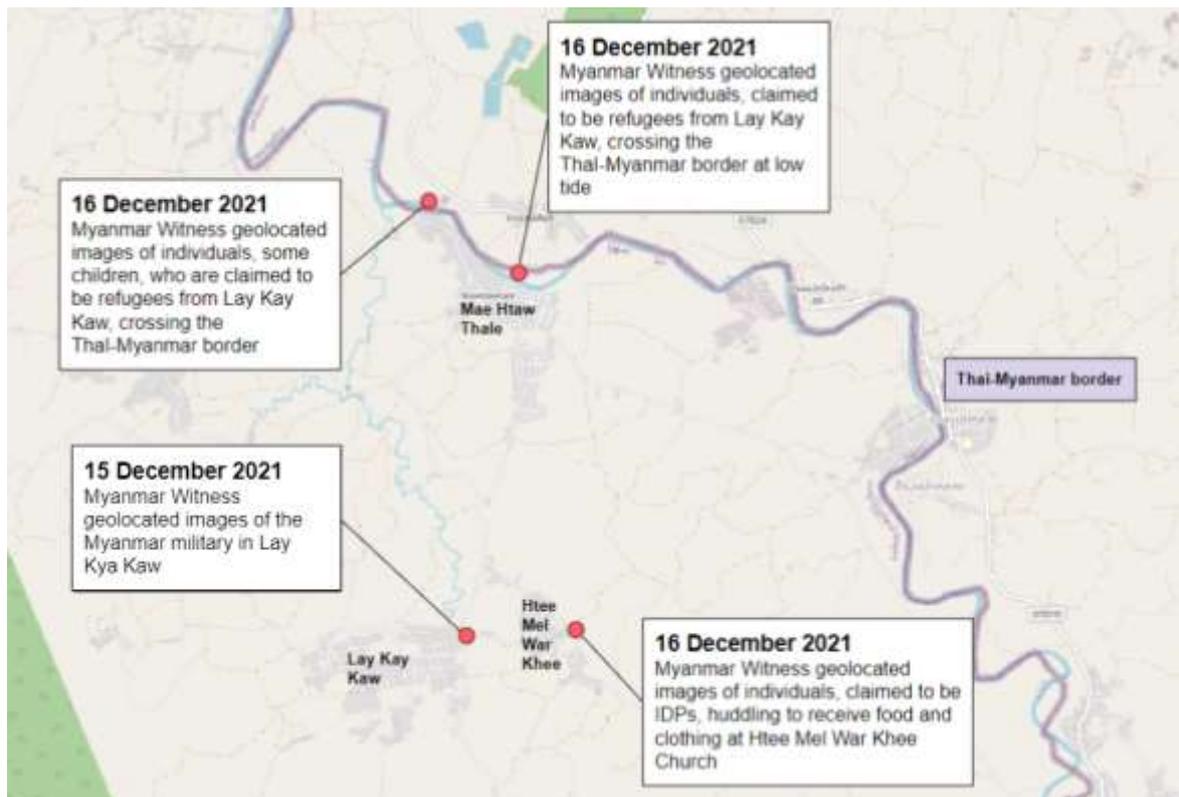


Figure 15: QGIS mapping showing IDPs being forced away from Lay Kay Kaw (လေးကျွေ့ကော်), towards the border, which is marked along the river in a purple line.

IDPs flee the fighting

By 16 December, reports suggested that IDPs from other areas around Lay Kay Kaw (လေးကျွေ့ကော်) had also begun fleeing the violence. Those who wished to escape the military had little choice but to retreat to the Thai border or to relocate to other villages further from the fighting. As a result, the violent clashes have forced many families to become IDPs within Myanmar or refugees in Thailand (Figure 16).

Reports began emerging that hundreds of people were fleeing their homes due to the fighting in and around Lay Kay Kaw (လေးကျွေ့ကော်). While [RFA](#) reports that around 1,000 people were displaced by 15 December 2021, a day later, [Khit Thit Media](#) reported that over 2,000 people had fled the villages of Lay Kay Kaw (လေးကျွေ့ကော်), Htee Mei War Khee (ထီးမယ်ဝါးခီး), Mae Htaw Thale (မယ်ထော်တလေး) and Bel Hi Kalaw (ဘဲဟိကလော်). This included people of all ages, with 700 people having fled to the Thai border. Myanmar Witness has identified and geolocated images which allegedly show this mass displacement of IDPs. For example, Figure 16 purports to show IDPs fleeing to the Thai border through Mae Htaw Thale (မယ်ထော်တလေး), crossing the river while carrying their belongings in bags (Figure 16). The original post claimed

that these images were taken on 16 December 2021. While Myanmar Witness cannot confirm that these images were taken on this date, if the images were taken on 16 December 2021, using [SunCalc](#) it can be determined that these images were taken between 1200-1230 local time.



Figure 16: Images allegedly showing IDPs fleeing Lay Kay Kaw (လေးကျောင်းကော့) through a river north at Mae Htaw Thale towards the Thai border (မာင်ဆော်တလေး) carrying bags of their belongings.



Figure 17: Geolocation of IDPs fleeing across a river at 16.641809, 98.528040.

Additional footage uploaded by [Chindwin News Agency](#) and [Khit Thit Media](#) shows large groups of people further south, at 16.635379, 98.536024, crossing the river into Thailand at low tide and walking down the Thai side of the border (Figure 18). In footage uploaded on 16 December which shows people crossing to the Thai side of the border, it is possible to hear suspected artillery close to the crossing site. The people in the footage react to these noises,

in what appears to be fear - running, instead of walking, through the crossing. This suggests that the fighting was in close proximity to the IDPs who were crossing the river.

The influx of refugees into Thailand has placed a strain on relations and highlighted the humanitarian nature of this crisis. Lieutenant General Nat Sing-Udom (ณัฐ สิงห์อุดม), Commander of the Thai Border Patrol Police, [reportedly](#) went to Mae Sot District, Tak Province, where he presented a policy on assisting refugees to border personnel. [Thai News](#) outlets released articles outlining the movements of Myanmar's citizens across the border, and provided information about the different border forces (14th Infantry Regiment Special Task Force, Mae Sot District Administrative Division and Border Police Company 346th) that were located at the border to control the flow of refugees.



Figure 18: Refugees flee Lay Kay Kaw (လေးကျောက်) through a river east in Mae Htaw Thale (မယ်ထော်တလေး).



Figure 19: Geolocation of refugees fleeing through Mae Htaw Thale (မယ်ထော်တလေး) [16.635379, 98.536024].

Those who were not prevented from crossing the Thai border by border control were [reportedly](#) sent to a warehouse on the embankment of the Mori River, which was acting as an IDP camp. After this, Thai authorities are said to have housed them in schools in Mae Sot, a town near to the Myanmar-Thai border. Myanmar Witness was able to locate one such makeshift refugee camp, Chumchon Ban Mae Tao Klang School, which was set up to house the influx of refugees (Figure 20).

The camp at Chumchon Ban Mae Tao Klang School appears to have been active for less than a month. Satellite imagery from [Sentinel](#) of the area shows temporary structures were erected between 15-20 December 2021; however, they disappeared between 30 December 2021 and 9 January 2022 (Figure 22). It could be that these structures were taken down when refugees were relocated to other areas, such as Mae La refugee camp in Tha Song Yang district of Tak [17.134434, 98.377919]. The Mae La camp houses around 40,000 Burmese refugees. This camp has faced challenges, including being [set on fire](#) a few days after the February 2021 coup - the source of the fire is unknown - and a [riot](#) on 14 December 2021. The riot broke out as a result of alleged corruption and movement restrictions associated with Covid-19 controls. Roughly 1,000 Burmese refugees demonstrated in a protest, accusing the camp officials of charging them money to move in and out of the camp. The refugees wanted the practice to end, demanded the removal of the site's chief and other Thai officials (including security volunteers) and the lifting of restrictions which they felt led to unfair constraints on their movement. These issues, as well as other vulnerabilities associated with being a displaced person, highlight the precarious position Myanmar's citizens are being placed in due to the clashes in Lay Kay Kaw and elsewhere (လေးကျောင်းကော်).



Figure 20: Myanmar refugees are housed at a school turned refugee camp.

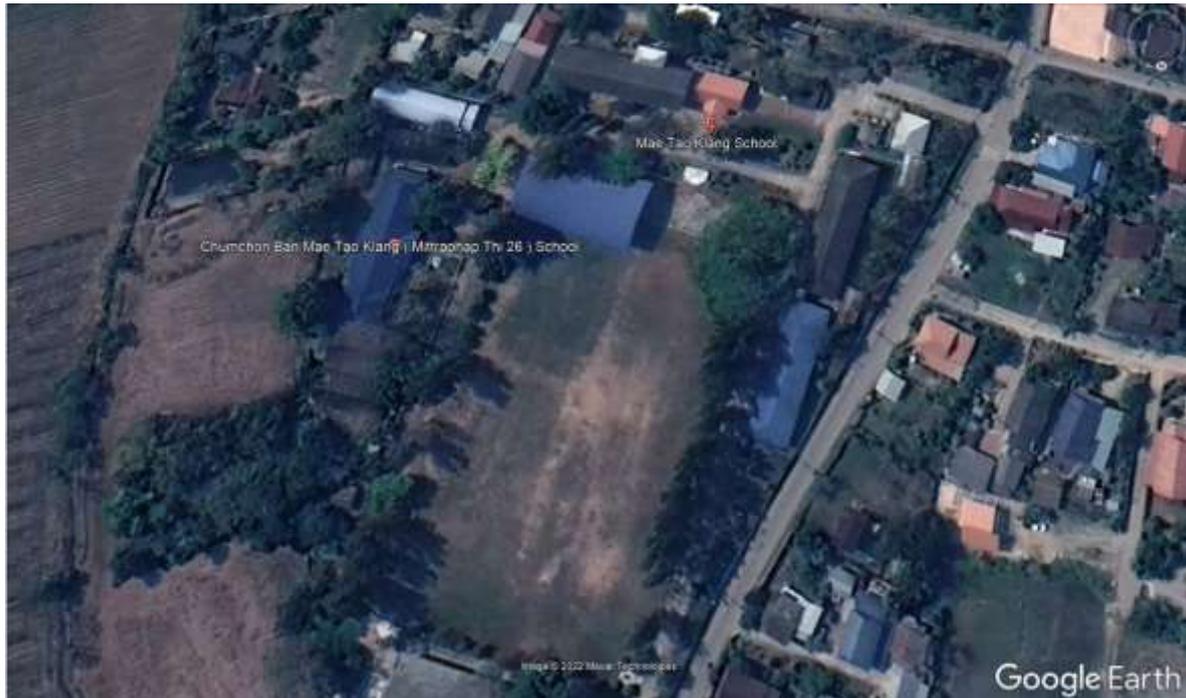


Figure 21: Geolocation of refugee camp at 16.677185, 98.570965.

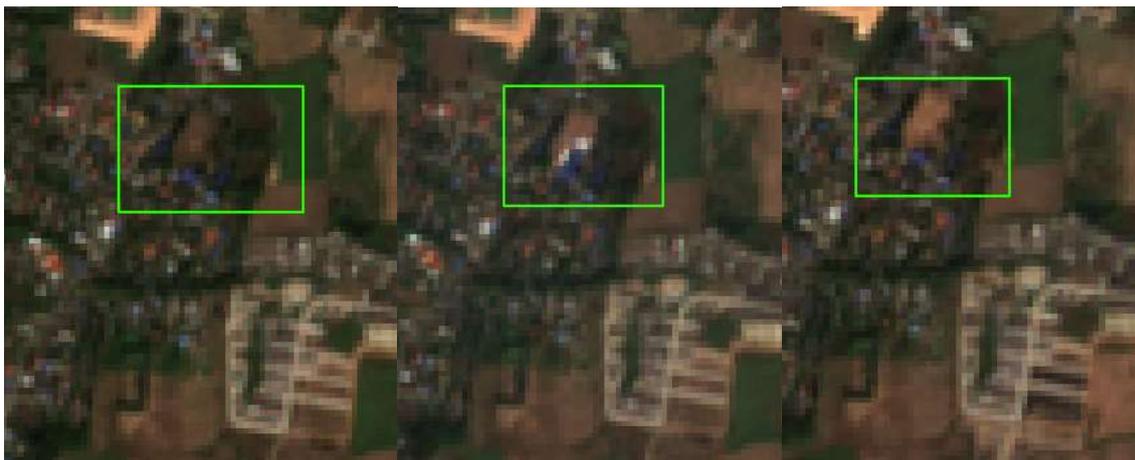


Figure 22: Sentinel imagery shows structures erected in this field sometime between 15 December 2021 and 20 December 2021. They disappear between 30 December 2021 and 9 January 2022.

Some IDPs were unable to cross the Thai border, and many sought safety in neighbouring villages, or were trapped due to ongoing clashes with the military. Myanmar Witness verified images, reportedly of displaced people, receiving supplies around Htee Mel War Khee (ထီးမယ်ဝါးခီး) Church (Figure 23). Khit Thit Media uploaded both [footage](#) and [images](#) of individuals handing out items, which appear to be clothing and other materials to crowds at

16.603096, 98.541107, as well as images of individuals, including young children, receiving food from make-shift cooking stations (Figure 24).



Figure 23: Geolocation of IDPs at 16.603096, 98.541107 crowding around individuals handing out what looks to be supplies, in video footage by Khit Thit Media, white materials.



Figure 24: IDPs receiving food from makeshift kitchens.

Fighting Continues

On 16 December 2021, fighting in and around Lay Kay Kaw (လေးကျွဲကော်) continued. Graphic images and footage emerged in Myawaddy (မြဝတီ) and Kawkareik (ဒုဗျင်ယာ်ဝိုင်ဖိ) townships, which showed dead Myanmar military soldiers. One of the videos was taken near Pyone Cho Betel shop (ပြုံးချို ကွမ်းယာ). Videos which emerged on this day also show KNU forces commanding others to shoot at the shop, where the military were hiding. One individual says to another "Shoot this betel nut shop they are hiding! Shoot it". Images show KNU soldiers hiding behind vehicles close to this location in Mae Htaw Thale (မယ်ထော်တလေး) at around 16.631332, 98.535713 (Figure 25). The deceased bodies of military personnel are pictured close to the stand, presumably taken after the footage mentioning the betel shop (Figure 26). It is reported that nearly 50 SAC soldiers were killed on this day.



Figure 25: Panorama view of two separate photos, demonstrating the betel shop and the KNU soldiers. Figure 26: a photo of a dead military soldier in this area behind the betel shop.



Figure 27: Geolocation of KNU hiding behind a vehicle close to an area where bodies of the recently deceased military soldiers lay.

Additional images [uploaded](#) on 16 December 2021 show scenes of destruction in Lay Kay Kaw (လေးကျောင်း) since the fighting began. Myanmar Witness was unable to verify these images due to the lack of identifiable surroundings or time indicators, however they demonstrate the probable human cost of the fighting in and around Lay Kay Kaw (လေးကျောင်း), with civilian homes destroyed and munitions used within civilian areas (Figure 28).



Figure 28: Images uploaded by Chindwin News Agency claiming to show destruction to homes and munitions dropped during clashes in Myo Thit.

Continued Arrests

It is alleged that several more people were arrested in connection with MPs around Lay Kay Kaw (လေးကျောင်း), including Daw Ma Khine and her husband, U Chit Ko and seven other residents including the teacher Sayar Min MIn from a boarding school. They were arrested in Myaung Mya (မြောင်းမြမြို့) township, Ayerwaddy region on 16 December 2021. Daw Ma Khine is said to have been released but not her husband. Their arrests allegedly resulted from the military's belief that they were connected to Wai Lin Aung, the MP who was arrested on 14 December 2021.

Artillery Shelling

It is reported that an artillery shell from the Myanmar military hit a sugar cane field in Mae Sot on the Thai side of the border on 16 December 2021. This could possibly have occurred due to the military allegedly using artillery on civilian areas close to the Thai border during clashes. [Khit Thit Media](#) uploaded a video of a smoking paddy field, which allegedly had been hit by an artillery shell. This video was geolocated by Myanmar Witness to Mae Sot at around 16.644036, 98.540182 (Figure 29).

Footage uploaded by [Salween Press](#) shows a large portion of the field ablaze after the supposed shell hit. Sentinel Hub imagery demonstrates a change in this area between 15-20 December 2021. This could be the result of the artillery shell landing here and causing a fire (Figure 30). Myanmar Witness has also identified footage in this area showing a [fire truck](#) putting out the fire here, as well as what purports to be an image of the field post-fire, though this cannot be confirmed by Myanmar Witness as the image is not descriptive enough to verifiably geolocate the area (Figure 31).

Whilst no artillery shell is seen in the footage, evidence across multiple channels suggests that this event did take place. Additionally, [Thai News Media](#) reported that the Thai Military lodged a protest note with the Myanmar government, via the local Thai-Myanmar Border Committee on 16 December 2021, over a mortar-type shell landing on Thai soil, in the Mae Sot district of the western province of Tak.



Figure 29: Geolocation of smoke arising from a field in Mae Sot, alleged to have been a fallen artillery shell.

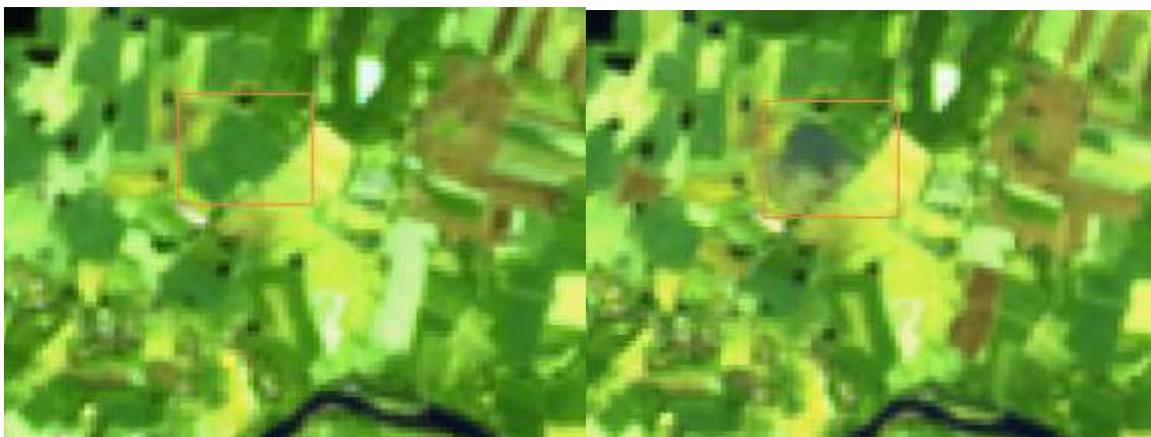


Figure 30: Sentinel Hub shows a difference in the surface area of the field at 16.644036, 98.540182 between the dates. This could indicate that fire has occurred in the area, causing the difference in earth surface..



Figure 31: Image purporting to be of the field in Mae Sot, alleged to have been the site of an artillery shell, allegedly fired by the SAC army.

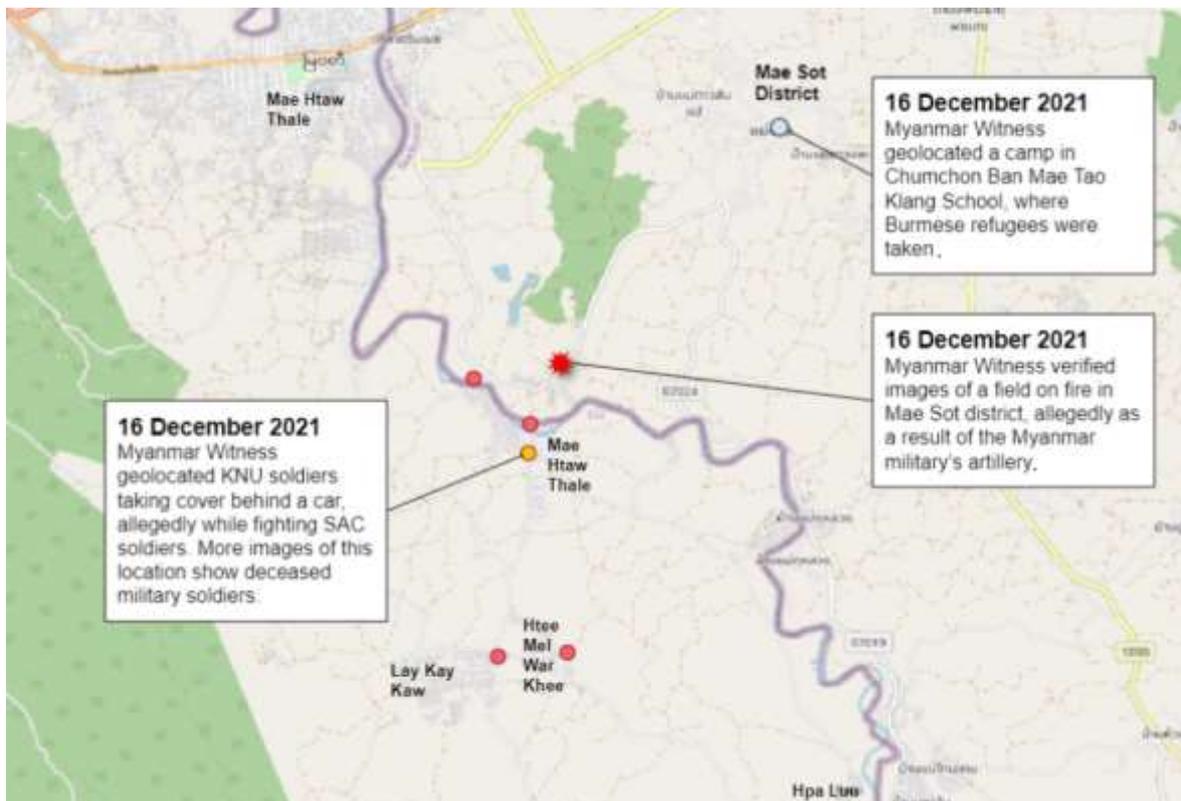


Figure 32: Location of fighting on 16 December 2021 and its location compared to previously established refugee movements and an alleged artillery incident in Mae Sot. Graphic created on QGIS.

17 December 2021

Continued Fighting

On 17 December 2021, fighting continued. The KNU captured military troops and seized their weapons (Figure 33). [Khit Thit Media](#) and [Chindwin News Agency](#) reported that a total of 18 Myanmar military soldiers, including those in officer ranks, were killed during clashes in and around Lay Kay Kaw (လေးကျောင်း), and eight soldiers, including two Border Guard Force (BGF) soldiers, were arrested by the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) and its alliance.



Figure 33: Images of captured BGFs and weapons with patches indicating the Southeast Military Command, either N. 12 Operations Command (Kayin State) or N. 19 Operations Command (Mon State). Some also have the same insignia as they are all part of the Southeast Military Headquarters.



Figure 34: Patches seen on captured military forces correspond to the [Southeastern Military Command](#).

The humanitarian repercussions of the ongoing fighting were laid out within two letters from the NUG's Ministry of Foreign Affairs dated [16 December 2021](#) and [17 December 2021](#). The letters included an urgent request for assistance and emergency humanitarian aid for the war refugees who had to flee their homes (Figure 35). In line with previous allegations in news media and on social media, the NUG claimed that troops raided Lay Kay Kaw (လေးကျွဲကော်) and unjustly arrested innocent people, including the aforementioned politicians U Wai Lin Aung and Dr. Wai Phyo. They claimed that a humanitarian crisis and human rights violations were occurring as a result of the heavy artillery being fired by the military, which was landing in or close to civilian and refugee inhabited areas. The letter also briefly touches upon violence by the military in other situations, including protests in Yangon and the burning alive of 10 people in Sagaing. The NUG also requested *“the international community to take strict action against violence”* and thanked both India and Thailand for their assistance to refugees on the ground.

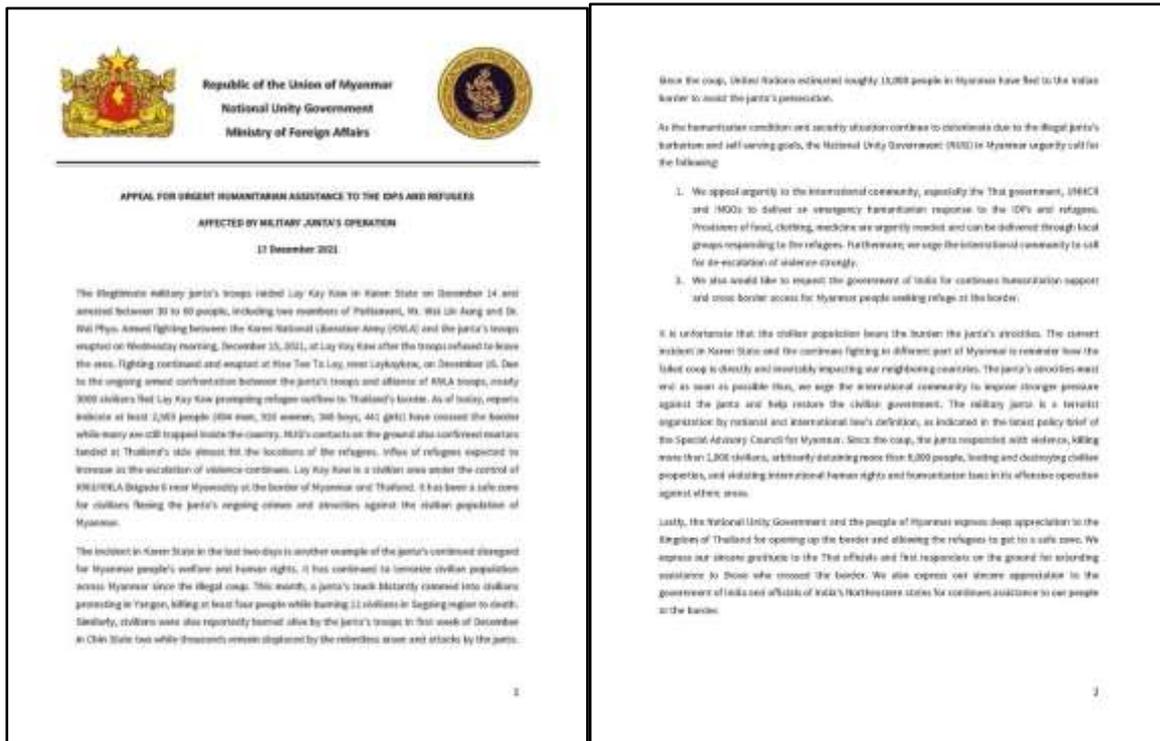


Figure 35: National Unity Government of Myanmar publishes a letter on 17 December 2021 urgently requesting assistance and emergency humanitarian aid for the war refugees who have fled their homes due to the clashes in Lay Kay Kaw (လေးကျောက်).

18 December 2021

[Warning: Graphic]

On 18 December the fighting appeared to have decreased in intensity in a number of locations. In an audio statement uploaded to social media by [Mizzima](#), what purports to be a member of the administrative local government from Lay Kay Kaw (လေးကျောက်) stated that the fighting was not heavy and was concentrated near Myittar Lin Myaing (မေတ္တာလင်းမြိုင်), Myawaddy (မြဝတီ) Township. On the same day, a member of the NUG's Southern Command was allegedly killed and subsequently buried (Figure 36).



Figure 36: Alleged images of Banyar, a member of the NUG's Southern Command, buried on 18 December 2021.

19 December 2021

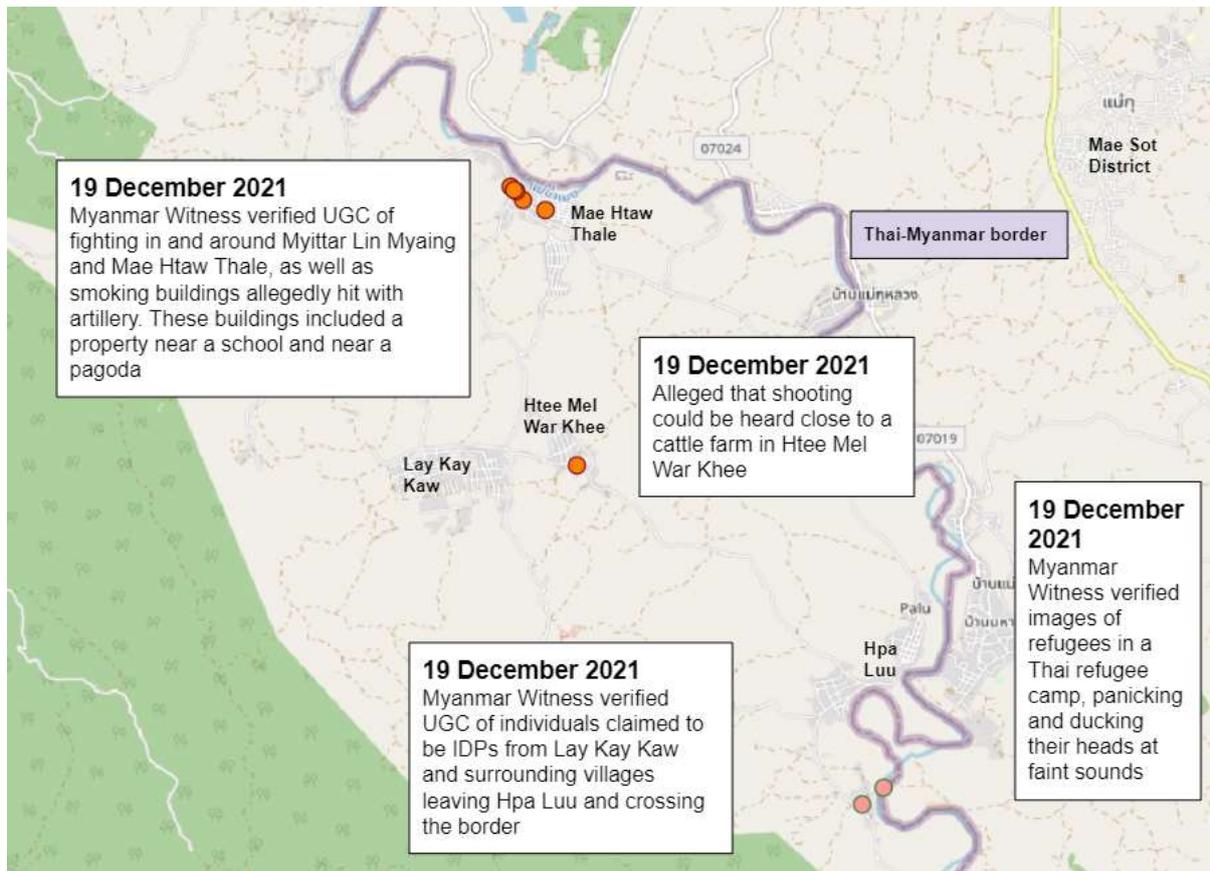


Figure 37: Mapping of events occurring on 19 December 2021 created on QGIS.

Fighting Intensifies Outside of Lay Kay Kaw (လေးကျောက်)

On 19 December, fighting intensified in Myittar Lin Myaing (မေတ္တာလင်းမြိုင်) and Mae Htaw Thale (မယ်ထော်တလေး) villages, geographically close to Lay Kay Kaw (လေးကျောက်). The Karen coalition forces reported that clashes started at around 1230 when more than 200 BGF and Myanmar military forces marched towards Mae Htaw Thale (မယ်ထော်တလေး) village. Intense fighting and consecutive gunshots can be seen and heard in a video supposedly taken from Myittar Lin Myaing (မေတ္တာလင်းမြိုင်). However, Myanmar Witness has been unable to verify this footage to the said location due to a limited number of distinguishable features.

In Myittar Lin Myaing (မေတ္တာလင်းမြိုင်), [Khit Thit Media](#) reported that two deputy battalion commanders and nearly 50 members of the Myanmar military were killed in clashes with local defence forces. Equipment and munitions were allegedly taken from these military personnel, and subsequently photographed (Figure 39). Myanmar Witness cannot verify where these images of weapons came from nor their relevance to battles in and around Lay Kay Kaw (လေးကျောက်), but it is reported they were retrieved from the military after intense fighting.



Figure 38: Munitions and equipment allegedly taken from the military in battles between the military and KNU on 19 December 2021.

Myanmar Witness identified footage of a property near a school in Mae Htaw Thale (မယ်ထော်တလေး) that was [reportedly](#) attacked by military forces on 19 December 2021. Fire was emanating from buildings in Mae Htaw Thale (မယ်ထော်တလေး) at around 16.633908, 98.532842 (Figure 39). Myanmar Witness has also identified damaged civilian structures, including homes, in Mae Htaw Thale (မယ်ထော်တလေး) at 16.632571, 98.535490 (Figure 41). These structures were allegedly destroyed by military artillery shelling.



Figure 39: Panorama of the Khit Thit Media video, showing fire in Mae Htaw Thale (မာ်းထော့ထော့လေး).

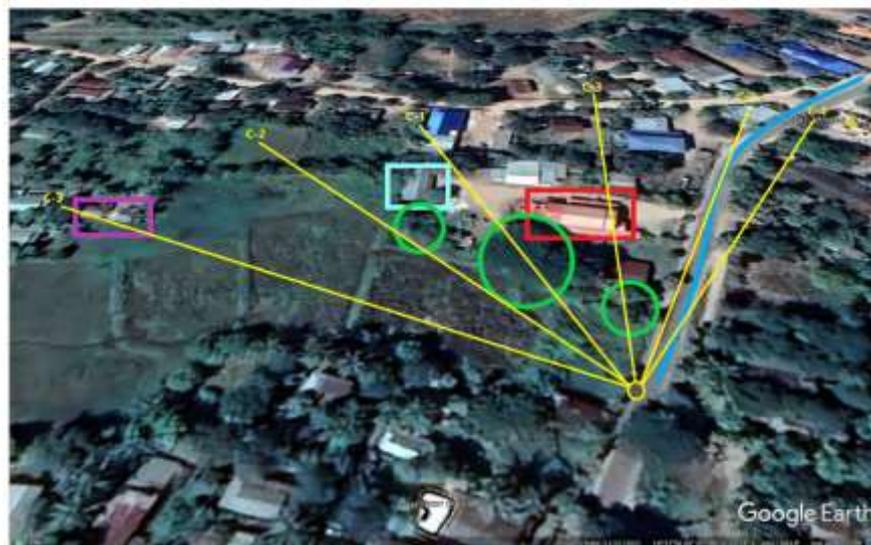


Figure 40: Geolocation of the Khit Thit Media video at 16.633908, 98.532842. The yellow lines coincide with the video point of view (POV).



Figure 41: Geolocation of destroyed homes at 16.632571, 98.535490.

It is also claimed that buildings near places of worship, such as Mae Hta Thale (မယ်ထောင့်တလေး) monastery and pagoda, were attacked by military artillery. UGC shows a smoking area at around 16.634950, 98.532023, just outside of a place of worship (Figure 42). Images of injured KNU members near this pagoda were also uploaded online (Figure 44). If, as the original post claims, this image was taken on 19 December 2021, the shadows present in the footage suggest the time the footage was taken was around 15:45-16:00 (Figure 45). However, the date for this image cannot be confirmed.

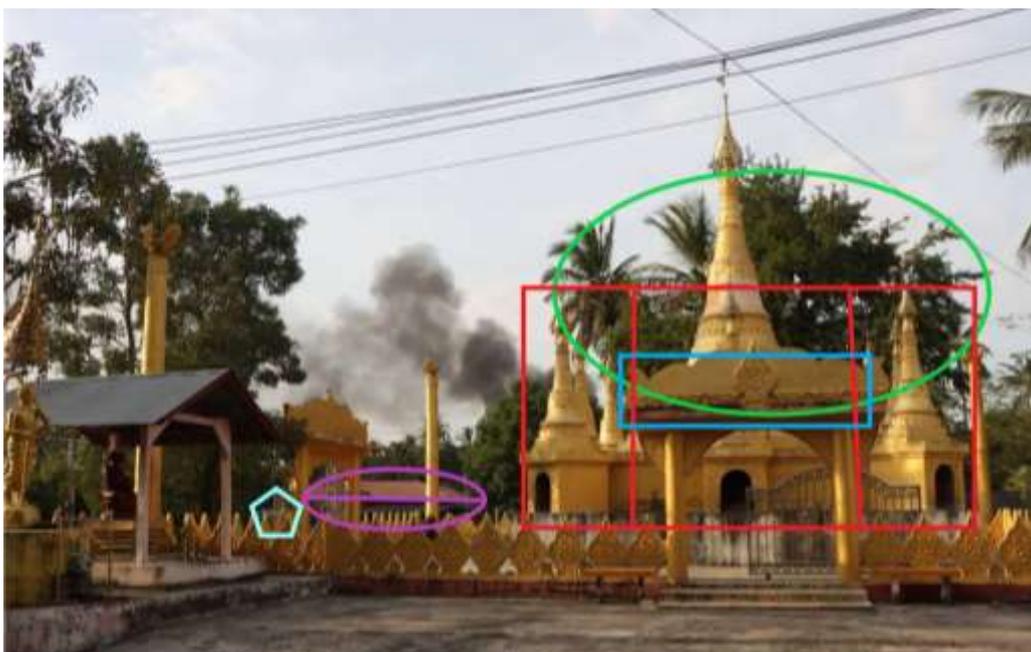


Figure 42: Geolocation of smoking area around Mae Hta Thale (မယ်ထောင့်တလေး) Pagoda at 16.634950, 98.532023.

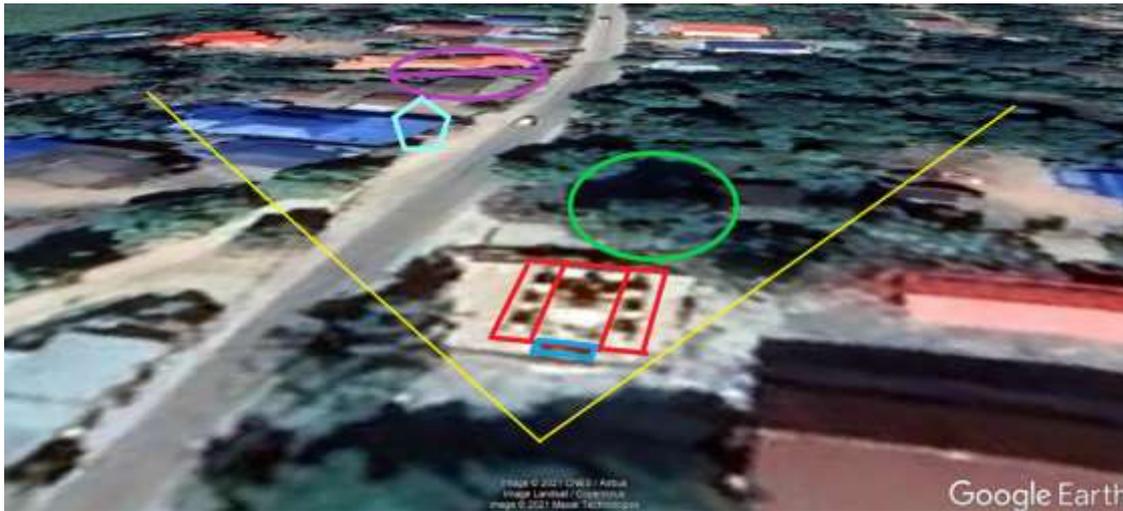


Figure 43: Geolocation of Mae Hta Thale (မာင်ဆာသာလေး) Pagoda at 16.634950, 98.532023, with smoke in the background of the image.



Figure 44: Geolocation of an injured individual being carried by other local defence force members at 16.635067, 98.531785.



Figure 45: Chronolocation of an injured individual being carried by other local defence force members at around 15:45-16:00.

IDPs Affected by Continued Fighting

Ongoing clashes led to a further deterioration in the conditions for IDPs remaining in the Myawaddy (မြဝတီ) Township area. A post by the [Lay Kay Kaw Youth Network](#) claims that shooting started at 0430 near a cattle farm in Htee Mel War Khee (ထီးမယ်ဝါးခီး). They claim that fighting and artillery shelling came close to an IDP camp in Hpa Luu (ဖလူး) village, close to the Thai border; east of Lay Kay Kaw, resulting in refugees fleeing the area.

In a video uploaded to YouTube, the sound of gunshots can be heard from Hpa Luu (ဖလူး) village, and a large group of people carrying bags can be seen leaving the village (Figure 46). The video claims these people are fleeing Hpa Luu (ဖလူး) due to nearby fighting. This has been verified by Myanmar Witness. The link and exact coordinates have been withheld due to privacy and safety concerns.



Figure 46: Video footage was uploaded with a filter (as above). This was likely done to dissuade identification of those in the image and their location. People appear to be leaving in a large group, with bags and luggage. This video footage was geolocated to Hpa Luu (ဖရူဖွဲ့).

[Khit Thit Media](#) uploaded footage allegedly showing locals fleeing across the Thailand-Burma border from Hpa Luu (ဖရူဖွဲ့) following fighting in the village. Myanmar Witness has geolocated this footage, and other related images of IDPs crossing the river, from Hpa Luu (ဖရူဖွဲ့) at around 16.561853, 98.576611 (Figure 47). These images show a worrying scene, with many individuals fleeing across the river, some individuals can be seen with water up to their shoulders. Myanmar Witness also geolocated images of IDPs fleeing Hpa Luu (ဖရူဖွဲ့) to 16.561614, 98.575766 (Figure 48).

The videos capturing IDPs crossing the river at Hpa Luu (ဖရူဖွဲ့) allegedly occurred after artillery shells, fired by the Myanmar military, hit a refugee camp near the Moei river and Hpa Luu (ဖရူဖွဲ့) in the evening of 19 December 2021. On the same day, images emerged that showed refugees panicking at a refugee camp located on the Thai side of the border in Hpa Luu (ဖရူဖွဲ့).

The footage demonstrates individuals running around a camp and ducking their heads in response to noises in the footage. While Myanmar Witness has been able to geolocate this camp, the exact location and link have been withheld for privacy reasons. Myanmar Witness cannot be certain that this footage was taken on 19 December 2021. [BBC Burma](#) reported that artillery shelling occurred in Hpa Luu (ဖရူဖွဲ့). According to refugee assistance workers reported within posts on social media, by the end of the 19 December, around 10,000 IDPs had fled as a result of the fighting (the source of this information has been withheld for privacy reasons).



Figure 47: Images of individuals crossing the river with luggage, allegedly IDPs from Hpa Luu (ဖာလူး).



Figure 48: Geolocation of individuals crossing the Moei river from Hpa Luu (ဖာလူး) at 16.561853, 98.576611.

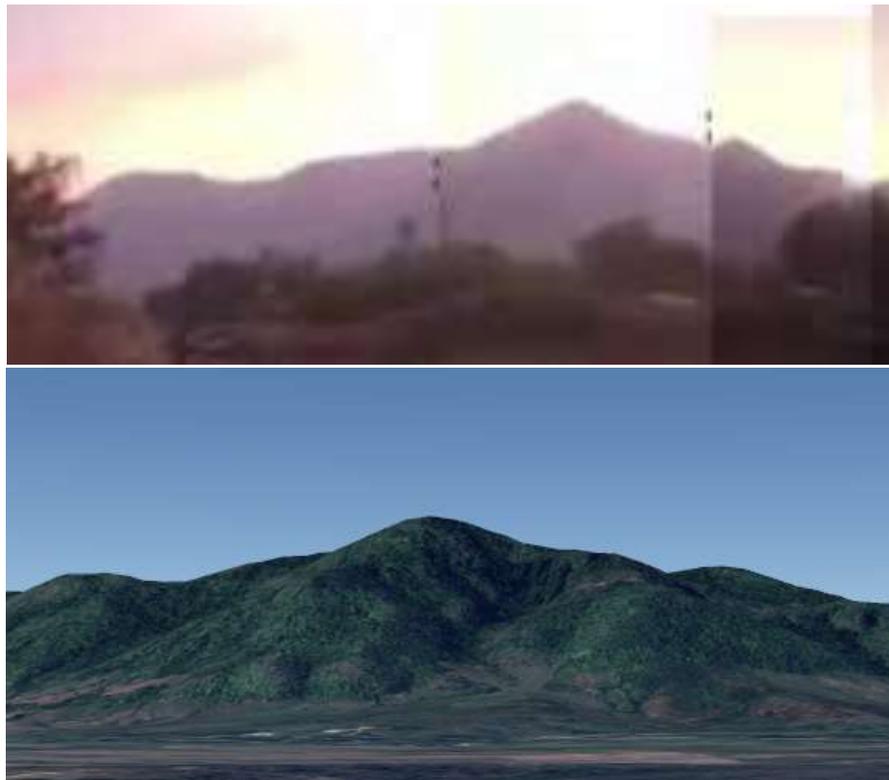


Figure 49: Panorama of video footage of IDPs fleeing in comparison to the mountain range at 16.561853, 98.576611, matching closely.



Figure 50: Geolocation of refugees fleeing Hpa Luu (ဖလူး) village at around 16.561614, 98.575766.

20-21 December 2021

‘No Fly Zone’

On 20 December 2021 a post by [D-Day Channel](#) claims that more fighting occurred between 0700 and 2300, when troops fired 46 artillery shells in the Lay Kay Kaw (လေးကျောင်း) area.

In response to the intensification of aerial attacks, the official [KNU](#) Facebook account released documents requesting the UN impose a ‘No Fly Zone’ over Lay Kay Kaw (လေးကျောင်း). They

sought to prevent the military from using aircraft and excessive force in the area, which could lead to increased numbers of IDPs (Figure 51). This is likely in response to [reports](#) from KNU spokesperson Padoh Saw Taw Nee, that a military aircraft bombed a location near Lay Kay Kaw (လေးကျောက်) on the night of the 16 December 2021, immediately before ground troops stationed on a nearby hill started firing heavy artillery towards the village of Mae Htaw Thale (မယ်ထော်တလေး). At the time of this report, the UN has been unresponsive to these requests. According to social media posts, clashes in Lay Kay Kaw (လေးကျောက်) started again the next day, 21 December 2021, at around 0855, and firing could be heard - but it is not specified if it was fighting or either party firing at another.

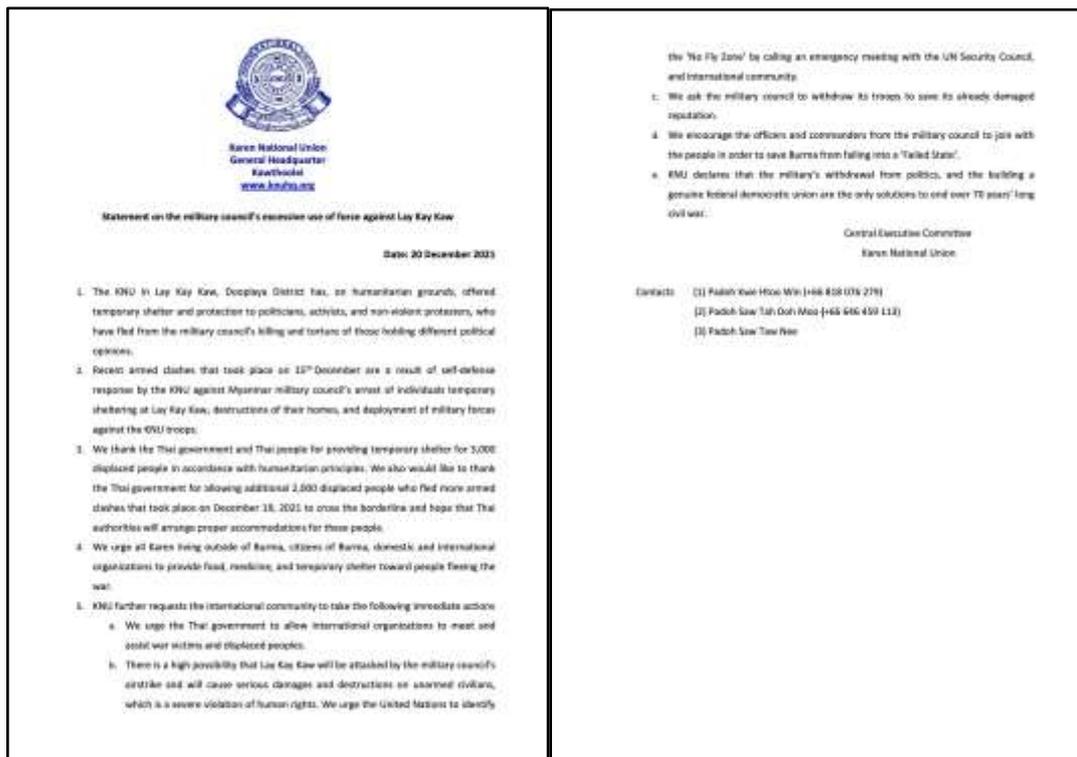


Figure 51: Document from the KNU formally requesting that the UN set a 'No Fly Zone' over Lay Kay Kaw (လေးကျောက်) (English version).

While the numbers vary from report to report, and agency to agency, it is clear that the human toll of the fighting in Lay Kay Kaw (လေးကျောက်) is immense. The [UNHCR](#) reports around 3,900 Burmese nationals had fled across into Thailand. [BBC News Burma](#) reported on 21 December 2021 that around 10,000 IDPs had been created by the clashes in Myanmar, reflecting numbers reported by Khit Thit Media a few days earlier. This was accompanied by a number of pictures of camps, showing tents and refugees sheltering, which could not be verified by Myanmar Witness (Figure 52).



Figure 52: BBC Burma reports 10,000 total refugees due to the ongoing conflict.

22 December 2021

Due to the vigilance of Thai border security, not all would-be refugees were able to cross the border into Thailand. As a result, many IDPs were forced to seek refuge in other villages, such as Hpa Luu (ဖလူး), close to the border. [Than Lwin Times](#) posted on 22 December that Lay Kay Kaw (လေးကျွဲကော်) refugees need assistance and help, reporting that some were even travelling outside of their home regions, as far as Tanintharyi (တနင်္သာရီ) region, in the search for peace and aid.

The firing of heavy artillery was [reported](#) on social media on 22 December 2021. This is consistent with previous reports which state that the military was utilising heavy artillery on villages across the region, including those near Thay Baw Boe (သေ့ဘောဘိုးရွာ). However, Myanmar Witness was unable to find verifiable footage of these events. Myanmar Witness is unaware of the KNU or PDF having access to such heavy weaponry. This supports the notion that the military is responsible for the use of heavy artillery within the Lay Kay Kaw (လေးကျွဲကော်) area.

Airstrikes 23-26 December 2021



Figure 53: Graphic created on QGIS demonstrating claims of airstrikes in the Myawaddy township between 23-25 December 2021.

On 23 December 2021 [Khit Thit Media](#) published claims that the military were using aircraft to bomb areas within and around Lay Kay Kaw. This marked one of the first times a Burmese news outlet reported on the presence of aircraft in the region and their use within attacks. Until this point the allegations that aircraft had been used largely came from social media users or Thai news outlets. Alongside the report, Khit Thit Media published an image of a MIG-29 - an aircraft which is within the Myanmar Air Force’s inventory. However, they do not specify if this was the aircraft which attacked the area or when this image was taken. In the Khit Thit Media report, a local resident claimed that *"They dropped many bombs in Lay Kay Kaw (လေးကျွဲကော်) [...] between 1000 and 1100 [local time]. They also dropped some in Mae Htaw Thale (မယ်ထော်တလေး) and Myittar Lin Myaing (မေတ္တာလင်းမြိုင်)"*. Myanmar Witness cannot verify this witness statement but the KNU’s request for a ‘No Fly Zone’ (above) and social media users corroborate the claim that airstrikes took place on or around this date in Lay Kay Kaw.

Fighting reportedly continued into 24 December 2021 - social media claims have been excluded here for privacy reasons, with more bombing and airstrikes beginning at around 1540 in Lay Kay Kaw (လေးကျွဲကော်), Hpa Luu (ဖလူး), Mae Htaw Thale, and Myittar Lin Myaing

(မေတ္တာလင်းမြိုင်). Unverified images of the damage left by said attacks circulated online (Figure 54).



Figure 54: Images of a crater, apparently from an air attack from the military in Myawaddy (မြဝတီ).

On 25 December 2021 it's claimed that another airstrike took place in the Lay Kay Kaw (လေးကျောက်) area, with attached footage of an aircraft seen flying in Myawaddy (မြဝတီ) at around 16.654372, 98.528151 (Figure 55). While this footage does not prove that airstrikes occurred at this time, it does demonstrate that aircraft were present in the area.



Figure 55: Geolocation of footage of an aircraft in Myawaddy (မြဝတီ).

An Airstrike Hits a House in Thailand

The artillery strikes close to the Thai border led to increased tensions with Myanmar's neighbour. An [article](#) outlined the increased frequency of border patrols by Thai forces, supposedly in order to keep refugees close to the border safe. [DVB](#) also claimed that Thai police and border guards were present in Maw La Chaing village, Phop Phra district, Thailand on this day due to a Myanmar army artillery shell landing on a villager's property, destroying

it. Upon further investigation, a sign on the wall of the property suggests the home belongs to Miss Sunee Archasuksan (house number 155/1) (Figure 56). [News articles](#) confirm this and accompany the claim with images of the military compensating the residents for the destruction with resources and new roofing. The military also claimed to have talked with the village head, Ban Muen Ruechai (of Village No. 5, Phop Phra Subdistrict, Phop Phra District, Tak Province) about encouraging people to make bunkers to protect themselves against further shelling.



Figure 56: The Thai military at house number 115/1 that appears to have been damaged by something.



Figure 57: An item lodged into a piece of wood with claims this belongs to the home of someone in Maw La Chaing village, Phop Phra district, damaged by the Myanmar military.

The Death of a Journalist

On the 25 December, A Sai K - a thirty-eight year old journalist and a chief editor of Federal News Journal who was documenting the clashes in Lay Kay Kaw (လေးကျွေ့ကော်) - was reported [killed](#) by [artillery fire](#) while hiding in the trees close to Htee Mel War Khee (ထီးမယ်ဝါးခီး). Monitoring group AAPP also records the death of this journalist, and attributed it to the fighting in and around Lay Kay Kaw (လေးကျွေ့ကော်).

A Sai K was not an active member fighting against the military; but a civilian journalist. According to the recent documentary, [Walking into Darkness](#), A Sai K and other journalists were residing in these 'liberated areas' under ethnic army control in order to practise independent journalism. They had been unable to do so elsewhere since the coup due to new restrictive laws which prevent journalism that is hostile towards the military government.

26-28 December 2021

Both ground fighting and aerial attacks continued between the 26-28 December 2021, involving the KNLA and PDF. In video footage uploaded by [Salween Press](#), it is alleged that three aircraft belonging to the military fired on Kawkareik (ဒုဖျာ်ယာ်ဝှံဖိ) in Kayin (ကရင်) State, and a plane can be seen passing overhead a few times. [Salween Press](#) also uploaded footage of fighting on the ground in the evening that purports to be from the Lay Kay Kaw (လေးကျွေ့ကော်) area. However, this location has not been verified by Myanmar Witness. The footage shows members of the KNU (Figure 58).



Figure 58: Comparison of a badge and uniform worn by two of the individuals in the footage compared to that of the KNU.

In an social media [update](#) from Salween Press early in the morning of 27 December 2021, it's claimed that fighting had broken out again near Mae Htaw Thale (မယ်ထော်တလေး). Additionally, [FIRMS](#) registered fires in Mae Htaw Thale (မယ်ထော်တလေး) on this day, however Myanmar Witness has not been able to locate any footage of these fires.

One of the Myanmar Witness' analysts on the ground confirmed a few explosions near Lay Kay Kaw (လေးကျောင်း) on the morning of 28 December 2021 at 0910 local time. Additionally, according to the [Myanmar Press Photo Agency](#), the military reportedly fired large weapons in the south of Lay Kay Kaw (လေးကျောင်း) in the evening at about 2030. Reports suggest that civilians' homes were burnt down, however Myanmar Witness has been unable to confirm the presence of fires in this area.

SAC encouraging the return of Refugees

Despite the security situation within the region remaining dire, at the end of December, the military reportedly began trying to persuade those who had fled the country to return to Myanmar. Video footage uploaded on 28 December 2021 allegedly showed members of the SAC encouraging the return of Lay Kay Kaw's (လေးကျောင်း) refugees through a megaphone (Figure 59). The SAC spokesperson says that they wish to welcome people back to their homes and that they were not fighting civilians but the 'terrorist' PDFs and NUG members. While this move might appear contradictory to the SAC's actions in the region, as illustrated within this report, it aligns with the messaging delivered within pro-government media channels. For example, throughout December, the GNLM implored those "*citizens who reside in various regions for many reasons*" to return back to Myanmar (Figure 60).

Despite invitations to return to the Lay Kay Kaw region, continued fighting in the coming months signals ongoing instability in the region. Myanmar Witness will cover the extensive clashes between the military, KNLA/KNU and their allied forces in this region in later reports.



Figure 59: Screen Capture alleged to be the SAC (allegedly in Myawaddy (မြောင်း)) calling for the return of refugees to safely return from the border and Thailand.

**State Administration Council
Press Release**

Re-invitation to Myanmar citizens who reside in various regions for many reasons

1. Some student youths, State service personnel and citizens, with worries, have evaded to areas of EAOs and foreign countries due to the incitements and intimidation of NLD members, extremist followers, unlawful associations and terrorist groups such as CRPH and NUG, stimulation of CDM, and persons and organizations at home and abroad not wishing to restore peace and stability of the State since Tatmadaw assumed the State responsibilities on 1 February 2021.
2. They are further worried about the dictatorship statement and speeches of unlawful association and terrorist group CRPH and NUG, and some relevant persons. As they face no security guarantee and difficulties in socio-economic life in those areas, they wish to return to their native lands.
3. **The State Administration Council will specifically ease restrictions for service personnel, intellectuals and intelligentsia, and persons from various arenas and citizens who, with worries, absconded from the country except for persons who committed murders, robberies, setting fires, mine explosions and intentional attacks on security troops, those who crowded to attack public service personnel and some people, those who destroyed government and private-owned buildings and those who are highly involved in the CDM activities by providing monetary assistance and other means.**
4. As those who evade their native areas are also citizens, the State Administration Council will arrange their returns from the evaded areas to various parts of Myanmar.
5. As such, the information was released that if those who evaded to various areas, except for persons who committed any kinds of crime, wish to return to their native lands in Myanmar of their own accord due to multiple worries, the citizens abroad can contact nearby ward, village, township and district administration bodies and relevant embassies, military attaché offices and consulates in accord with the easing restrictions under the law.

*Information Team
State Administration Council*

THE State Administration Council will specifically ease restrictions for service personnel, intellectuals and intelligentsia, and persons from various arenas and citizens who, with worries, absconded from the country except for persons who committed murders, robberies, setting fires, mine explosions and intentional attacks on security troops, those who crowded to attack public service personnel and some people, those who destroyed government and private-owned buildings and those who are highly involved in the CDM activities by providing monetary assistance and other means.

Figure 60: Global New Light of Myanmar, 15 December 2021.

Refugee camps at the Mori River - 16 November 2021 - 12 January 2022)

Myanmar Witness has confirmed that additional makeshift refugee camps were set up on the Thai border, likely in response to the alleged SAC offensive activity in Lay Kay Kaw. On 22 December 2021, [People's Spring](#) uploaded images of supplies being transported from the Thai side of the river to make-shift homes and tents set up on the Burmese side of the river (Figure 61). These tents were not visible in images of the same location earlier in December 2021. Satellite imagery taken on 12 January 2022 revealed their presence, indicating that they were set up between 16 November 2021 and 12 January 2022 (Figure 62). As these photos were likely taken in the timespan when conflict is said to have been happening near Thay Baw Boe (သေ့ဘောဘိုးရွာ), the inhabitants of the new makeshift camp may have fled the fighting there.



Figure 61: Supplies from the Thai side at 16.561853, 98.576611 being transported across to make-shift homes and tents set up on the Myanmar side of the river.



Figure 62: Satellite imagery taken between 16 November 2021 and 12 January 2022 demonstrates newly set-up tents (rectangle) and what appears to be people (circle).

Byu Har Kone (Strategic Hill) Military Base

While it has been difficult to fully verify many of the reports of attacks, shelling or ground fighting, during the course of the investigation, Myanmar Witness uncovered a military base at 16.581145, 98.539210, close to Lay Kay Kaw (လေးကျောင်းကော်). This military base is called Byu Har Kone (Strategic Hill), and is placed in a strategic position due to its elevated location which allows it to influence control over the nearby areas. The exit route from Byu Har Kone base is through Lay Kay Kaw (လေးကျောင်းကော်) towards Asia road via Myawaddy (မြဝတီ). Images shared with the Myanmar Witness team through private submissions show artillery firing positions, mortar positions in the ground, and weaponry stationed here (Figure 63). Drone footage also shows smoke in this area, suggesting the area was in use at the time the footage was taken. As such, this provides additional evidence to substantiate claims that the Myanmar military were both present and active in the region during the timeframe investigated.



Figure 63: Location of Byu Har Kone firing station at 16.581145, 98.539210.

Conclusion

Through open source analysis, Myanmar Witness has been able to shed light on many events which have occurred in and around Lay Kay Kaw (လေးကျောင်းကော်) during December 2021. This chronological reconstruction of events, supported by verified footage and images, gathered using open source techniques, has demonstrated the human toll of clashes between the military and local defence forces. Evidence has been collected which could suggest the use of heavy artillery targeting civilian areas, the seemingly unjust arrests of anti-SAC figures, and the displacement of thousands of individuals from their homes, many of whom have sought

refuge across the Thai border. This mass displacement is almost certainly the result of the Myanmar military's activity in the area. The attacks on civilian areas and violence inflicted upon civilians by the military has created IDPs, refugees and led to civilian deaths. What was once designated a 'town of peace' has sadly become a 'town of pain'.

This report is the first in a series documenting the violence in Lay Kay Kaw. Myanmar Witness has continued to investigate alleged military violations in Lay Kay Kaw and its surrounding villages and will be releasing further reports detailing more recent activity in this area, including refugee movements and artillery strikes. For further information, visit the Myanmar Witness website: myanmarwitness.org

List of abbreviations

• Border Guard Forces	BGF
• Civil Disobedience Movement	CDM
• Committee Representing Pyidaungsu Hluttaw	CRPH
• Global New Light of Myanmar	GNLM
• Fire Information and Resource Management System	FIRMS
• Internally Displaced Peoples	IDPs
• Karen National Liberation Army	KNLA
• Karen National Union	KNU
• Karenni National Defence Forces	KNDF
• Light Infantry Battalion	LIB
• Light Infantry Division	LID
• National League for Democracy	NLD
• National Unity Government	NUG
• People's Defence Force	PDF
• Security Administration Council	SAC
• The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees	UNHCR
• User Generated Content	UGC
• United Nations	UN
• United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees	UNHCR