

Tibet Oral History Project

**Interview #4B – Lobsang Norbu
December 30, 2013**

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INTERVIEW SUMMARY SHEET

1. Interview Number: #4B
2. Interviewee: Lobsang Norbu
3. Age: 83
4. Date of Birth: 1930
5. Sex: Male
6. Birthplace: Lhoka
7. Province: Utsang
8. Year of leaving Tibet: 1959
9. Date of Interview: December 30, 2013
10. Place of Interview: Private home, Old Camp 4, Bylakuppe, Mysore District, Karnataka, India
11. Length of Interview: 1 hr 57 min
12. Interviewer: Marcella Adamski
13. Interpreter: Tenzin Yangchen
14. Videographer: Pema Tashi
15. Translator: Tenzin Yangchen

Biographical Information:

Lobsang Norbu was born in Lhoka. His mother passed away after giving birth to twins when he was 13 years old. Lobsang Norbu explains the various types of taxes that were levied such as labor tax, money tax, military tax, grain tax and transportation tax. He attended the first “public” school in Tibet, which was established by the 14th Dalai Lama, for a few a few years before he had to leave home at age 14 to join the army as part of his family’s military tax.

Lobsang Norbu describes the numerous divisions and leaders in the army at Drapchi and the various drills taught to new soldiers. He was trained in using guns, giving flag signals, operating the wireless radio and learned to drive vehicles. Lobsang Norbu was deployed as a bodyguard to His Holiness the Dalai Lama when he visited the Gaden Monastery to take his doctorate exam.

As conflict with the Chinese army increased, the Dalai Lama escaped from Lhasa and Lobsang Norbu gives a vivid account of the long journey His Holiness undertook to India. Lobsang Norbu was responsible for the guards’ weapons and arranging horses and pack animals. He describes the various places His Holiness stopped along the grueling trek. The soldiers tried to join with the *Chushi Gangdrug* [Defend Tibet Volunteer Force] but they were overwhelmed by the Chinese army and fled to India over the treacherous Mangola pass and arrived in India starving.

Topics Discussed:

Utsang, taxes, Tibetan army, invasion by Chinese army, resistance, Dalai Lama’s escape, Chushi Gangdrug guerrillas, escape experiences, life as a refugee in India.

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Interview #4B

Interviewee: Lobsang Norbu

Age: 83, Sex: Male

Interviewer: Marcella Adamski

Interview Date: December 30, 2013

Question: Please tell us your name.

00:00:22

Interviewee #4B: Yes?

Q: What's your name?

#4B: Lobsang Norbu.

Q: His Holiness the Dalai Lama asked us to record your experiences, so 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?

#4B: Yes, [I] do.

Q: Thank you for offering to share your story with us. During this interview if you wish to take a break or stop at anytime, please let me know. If you do not wish to answer a question or talk about something, let me know.

#4B: Okay.

Q: If this interview was shown in Tibet or China, would this be a problem for you?

00:02:11

#4B: I have no problems. It has been many years since '59 that I came here.

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

#4B: Okay.

Q: Lobsang-*la*, can you please tell me how old you are and where you were born?

#4B: Eighty-three.

Q: Where were [you] born?

#4B: You can say Lhoka.

Q: Who was in your family when you were a child?

#4B: In my family?

Q: Yes.

#4B: At that time there was father but I cannot remember the younger siblings much. Mother passed away when [I] was 13 years old.

Q: What caused her to pass away?

00:03:38

#4B: [Mother] gave birth to two children and passed away when [she] could not push out the afterbirth. There were no good doctors in Tibet.

Q: When you said two children, was it twins and did they survive?

#4B: It was twins and both the children survived. Mother passed away when [she] could not push out the afterbirth. Later the children did not survive.

Q: Who took care of you after your mother died?

#4B: Yes?

Q: Who took care of you after your mother died?

#4B: [Silent]

Q: [Your] mother passed away when [you] were a child. Who took care of [you]?

#4B: Father was there. At that time father and many family members were there. The family members were not my relatives but staff members of the family.

Q: What kind of work did your father do for a livelihood?

00:05:29

#4B: Earlier my father was the leader of the village and later became a taxpayer on account of *dalokpa* 'leaving monkhood.'

Q: What does *dalokpa* mean?

#4B: Initially [father] had been a monk and leader of the village.

Q: Can you tell us something about the tax system and the government?

#4B: There was one kind of tax where you cultivated lands and served labor tax. The family also had a military tax. Because of the military tax I came to be in the army at the age of 14. That is how it came about.

Q: You mentioned that your father was leader of a village, but I didn't understand what type of work he did or what type of livelihood he had besides being the leader.

00:07:09

#4B: As a taxpayer father served tax obligations, attended meetings, cultivated lands and all such things.

Q: Were the taxes that your father had to pay... Was the amount difficult for him?

#4B: It was quite difficult. We were obliged to render two kinds of taxes, a military tax and a labor tax. The labor tax was a bit difficult. Whereas with the military tax if a person [from the family] joined [the army] there were not many problems.

Q: What are the two different types of taxes? Could you explain that please?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Labor tax...

[Interviewer to interpreter]: You gave labor and then financial, you gave money?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: You gave a labor tax and then the other one was the military tax for which you had to send one member of the family to join the Tibetan army.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: I see.

Q: And the labor tax was actually money or did you supply labor?

#4B: There were types where money or grains or transportation tax by the use of horses and donkeys were levied. There were different kinds.

Q: Lobsang-*la*, do you know what the taxes were used for? How did the government use the tax money that they collected?

00:09:58

#4B: The entire [tax] did not go to the Tibetan Government because there was a leader in the village. He had expenses to meet. There is a part that has to go to the Tibetan government, which is sent there. I have no knowledge how that is done. The tax revenue comes from the lands.

Q: So you don't know if taxes were used to fix roads or provide schooling for children? You don't have any understanding of that?

#4B: This is a sad thing to say because in the past the government did not establish any schools. When His Holiness the present Dalai Lama was around 10 years of age a school was established by the government in which I got admission. It was a new school. There were no schools ever established for children of taxpayers in the past. There were schools for the aristocrat children in Lhasa.

However, I could attend the school for only two years as [I] left to join the army.

Q: Before your school was established, there were other schools that existed but only the aristocratic families could go.

#4B: There were no schools for common citizens. For common citizens there were private schools with families but no government ones. The one established in our [village] was the first one. It was set up when His Holiness the Dalai Lama was 10, 8 or 9 years old.

Q: How old was His Holiness the Dalai Lama?

00:12:50

#4B: That was the first government school.

Q: How old was His Holiness the Dalai Lama?

#4B: [His Holiness] was around 8 or 9 years old. I was 14 years old when [I] joined the army and His Holiness was 10 years old.

Q: Can you tell us how did it come about that you had to join the army?

#4B: I mentioned earlier about the land [for which the tax] was partly serving the army and partly performing labor service. Hiring another person to serve the army [on our behalf] was not permitted because the person could run away from the army taking away the government weapon. Therefore, the government order was that a member of the family be drafted. Since I was the son of the family I was enlisted at age 14. Generally, in order to be drafted into the army one must reach the standard height and pass a test. However, I was a child then and did not have the qualifications, but being the son of the family I was drafted with the understanding that [I] would gradually grow taller. That is how I was enlisted.

Q: What kind of feelings did you have about going to the army and dropping out of school?

00:15:40

#4B: I was a child then and it is a sign of not being aware that [I] felt happy to join the army. A lot of thrashing happened in the school. It was not like foreign schools. Teachers in Tibetan schools thrash a lot. So [I] was happy and not sad [to leave school and join the army]. Nevertheless, I got the opportunity to study in the army.

Q: So when you first arrived at the army what kind of activities or training did you have when you were 14?

#4B: When one first joined the army one had to *shonday* the older soldiers and learn military drills. The military drill was in the English language then.

Q: What does *shonday* mean that you had to for the older soldiers?

#4B: Yes?

Q: What does *shonday* mean?

#4B: *Shonday* means attending to the older men. Similar to [young] monks running to serve tea here [to the monk congregation] we had to run around likewise. It was difficult for a year or two. Learning the military drill took around two years.

Q: Was it exercises?

00:17:24

#4B: Yes, learning the military drill, exercises and various other activities took around two years. These were in the English language.

Q: Who was teaching you?

#4B: The teachers were older soldiers that already had had training in the past. There were separate teachers. There were different [leaders] like *chupon* ‘leader of 10 troops,’ *dhingpon* [*shelngo*] ‘major, leader of 25 troops,’ *gyapon* ‘leader of 100 troops,’ and *rupon* ‘captain, commander of 250 troops.’ One gradually rose in rank after training.

Q: Were the soldiers Tibetan soldiers or were they from another country?

#4B: [They] were Tibetans. There were none from other races. There was one left behind from China. In the past there had been a war against China and one had been left behind who was awarded the title of *dhingpon*, the leader of 25 troops. He was very old when I became a soldier, about my age now. There were none else. He had surrendered [to the Tibetans] during the war.

Q: Why were the classes taught in English to Tibetans?

00:19:38

#4B: [The commands] were in English like “Attention,” “Stand-at-ease,”...[not discernible]...and “About turn.” During exercises there were commands like...[not discernible] while one did these [moves hands to the sides and front]. These were all in English but the English was not pronounced clearly as [I] look back.

Q: So the military exercises sounds like they were taught to the Tibetans by some English-speaking people. Do you think that’s what happened?

#4B: Initially the Tibetan teachers were selected and sent to India to train. After training in India, they returned and trained the other soldiers. There are two versions. One is that

the training took place in India while another states that it happened in Gyantse. [I] am not sure which is correct.

Q: What kinds of training did you have? What did you learn how to do?

#4B: After passing out of the military exercises, I trained initially in [the operation of] *biriguns*. New *biriguns* were procured.

Q: *Biriguns* meaning machine guns?

00:21:48

#4B: *Biriguns* are things that fire rapidly *dha, dha, dha*. There were machine guns, *biriguns* and *losegun* [?]. Gun is an English word.

Q: I wanted to establish where was this training camp and how many... What was the nearest city and how many Tibetans were in the camp?

#4B: When I was a soldier it was at Drapchi. In the past our division was not called Drapchi but Gyachong ‘Chinese Attackers’ for there are stories of it having fought the Chinese in many wars, traveling to Kham to fight many wars, and was called Gyachong Division. Later the name was changed to Drapchi and it was Drapchi when I became a soldier. It is located right in Lhasa close to Sera [Monastery].

Q: How many Tibetan soldiers were there?

#4B: Tibetan soldiers? I do not know about the entire Tibetan army but there were stories about [divisions named after] the 30 letters of the alphabet.

Q: At that time the Drapchi...

00:23:15

#4B: There were [divisions] like Kadhang—Khadhang, Ngadhang, Chadhang, etc. We were the Khadhang [Division]. Earlier Drapchi being the first unit was Kadhang. Later His Holiness the Dalai Lama’s Security Division was newly established. In the past the Drapchi served as [His Holiness’s] security because it was offered to His Holiness by Nationalist China. It seemed like some compensation was paid to our [division]. Later His Holiness’ Security Division was newly formed and we became the Khadhang. It was called the Khadhang Division.

Q: How many people were in each division?

#4B: There were 1,000 in the Drapchi. The Gadhang had 1,000 and was formed in Tsang. Drapchi was established in U, that is why the term U and Tsang.

Q: How many were there in the Drapchi?

#4B: Drapchi is the U one.

Q: 1,000?

#4B: Yes.

Q: Isn't Khadhang the Drapchi?

#4B: Yes, it is the Drapchi.

Q: Was it 1,000?

#4B: Yes, it was 1,000. The rest [of the Divisions] like Ngadhang, Chadhang consisted of 500 [troops]. Except for Khadhang and Gadhang the rest did not have 1,000.

00:25:17

Close to the time of the attack, two divisions were established called Padhang and Phadhang. These were also called Dongda and Dunga; they did not have a base. Dongda means [troops] from the wealthy families. Dunga consisted of one [man] from every six families. They trained a little bit in Lhasa but could not fight being a fresh unit and were sent back. The Chinese were very mighty and being fresh they would not be able to overcome [them]. So [they] were turned back. These two [Divisions] consisted of a thousand each.

There were no good weapons to engage in war. The guns were the English-made short barrel ones. The English-made short barrels were procured from India and the English. They sold the ones already used and there were no new ones.

Q: When you referred to the attack, are you talking...Can you tell me what attack you're referring to?

4B: It was the present Communists that attacked. Before they [the Chinese] arrived, they [the new recruits] were returned. Having come fresh from the villages they were not capable of engaging in war. [They] did not get to fight because the Chinese were very mighty.

Q: When were they returned?

00:27:25

#4B: Yes? The Tibetan Government turned [them] back. [The two divisions] were established but were turned back and did not get to fight for they were collected from the villages.

Q: Were [they] turned back before the attack?

#4B: Yes. Before the attack [they] were sent towards the east to fight and the people of Dhotoe [Kham] frightened them by remarking, "The Chinese are coming. The Chinese are coming." They fled and could not fight. Besides, there were no good weapons.

The Chinese were approaching from there [the east] and they [the new recruits] did not have good training, military training.

Q: What year are we talking about or what period?

#4B: Perhaps '55. It was around '54-'55.

Q: Prior to that...

#4B: [Interrupts] It was during the period the Chinese were said to be approaching. I am not able to say the Western dates correctly.

Q: Before the Chinese were appearing from the east and you're...let's see, when you were 14 it was 1944, when you are 14. What were the Tibetans preparing for? Were they having ongoing fights with the Chinese or when was the last encounter with the Chinese, the prior encounter with the Chinese before 1944?

00:30:00

#4B: There were no Chinese then [when I joined the army in 1944].

Q: There were no Chinese then?

#4B: There were no Chinese. There were a few Chinese called *kyethoe* left behind after a war that took place a long time ago. A small number of entitled people were living there like sentries. There was no large number of Chinese. Prior to the appearance of the Communist Chinese the government turned them back.

Q: When the Tibetan government was training soldiers, what were they training them for? Who was the enemy in like the 1940s?

#4B: The Chinese had already announced then that they were going to come and they were considered the enemies. Then the English [commands] were changed to Tibetan. It was no longer in the English language.

Q: In the army?

#4B: They [the Chinese] were hostile towards America, terming it "Imperialist America" and did not like the English language. So [the commands] were changed to Tibetan like *bakloe* 'stand at ease' and *lodim* 'attention.'

Q: The Chinese made the announcement that they were going to invade Tibet in what year roughly, can you tell us?

00:32:34

#4B: It was around the second year of my schooling. I am not able to give the correct year.

Q: At school?

#4B: Yes, when I attended the school.

Q: The new school?

#4B: Yes. I mentioned that my teacher went to Chamdo; it was a little after that. [I] am not able to give the correct year.

Q: So you would have been about 15. Okay, right, so that would have been 1945. Okay. Now how long was the tour of duty for each young man that was called into service?

#4B: There was no standard timeline. If one grew old and could no longer serve, a new soldier must be recruited. A new one must be replaced in the event of sickness. There were some that remained until old age if they rose in rank.

Q: There was no standard timeline?

#4B: There was not. It depended upon one's physical condition.

Q: Did any young Tibetan man join the army willingly to make it a career or was it always a requirement like from tax or something like that?

00:34:30

#4B: It was not like that. A particular family is obliged and if this family does not have a son, it must hire a boy from another family and send [him to join the army]. It was not [this boy's] choice and he must be paid a salary.

Q: Were there any boys that wished to join the army and did so?

#4B: There were. There were some that wished to but he needs a landowner to pay his salary. [The land] owner must appoint [him].

Q: So if you join the army on your own, you still needed a sponsor, the government would not pay you.

#4B: No [the government did not pay]. The family who is obliged to meet the tax must appoint [a son/hired boy] and the government will not [pay any salary].

Q: Why did the young man have to look for someone then?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: The government did not pay any money, so if a boy wanted to join the army, he had to look for some family who were tax payers and did not have a son to send to the army. So that family could pay him and he could join the army.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: I see. The government itself never paid any...

00:36:20

#4B: Because there is only a little salary from the government, [the hired boy's] clothes and all other expenses must be borne by the family, the landowner.

Q: Lobsang-*la*, what was your wish like in 19...Like say you are 14 and you had two years of one kind of training and then two more years. You're now 18. What kind of skills have you learned in the army? What kind of things have you practiced?

#4B: At 18? Should [I] not recount serially?

Q: [You] joined at 14...?

#4B: [I] joined at 14 and first learned [to operate] the *birigun* and then the *tharcha* [flag]. *Tharcha* is waving [a flag] in the air like this [indicates waving flag side to side] that will send a message there. Every signal is incorporated in this [waving of flag] and is understood. The third training I undertook was wireless [operation] and the fourth learning motor [driving]. I was in the 20s when learning motor [driving]. [I] must have been 18-19 at the time of learning wireless [operation].

Q: By learning motor, do [you] mean driving?

#4B: Yes, except for learning to drive [I] could not get to learn dismantling and assembling. There was no road between India and Tibet. So [vehicles] were dismantled in India and we assembled [the parts] in Tibet. The Chinese were already in Kham during this time.

Q: Continue your story. What happens to you after you learn how to drive a vehicle?

#4B: After learning motor?

Q: Yes. What happens after [you] learned to drive a vehicle?

00:39:16

#4B: After learning to drive in Dromo [I] transported goods belonging to the merchants to and fro. However, I did not have to remain long because His Holiness the Dalai Lama arrived in Gaden [Monastery] and I was deployed as a bodyguard at Gaden. [His Holiness] came to Gaden to give the test in Geshe Lharam 'Doctorate in Buddhist philosophy' and I was deployed at Gaden as a bodyguard then. There were not many guards, only around 150.

Because I knew [to handle] a *birigun* and the flag [waving], I was deployed as a bodyguard.

Q: Can you tell us something about that day and the ceremony?

#4B: His Holiness' [Geshe Lharam ceremony]?

Q: Yes.

#4B: It went incredibly well. Following that was the *tsogchoe* ‘a 12-day prayer assembly’ wherein His Holiness was offered the *tenshug* ‘special prayers requesting a master to live longer.’ At that time I was deployed at the Potala Palace as a bodyguard. Some of the younger boys were selected to carry the *tenshug* offerings that I did.

Q: Can [you] please say something about the *geshe* ceremony?

00:41:07

#4B: The Geshe Lharam [examination] must be taken at all the three monasteries of Sera, Drepung and Gaden. [His Holiness] had already taken it at Sera and Drepung. The one at Gaden was done later and I left the driving responsibility and was deputed as a bodyguard.

The regular bodyguards were present and we were additions.

Q: Why were there so many guards sent to protect His Holiness when he was getting the *geshe* degree at Gaden?

#4B: There were not many bodyguards. The Chinese were worsening the situation then. [Tibetans] were living alongside the Chinese and the Autonomous Region was formed but they [the Chinese] were worsening the situation and we were like secret bodyguards.

Q: Where were the Chinese?

#4B: Gaden is located in front of a mountain [shows left upright palm] and we were atop the tall mountain called Wangpori. The reason for [our] being there was because the Chinese were worsening the situation.

Q: What year was that?

#4B: Yes?

Q: What year was that? How old was he?

00:43:11

#4B: The year was perhaps ’58. It was around the critical time. [His Holiness] went for the *tsogchoe* and then the Chinese sent an invitation [to His Holiness] to visit the Chinese prison to watch a theatrical performance. It was the end of that month in the same year. His Holiness could not attend as the population of Lhasa emerged and the people lay down and stopped [His Holiness]. So His Holiness had to be escorted [to India]. It was towards the end of ’58 and beginning of ’59.

Q: Can you tell us in 1959, around that time ’58-’59, what were your feelings as a young man?

#4B: The feeling at that time when the Chinese were intimidating [us] was though we did not have the weapons to challenge yet [I] felt ready to fight. There was not an iota of fear. [I] felt ever ready to fight. Then I came as His Holiness the Dalai Lama’s bodyguard from

Lhasa to Tsona. Even then [I] felt ready to fight and did not have an iota of fear for them [the Chinese]. Though they were that mighty, yet we had no fear.

Q: Tell us about that journey from Lhasa to Tsona.

#4B: The journey?

Q: Yes, about the journey.

#4B: Actually it was very difficult [for His Holiness the Dalai Lama] during the journey. There were only [a few] monasteries and [His Holiness] had to stay in terrible places like A-Chumdhagya, A-Chumdhagya. When [His Holiness] stayed there, it was so [terrible] that I even shed tears. It was worrying for even an ordinary man and His Holiness was forced to stay there. However, the pursuing Chinese captured none. The Chinese did come in pursuit.

00:46:35

My responsibility was this. [We] were carrying a small quantity of arms on around 26 horses and mules. Without a small quantity of arms one needed to fight the Chinese. His Holiness moved a few miles ahead and [we] followed with the arms. I was in charge of it. I had around 10-15 soldiers as assistants.

[Interpreter concludes as: ...though the Chinese pursued none of us were...the Chinese could arrest none of us.]

[Interviewer to interpreter]: Even though they [the Chinese] pursued?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Yes.

Q: What was your understanding of what your group of men was...How many men were with you guarding these horses and mules of His Holiness and did you understand why you were doing that and where His Holiness was going?

#4B: The total number of soldiers or...?

Q: Along with horses and mules.

#4B: The total number was around 260.

Q: And with the horses and mules?

#4B: Yes?

Q: Horses and mules...?

#4B: Along with horses and mules, there were around 10 men working with me. I was in charge of them.

Q: Did you know at that time why and where His Holiness the Dalai Lama was going?

00:48:35

#4B: [I] did not know at the time of leaving Lhasa. A mile or two after leaving Lhasa [I] saw His Holiness and then realized. Otherwise, fearing that the people would come to know and since the Chinese Army headquarters was close by it was kept a secret and we did not know about it. The instruction was that [we] were to go to the *tseri* ‘top of the mountain’ the next day and not that [His Holiness] was leaving.

There was a dockyard called Benzadugu or Ramagadu. Only after crossing in a boat was I issued this instruction, “You should take the soldiers and go to the waterside.” There were two men from Amdo. “Consult the men from Amdo. You should go there. In case [you] see any lights flashing, proceed further.” I was the only one given this instruction while none of my colleagues were told. I wondered why [I] was being instructed to move towards the river when [I] had been told to go to the mountaintop. [I] had to obey because these were orders.

[I] asked the men from Amdo but could not understand their speech. I replied, “That is okay.” Later I realized that the Chinese could cross the river in vehicles and [we] were to block the route. Since I was given the responsibility [I] could not sleep while all the others went to sleep. Then there was lights flashing and I woke up all the men. “Why are you sleeping? [You] should not sleep. Get up.”

There were two routes and the Amdo men were guarding one route while I was at the other. They possessed horses and had already left on their horses. Now we had to walk carrying the *birigun*. At this point the arms were not together in a group. There was one horse between 2-3 men and I drove one. [We] walked through the night and arrived at a family home around dawn. There was an estate of the Namgyal Monastery. [We] were provided with a little bit of *tsampa* ‘flour made from roasted barley’ and tea at the estate. [I] met my colleagues whom [I] had lost in the dark. From here [I] could see His Holiness trekking on the pass called Chela [looks up]. Only then did I realize and not until then.

00:52:42

The name of the pass is Chela ‘Sandy Pass.’ After coming down the pass is [the dockyard of] Benzadugu on the Yarlung Tsangpo ‘Brahmaputra River.’ One must cross in a boat and His Holiness was also there. We all stood in line and crossed group by group in the boat. By the time our turn came night had fallen. Walking a little further after crossing the river was a monastery called Kyarshu Gonpa. [His Holiness] spent the night at Kyarshu Gonpa.

[I] thought [I] might get to sleep that night since [we] had walked the whole of the previous night but [I] was asked to report at once. I was a *birigun* operator and ordered to go on sentry duty at the riverside. It was windy with sands flying in [my] face and [I] suffered incredibly. At around midnight someone came to replace [me]. It happened like that. His Holiness stayed in a small monastery.

Along with us were an equal number of *Chushi Gangdrug* [Defend Tibet Volunteer Force] bodyguards. Majority of the *Chushi Gangdrug* [guerrillas] were not there then. Those based in and around Lhoka helped and they were with us. The next day [His Holiness] camped at a place called Chethosho. It is a town but there was not a good monastery. His Holiness had to stay at such a place again.

00:54:47

What I mentioned earlier about my being the *zedhewu thuekyop* ‘ammunition manager’...Finally the horses and mules were brought together. Earlier each man had been entrusted with a horse and these were brought together and I was given the responsibility of *zedhewu thuekyop*. I was responsible for arranging horses and *khelma* ‘pack animals.’ It was my duty to get these ready for His Holiness the Dalai Lama.

Had [His Holiness] journeyed directly from Chethosho towards Tsethang and Yarlung, there is a major road. That seemed to be the route [His Holiness] would take. Then some informers brought news and...initially, there were no soldiers of the Security Division because the bodyguards were there. Later, a few soldiers of the Security Division arrived. They managed to come. They too brought some arms.

When the soldiers arrived, the *Chushi Gangdrug* [guerrillas] and the people complained, “[We] do not want these bodyguards that are dressed in Chinese attire.” Saying so they were not made a part of [His Holiness’ security] while we remained. They were deployed towards the right to a place called Dhuwazong to stop any Chinese coming from that direction. His Holiness crossed the mountain pass of Zapola into Chongya.

00:56:59

It seemed the plan was [for His Holiness] to spend a day or two at the Chongya Monastery. However, when we reached there and were about to unload the packs, His Holiness set off instantly. We did not have time to unload and continued the journey. The reason it seems was that some informers gave news about pursuing Chinese. [I] had no knowledge about each and everything. Then further along were two monasteries of Lingsang, two small monasteries where [His Holiness] spent a night. The names of the monasteries of Lingsang are Choedhe Gong and Choedhe Wo.

00:58:37

The next day there was a very difficult pass called Yathoedala. After [His Holiness] overcame the pass of Yathoedala with great difficulty, there was Gyukhangdong, a place with high passes. After coming down the pass there was no monastery and [His Holiness] had to stay at A-Chumdhagya. It used to be said, “Better to take the birth of a goat than a human birth in A-Chumdhagya.” This is an incredibly desolate place. Even wild animals hardly lived there. There were just a few families and [His Holiness] was forced to spend a night there.

Is my recounting these of benefit or not because these are very old stories? After A-Chumdhagya there is a pass called Shopothala. Crossing the Shopothala pass is a monastery called Khathang Gonpa. It is a small monastery and [His Holiness] spent a night there.

01:00:24

From Khathang Monastery [His Holiness] arrived in Nyen Lhunzezong. [His Holiness] stayed 2-3 days at Nyen Lhunzezong where a ceremony was held. Since I was the *zedhewu thuekyop* I could not attend the ceremony and remained there. However, what occurred at the ceremony was...“[Lhunzezong] has become the second Lhasa.” The villagers came from [the ceremony] saying, “Our [place] has become the second Lhasa.”

Actually it was not “Second Lhasa” but [His Holiness] might have said “Second Capital” for information had been received about Lhasa having been lost. [I think His Holiness] considered it as a temporary place. All [the latest] news was announced and a meeting was held here. The [Lhunzezong] fort is a grand one located atop a mountain. [I] heard that nothing exists these days as the fort has been destroyed. It was called Nyen Lhunzezong.

Q: It is near Khathang Monastery?

#4B: Yes?

Q: It is near Khathang Monastery? Is Lhunzezong close to Khathang Monastery?

#4B: [His Holiness] arrived in Lhunzezong from Khathang Monastery.

01:02:28

From Lhunzezong [His Holiness] was to proceed to Tsona. There are two mountain passes to cover. There is one pass called Zimdila, which is very dangerous should the Chinese appear. Hence, most of our soldiers were deployed there. His Holiness journeyed through the pass at Jora with a small contingent into Tsona. There are two routes. Whether it belonged to the Chinese or not, that day a plane flew. The plane flew very low but [His Holiness] advised us not to cause any harm like shooting at the plane. So we did not. [We] did not know to whom the plane belonged but a white plane flew.

Q: White?

#4B: After reaching Tsona, there was a small monastery called Gonpa Tse that belonged to the Tsona Rinpoche. [His Holiness] spent a night there.

Q: Continue.

#4B: The next day at Tsona a message arrived saying that India had accepted His Holiness coming there. So we were given an audience in the monastery and then His Holiness left for Mon [Tawang, Arunachal Pradesh] and we returned with the hope that we would be able to stand our ground for the time being. We traveled to Yarlung to resist [the Chinese].

Q: Yarlung?

01:04:25

#4B: Yarlung where the Lingsang monastery is located. [We] had arrived all the way there, which is very far away. That morning His Holiness gave an audience and blessings. [I] felt extremely sad that morning. However, it was imperative we go back for the time being because there was the plan to establish a new government at Lhunzezong. [We] hoped to be able to hold ground there.

Then from Tsona I...Since the soldiers had travelled for around 10-12 days from Lhasa without *tsampa* or other provisions, grains were procured at Lhunzezong and I was instructed to go to make *tsampa*. I was sent ahead to make *tsampa*. I had 2,400 *khel* [a measurement] of grains ground into *tsampa* but before taking delivery of the *tsampa*, [I] was told to go to fight at once at Yarlung. Along with another soldier I was told, “You have to take the lead.”

As [we] moved ahead, on the road were people like this [keeps fingers in line] fleeing from Lhasa. Everybody was fleeing and there was no way [we] could overcome [the Chinese] in a fight. Artillery shells were being fired like rain. Though it was remarked that they possessed more cannons than we did guns and it was impossible to withstand [the Chinese] yet we persisted and proceeded until the monastery of Lingsang.

01:07:30

About my responsibility as *zedhewu thuekyop*, it was no longer necessary to have a person in charge and all [ammunitions] were distributed to the men. A *zedhewu thuekyop* was no longer required and that day the army said something about rewarding me with a title but being on the road [I] paid no heed to it. And then [I] left from Yarlung that night with the view to fight. As [I] proceeded along the way everybody came fleeing [my] way. There was no one joining the fight.

At A-Chumdhagya [I] met Andrug [Gonpo Tashi] of the *Chushi Gangdrug*. He had come from Kongpo. [He] had been to Kongpo and was not present there when His Holiness [passed through A-Chumdhagya]. He said, “I will go to Nyen while you go to Yarlung to fight. There is no reason to be afraid to fight.” That was agreed upon. So leaving the majority of the troops there, our two *rupon* and a *dapon* ‘colonel,’ the three of them returned to Nyen to attend a meeting. They took me along on the return journey because, “He is familiar with the routes and [we] need someone that knows the way.” So I was taken along.

[We] went there and a meeting was held in Nyen. At the meeting in Nyen Andrug Gonpo Tashi formulated a strategy to fight, “This number of *Chushi Gangdrug* guerrillas, troops of the Drapchi Division and Kusung Division, and monks from the monasteries will move to [their] assigned areas.” I was given the task of delivering this letter all alone in the night. Whomever I showed the letter replied, “I am hungry. How can [I] fight?” Everybody was on flight with no one willing to fight. From then on everybody was on the run. Therefore, ...[to interpreter] I will recount after [you have translated].

Q: Everybody was on the run...

01:10:49

#4B: Everybody was on the run and there was no route. It was said that [we] should resist in Tsona but that could not happen because the Chinese had arrived in Tsona. There was no way out through Tsona. Now what to do? [We] were stranded. There is a pass called Mangola but the route was impossible because of snow. Then there was a *rinpoche* ‘respected lama’ from Jorakhata who drove yaks [through the snow] and created a path. That is how the people were able to get through on the route. And then [we] were in Mangola in Indian territory.

Should I continue the story from the Indian border?

Q: I would like to go back and understand a few things.

#4B: Okay.

Q: How many days did the journey take from Lhasa to when you departed from His Holiness?

#4B: Normally it is a distance of 11-12 days from Lhasa to Nyen. However, [I] am not able to say the exact number of days because [His Holiness] camped a few days. Since [His Holiness] camped a few days along the way I am not able to say exactly. Normally it is a distance of around 15 days, around 15 days to Tsona. There were no vehicles and one was either on foot or on horseback.

Q: Can you tell us what were your feelings on this journey as a man who was trying to help His Holiness escape from danger? What kind of feelings did you have as a man?

01:14:04

#4B: In my mind?

Q: Yes.

#4B: I felt what a disaster it would be if the Chinese came in pursuit and hoped they did not pursue and if they did, though [we] had plans to fight...such was the panic. We did not have much to eat but one did not feel the hunger or exhaustion. It was just panic.

Q: How many days do you think the traveling soldiers went without food?

#4B: It was not like there was never any food. One carried a little amount of *tsampa* of which a spoonful was gulped. It was not like there was never anything [to eat]. It had happened that [the soldiers] were without *tsampa* for three or two days. Though [we] begged no one gave because of the huge exodus of people. While gulping a spoonful of *tsampa*, it was difficult when there was no water as the *tsampa* got stuck in the throat. However, there was no fear of starvation.

Q: How many soldiers would you say altogether accompanied His Holiness? How many were soldiers and how many were from the *Chushi Gangdrug*?

#4B: In His Holiness' convoy?

Q: In the convoy.

01:16:14

#4B: It is not possible to count each and everyone in the convoy. We were around 260 and they [the *Chushi Gangdrug*] were also of the same number. Around 100-200 men on horseback rode here and there, and 50-60 men moved about. It is not possible to count each and everyone since some were moving ahead and some bringing up the rear. So, it cannot be ascertained.

Q: Can you—for people who don't understand the conditions or the terrain of Tibet—can you describe what the actual journey was like? You know, was the snow very deep? Did you have to get off the horses? How did you get up and down those mountains?

#4B: What horses?

Q: Were there places where horses couldn't go and one had to get down and walk or sometimes one could ride or places where one climbed up and down?

#4B: It was not very difficult getting off horses and such because the people of Tibet are very experienced riders. The most difficult part was the snow. They fed the horses with a lot of grains and such. Numerous horses and mules died and so a lot of belongings were left in the snow. I drove a mule that did not give [me] any trouble. A huge number of horses died and many things were left in the snow.

Q: Did you have a horse and a mule to carry your goods?

01:18:49

#4B: The horses belonged to others. I owned only one mule. [I] was left behind and became separated from the colleagues when [I] was sent to deliver the letter. I was alone without any companion and it was the lone mule that served me. When [I] arrived at the forest they [the other soldiers] were overjoyed saying, "[We] thought you had been killed" and they lifted and threw me in the air.

When [we] reached the first Indian post, everybody...their men carried *tsampa* and such. We gathered into a group but did not have anything to eat and I said, "Let us stay here for today." We were now 20 men in a group. "Let us stay here. I will watch our belongings while you go up the mountain and beg for food. Unless we have something to eat and to carry, [we] will not be able to walk. Should [anyone] have money in the pockets, buy some things."

When [they] returned in the evening, these men brought not even a pinch of *tsampa*, nothing to eat. I chided them, "This is unbelievable! So many of you went and bring nothing to eat. This is unbelievable!" The others did not answer but one told me—[they] used to call me *chupon*—"Chupon, you speak glibly. You should go tomorrow."

01:20:45

“Okay, I will go tomorrow,” [I] replied. Among the group was a person I liked called Jampa; he used to beat the drum and was tall. [I] asked him to assist me and he assented. So I took him along and said, “Take [me] where you have been yesterday.” [We] went where they had gone the day before and [they] were right. There among the bush fencing was the Mon tribal people with arrows. They [other soldiers] had returned the day before out of fear.

I stood up and spoke a few words of the Mon language, “One of you please come forward.” One man came forward and I was forced to lie, “There are 20 Indian sentries and orders have come for an additional 20 Tibetan soldiers to be posted here. We have nothing to eat. You must lend some which I will return when provisions are airdropped later.” [Smiles] Thus I lied and he took [us] along and collected little quantities of small-sized corn from every family and we got something to eat. In addition [they] gave some *chang* ‘home-brewed beer’ and a little bit of *tsampa*.

Q: This was over the boundary into India. So, when His Holiness left you went back, first you went back to the fort and stayed there. Then you got a message from Andrug to go...

[Interpreter to interviewer]: ...and to fight in Yarlung.

Q: ...and fight in Yarlung but the people refused...

[Interpreter to interviewer]: People refused and everyone fled.

Q: And everyone fled and then you rejoined your troops then?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Troops, yes, rejoined the troops and then crossed over the Mangola pass...

Q: The Mangola...

[Interpreter to interviewer]: The Mangola Pass and then were in the region of Mon, which is a tribal area.

Q: In Mon. Okay and there were about 20 men with you? And so what happened next then?

01:25:12

#4B: [Speaks before translation] And then...should I speak?

Q: Yes, what happened then?

#4B: And then I returned with the stuff and boasted to the others, “See, we have brought something. Now [we] can eat.” Then [we] boiled the corn. [We] boiled it for a long time but the corn could not be cooked. [Yet] everyone ate it and suffered from stomachache in the night. [We] could not leave the next day. [We] found flat stones, wood and made a fire and roasted [the corn], which could be consumed. Then [we] continued the journey.

When [we] arrived at a village where you found a little bit to eat and could rest, but there came the fear that you might die of starvation or what might happen? Sometimes you felt better. And in this manner [we] reached Tawang. The day [we] arrived in Tawang...Along the way there were [people] that gave or sold grapes, if you had a little money, which [we] ate and almost died that night. Consuming a large quantity of grapes led to severe stomachache and bloating. Such happened and [I] nearly died.

After reaching Tawang, the next or the following day food rations were airdropped and one got some rice and something to eat. Food rations began from there. Then the Indian Government collected all the guns and such that we possessed.

Q: Where were the planes from?

01:28:20

#4B: [I] wondered from where, but considered it as the Indian Government's but did not have much knowledge. Everyone thought of it as India's.

Then the weapons were collected at Tawang and [we] spent around 10 days there, spent around 10 days. Then the people were grouped and we, the Tibetan soldiers were to be sent first. [We] had to leave. Monpa [inhabitants of Mon] led [us] zigzag down the mountain and gradually came lower and lower. When [we] reached one area, there was a huge river. One had to climb up a steep cliff to avoid the river. Some managed to climb the mountain but there are stories of some having fallen off the cliff. We gave the little money that [we] had to the Monpa and asked them to prepare a bridge. They built a bridge. After its construction [we] took the belongings across the bridge. Water flowed above the bridge. It was an incredibly strong river.

I was very agile then and could help take things across on my back. A little while later the bridge started to collapse under the strong current. Even as it started to collapse [I] rode the horse over the wood and took things across. Behind me was a tall soldier who was carrying a gun on his back. There was a *thud* and as [I] looked back, he was drowned along with the gun. A little further down [I] caught a glimpse of the tip of the gun and that was it. Then I was afraid and dared not go across to take things. There were such problems. At that time the Monpa helped build the bridge but it was not made well. The Monpa attached wood to wood, so it cannot be a strong structure. Such an incident occurred.

01:30:50

I seem to have mixed up the latter part a little bit. [The incident] happened before the guns were surrendered. It was before reaching Tawang.

Q: Wood joined by...

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Tied by creepers...

[Interviewer to interpreter]: Vines...

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Vines.

#4B: Then all our belongings, the Monpa said, would be useless and would have to be burnt in the heat [of the plains]. So they begged or bought them at very cheap rate. Then without any belongings [we] continued the journey. [We] kept travelling, reached the Indian border and a place called Phutay. At this place if you sat on the floor without any clothes you would be steaming with the intense heat. It felt as though [we] were in hell.

“What shall I do?” I thought. It seemed one would die instantly. Then Indian Army trucks arrived that took [us] away. The breeze during the journey seemed to take the heat off. And then [we] arrived at Missamari [Assam] where there was a line of bamboo huts constructed by the Indians. Everybody assembled there and lived in the bamboo huts. Should I narrate all these?

01:34:27

After arriving in Missamari, though the heat was intense in general I felt happy because having been to the radio school in the past, [I] knew a little bit of the English language which became useful. Knowing the numbers until 100 was useful as well. The others knew nothing and thus I was appointed a *gyapon*. “You are a *gyapon*,” [I] was told. They could sit fanning themselves while I had to go out in the heat to get rations. I was healthy then and did not suffer any illnesses. I was in great demand with the leaders as an interpreter and [I] felt happy.

Q: I just want to...

#4B: [Interrupts] This story seems to be all about me. Is that okay?

Q: That is the story we want, but I do have one question I wanted to check. When you had reached India and you said that the planes were dropping supplies that was in India, who was sending the planes and the goods?

#4B: We believed [the planes] as belonging to the Indian Government but did not know whose planes they were. [We] supposed they belonged to the Indian Government.

Q: And what kind of supplies did they drop...?

01:36:53

#4B: [Interrupts] Earlier in Tibet a small cache of weapons was dropped at Lhoka Gongkar for the *Chushi Gangdrug* where none of the Tibetan [Government] troops were deployed. At that time [they] were believed to be American planes. The ones that dropped food rations were considered as belonging to the Indian Government.

Q: Did the group know at this time whether His Holiness had made it to India and what the reception was like?

#4B: [We] came to know at times because some people possessed small radios. One heard everything over the radio. In the evenings everybody gathered around the man that owned a radio in great joy. One heard some news in that way.

Q: How did it make you feel when you heard His Holiness had reached India?

#4B: Yes?

Q: How did you feel when you heard over the radio that His Holiness had reached India?

01:38:48

#4B: There was immense joy. Everybody was filled with joy. [We] did not hear [the news] very clearly but something like [His Holiness] having reached Mussoorie. Though [we] did not know where Mussoorie was then, yet [His Holiness] was in India and was safe and everybody was filled with immense joy.

Q: How many of the people that arrived with you at the very end were people that had started out with you originally from Lhasa? What was the number of people? And then how did you feel knowing that you had escorted His Holiness out of Tibet?

#4B: What did [you] say?

Q: How many of the soldiers that were with [you] from Lhasa arrived in India?

#4B: Except for 20-30 that went back from the border in the night, all the rest reached [India]. We were together until Gangtok [Sikkim] where [we] were sent from Missamari on road construction. Twenty to 30 went back from the border and did not reach Mon.

Q: And then how did you feel knowing that you had escorted His Holiness out of Tibet?

#4B: [My] feeling?

Q: Yes.

01:40:58

#4B: At that time [I] did not know much, whether [I] had done well or not. [I] did not know much but was happy that [we] did not fall into Chinese hands. [I] did not even know if [I] had served [His Holiness] well or not.

Q: How many people actually went with you to India? You said 20-30 returned to Tibet. How many continued with you into India?

#4B: [The 20-30] men did not arrive in India but returned from the border.

Q: They returned from the border but how many men reached India?

#4B: The men that reached India were more than the [initial] escort team because many joined later, those that had escaped from the attack on the Norbulingka and the Potala Palace. So we were around 300 at the road construction site in Gangtok.

Q: Initially there were 260...

#4B: Yes and the figure increased because some escaped later that were not in the escort team. So the figure increased.

Q: When you look back on that time when you were helping His Holiness escape, what do you think about it now when you look at it as part of your life experience? How do you feel about it now?

#4B: Now?

Q: Yes, now. What do [you] feel now?

#4B: About what happened in the past?

Q: Yes, yes.

01:43:40

#4B: There is not any other thing regarding what happened in the past but [I] feel very sad that the functioning of the government was extremely poor because one was not aware then, but [I] realize now that the government did extremely poorly. Likewise, it has not provided education to the people and likewise, because the government was not good [we] were unable to put up resistance. [I] regret that it has functioned so badly. However, having arrived in India, I am very happy that the spiritual activities of His Holiness the present Dalai Lama is so great that it is beyond one's dreams. One never had any hope that it would turn out like this.

Q: Is there anything else that you would like to share with us before we conclude our interview about your adventure and journey from Tibet? Is there anything that you wanted to add?

#4B: About the journey from Tibet?

Q: Is there anything else?

#4B: So far I have recounted about the journey but narrating the stories within Tibet...They are old. I have never been towards the east [of Tibet] since I was in school as I mentioned earlier. [I] have never been there but I have been to deliver radio instruments up to Kongpo Gyamda. [I] have not been further than that. I have been to acquire grains and such from the people but have not been to that side either to fight or to accompany Lhalu and Ngabo [Ministers in the former Tibetan Government]. I was at the Radio Training School at that time and then left to learn driving.

Q: Would you like to see more of Tibet if you could return?

#4B: Once again?

Q: Yes.

01:46:44

#4B: [I] would not wish to go to Tibet now because of the terrible things the Chinese are doing. Whenever I listen to the radio or anywhere things seem to get worse rather than better. So [I] would not wish to go because [my] parents and all the siblings are dead; there is no one to meet, all the monasteries are in decline, mineral resources have been mined and the land rendered bare. So [I] do not wish to go back. If one cooperated with them [the Chinese] and took their money one became rich, but otherwise there is nothing and [I] would not want to go.

Q: What do you hope will be the future of Tibet?

#4B: The hope for the future of Tibet is that presently His Holiness the Dalai Lama is propagating the Middle Way Approach. His Holiness has been forced to adopt the Middle Way Approach because right from the beginning the Indian Government's [former Prime Minister] Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru stated that Tibet was a part of China. [Our] neighbor stated it and so did all other countries and we could get no help. I do not know in depth about the Middle Way Approach. Earlier an Englishman, an English couple explained about it profoundly and its benefits and hopes. Actually the Chinese should be happy because despite invading us, they are being allowed to remain.

If such [approach] could be achieved one might wish to go back, but as of now their [the Chinese] doing is getting worse rather than better, and [I] would not wish to go. The Chinese only think about invasion. Initially when [the Chinese] came to Tibet they said, "Imperialist America" and portrayed themselves to be great. I have no hope that our returning to people like these will bring any happiness.

Q: What is in your own words, what is your understanding of the Middle Way Approach?

01:50:55

#4B: [I] do not know in depth about the Middle Way Approach but in my opinion [His Holiness] is forced to adopt the Middle Way Approach because of the lack of support for our cause. That is what [I] think. According to the explanation I heard earlier about the Middle Way Approach, it is very profound because the Middle Way Approach first happened in Europe. Such an account was explained in great depth but [I] cannot remember each and everything. However, the Middle Way Approach is such that it encompasses both spiritual and worldly aspects. I am not able to comprehend each and everything correctly.

The Chinese state that the Middle Way Approach is seeking complete independence. [I] do not think that's correct but I am not able to comprehend exactly. However, everyone who understands it state that it is good and as I look at it, it seems that way because should [His

Holiness] not adopt the Middle Way Approach, we do not have any support. [I] feel it is something like that.

Q: What do you wish that the children who have left Tibet with their families, what do you hope that they preserve about Tibet whether they're in Tibet or whether they had to leave as refugees? What do you hope will be preserved for the next generation?

01:53:18

#4B: I do not know exactly what they [the younger generation] are hoping for. [I] do not know. Actually [they] do talk about independence, but [I] do not know exactly what [they] have in mind. However, [I] think seeking independence is not worthwhile because we have no support.

Q: Now that you've finished sharing your story with us, what was it like for you to tell us what happened and your memories and your experiences of your time in Tibet? To recount this what was that like for you to do this right now?

#4B: Yes?

Q: Today [you] have shared [your] memories, experiences and story with us. What do [you] think it's been like?

#4B: What I think?

Q: Yes.

#4B: [I] wonder if it is beneficial or not because [I] do not have much to recount except my own story. [I] do not know if this will be beneficial or not.

Q: Your experiences have not only been beneficial for us here today, but will be beneficial for Tibetans all over the world who were not on that journey helping the Dalai Lama escape and you took us on that journey and you've made history come alive for us and the history will not be forgotten.

01:55:44

#4B: Okay. [I] had a great desire to recount [my story] and [you say] it is beneficial and that is very good. However, [I] have not been able to get involved in politics having engaged in serving the Tibetan Government as a driver all along due to which my knowledge is limited. Therefore, [I] am sorry that [I] cannot dwell upon serious matters.

Q: Just because you gave such an important historical account I want to make sure that we check one more time, if this interview was shown in Tibet or China would this be a problem for you?

[Interpreter interprets as: ...it wouldn't be a problem for you, right?]

#4B: Right.

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

#4B: Okay.

Q: Thank you.

#4B: [Smiles]

END OF INTERVIEW