

Tibet Oral History Project

Interview #11N – Ngodup Yamphel
April 7, 2015

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INTERVIEW SUMMARY SHEET

1. Interview Number: #11N
2. Interviewee: Ngodup Yamphel
3. Age: 79
4. Date of Birth: 1936
5. Sex: Male
6. Birthplace: Lungpashi
7. Province: Dhotoe (Kham)
8. Year of leaving Tibet: 1959
9. Date of Interview: April 7, 2015
10. Place of Interview: Hotel Norbu Sangpo, Boudha, Kathmandu, Nepal
11. Length of Interview: 1 hr 32 min
12. Interviewer: Marcella Adamski
13. Interpreter: Tenzin Yangchen
14. Videographer: Henry Tenenbaum
15. Translator: Tenzin Yangchen

Biographical Information:

Ngodup Yamphel was born in Lungpashi, a very small village. His was a semi-nomadic family engaged in farming as well as raising animals. He recalls that the Chinese appeared in his hometown when he was 12 years old. The Chinese initially tried to gain the trust of the Tibetans by paying large amounts of *dhayen* ‘Chinese silver coins’ for turnips and yaks.

Ngodup Yamphel recounts how the Chinese prepared an inventory of various animals owned by the families in his region and gave them vaccinations against diseases. They requested the local Tibetans send animals to assist with the construction of roads. Later the Chinese forcefully took away one of every six animals. Ngodup Yamphel says that amassing of Chinese troops led to the formation of the resistance movement under Phurpapon, the leader of Markham. He joined the movement at the age of 18 after a divination was used to decide which of his parents’ five sons would become a soldier.

Ngodup Yamphel describes in detail about his participation in the resistance. The men were forced to flee towards the south and joined up with the *Chushi Gangdrug* [Defend Tibet Volunteer Force]. They faced many risky encounters with Chinese soldiers under the leadership of Andrug Gonpo Tashi. They continued to move from place to place to avoid being captured and eventually ended up in the safety Indian Territory.

Topics Discussed:

Kham, invasion by Chinese army, resistance fighters, Chushi Gangdrug guerrillas, escape experiences.

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Interview #11N

Interviewee: Ngodup Yamphel

Age: 79, Sex: Male

Interviewer: Marcella Adamski

Interview Date: April 7, 2015

Question: Please tell us your name.

00:00:08

Interviewee #11N: Ngodup Yamphel.

Q: His Holiness the Dalai Lama asked us to record your experiences, so that we can share your memories with many generations of Tibetans, the Chinese and the rest of the world. Your memories will help us to document the true history, culture and beliefs of the Tibetan people. Do you give your permission for the Tibet Oral History Project to use this interview?

#11N: [Nods]

Q: Thank you for offering to share your story with us. During this interview if you wish to take a break or stop at any time, please let me know. If you do not wish to answer a question or talk about something, let me know. If this interview was shown in Tibet or China, would this be a problem for you?

#11N: As I mentioned earlier...what problem would there be except perhaps for the nephews and nieces who live in the hometown. However, firstly, it is for the cause of His Holiness the Dalai Lama and secondly, the Buddha dharma. So even if it creates problems in the hometown, that cannot be helped if it will benefit the Buddha dharma, His Holiness the Dalai Lama and the lamas due to whose benevolence, we have been happy since arriving in India.

If [this interview] is not seen in the hometown...it would be better to leave out the name of the place called [name omitted] as you [the interpreter] suggests. Otherwise...

Q: We're honored to record your story and appreciate your participation in this project.

00:02:46

#11N: Okay.

Q: *Pa-la* 'respectful term for father,' can you please tell us where you were born?

#11N: Should [I] say the name of the place? My actual birthplace was Lungpashi, the real birthplace.

Q: When were you born? What year or how old are you now?

#11N: Birth year?

Q: Yes.

#11N: I do not know the birth year. You calculated it yesterday [during the pre-interview]. I was 12 years old when the Chinese appeared in our region. [I] do not know [the year].

Q: When you were born who was in your family, *pa-la*?

#11N: I was the youngest at that time. We were six siblings including me, and the two parents. That is eight.

Q: What kind of livelihood did your parents engage in?

00:04:39

#11N: We owned a good number of animals like yaks, *dri* 'female yaks,' goats and sheep. The farmland was not large when [the family] lived in Lungpashi. Butter, cheese and such were bartered for grain. That was how [we] earned a living.

Q: Was there enough food for your family of six children, enough food to eat everyday?

#11N: [We] had to acquire [grain] from outside and consumed it along with dairy products and that had to last.

Q: Were you living, *pa-la*, in a large town or a small village? Can you tell us how many families were there?

#11N: When I was in the place called Lungpashi there was only our family that lived close to the monastery. Then when the children grew up, we purchased land in [name omitted] and moved there.

Q: Purchased land?

#11N: Yes.

Q: What was the name of the little monastery when your family first lived together?

00:07:03

#11N: Gyaka Datsang.

Q: How far away did your family move?

#11N: It was at a distance of half a day on foot. Let's say a day. A mountain pass has to be crossed.

Q: Can you tell us what was the purpose of buying land and moving?

#11N: Because there was no land there, no fields and it was not sufficient to depend only upon the animals. So when the children became old enough to work, [we] moved.

Q: Tell us about your father. What kind of a person was your father?

#11N: Should [I] say the name?

Q: No. What kind of a person was he?

#11N: The face was long with a beard like him. [Laughs and points off camera and touches chin]

Q: What about your mother? What kind of a lady was she? What kind of a woman?

00:09:02

#11N: Mother was young in age. It seems [she] was very beautiful when younger.

Q: And then?

#11N: My father's was an extremely wealthy family. My mother used to be a servant in father's family. In Tibet...the family's son fell for the servant that was objected to by the parents. So they went to live where there was not anyone near the monastery. They lived together there. Though a rich family, [father's family] did not give anything.

Q: What are some memories of your family life when you were a little boy growing up? Do you have any special memories?

#11N: I can remember from the time I was 6 or 7 years old. Earlier I spoke about moving from Lungpashi to [name omitted]. I was 8 years old then. [I] arrived in [name omitted] at the age of 8. From when [I] was 8 years old we had to pay taxes to the Tibetan Government, which was done for four years. After four years I turned 12. Then the Chinese appeared when [I] was 12 years old.

Q: *Pa-la*, what was your first memory of seeing the Chinese in your country?

00:11:35

#11N: To be frank I have no memories. The Tibetan Government's tax system was stringent. When the Chinese appeared they paid 4-5 *dhayen* 'Chinese silver coins' for a basinful of turnips. It was white silver. A yak fetched around 70 *dhayen*. [The Chinese] did such.

Q: Turnips?

#11N: [The Chinese] paid around five *dhayen* for a basinful of turnips, white silver for turnips! They did not have anything to eat.

Q: And then for a yak?

#11N: A yak was paid 70 *dhayen*! People owning large flocks sold a great number. We did not have any to sell nor did [we] need to buy. [Our] family's situation was like that.

Q: And then what other memories do you have of the Chinese coming into your area?

00:13:00

#11N: Later the Chinese might have arrived in Lhasa, might have arrived but we would not know. Much later they became rich in Gathok. They transported *doy* 'rice' between Ba and Markham Gathok. They accumulated a huge quantity of rice in Gathok.

Q: Who?

#11N: The Gyatsong.

Q: Who's Gyatsong, the Chinese?

#11N: Yes, the Chinese, by sending *doy* from Ba.

Q: *Dri* 'female yaks'?

#11N: *Doy*, for consumption.

Q: Oh, *doy*?

#11N: Yes. They kept accumulating rice in Gathok and then a large number of Chinese arrived in Gathok, in the place called Markham Gathok, which is the place where...[not discernible] used to live in the past.

Q: Do you mean to say that the Chinese brought rice from China to Markham Gathok?

#11N: Yes.

Q: What happened in Ba?

#11N: They brought it through Ba to our region.

Q: Bringing rice?

#11N: Yes, yes, rice for consumption.

Q: Why?

#11N: For consumption because a large number of them were to come later. We did not know that. Later, a large number of troops gathered.

Q: And then what happened?

00:14:48

#11N: Then they went directly to Chamdo but there was no resistance. There was not any resistance probably because except the news about the armory being set on fire by Ngabo [Ngabo Ngawang Jigme, a government official] I] had not heard anything.

Then in our place...then they [Chinese] started to talk about illnesses in animals, that the animals carried diseases—it was much later—that the animals were sick and needed to be given injections. Their doctors came to the nomadic region. They gave injections to all the animals and made an inventory of the number of pack animals, number of animals that were not pack animals, number of milk giving animals and such. Then they left. After they left...

Q: The Chinese?

#11N: Yes, the Chinese. After they left...it seems they were building roads from Ba to Markham Gathok. Instead of constructing roads from Markham Gathok, they started through the north towards Tsawa Pangda from Chamdo, and from Pangda to Tsawa Ngagong where the road was bad. That is in the direction of the Salween River.

Q: From Pangda to...

#11N: Built roads from Pangda to Tsawa Ngagong, from Tsawa Pangda.

Q: Tsawa Pangda to...

#11N: Tsawa Ngagong.

Q: Ngagong.

#11N: Yes, between [Tsawa Pangda and] Tsawa Ngagong.

Q: Built roads.

#11N: Yes, building roads...

Q: The Salween River?

#11N: The Salween River. The Salween River flows between the places called Tsawa Ngagong and Tsawa Pangda.

Q: Did anything happen to the animals as a result of the injections?

00:17:50

#11N: Nothing happened. They had been carrying out a census of the animals. Roads were being constructed at Tsawa Ngagong and [the Chinese] said, “You have to serve as transporters. This family has this number of *dzo* ‘animal bred between a yak and cow,’ this number of yaks, this number of horses and this number of mules.” A census had already been done. “You have to come [with the animals]. We will pay transportation fees and in case of death [of an animal] we will compensate.” It was an order and we had no choice whatsoever.

Q: And did the people comply?

#11N: [People] had to comply and went. The animals were already counted and after the pack animals had left, [the Chinese] claimed “We do not have anything to eat,” and took away one in six animals by force whether it was a *dri* or a yak, one in six. Then only five were left. That was how the Chinese drove them away.

Q: Did [the Chinese] pay?

#11N: [The Chinese] said they would pay later. They had unending supply of money, which they later took back.

00:20:22

Just after this happened, from Lhasa, Tibet—we heard about it but did not witness—[we] heard in the hometown that His Holiness the Dalai Lama has had to visit China. Then it was said that His Holiness had returned from China. Trijang Rinpoche [one of the tutors of His Holiness the Dalai Lama] arrived in our region on horseback. [Prays] I take refuge in him. It was the previous incarnation. [Trijang Rinpoche] arrived in our region on horseback. Our monastery made great preparation, after which [he] left for Lhasa.

Then it was announced that all our leaders must go to China to attend a meeting. [They] were taken to China and returned nearly a year later. The most senior leader among the 18 leaders of Markham was Phurpapon. Phurpapon returned and said, “I was a long time in China to attend meetings. During this period my family has become very poor in terms of food and clothing. The animals have died and it has been terrible. I request the Chinese to help me.” He received two bags of *dhayen* and 10 *khadhun* ‘short-barrel rifles’ from the Chinese.

Q: Ten bags of *dhayen*?

#11N: Yes.

Q: Two bags...

#11N: Two bags of *dhayen* and 10 *khadhun*.

Q: Is *khadhun* a rifle?

#11N: Rifles, rifles. There were rifles left from the Tibetan Government stock. He took 10 rifles from it. The Chinese considered him important, very important.

Q: Did the Chinese give [him] those?

00:21:52

#11N: The Chinese gave them to him. Then he gathered all the best men of Phurpatsang, formed an army and constructed a fort. He then spoke to all those leaders from the 18 that concurred with him. However, there were those that did not agree like Zesopon and a few other leaders. [They] did not concur with him. All those that obeyed got together under [Phurpapon].

Q: How many were there that concurred with him?

#11N: Whatever the number, those leaders got together.

Q: Where were the leaders from?

#11N: There were leaders from the lower regions that came all the way from Ba Dowachukha. There is [a place] called Gorung with a [monastery] called Gonsagon where there was an accomplished lama called Pekong Lama. He came there as an army chief when [I] left. Then there is a place called Bumba that was later incorporated in the region of Ba though it was not so in the past. This person from Bumba—he has a relative living in India—Kushanampatsang arrived as an army chief. Then there were [the leaders of] Sampadingka and Rongsho. Phurpapon led the army and attacked the Chinese.

Q: Was Phurpapon one of the people, one of the leaders that went to China?

00:24:59

#11N: Yes.

Q: And then a year later his family was no better [off]. So he challenged the Chinese and said, “Give me something for my family.”

Q: Okay and so Phurpapon, did he found the resistance?

#11N: A [resistance] group was formed then. A group was formed consisting of all those [leaders] that came to meet with him. The [name omitted] region of Markham was close to Phurpapon and so we joined.

Q: Did you go?

#11N: I did. We were five brothers and I was the one selected after consulting a divination.

Q: Consulting a divination?

#11N: Yes, that was done in our hometown.

Q: To go to war?

00:26:08

#11N: Yes, a divination was consulted as to who among the five sons should go and it was I. The reason we consulted the divination and went to war was because it was not necessary to pay any money but it was mandatory for three families to jointly send one man, a man from three families. For instance, you [the interpreter] provide a horse, she [the interviewer] provides a gun and I go as the man [fighter]. So three families jointly produced a soldier. That was how I went.

Q: And how old were you?

00:27:16

#11N: Me?

Q: When [you] went to fight?

#11N: Me?

Q: Yes.

#11N: I was perhaps 18.

Q: Can you tell what kind of divination that was done by the family?

#11N: A lama was given the names and asked who among the five brothers should go. The lama did the divination using a rosary.

Q: And how did you feel about being selected?

#11N: I was young and did not know fear—did not know any fear. [Laughs] A senior person was appointed our leader, a grand looking person called Richen Lojam who was older in age.

Q: Richen?

#11N: Richen Lojam.

Q: Lojam?

#11N: Lojam. He was the leader of us 25 men. There were 25 men in the group.

Q: And who was he?

00:28:58

#11N: The region was called Richen and Lojam was his name. We belonged to the same hometown, under the same leader.

Q: When you said from the region every family had to send a son, I mean, a man, a rifle and a horse, were the families farmers? Were they nomads? What was the make up of the community?

#11N: We were all semi-nomadic pastoral farmers, similar, hailing from the same village. Everybody was semi-nomadic pastoral farmer. It was a good area with nomadic and farm lands.

Q: At that point you were about 17, 18. Can you tell us what happens next to you when you...? Do you say goodbye to your family? Do you see them again? What happens?

00:30:32

#11N: This is what happened later. There was an encounter and [we] were able to overcome [the Chinese] at Sampa Dinkha but not at Rongsho.

Q: Yes?

#11N: [We] won the encounter at Sampa Dinkha.

Q: Sampa?

#11N: Dinkha. It is on the banks of a river.

Q: At Sampa Dinkha?

#11N: Phurpatsang [group] fought and killed all the Chinese. We won. While fighting at the place called Rongsho, the Chinese could not be overcome; the Chinese won. We went to Gathok to fight the Chinese and barred [them] in a house at Rangwo Dhotoe for many days. The Chinese could not come out nor did we dare enter. The Pondha Kungo arrived at that time and stopped us from fighting.

Q: The one that didn't allow fighting was Pondha Kungo?

#11N: Apo Topgyal.

Q: Apo Topgyal?

#11N: Yes, [he] was called Topgyal. [He] did not allow [us] to fight.

Q: So when you said you had an encounter how many people would there be in that group?

00:32:21

#11N: In our group were nearly 60-70 men. Around 25 men went to Sampa Dinkha while around 60 went to Rongsho. That was a lot of men.

Q: Were there as many Chinese or greater numbers?

#11N: At that time?

Q: Yes.

#11N: There were not many Chinese then—not many Chinese. The reason Pondha arrived and stopped us from fighting was because some sort of truce was reached between China and Tibet. The Chinese agreed not to use force and oppression, like demanding animals, ordering transportation and such. It was agreed that the Chinese at Gathok would leave for Chamdo, escorted by the Markham [fighters] and the Chinese at Tsakha would withdraw escorted also by the Markham [fighters].

This was done according to the agreement and [we] escorted [the Chinese troops] until Tsawa Pondha. At times [we] fought them and at times escorted them. After we escorted [the Chinese troops] to Tsawa Pondha and returned, some remarked that there was a 10,000-strong Chinese army at Gathok while some said there were 6,000. Chinese reinforcement had arrived at Gathok in Markham. Now there was no way we could fight. We persevered under such circumstances for little over a year.

[The Chinese] were aware that we had joined the armed force but among the laypeople, some liked the Chinese and some that followed Phurpapon were fighting the Chinese. So we dared not remain and left. The Chinese hated the sight of monks and lamas, and when butter lamps were lit, complained that all the butter was being wasted and that *tsampa* ‘flour made from roasted barley’ was being thrown away by making dough [offerings]. All our people felt pain when such were uttered. [The Chinese] spoke about the non-existence of dharma.

Q: How did you leave?

00:36:10

#11N: [Speaks before question is interpreted] That was not all. When we started the resistance movement, Gyalthag, Kongra, Gyupa, Chating, Bapa, everyone rose up against them. Nevertheless, due to their huge number, however many were killed, they could not be vanquished. All the citizens rose up then.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: The Chinese, huge number?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Yes.

Q: And so, where were you in the story? Are you...what's happening to you?

#11N: At that time I was in Markham, right in the hometown. After that [we] dare not remain there. Should one say, ran away? [We] went further away and were hearing about the formation of the *Chushi Gangdrug* [Defend Tibet Volunteer Force] in Lhasa. The name *Chushi Gangdrug* was given in Lhasa. [We] heard that [the men of *Chushi Gangdrug*] were

coming through Shang Gaden Chokhor. We, who were on the way there, and the *Chushi Gangdrug* men coming to Shang Gaden Chokhor, met at Penpa. Then we were satisfied. [Laughs]

Q: How many days or weeks were you fleeing from the 10,000 Chinese troops? Were they following you or were you just getting out of the area?

00:38:37

#11N: When we left from Gathok, there was nobody in pursuit. One must recount clearly. There were not [any Chinese] that stopped us on the way to Penpa, and at Chara Penpa was the *Chushi Gangdrug*.

Q: There wasn't anyone pursuing?

#11N: No, no.

Q: [You] met up with the *Chushi Gangdrug* at Chara Penpa?

#11N: Yes. We did not come in large numbers but in groups of 3-4 or one or two. They [Chinese] would not allow if everyone traveled together.

Q: The original group of like, say 25 people that joined with you, you were broken into...they began leaving the area in groups of three or four?

#11N: [We] were scattered, each going one's own way.

Q: Were [you] scattered after the encounters?

#11N: After the encounters [we] returned to the village. When we fought as a group of 25 there was not anyone providing us with food. So each one had to return home.

Q: Did you leave your brothers and family behind when you left?

00:40:30

#11N: [They] were left behind. I left behind exactly seven members: five siblings and the two parents. We were eight, including siblings and parents.

Q: And what happened to you then, *pa-la*?

#11N: [I] mentioned about having reached Penpa. At Penpa...soon after the *Chushi Gangdrug* launched an attack at Powo Tamo. We were not in the group that attacked at Powo Tamo. There were a large number of resistant fighters, like 500-600 and around 200 or over a hundred went to Tamo but could not overcome [the Chinese] there. We lost. Eight to nine Tibetans were killed but the attack at Tamo was not successful.

Then [the Tibetan resistant fighters] returned and left for Phakpadho. Andrug Jindha [Andrug Gonpo Tashi, founder of *Chushi Gangdrug*] dispatched three groups to Chungpo

Tengyal. There used to be an armory of the Tibetan Government in Tsawa Pasho. Jindha himself went there to fetch weapons. The rest of the groups were taken to Tsawa Pasho. Three groups left for Chungpo Tengyal and the rest for Tsawa Pasho, to Tsawa Pasho. When we left it was said that the Chinese were there in Tsawa Pasho.

Q: Did you go to Tsawa Pasho?

#11N: Yes, along with Andrug Jindha. When [we] left for Tsawa Pasho, whether our secret leaked or whatever, the Chinese had gone and were not in Tsawa Pasho.

Q: Didn't [you] go to the armory in Tsawa Pasho?

00:42:18

#11N: Yes, to the armory. The armory was there. Besides the armory, there were many of their [Chinese] things. There was no reason for us to remain in Tsawa Pasho, as the Chinese were not there. [We] took over the armory that was in a monastery. There were piles of guns. It was said that there were 100 short barrel rifles. However, the *Chushi Gangdrug* was given only 96 while nomads had taken four, nomads belonging to the monastery. There were 40 sacks filled to the brim with bullets that [we] got. Then there were articles belonging to them including sacks of *dhatuk*.

Q: Sacks of what?

#11N: *Dhatuk*.

Q: What's *dhatuk*?

#11N: Chinese *dhatuk* is a thin fabric used to make shirts that are found in Hong Kong.

Q: How many?

#11N: Perhaps there were two or three sacks. That was a lot because a sack could hold many since they are thin. Then there were pork, pickles, and other food. It was quite a haul and was very helpful for the *Chushi Gangdrug*. We did not stay long. [We] dare not and returned after three days.

Q: Was it a Chinese armory?

#11N: Chinese armory. The armory was a Tibetan Government armory but under Chinese control then. Our Tibetan Government armory had been taken over.

Q: And what did you take with you?

00:45:00

#11N: Not individually, but from the armory we collected 96 short barrel [rifles], 40 sacks of ammunition, *dhatuk* and all the things that belonged to the Chinese. The *Chushi Gangdrug* gathered all such things.

Q: What did that feel like to you to be taking the ammunition, the rifles and everything? What were you feeling, *pa-la*?

#11N: To return to the hometown...it would not take more than eight days from the monastery [where the armory was located] to my village. [I] did not feel anything inside except that [I] will not be able to return to the hometown and the thought about how benevolent [my] parents are.

Q: What did you think might happen?

#11N: The thought, even after we had reached Mon Tawang was that [we] will get to return to Tibet in a year or two, thought [we] would reach the hometown but that was not to be. [Laughs]

Q: So when you said, “Now eight days from my town. Now I won’t be able to see my family,” but then your thought was that you would be able to go back? Were you worried about getting killed?

00:47:25

#11N: Even after arriving in Mon Tawang [I] thought perhaps in a year or so [I] would return to Tibet. All the older people were saying so, “We may not have to remain more than a year or two. Until then [we] will not get to return to Tibet.” They spoke about the British giving independence to India and things like that. They said [we] will not get to return.

Q: Not get to return to Tibet?

#11N: Everyone said [we] will not get to return for some time, not get to return for 8-9 years.

Q: Did the older people initially say, “will not get to return”?

#11N: [They] said [we] will get to return but not soon.

Q: What about the British giving independence to India?

#11N: How many years did the British take to give independence...it was 20-30 or 18-20 years that the British ruled India; it was said that it took so many years. “So likewise they [the Chinese] will rule Tibet,” it was remarked. His Holiness was able to come.

Q: So when you have these...*Chushi Gangdrug* has the rifles, the 96 rifles and the ammo. Where do you go next, *pa-la*? What happens?

00:49:09

#11N: Then we came back directly after loading the guns. Andrug Jindha—there are three districts called Sho-Tar-Lho—selected 10 soldiers from each district and distributed 10 rifles each. Of course, [the guns] were distributed. Most of us possessed our gown guns and

horses that we had brought from home. The Tibetan Government did not provide nor did anyone else. We already owned guns and did not need the short barrel [rifles]. Then we reached Lhozong and Andrug Jindha celebrated Losar ‘Tibetan New Year.’ It turned a year.

Q: What was the name of the place that you reached?

#11N: It was called Lhozong where we celebrated Losar.

Q: Lhozong.

#11N: It was one of the district headquarters under the past Tibetan Government.

Q: Continue what happens, *pa-la*.

#11N: Then we...Jindha was making every effort to reach Lhoka.

Q: Lhoka?

00:51:01

#11N: Yes. Then we continued but did not travel together. Two or three groups went ahead and some followed. Andrug Jindha was traveling in the middle. I was among those that were in the lead. Those of us in the lead reached a place called Aladho.

Q: Where?

#11N: Aladho. Upon reaching Aladho, there among us was one who used to be a rich merchant. He possessed a radio and a binocular.

Q: What was the man’s name?

#11N: Gedhun Yeshi.

Q: Radio and...?

#11N: Binocular to see in the distant.

Q: Was he rich?

#11N: He was rich and donated all his wealth to the *Chushi Gangdrug* at Chara Penpa.

Q: And then?

#11N: At Aladho some of us younger ones were moving about on the horses. He was on some sort of a bed near a window of someone’s home and was playing the radio. Then he exclaimed, “Alas!” “What is it?” the others asked. “Lhasa has been lost. Lhasa has been lost!” It was said so over the radio.

Q: He exclaimed?

#11N: He exclaimed instantly. Andrug Jindha was at...What is the name of the monastery? [Andrug Jindha] happened to be at Gyamtsoling and was following [us].

Q: Where?

00:52:33

#11N: Andrug Jindha mentioned that [he] heard about the loss of Lhasa over the radio at Gyamtsoling.

Q: Andrug Jindha?

#11N: They heard it there. We were not far apart, just a day's distance. Then Jindha directed us to go directly to Lharigo.

Q: Lharigo?

#11N: Yes, to Lharizongpa, to go there directly. Jindha had arrived. Then we went directly to Lharigo. After reaching Lharigo, Jindha arrived in two days. Following Jindha's arrival, lots were drawn to go to Kongpo Gyamda. The Chinese were present at Bhotakung near Kongpo Gyamda. There were no Chinese in Shingpathang, as they had left. Those that went to Bhotakung were [the men from] Lithang, Dhargay Gonpa, Markham, Chamdo, Kongra and Tsawa Rongpa. Around seven of us groups resisted at Bhotakung. There was a large number of Chinese at Bhotakung, it being located on the motor road. It is a little further away from Kongpo Gyamda.

Q: Bhotakung?

#11N: Bhotakung, Bhotakung.

Q: Is Bhotakung a place?

#11N: Yes, it is the name of a place in Kongpo, located a little further away from Kongpo Gyamda.

Q: To defend Bhotakung?

#11N: What?

Q: To defend Bhotakung?

#11N: [We] were to resist if the Chinese appeared. We had to pass through Kongpo Gyamda...Andrug Jindha...There was a place called Nyimari where [fighters from] Chating, Bapa and Gyalhang went. These three groups proceeded to Nyimari. The reason for marching to Nyimari was to resist the Chinese that might come from Lhasa. Between

these two was a road through Shingpathang that led directly to Lhoka. All of us were moving on this route.

In around two days Andrug Jindha managed to pass through Shingpathang towards Lhoka. All the wealth of the merchants had been donated to the *Chushi Gangdrug*. So there was a lot to carry, which was being transported by the people. Those Bapa and Chating [fighters] that had been deployed to Nyimari were no longer there following Andrug Jindha's departure.

Q: Where?

00:55:06

#11N: [They] had followed Andrug Jindha. We were at Bhotakung near the Chinese. Early one morning we received a letter that said, "Set out at once. Everyone at Kongpo Gyamda has left. You have to set out instantly." We set off and when we reached Kongpo Gyamda, the drivers of the mules that carried our provisions were also gone. There was no one. Then we left and reached Nyimari. No, it was not Nyimari but Chinda.

At Chinda a group of people had made camp. "Come and set up camp. [We] can proceed later." One must cook one's own food at the camp for there was not anyone to rely on. However, our mule drivers along with the mules laden with our supplies had gone. The mules with the supplies were gone. [We] left saying, "We cannot set up camp."

As we proceeded and reached the intersection of the route over the bridge of Chinda that was in use during the Tibetan period and the then motor road, up there was a man on horseback. I remarked, "There is something [not right] looking at that man." He came charging on a horse. He was the one called Aten from Tsawa Rongpa who said, "Shingpathang has been overrun with Chinese. There is a fleet of vehicles but [I] have not counted. All the horses have bolted." He came rushing.

It was not possible for us to take this route. So we took a deviation and climbed over a slope onto a large level ground. Driving all the horses and mules, we waited there, waited by the motor road. While [we] waited, those many soldiers that had been camping appeared with red flags flapping. [They] were also blowing conch shells.

Q: Were they the Chinese?

#11N: No, no. [They] were our people and it made [us] happy. Just as they appeared, vehicles came roaring by. One felt nervous.

Q: The Chinese?

00:57:21

#11N: Yes, vehicles appeared in a pattern of blue. There were none on foot. Then all our older ones started firing. We possessed only short-barrel [rifles] and there was the sound of *hrrrrr...* and yet the vehicles came roaring. And then all [the vehicles] stopped. The Chinese rushed out of the vehicles and lay near the water as if [they] had been shot. Even then

[they] did not retaliate. Then suddenly they got up from the water's edge and fired a few shots. And then the firing began. [They] fired artillery shells. Then there was exchange of fire.

It was quite late. I looked back and our main army unit was suddenly gone. It was true that fighting there would have resulted in a huge loss of men since there was no escape route on either side of the narrow valley. They had fled on foot to the other side of the bridge at Chinda. [Their] horses bolted followed by ours. Our men were fighting the Chinese on the mountain. Then...[not discernible] who said, "Ngodup, go and catch the horses." I replied, "You go and catch the horses. It is not my horse alone." [I] was angry. I had gone to set fire to the vehicles and singed my hair, I swear.

Q: Chinese vehicles?

#11N: Yes, [I] had gone to set fire to Chinese vehicles and managed to set fire to only two vehicles. On the way back had I not the pistol I was finished. I possessed a Chinese pistol, a Chanata. Possessing the pistol...they appeared unexpectedly and [I] could not use the rifle but fired the pistol and managed to kill both. After the killing [I] tugged at the [dead Chinese soldiers'] guns but could not as they were somehow wedged to the bodies. I fled with my hair on fire. Lo Tseten or someone from Dhargay Gonpa was nearby who screamed, "Your head's on fire." "That is good," [I] replied for there was nothing else to comment.

00:59:55

I was ordered to catch the horses and was angry and said, "If the horses have bolted, they are not just mine but belong to everyone." We were 18-19 men that were left behind while the rest had gone. Despite the shelling we waited until dark having driven the horses further into the valley. Then when darkness fell they [Chinese soldiers] left in the vehicles. Except for around four vehicles, the others could be driven. [The vehicles] could move; [we] had failed to cause damage. However, a good number of Chinese had been killed, filling nearly two vehicles because [the corpses] were wrapped in white cloth. [They] did not leave even one body behind. [The bodies] were taken away after wrapping in white cloth.

As night fell we had some tea and descended. Some suggested [we] take the route across the river, cross the river and go through the forest while others rejected and opined [we] take the other route. [I] reflected and being young in age...everybody said...[not discernible]. There was one called Lodoe from Gonjo who was a good man. [I] suggested, "Let's go across the river. The other route offers nothing...[we] are only around 30 horsemen. Even if we trek the whole night through this route, we will not reach Shingpathang tonight. There is not a good pathway. If you dare to, come, for I am going to take the motor road."

[I] owned a horse and a mule. The mule followed my horse as though it was tied to it. "I am going to take the lead. If [you] follow and are shot at, try to save yourselves...[not discernible] I am determined to go." Some said this [and some said that] for there were around 30 people. I rode the horse and prepared to leave. Gonjo Lodoe said, "Are you going?" "Yes, [I] am." Gonjo Lodoe followed me together with his three servants.

Q: Then what happened at Shingpathang, *pa-la*?

01:05:27

#11N: Then at Shingpathang we...I was moving in the front and the 30 horsemen were following me. At the turn leading to Lhoka...at upper Shingpathang we had to deviate towards Lhasa and not Kongpo Bhala. After moving for sometime there were two nomad families. Then daylight began and [we] rested. There were two men among us without horses. [They] did not have horses to ride. So we gave them horses by adjusting the pack animals. One was from Dayab and the other from Lithang. [Laughs]

Taking them along, we moved until the base of the mountain pass of Lhoka. There was no other choice for fear of one's life. [We] spent a night there. After spending a night [we] crossed the pass. This was in the direction of Kongpo Bhala, in the direction of Kongpo Bhala. On the pass [we] took along two men of...[not discernible] and returned the other two telling them they need not continue and to return towards Kongpo. Then we came directly and reached a large monastery—[I] do not know the name—behind Gaden [Monastery].

Q: Gaden?

#11N: Yes, we reached behind Gaden.

Q: Were [you] now coming towards Lhasa?

#11N: It was not possible to reach Lhasa. We were to go to Rasodukha to cross the river near Lhoka by boat. As we came down the mountain pass, Kongpo Bhala could be seen down below. A little further away from there was a large number of horsemen. They were those that had fled through the other route. [We] did not know that. Then we reached the monastery and spent a night there.

Q: What's the name of the monastery?

01:07:25

#11N: I do not know the name of the monastery. It is located right behind Gaden. After spending a night there, [we] trekked through some valleys near a mountain range. On the other side of the path we came across a few men. They were locals who said, "Where are you going? You seem to be [men of] the *Chushi Gangdrug*." "Yes, we are and on the way to Lodukha." "Lodukha has been lost to the Chinese. There is no way for you. The Chinese have captured it."

Q: Lodukha?

#11N: Yes, it is called something like Lodukha and located near Chushul on the way to Lhoka. "[Lodukha] has been lost to the Chinese. There is no way." Everyone exclaimed, "What to do? What to do?" The men knew the area and said, "Take the other route and go directly. There are eight boats. If one can go across in a boat, Lhagyari can be reached

immediately.” How many were we then? Perhaps 30 that reached the river bank where there was eight boats ready to take off. Just as we set off, the others behind us caught up.

Now everybody was on the run. It took around a day and half for everyone...The boatmen did not take many people in, which [they] cannot be blamed. At a time [each boat] carried six or seven men along with saddles and saddlebags. The horses were chased into the river and swam across straightway. After crossing the river and as [we] were upon the mountain pass, Lhagyari could be seen from afar. [We] reached Lhagyari exactly a day after crossing the river, having come directly...[not discernible]

Q: Continue please.

01:11:04

#11N: Then Lhagyari...After crossing the river [we] reached Lhagyari. At Lhagyari it was said that everything was good in Lhoka. We spent three days at Lhagyari. Being among the younger ones in my *toptsang* ‘communal eating unit,’ [I] had to be on sentry duty for two nights. [Laughs] After spending three nights in Lhagyari, the Markham group, the other was the Chating or...both the Chating and Bapa groups, the three were told to go to Wula—I think it was called Yathoedala—to resist the Chinese.

[We] left Lhagyari at around daybreak and reached the pass at Yathoedala quite early. Having been told that [the Chinese] were coming, we waited the whole night on the pass but nobody turned up. Nobody came the entire night. We were 6-7 young men that were deployed on the pass while they remained there in the village. Then a messenger came asking [us] to come down. [We] returned and then were told to proceed towards Chumdhagya. However, not having traveled earlier we had no idea where Chumdhagya was.

Q: Chumdhagya?

#11N: Yes, Chumdhagya. Having been told to go to Chumdhagya [we] set off. Just before crossing over the mountain pass at Chumdhagya, before the mountain pass near Wula an airplane flew in the sky whirr...that belonged to the Chinese. It was not flying low but fairly high. Then it flew away. When we were descending a mountain pass near Chumdhagya and looked down, they pointed with fingers and said, “That is Chumdhagya.” It was plane but [I] had no idea having never been there.

At the base of the pass was a very huge building with a large farm area. Gen Namgyal of Bapa and Dawa of Chating were passing by. I jokingly asked them, “Where are the Chating and Bapa going?” “We are going along this route. Would you like to come too?” “Yes,” [I] replied. [The said,] “Look at the large town. Let’s take rest there. That over there is Chumdhagya.” “Okay,” I said for [I] had no knowledge about Chumdhagya. “Why do you want to make camp? Chumdhagya is very near.” [They] said, “There is no good place to rest at Chumdhagya. It is filled with our soldiers.” “Okay,” [I] replied.

01:13:55

My companions said, “What are you talking about wasting your time?” “I was just joking for there is nothing else to talk about,” [I] replied. I had a good horse. The horse was a good one and I also had a good pack animal. I sped away. Close to Chumdhagya, the other side was flat ground that was frozen. It seemed like some sheep were moving near the ice. [I] observed and they weren’t sheep but looked like humans. [I] reined in the horse and told Gedhun Yeshi who appeared, “Take a look through your binoculars. There is something moving near the ice like sheep or people.” [Gedhun Yeshi] said, “You take a look” and threw [me] the binoculars. I took a look. They were people, the Chinese marching in rows. “Oh, God! They are the Chinese marching in rows,” I exclaimed. “How can it be?” Someone called Dhargay took a look, “Oh, it is the Chinese!”

Then one became nervous. “What shall we do? What shall we do?” There happened to be our soldiers in the village and they fired unnecessarily...*tat, tat, tat, tat*. Then there was no choice for us but to rush to the village. However, it was useless. By the time we reached the village, the Chinese had entered it. Then [we] took the upper route as there was no way to go into the village and then the route towards Nyen may be blocked. [We] did not want this to happen and so three or four of us hurried there.

When we rushed down they [Chinese] fled away. [We] prevented the road from being blocked. It was late, very late, when the encounter took place. I thought...[not discernible] was far away but a little distance away a [person from] Amdo and a horse—it was a horse belonging to a [person from] Lithang or Amdo—a horse and a man had been injured. “[not discernible],” I thought. There was not much of a fight. Everybody...Really I was surprised. Everyone ran away. Nobody put up a challenge.

Q: Who? Everyone?

01:16:30

#11N: Yes, everyone was like that. There were the men from Lhoka and all of us from the north. Those from the north were huge in number. And then we left from there. There were Gen Lobsang Jampa from Lithang and some of us. Darkness fell just before the mountain pass. A little further away from the pass was a valley where [we] slept. There was no other choice. [We] had to go to Chumdhagya...no not Chumdhagya but Nyen.

Just before reaching Nyen, our Markham group was returning after fighting in Lhoka. There were around 10 men. Aku Lotse, who was the head of our northern force asked, “Where are you going?” [They] replied, “We have been sent by the Markham unit to serve as sentries at Chumdhagya.” Aku said, “We came from Chumdhagya last night. Just try and see if you can find a way there. There is no need to go to Chumdhagya. Those protecting the area are about to reach here.” Then they followed us. We advanced. In Nyen...

Q: Where?

#11N: What?

Q: Where?

#11N: Reached Nyen.

Q: And then?

01:20:08

#11N: [We] reached Nyen and took some supplies. Jindha was gone; there was no one. We were the last ones. We prepared to stay there but were told not to. The senior people refused to remain even in Nyen. There was a monastery in Nyen where [I] hoped to stay but [the senior men] would not. That whole night [we] climbed up the pass. It was same on the other side after crossing the pass. [We] rested but one could hardly move in the morning although one had a horse to ride. Then [we] kept going down. At the base a person called Zong Wolung from Markham who was an aristocrat...[not discernible]. And then [we] continued.

People had spread peas in front of horses. [I] scooped up some since I had a horse and mule to feed. And then we left. We came across a village and were told that Jindha had passed by. Jindha had gone. We camped and then continued. Then [we] seemed to have arrived at the base of the mountain pass of Mangola. There was a route this side [points to left], and taking the route that side [points to right] would lead to Diguthang, it was said. It was added that the Chinese had arrived in Diguthang and there was no way to get there and that some men coming from Diguthang had met Andrug Jindha and left straightaway with him. Then [we] continued through the valley for there was no other choice. When we were on the pass, our group seemed to be the last one.

01:21:54

It became late after we crossed the pass. There were juniper trees and also grass for the horses. Fearing there may not be grass available further down; we spent the night there. After continuing the journey [we] reached Mangola near a flat area at a bend. As one looked up at the snowy-covered mountain, there were rows of dark spots unable to move in the snow.

Q: Were these people?

#11N: There were people and horses. Each person possessed a horse or mule or two. After overcoming the pass [we] came upon an intersection. It became dark when we reached the intersection. Even here, [we] found juniper that was plucked to make fire and prepare tea. It was nighttime. Then there was the sound of *rak, rak, rak*. [I] saw the form of a person riding a mule. There was a man on a mule and two without mules. Three men came by. [We] happened to have reached Indian Territory. One of the men who spoke Tibetan said, "You are in Indian Territory. There is no danger. Take it easy. Once you reach the place called Mon Tawang, India has everything ready for you." That is what [he] said.

Q: How did that feel to hear you are in Indian Territory?

01:25:14

#11N: A person must be honest. On the other side the Chinese were in pursuit and one had to fight and then flee. There was a lot of anxiety and dread in the mind. On hearing this one felt, “Oh, [I] am so happy. There is no one to attack [us] in Indian Territory.” [I] did feel that. Then [I] asked the older people, “When will we get to go back? When will [we] return to Tibet from Indian Territory?” Then we discussed about this. [Laughs]

Q: What did they say?

#11N: Some of them said, “I thought [we] would get to go back in a year or two.” Some of them spoke about the British giving independence to India and all such things. The older people said so. [I] wondered what [they] were talking about and did not listen. [I] really thought [we] would get to go back soon. [I] thought so even after reaching Missamari [Assam]. We were told to go to Gangtok and from Gangtok to Mustang. Nobody mentioned Mustang but [we] were told about going somewhere. [I] thought [I] was going back to Tibet. There were some belongings all of which [I] tried to carry believing [I] could take back [to Tibet].

Q: I think that’s probably a very poignant place to stop this story, *pa-la*?

01:27:35

#11N: Okay.

Q: *Pa-la*, maybe we can...we would love to hear a much longer what happened to...about your next adventures, but unfortunately we will have to do that some other time.

#11N: Okay. It is not necessary for me to talk about Mustang?

Q: About the organization [*Chushi Gangdrug*] in Mustang?

#11N: Yes. Let’s leave it. My colleague has also finished [his interview].

[Interviewer to interpreter]: Oh, okay. So he’s ready to finish? Is that okay?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Yes.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: Yes, I see.

Q: Maybe another time we’ll be able to hear about Mustang. I don’t know.

#11N: Okay. It is not necessary for me to talk about Mustang because everybody knows the story. That was the story of how [we] struggled in Tibet. One has left behind country, properties and benevolent parents. Now they are no more, everyone having passed away. I am the youngest. If one does his work with integrity, one lives long.

Q: *Pa-la*, what is your wish for Tibet?

01:29:53

#11N: Mine? My opinion about Tibet is that even if [I] do not get to return to Tibet during my lifetime, [I] hope it will happen during the children’s lifetime. However, if [we] do not get to go back during the lifetime of His Holiness the Dalai Lama, it will be difficult once His Holiness the Dalai Lama passes away. That is the worry in [my] mind.

If [we] can go back to Tibet now, [I] can meet my nephews. Earlier a nephew came to see [me]. The nephews and everyone will get to meet each other. After the passage of time relatives will not recognize each other, cannot recognize each other when the time comes to return. One cannot return to the hometown and boast “We achieved this and that” or “[My] parents did so and so” which nobody will accept. It is very difficult. Due to the benevolence of His Holiness the Dalai Lama the children are happy living in this country. The worry I have is that if His Holiness the Dalai Lama does not live, we land in a strange situation. What will [we] do? [Prays] I take refuge in him.

Q: *Pa-la*, thank you so much for sharing your very, very powerful adventures with us.

01:32:09

#11N: [Joins palms] Okay.

Q: If this interview were shown in Tibet or China, would this be a problem for you, *pa-la*?

#11N: There may not be. [I] believe there will be no problems.

Q: Thank you very much for sharing your story with us.

#11N: [Joins palms] Okay.

END OF INTERVIEW