

Tibet Oral History Project

Interview #63D – Ati
May 17, 2012

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INTERVIEW SUMMARY SHEET

1. Interview Number: #63D
2. Interviewee: Ati
3. Age: 80
4. Date of Birth: 1932
5. Sex: Male
6. Birthplace: Nyarong
7. Province: Dhotoe (Kham)
8. Year of leaving Tibet: 1959
9. Date of Interview: May 17, 2012
10. Place of Interview: Bir Guest House, Bir, Himachal Pradesh, India
11. Length of Interview: 2 hr 17 min
12. Interviewer: Rebecca Novick
13. Interpreter: Tenzin Yangchen
14. Videographer: Ronny Novick
15. Translator: Tenzin Yangchen

Biographical Information:

Ati belonged to a nomadic family and recalls herding yaks as a child with his mother. He became a monk at the age of 10, studying and living at a hermitage, and later joined Gyukhu Monastery. However, he left monkhood at the age of 14 in order to return home and help his mother. Ati then became a bodyguard to Gyari Nyima, the chieftain of the region. Ati travelled to various villages where Gyari Nyima went to settle disputes and look after the welfare of his subjects.

Ati describes in detail how in 1956 the invading Communist Chinese affected liberation and how the chieftains of various regions decided to rebel against the Chinese. He provides an elaborate account of the numerous fierce and dangerous encounters he and his people had with the Chinese army until they were defeated in 1959. Then the rebels and their families were forced to flee to the mountains. They were pursued by the Chinese and eventually their wives and children were either captured or killed and only 18 men survived.

After escaping to India, Ati decided to join the Mustang Unit of the *Chushi Gangdruk* 'Defend Tibet Volunteer Force' in Nepal. He gives an in-depth account of how the Mustang Unit was organized in 1960 and the troops were trained by 12 Tibetans who had received training in the United States. Ati describes his involvement and the operations carried out inside Tibet to attack the Chinese. He went to India after the Nepalese Government disbanded the unit in 1974.

Topics Discussed:

Kham, herding, monastic life, government/administration, invasion by Chinese army, resistance, Chushi Gangdrug guerrillas, escape experiences, guerrillas in Mustang.

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Interview #63D

Interviewee: Ati

Age: 80, Sex: Male

Interviewer: Rebecca Novick

Interview Date: May 17, 2012

Question: Could you please tell us your name?

00:00:13

Interviewee #63D: My name is Ati.

Q: His Holiness the Dalai Lama asked us to record your experiences, so we can share your memories with many generations of Tibetans, Chinese and people around the world.

#63D: [Nods]

Q: Your memories are going to help us document the history, culture and beliefs of the Tibetan people.

#63D: [Nods]

Q: Do you give permission for the Tibet Oral History Project to use this interview?

#63D: [Nods]

Q: Thank you.

#63D: [Nods]

Q: During the interview if you want to take a break at any time just let us know.

#63D: Okay.

Q: If there's any question you are not comfortable answering, that's fine.

#63D: [Smiles] Okay.

Q: Now we have to ask you, if this interview was shown in Tibet or China or anywhere else in the world, would this create any kind of problem for you?

00:01:56

#63D: There will be no problems.

Q: Thank you very much.

#63D: [Nods]

Q: Could you start by telling us a little bit about your very early childhood growing up in Tibet?

#63D: How should I say? When I was small, we were nomads. It is better to mention that [we were] nomads. Though [we] owned lands, you can say that we were nomads. I was with my mother as a little child. Since the time I can recall, I used to herd animals. There were not many tasks.

Q: Could you tell us about what you had to do, what your responsibilities were with the animals?

#63D: I used to herd animals with my mother.

Q: With mother?

#63D: Yes.

Q: How do you herd animals?

00:03:20

#63D: [We] drove them to the mountains early in the morning and herded them where there was good grass and water through the day. [The cattle] must not be allowed to move far away from the grassy area. One must also guard them against predators like wolves and wild dogs. In the evening we drove them back to the *ba* 'tent made from yak hair.'

Q: Are you talking about yak and *dri* 'female yaks'?

#63D: Yes, *dri*, yak and sheep.

Q: Was there a big problem with wolves?

#63D: Yes, wolves were a problem. Animal thieves were a threat during wintertime when the animals were well fed and around the autumn period of the 9th and 10th lunar months. [We] had to beware of thieves who were poor people and such.

Q: How did you handle the wolves? How did you deal with them?

#63D: If the wolves appeared during daytime, we would shout and they ran away. They were also killed by firing. We were armed with guns. In our village every family possessed a gun. The older ones carried guns but I was small then and did not have one.

Q: In the evenings after all your work was done and you've had your dinner, what did the family do? Before you went to bed, what did you do in the evenings?

00:06:28

#63D: In summertime the animals were brought back home around this time [of interview], 6 or 7 o'clock, and then the *dri* were milked. The milk was boiled and then cooking took place. In our village cooking was not an elaborate affair. One made tea, ate *tsampa* 'flour made from roasted barley' and meat. Then it was bedtime around 10 o'clock.

Q: Did you ever used to hear stories or tell stories?

#63D: Not much was told. There was nothing much to tell the children as they do not understand.

Just before going to sleep, we recited the *Dolma* 'Praises to the 21 Goddess Tara' two or three times. Little children just looked on, as they did not know the prayers. Then when the mother went to bed, they did too.

Q: Tell us about how your life changed, as you got a little bit older? Then what happened?

#63D: When I was around 10 years old, I became a monk and started studying. I went to a lama that lived in retreat at a hermitage and studied for around three years. I visited home in a month or 10 days and lived at the hermitage studying under the lama. There were no schools in my village. The lama taught me the script and the dharma.

Q: It wasn't a monastery?

00:08:57

#63D: It was not a monastery. [I] lived in the hermitage. I was studying so that [I] could become a monk. One must study the script and then become a monk.

Q: Was this difficult to be away from your parents at such a young age?

#63D: We used to feel sad and cried a little but after a few months you became accustomed. The lama was loving and there was no lack of food. One could eat meat, butter, *tsampa* or whatever one wished. There were two or three other small monks like me who studied under the lama. We used to play and that was very enjoyable.

Q: Tell us what was your daily study routine like with this lama?

#63D: [We] started studying when there was enough light to read the characters. Daylight begins around 5 o'clock. [We] were allowed to drink tea around 6:30. From early morning until then, [we] engaged in studying. Then we took our "breakfast," as you would say in India. After food, once again it was back to studies until 12 o'clock when [we] took our lunch.

Q: By studying, do you mean reading?

00:11:40

#63D: Yes, [we] continued to read the scripts. Except for reading, there was no writing taught to the monks of the village. One began to learn to write only when one grew older. It was just reading while one was younger.

Q: You mean memorizing?

#63D: Right. It was memorizing and memorizing only.

Q: After your time with this lama, then what happened?

#63D: Then I lived as a monk in the monastery for 2-3 years—in the Gyukhu Gonpa, that was our principal monastery. It was a Nyingma [Monastery]. I joined the monk congregation and lived there for around three years. [I] did not stay longer than three years.

Q: Were you quite happy being a monk? Was that a happy time in your life?

#63D: Oh, it was a happy time. A monk's life was a very happy one. I was young then and a monk's [life] was very happy. There were prayer assemblies that the monks attended. It was a very happy time. My family was quite a wealthy one and there were my maternal uncle and many others in the monastery. There were around four monks [from the family], including maternal and paternal uncles. I lived happily, extremely so, among them.

Q: Do you remember the first day you joined the monastery? Do you remember what happened?

00:14:18

#63D: [I] remember the first day [I] joined.

Q: What was it like?

#63D: When we first became monks in the monastery, the custom was that it [admission] took place during a great prayer assembly. New monks joined the monastery when there was a great prayer assembly session going on. One would be given a *khata* 'ceremonial scarf' as one entered the temple to signify that one was now a monk. The monastery would provide a good meal and give treats. There was *buram* 'brown sugar cubes' available in the village that was round in shape and brought from Lithang. The names [of the new monks] were then entered in the monastery's register.

Q: What did you feel that you learned in those years that you took with you later when you were no longer a monk?

#63D: The prayers that [I] am able to chant now are because of the learning then, as it was never the custom in Nyarong for laymen to learn to read. Except for monks, there was no custom for laymen to learn to read. There was no such custom in my region. My being able to read the scriptures and chant the prayers now is thanks to that.

Q: You are a monk from age 10 to 14, so what happened to change that?

00:17:15

#63D: I no longer lived in the monastery but returned home to the nomadic site. I lived at home and for a year or two, moved here and there along with Dolma's [a member in the Tibetan government-in-exile cabinet] father, riding a horse and carrying a gun.

Q: Dolma's father?

#63D: Gyari Nyima. [I] moved about with Gyari Nyima. Until the age of 24, [I] lived that way in the village.

Q: Okay. So first of all why did you leave the monastery exactly?

#63D: There were no faults [vows broken] for leaving the monastery, as [I] had not married. [I] did not return to the monastery and left it like that. Moreover, there were no other sons at home except me. So, thinking that a bride should come home and that someone should take responsibility, [I] did not remain a monk. I was the one to have to take care of Mother and the home. There were no sons except me. In my region, the son took responsibility of the house. The son was the main person to take responsibility. That was why [I] stayed back [home].

Q: *Aku-la* 'respectful term for paternal uncle,' you mentioned that you went back from the monastery to your home to look after your mother, was your father not around?

00:19:44

#63D: Father was not there. Well...not that father was not there but he lived in a separate home. [He] was the husband of Mother and her sister. Mother was living separately. There were my mother and her sister. Mother's sister had entered [father's home] as a bride. Her husband associated with my mother. Father had his feet in two places but he did not take much care in our home but in theirs. My mother's older brother, who was a monk, took responsibility of our home and I was supposed to take care of mother. Actually we possessed two nomadic units but were I to narrate in detail, it would be very long.

Q: So when you went back to your home, what were you doing at that time?

#63D: Well, [we] were nomads. [I] herded animals and at times trailed Gyari Nyima. Much of the time I went with Nyima's father.

Q: Was it Nyima's father?

#63D: Nyima himself; Dolma's father who is called Nyima. [I] used to go with Nyima.

Q: How did that happen? Was he a friend of the family? Was he a neighbor? How did you get to know him?

00:22:03

#63D: Gyari Nyima was our Chief. [He] is the father of...[not discernible] and Dolma.

Q: Dolma and whose father?

#63D: Gyari Lodi. [To interpreter] Of course, you would know Nyima.

Q: He was like a village leader?

#63D: There were four senior leaders in Nyarong and Gyari Nyima was one of them. He was the leader of around 1,700 families. I lived in the same village.

Q: How did you become so friendly with him? How did that happen?

#63D: He was a leader in our region and required attendants. I do not know if this is prevalent in foreign countries but in my region wherever the leader went, he took along many people as attendants and assistants, around 10-15 people. Leaders must go to various places, visit his subjects, settle disputes and go to places where there are conflicts. So I went along as the leader's attendant.

Q: What kind of issues did you have to deal with? Did he have to deal with from the people? What kind of grievances?

00:24:49

#63D: We did not have anything like maintaining relations or receiving aids from other countries. However, the leader must observe if there are disputes among the people, look after the welfare of the people, find out their problems, be alert about enemies and various other issues. In our region the leader was like the herdsman among the animals. He must take care of the subjects and look after their welfare. Though of course one could not offer material help, yet the leader must resolve disputes and take care of such issues. He must also act, for instance, in case Lithang or the Communist Chinese attacked Nyarong. The leader must confront them or settle the issue. That was the custom in our region.

Q: Can you name any of the specific disputes that people used to come to him with?

#63D: The disputes could be quarrels among the people. Other than that there were not many issues. That was the custom in our region. Presently, each state in India takes care [of the people in that particular state] but in our country, whether it was the Bapa 'people of Ba' or the Chating, leaders of each region took care of issues like quarrels, marital discords, murders or any other issues that arose. So the leader must resolve such disputes and make a fair judgment.

Q: You mentioned murders...

#63D: Yes, there were cases of murders, arguments and many other disputes. There are possibilities for different kinds of disputes.

Q: You said at that time you were learning how to use a gun. Can you talk about that?

00:28:03

#63D: Of course, one could handle a gun. We used to handle guns since a young age, playing with it, shooting wild animals and birds. These guns did not belong to the country but were our possessions, having bought them ourselves. We had freedom in Tibet. The country [government] did not distribute arms but everybody owned guns. When the Chinese attacked in '56, we used our [own] weapons and fought them. There was not anybody to extend assistance, but when the Chinese caused us suffering we [used] the weapons we owned.

Q: So just staying with this time when you were roaming around with Gyari Nyima and talking to people about their disputes, what was your role exactly in this? What were you doing?

#63D: [My] responsibility was to be an attendant to Gyari Nyima. Gyari Nyima was a big chieftain and there were dangers from enemies and others. We were similar to bodyguards.

Q: And you think part of the reason you got this position was because you were educated from having been a monk, for receiving that kind of education?

00:30:38

#63D: No, no. The leader selected people he liked and also those who possessed weapons. He asked this person or that person [to accompany him] but it was not on account of education because there was no use of education in our region. [He] took along the elderly ones when on a mission to resolve disputes. And where there was suspicion of danger, [he] asked young men who were courageous and possessed weapons to accompany [him]. There was no other reason.

Q: *Aku-la* is very tall we can see, so...

#63D: [Smiles]

Q: It seems to me that this was an exciting time in your life that you enjoyed this time. Is that right?

#63D: It was a very happy period. We were extremely carefree because there was no need to worry over [losing] your possessions. There was complete freedom to move, to stay, to eat and to drink. One could travel freely anywhere. There was complete freedom as Tibet was sublime. [People] were incredibly happy. When we lived there, it was a very happy period. Unlike now, we owned our wealth and there was no one to restrict us. It was a land of freedom and a happy place then.

Q: ...just with these disputes for a little bit and how the disputes were settled because we don't know really much about this. I mean, what happened when the parties could not come to an agreement? Did that ever happen?

#63D: The leader will...[not discernible] to the party that does not heed the judgment.

Q: What will he do?

00:33:35

#63D: He will go to war and do whatever he thinks fit. The leader will take up for the party that accepts his decision. For instance, there is a dispute between two people in our region that is being resolved; the person that does not accept the ruling becomes the opponent of the leader. The leader becomes his enemy during the settlement of the case. Then there will be a punishment or whatever that must be imposed.

Unlike here, in our region we held our leaders in high esteem. Leaders were greatly revered. In countries like India, if there was something amiss by the leader, there are protests but we were not like that in Tibet. Leaders were held in such high esteem as a child would his parents. The reverence was like that.

Q: What kind of punishment would the leader mete out to somebody who did not accept his resolution?

#63D: The punishment could be paying out penalty in the form of wealth or anything. The penalties were huge. The penalties were mostly in the form of wealth.

Q: Was there much violence in your region, either domestic violence or between families or feuds?

#63D: Yes, it happened incredibly so. All the people of Kham are similar. It happened a lot. It is really bad and there is nothing more to be said about it but fights did occur.

Q: Were there lots of these blood feuds between families that would carry on for generations?

00:36:32

#63D: It was imperative to avenge [a killing in the family] for it would be considered very bad in our region unless that was not carried out.

Q: Okay. So it carries on then to the next family. So these leaders were very busy then settling disputes?

#63D: Yes, [they] were. At times people left the region in protest against the leader. Someone from Ba could arrive in Chating or someone left for Chating from Ba. People ran away following killings that happened during clashes or not heeding the leader's decision by moving to Lithang, Tangu, Ganzi or to distant places. Such things used to happen.

Q: I see. This man Gyari Nyima, this leader of your region, did you think he was a fair man? Did you agree with his decisions always?

#63D: [He] was fair and was not corrupted because some people may offer bribes to the leader to receive his favor but he never accepted that. [He] spoke frankly and separated the black from white. Gyari Nyima never discriminated nor took bribes. He imposed lashings

and penalties but never favored one over the other by taking bribes. He acted honestly and spoke frankly.

Q: How did your life change from this point?

00:39:14

#63D: I lived in that way until the age of 24. Then at age 24 in the year '56, the Communist Chinese affected liberation. You know what liberation is, right? Then we revolted against the Chinese. Gyari Nyima was a big leader of Nyarong and since the appearance of the Chinese, they paid him a salary like an official, as we would call it. Therefore, Gyari Nyima understood every plan of the Chinese like the imposition of liberation, confiscation of wealth, destruction of lamas, monasteries and the people.

He came back in '55 and revealed that the Chinese would impose liberation, which was bad. Therefore, when the democratization of liberation process began in the year '56 and the clashes took place, Gyari Nyima made secret plans with the people. I was 24 years then and continued to fight the enemies since then.

Q: Where did Gyari Nyima live as a Chinese official?

#63D: [He] lived in China; [he] lived in Nyarong; [he] went everywhere. [He] was a big leader. Lingkhashipa Gyapon Chimi Dorjee, Gyari Nyima and Jagoe Tobden took an oath in '55 in Dhartsedo that they would rebel against the Chinese. Gyari Nyima battled and so did Lingkhashipa Gyapon Chimi Dorjee, but the subjects of Jagoe Tobden refused to fight.

Q: And then what happened after you joined the resistance group?

#63D: The Chinese started the liberation process in the 1st Tibetan lunar month of the year '56. [I] do not know what it is called in Indian or English but we called it *chingdol* 'liberation' in Tibetan. The Chinese began the liberation process to annihilate the Tibetans by confiscating [their] riches and to destroy lamas and monasteries. It began in the first Tibetan lunar month of '56. While they [the Chinese] held meetings, we started to train but could do so for only 17 days. Right at the start Gyari Nyima planned to fight and we were undertaking secret activities. And then we fought.

Q: Where did you fight?

00:43:14

#63D: [We] fought at Gyamtso Phodang. [We] clashed with the Chinese and continued to fight.

Q: From your memory, can you tell us what happened when you joined that? Can you give us some sense of what happened and what you saw and what was going on?

#63D: The clash took place on the 18th day [of the 1st Tibetan lunar month of '56] and once that happened, shots were fired from the guns. There were a little over a 100 Chinese in the house of the Gyaritsang. We clashed with them. Many Chinese officers were talking to us

during a meeting when we clashed. The main reason we fought them was because of our opposition towards liberation. We attacked them. Of course, we would because they tried to arrest some of the influential and older people but we stopped them. The clash happened during which shots were fired and then the actual fight began.

Q: Was a meeting in process initially?

#63D: Yes, meetings continued to take place for 17 days. They spoke to us about the liberation. It was some sort of a training [indoctrination] program.

Q: You're saying that this is before the formation of *Chushi Gangdrug* [Defend Tibet Volunteer Force]?

00:45:49

#63D: This was way before the formation of the *Chushi Gangdrug*. We in Nyarong fought in the 1st Tibetan lunar month of '56. [The people of] Lithang resisted in the 3rd Tibetan lunar month. And then it was the turn of Dango. It was '58 when Andrug Jindha [Gonpo Tashi] started the *Chushi Gangdrug* in Lhasa and constructed the Golden Throne. Unable to withstand the Chinese onslaught and subsequent to losing their territories, the people of Kham hailing from Ba, Lithang, Chating, Nyarong, etc., escaped. Then when Andrug Jindha formed the *Chushi Gangdrug* in Lhasa, the Golden Throne was constructed. The *Chushi Gangdrug* was just beginning to be established then.

There was no *Chushi Gangdrug* there [in Kham province]; Nyarong fought until it was wiped out and then Lithang fought until it was wiped out and then Chating fought. Each region waited until the other was demolished. They were not united. Had there been unity, it would not have been easy for the Chinese to overcome [the Tibetans].

Q: I'd like for you to tell us a lot more detail, as much as you can remember about this meeting where there were the 100 Chinese officials that ended in violence. Can you please as much as you can remember tell us what happened at that meeting and if you remember things that was specifically said and how it ended the way it did?

#63D: During the meeting with the Chinese, they had plans to arrest a relative of the Gyaritsang family who was one of the influential men. At that time all influential men were being captured. There was a *zong* 'fort' located at Chandoriwong in Nyarong in which all the leaders of Nyarong had been jailed on the pretext of being given propaganda lessons. That was the main *zong* of the four divisions of Nyarong.

Q: *Zong*?

#63D: Yes, [they] were jailed in the *zong*. While the leaders were jailed in the *zong*, the Chinese could move around freely among the subjects. With the leaders in jail, there were only the subjects. In our case, in '55 Gyari Nyima had secretly planned and decided to fight. We had already decided to fight. Therefore, it was 4 or 5 o'clock in the evening of the 17th day of the 1st Tibetan lunar month of '56 that they [the Chinese] planned to seize one of our leaders, a nephew of the Gyaritsang family who was present in the meeting with us.

There were around 100 Chinese that were trying to seize him. When [they] tried to capture him, he did not give up. He was armed with a pistol and did not fall into their hands. The people rose and screamed and the clash began with the firing of guns.

Q: And then what happened?

00:51:13

#63D: And then the fight started in Nyarong against the Chinese army. There were around 100 Chinese troops in the palace of the Gyaritsang. Both the wives of Gyari Nyima were present in the house then. The people attacked the Chinese and chased them out of the Gyaritsang palace to the fort. We killed five or six Chinese including two officials.

We restrained from killing more because Gyari Nyima was in China then. He had made all the decisions and then was living in China. We feared that killing all the Chinese might lead to our leader being killed there by the Chinese. However, during the fight, two Chinese officials and two or three troops got killed. [We] did not kill the rest and chased [them towards the fort]. The subjects of Gyari Nyima consisted of 1,200-1,300 people who surrounded the fort. [The two sides] fought each other for six months.

Q: Did you block the fort?

#63D: Yes, [we] surrounded the fort. There were many encounters with the Chinese and a lot of killing took place. There was carnage on both sides in great numbers. [We] fought for six months and then Nyarong territory was lost.

Q: And then?

#63D: And then that was it.

Q: Did you say that Nyarong was lost?

00:54:10

#63D: The Chinese attacked us three times as we surrounded the fort. While we lay siege to the fort, the Chinese attacked from three different positions. Each time, the clash occurred for a day or two but we did not lose ground. The Nyarong [people] killed a large number of Chinese then while [we] did not lose many from our side. Later, perhaps it was in the 5th month that numerous Chinese troops appeared from Ganzi. Four hundred Chinese troops arrived to attack Nyarong.

Q: From Ganzi?

#63D: Yes, 400 [Chinese soldiers] arrived from Ganzi. We clashed at several locations and finally from among the 400 Chinese, except for 40 that got away, [we] killed the rest. From among the men of Nyarong, perhaps it was six men that were good, young and famed for their valor that were killed while 10-11 were injured. A great number of Chinese were killed then. It was like that.

Q: Casualties were much heavier on the Chinese side. Why were the casualties so much heavier on the Chinese side?

#63D: From the 400 [Chinese troops] only 40 got away. Forty managed to escape.

When they [the 400 Chinese troops] arrived in Nyarong, [we] were stationed at two places: one [group] waited for them and another followed them. They were sandwiched and the Nyarong [people] killed an innumerable number then, while we lost only that many men. Actually, the number of people of Nyarong that died was, in fact, countless. However, during that time that was how we won.

Q: You and the people you were fighting with, did you have a fighting unit? Did you have any kind of army training?

00:57:59

#63D: There was no training. Each one possessed a gun and was prepared to fire. There was no training whatsoever except for the male energy to fight. We did not have any kind of training. Each one could aim his gun well. [We] owned guns and used to play with them. [We] had good aim and fought with male energy. There was no training of any sort.

Q: From the Tibetan side, what was your biggest advantages and your biggest disadvantages, in terms of the fighting?

#63D: There was no advantage as such; if they killed us, that was it and if you managed to kill them that was it. The Chinese were causing us suffering and unable to endure it, we fought and killed them. With us too, they killed as many as they could. There was no friction on account of material wealth. The Chinese were oppressing us due to which we confronted and fought them.

Q: Okay, carry on and tell us what happened then?

#63D: We continued to fight the enemy in our region until '59. Then Nyarong was lost and the people surrendered to the Chinese.

Q: The people?

#63D: Yes, the people. [However,] people like us who numbered around 20 families... including Gyari Nyima's, there were around 30 families that did not surrender to the Chinese. [We] did not surrender to the Chinese nor gave up our weapons and ran to the mountains. We were penniless, just the men and horses. We spend the years from '56 to '59 fighting the enemy. [We] rebelled against the Chinese.

Q: Tell us about your life up in the mountains. Tell us what that was like.

01:01:10

#63D: Whether it was winter or summer, we did not have houses or tents. [We] continued to live in the forest regions and entire families were present. In '56, we had taken along our

wives and children with us. When the enemy attacked, the husbands fought while wives and other family members fled wherever there was a safe place from the line of firing. There was no distant place to go to and [we] moved about in that region. Then in the year '59, [we] fled to Golok and then towards the Changthang 'Northern Plateau' region on to India.

Q: How did you survive with food during this time?

#63D: Of course, there was fear, both day and night.

Q: No, [I] mean food.

#63D: [We] killed wild animals for meat. The Chinese were herding animals that belonged to Tibetans and we attacked such groups and killed them [domestic animals] as well as wild animals. Except for that, we did not have *tsampa* or anything else. [We] lived for three years on the mountains surviving solely on meat. At times we could not boil the meat and were forced to eat them raw. We suffered such extreme difficulties.

Q: Tell us about your escape and how the decision was made that this was time you have to leave now? Who made that decision?

01:04:01

#63D: All of us took part in the discussion. There was no way to live with the Chinese having occupied every region. When there was nowhere to live, [we] moved away being pursued by the Chinese. We fought and fled, fought and fled and continued to move away. Then in the 6th Tibetan lunar month of '59, the pursuing Chinese captured all our wives. We were being pursued by many tens of thousands of Chinese. We were fleeing and the Chinese caught up with us at Tso 'Lake' Kyari Ngori in Amdo and captured or killed all the wives and children.

Except for 18 men that were able to escape, the rest were lost. Some were killed and some were captured. Wives were killed; children were killed. At that time I had my mother and a sister, who were lost to the Chinese. All the wives were lost except for 18 of us. There were around 24-25 families from which only 18 men managed to escape. Some were killed and everything was over.

Q: So can you tell us what happened next?

#63D: Then [we] continued to flee through the north, fighting and fleeing along the way. And then [we] arrived in Mustang in Nepali territory. There was no enemy then, as the Chinese could not come there. Each of us destroyed our weapon and then arrived in India.

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Changthang?

[Interviewer to interpreter]: Yeah, I don't know. You think he must have crossed the Changthang, yeah? It must have been.

Q: How long did it take you to leave Tibet, to flee Tibet?

#63D: We left Golok in the 2nd Tibetan lunar month of '59 and reached Bodh Gaya in India in the 12th month.

Q: You mentioned that you were at Tso Kyari Ngori in the 6th month.

#63D: Yes, that was during the journey.

Q: And you were in Bodh Gaya in the 12th Tibetan lunar month.

#63D: Right. [We] arrived in Tsokha, Mustang in Nepal in the 11th month.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: So they carried on from Mustang to India and then he went back to Mustang, he said.

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Right.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: Did they have to cross the Changthang from Gyalrong you think so?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Yes.

[Interviewer to Interpreter]: It's north of Lhasa.

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Yes.

Q: Okay. So tell us about the journey coming out. What difficulties you faced on the journey?

#63D: During the journey, the Chinese was pursuing us.

Q: You mentioned being pursued by the Chinese up until Golok.

#63D: The Chinese pursued us until Tsokha. There were no places without Chinese presence, as they had a free run after Lhasa was occupied. There were only the rebels and we were being pursued. We were ahead and following us [on the escape journey] were Tehor Phuntsok [Interviewee #55D] and the Gundhatsang group [included Interviewee #28M Yidham Kyap]. We [groups] were escaping one after the other with the Chinese in hot pursuit. All the time during the journey we were fighting the Chinese.

As for food, there was nothing but meat. There were times when we could not hunt wild animals in the northern region and for 7-8 days the 18 men would be without anything except water. Then [we] came across a Tibetan brown bear that we killed and got to eat meat. Otherwise, [we] were on the verge of killing and eating a horse [we] had. Such were the difficulties we faced. We suffered problems throughout.

Q: So at this point you're travelling on foot?

01:10:28

#63D: On horseback.

Q: Okay but they had to kill the horse.

#63D: [We] were saved from eating the horse since [we] managed to eat a Tibetan brown bear. [We] got something to eat. We were saved from eating the horse.

Q: Did you have to cross the Changthang to get out of Tibet?

#63D: Yes, through the Changthang to Nepal.

Q: What time of year was that?

#63D: It was wintertime, the 11th lunar month. [We] came through the Changthang at Achikhongya in the 6th month. It was the 10th month and wintertime that we came through the Changthang.

Q: Was it winter when you came through the Changthang?

01:11:33

#63D: Yes, it was wintertime. It was the 8th, 9th and 10th months. It was very far from my region to Mustang.

Q: So how were you able to handle the weather in the Changthang area in winter?

#63D: Yes, it was cold. [We] just had our clothes but no blankets. As was the custom in my region, we wore fur coats. There were no blankets, except for the saddles and seat covers. It was many months since we had *tsampa*, salt or tea. [We] hunted wild animals and ate meat. It was just meat that [we] ate.

Q: It's amazing. So from this period where you were fleeing Tibet and the Chinese were chasing you and you were fighting and fleeing, fighting and fleeing, this whole period of months that took you to get out of Tibet. Can you try to recall just maybe a couple of incidents that really stick in your memory from that time?

#63D: When you encounter the enemy, you fired your gun. It could be for an hour or half an hour. When they killed on our side, that was it and when we killed them, that was it. This continued as [we] journeyed along. There was no particular time; you encountered them in the morning or in the evening or at night. They chased us wherever we went. During the encounter in Golok, their aircraft pursued us. It was like that for us.

Q: Did you say that an aircraft pursued you in Golok?

01:14:21

#63D: Yes, the plane watched our movement in Golok. The aircraft pursued and dropped bombs on us. The bombs did not kill us.

Q: They dropped bombs. So when the Chinese dropped bombs, did they land on people? Were people killed from that?

#63D: Yes, animals. And numerous people were killed. It was countless number. You could not say who was killed and who was not. The number was countless in Golok. One would not be able to count the number of dead.

Q: When you reached the border, when you reached Mustang, the Nepali border you had to give up your weapons. Can you say what actually happened at the border and how the Nepali border police treated you and how that whole thing went down?

#63D: We, the [men of] Nyarong did not give up our guns to the Nepalese. A great lama called Nyoshuk Khenpo Jamyang Dorjee was with us then. He prayed for us and we broke all our guns and threw them in the river. We, the 18 men of Nyarong, did not give up even one gun. [We] did not surrender them to the Nepalese. Neither were they surrendered to the Nepalese nor buried underground but broken and thrown into the river. The weapons were useless and had to be destroyed. Once you were in India, weapons were useless.

Q: What did Khenpo Jamyang Dorjee say?

#63D: Nyoshuk Khenpo Jamyang Dorjee advised us to break [the guns] and that he would offer a prayer of benediction for us. So we broke all the guns.

Q: Why did you go to Bodh Gaya next?

01:17:45

#63D: His Holiness the Dalai Lama was in Bodh Gaya. [We] went on pilgrimage and to see His Holiness. [We] had never seen His Holiness. [We] wanted to see His Holiness and the pilgrim sites, as Bodh Gaya is a holy place. All [our family members] were dead, except for the 18 men. [We] went on the pilgrimage and made offerings for the dead and saw His Holiness.

Q: In Bodh Gaya when you saw His Holiness, do you remember what that was like and do you remember anything he said at that time?

#63D: [I] do remember. His Holiness asked about the difficulties we had faced and we apprised him about how the people were killed. Then we wrote the names of all that we could remember, the people of our village, our spouses and everyone who had died to His Holiness along with offerings. [We] had an audience with His Holiness wherein he told us about losing Tibet and the difficulties and we informed him as I mentioned [above]. That was it and there was nothing else to be said.

Q: Do you remember what he said?

#63D: His Holiness said, “You should not worry. We Tibetans have lost our country but [we] have reached here. Tibetans everywhere must live together.” Other than that [His Holiness] did not say anything to us then. There was not much to say because it was only a few months since His Holiness had arrived [in India]. There was no proper residence nor were there any schools.

Q: Did you get any injuries from your fighting?

01:20:41

#63D: I have never been hit by gunfire. I was not shot.

Q: That’s good. What happened after Bodh Gaya?

#62D: Then [I] went to Darjeeling. Gyari Nyima was living in Darjeeling then. Gyari Nyima and family had left [Tibet] earlier while we had followed later. [I] stayed for around three months and then left for Mustang.

Q: What were you doing in Darjeeling for three months?

#63D: [I] stayed idly. There was no thought given for education then.

Q: And then?

#63D: And then [I] went to Mustang.

Q: And then?

#63D: [I] joined the army in Mustang, the organization of the *Chushi Gangdrug*. And lived there for around 14 years.

Q: You were in Mustang for 14 years.

#63D: Yes, from ’60 to ’74.

Q: I’m kind of getting the feeling you’d rather not talk about that time in Mustang. Is that correct or are you fine to talk about it?

01:22:59

#63D: [I] can talk about it. There is no problem in speaking about it. It was an army unit when [I] initially joined it. All the people came from scattered backgrounds; there were men belonging to the three provinces of Tibet: Dhotoe [Kham], Dhoday [Amdo] and Utsang. I can readily speak on anything you ask me about. [I] do talk about it.

Q: Can you tell us about the...When you first joined the *Chushi Gangdrug* in Mustang? You tell us anything you can remember.

#63D: Actually when we lived in Darjeeling, Andrug Gonpo Tashi, Dungyik Lhamo Tsering and Gyari Nyima had made plans to form the Mustang Unit. Gyari Nyima told us—we were able and we were young—“Do you want to go to fight or construct roads in Gangtok?” We had been fighting since leaving our region and the Chinese had killed all our spouses, so we chose to go to fight the enemy. Andrug Gonpo Tashi, Dungyik Lhamo Tsering and Sey Gyalo established the Mustang Unit.

Since it was the route we had taken earlier, we were deputed before everyone else, saying “You came through it, so you know the place” so [we] were sent there first. I cannot remember the exact Tibetan lunar month; perhaps it was the 3rd or 4th Tibetan lunar month of '60 that we left for the Mustang Unit.

We felt very happy to be soldiers of the Mustang force. [We] had no education and it was a tough job to dig earth [for road construction]. And by joining the army, one would be equipped with weapons and with the thought that the army would be a success, [we] left for the Mustang force.

Q: When you arrived, what was the set-up there?

01:27:06

#63D: There was absolutely nothing. We were new there and there was nothing organized and no reception. Later, 15 or 20 days after we reached there, Bapa Gen Yeshe, who was to be the supervisor, arrived in Nepal. Then he sent people out to scout for locations to set up base camp and held secret talks to locate places. Otherwise, there was no particular place you could go to. One had to scout for sites. That was done after the supervisor Gen Yeshe arrived. However, when we arrived, there was absolutely nothing. Each of us sought our own food and hired a place to stay. Nothing was organized when we arrived there initially.

Q: What kind of weapon supplies did you have?

#63D: What?

Q: What kind of weapons did you receive?

#63D: [We] had not received weapons then. Men began to arrive in groups of 10, 15, 20, 30 and 40. Besides, there were not facilities for 100 or 200 men to travel [together]. [Men] were being dispatched from India and they had to cross Missamari...no, not Missamari...Siliguri...no, not Siliguri but...Raxual to arrive in Nepali territory. So men in groups of 20 or 30 were dispatched.

Until the 7th Tibetan lunar month corresponding to August of the Western calendar, there were not enough men to start the *Chushi Gangdrug* Army in Mustang. Then gradually and secretly, men in groups of 15, 20 were deputed. And when questioned by the Nepalese the answer was “To Mustang.” The unit moved further up and then gradually to a camp on a barren mountain. Food was a big problem then. Each of us paid for our own food, as the army had not yet been established.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: So it was really more surviving than training, sounds like. You said Bapa Yeshi was there.

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Bapa Yeshi arrived 15-20 days later; after they did.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: Yeah. So what was he doing?

Q: [You] said Bapa Yeshi arrived 15-20 days later, what was he doing?

01:30:51

#63D: He chose the site and assembled people. After arriving there, he gradually formed a reception and assembled all the men. He was the leader who scouted for a good location to build base camp. He was the principal person to lay the plans.

Q: Okay and then? Continue.

#63D: It was by the 7th Tibetan lunar month and [I] think the month of August that 400-500 men had assembled. We were dispatched as an army to the barren mountain. There were no tents, absolutely nothing. [We] possessed some cooking utensils, so 5-6 men formed a cooking unit. We lived together for a few months and then the secret activities of the organization were formulated. By then men had assembled and cooking units were established. Fourteen men formed one cooking unit. Plans were made only after we arrived there. And then activities were carried out. [We] faced extreme difficulties initially.

Q: Bapa Yeshi, he was Gonpo Tashi's right-hand man, yeah? He was a monk before, is that right? Lobsang Yeshi?

#63D: Right.

Q: All right and then what happened?

#63D: Later cooking units were formed. The units could not be formed [based on regions] like Ba or Chating since it would not be good. Therefore, five men of Nyarong and five men of Amdo [made up one cooking unit]. Lots were drawn. Except for five men, a cooking unit could not consist solely of men from the same region because there would be no cordiality [among the groups] with each region claiming authority over the other. So Amdo and Nyarong with 10 men, Ba and Chating with 10 men, Lithang and so on formed the cooking units called *chupho*. After the *chupho* were formed, new rules were formulated wherein a leader for every 10 men called *chupon* was appointed, a leader for every five men called *ngapon* was appointed, a *shelngo* 'general' was appointed for every 20 men, a *gyapon* for every 100 men. Such rules were formulated followed by military training.

Military training instructors were men that had been sent to the United States from Darjeeling in '60. Numerous Tibetan men had gone to the United States for military training. They returned and gave new military training in combat, ambush and firing. [We] received new instructions. Now the *chupho* were formed and leaders appointed. [The army] was divided into groups of 100. There were a *gyapon* for the 100 men, a *chupon* for

every 10; so for every 100 men, there was one *gyapon*, a *shelngo*, *ngapon*, etc. Twelve teachers arrived from the United States in the 10th or 11th month of '60.

Q: Were they Americans?

01:35:41

#63D: No, no they were Tibetans. There were 12 men who had gone to the United States for training. The 12 men headed four divisions of 100 men each. For every division there were three teachers that headed it and lived with them to impart training. After training for around four months, the United States provided weapons in '61.

Q: Weapons arrived?

#63D: Yes, weapons were dropped from planes. Not everyone possessed a gun. There were weapons for 400 people. An aircraft brought weapons to arm 400 men. After five or six months, another load of weapons for 400 men were delivered. The United States dropped weapons three times in all.

Q: How did it affect the morale with the dropping of the American weapons?

#63D: Oh, [we] felt very happy. The weapons were dropped in Tibetan territory, dropped in Tibetan territory. For instance, if this was Tibet, the weapons were dropped in Bir [place of interview] and the Chinese military camp was located not further than Bainatha. Just nearby was a big Chinese army camp. There was no other place available for dropping [the weapons]. We did not have weapons and were filled with terror that the weapons dropped from the aircraft would be seized [by the Chinese]. However, we, the soldiers, were firm that we would not let go of the weapons even at the cost of death. After the weapons were dropped, [we found] that the Americans had done well with the packaging of the bullets because they were ready to be carted away. We did not face any problem as the Chinese could not come there. Once we received the weapons, we were overjoyed, incredibly happy.

Q: And then what happened?

01:40:16

#63D: After we had brought all the weapons that were dropped by the planes, 400 men were sent away from where we were living in Nepalese territory to the actual Tibetan border among the rocks. Having made plans to attack Chinese [posts], 400 of us left the base camp and went to the border and stayed there. Every two or three days, [we] used to go inside Tibet to survey the area. You know what I mean? It was to observe what the Chinese were doing, where their military camps were located, where they were living in Tibetan territory and the number of troops in the army camps. We had been trained in American secret activities, using weapons, combat and every aspect of warfare.

I am not sure of the month in '61; it could be approximately the 6th month that 60 or 70 of us including our teacher who was called Nyarong Kalsang Dorjee went to the north to try to attack the enemy and spent around a month in the mountains carrying our food

[indicates carrying load on back] and weapons. There were no horses, nothing. [We] did not get a chance to attack then and were searching for the Chinese.

One day three of us, the teacher Kalsang Dorjee, our *gyapon* and I went looking for Chinese and chanced upon them on the way. There were five Chinese and we waited by the road. We fired and killed the five Chinese. Four of them were killed instantly while the fifth was injured. We were not shot at. [We] managed to kill all the five.

01:44:00

After that, it was in the 10th month when a teacher called Lithang Rakra—there were many teachers and [I] do not know all the names—and 51 men entered Tibetan territory. By then we owned horses, having been funded by the Americans to purchase them and also provided with food. The 51 men went over to the other side of the Lhasa Tsangpo [River], which flows in Nepalese territory to await Chinese vehicles and set three vehicles on fire. There were 15-20 Chinese in [the vehicles] that were killed. There was one senior Chinese official who was killed. The leader had with him the amended version of the constitution of China to be distributed. I believe the Americans said that they did not get such important information even during the World War II. We were able to get this information and sent it to them.

Q: What was the information?

#63D: Information regarding the policies of China, secret information. [We] burned three vehicles belonging to the Chinese.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: Okay, I know about this particular ambush. It's quite a famous event. It's very fascinating that he was part of that. And you can tell him.

#63D: Right, I was part of two incidents. The earlier one was when we killed five Chinese and this one. Much, much later, [I] wonder which month it was...yes, it was a year later. Numerous men went to the Changthang region. I also used to go all the time—not that I was a courageous man but Kalsang Dorjee had been trained in the United States in battle strategies and locating army camps. I was assisting Kalsang Dorjee and could be called his servant or attendant. Having been there on numerous occasions, I became familiar with the regions in Nepal that we traversed. During one summer season, I took 10-15 trips there. There would be five or three men with me but not more, as the attacks were guerrilla style. The maximum number of men was 10 or 15. In that way, [I] used to move all the time.

Also in the 10th month of the following year, 45 or 46 of us once again crossed the river to the other side like the previous occasion with [Lithang] Rakra, waiting for vehicles to pass. We waited at two places but no vehicles came by. Had the vehicles come, we were waiting at Ghue and Riya in Tibetan territory. The Chinese had killed a *kyang* 'Tibetan wild ass.'

Q: [You] killed 10 Chinese?

#63D: *Kyang. Kyang.*

Q: I see.

#63D: The Chinese had killed a *kyang*. There were around a 100 Chinese.

Q: You mean the animal called *kyang*?

#63D: Yes, an animal that looks like a horse. It is a striped wild animal and it is called *kyang*. Chinese ate the meat of *kyang*. They had with them 60 yaks. You know yaks that belong to nomads? They had brought 60 yaks with them for their meat. There were around 100 Chinese. They were in a valley. We failed to ambush any vehicles on the other side but observed them coming, so we attacked them first. Around 30 odd [Chinese] troops were killed but one cannot know correctly. We fired for around three hours and managed to drive the 60 yaks with us. We could bring the 60 yaks with us to the Mustang base, as we needed them for food. That was how an attack took place.

Q: The 60 yaks back to the camp. That was a good day. Okay, anything else you'd like to say?

01:50:56

#63D: The soldiers of the Mustang army used to go to attack animals of the Chinese at Lake Mansrover in Ngari region. Food was scarce and [we] did whatever [we] could against the Chinese and attacked [their] animals. During this incident, the Chinese pursued [us] and we lost three men, Gyapon Kanze of Dege and another man was also killed and a third one was injured. It was three killed as well as injured. [I] have no idea how many Chinese were killed but that was what happened on our side.

Well, numerous stray incidents of encounters took place. There were killing on both sides. Much later, I cannot recall correctly if it was in '65 or '66 that five men including Lithang Tender came across an American cameraman. "You should be at the border," [the American said]. The American was not one of those that were helping us. [He] was from an American organization that secretly surveyed the area. "You must go to the border to attack the Chinese," [he said]. There were five of them [Tibetan guerrillas]; no, there were seven of them. Taking along the seven men, [the American] traveled to the Changthang. They went to the Chinese motor road at the Changthang.

Tender hailed from Lithang and was an extremely courageous man. He was foolish and a very straightforward person. Believing him to be an American benefactor that provided the weapons and wanting to prove something, they waited and then two vehicles arrived. There were only seven of them but they fired upon the vehicles. The American was filming the scene while they attacked the enemy. They burned both the vehicles but there were not many Chinese in them. There were around 10 Chinese. [They] burned the vehicles, killed the men and seized the weapons while one of our men, a man from Chating was injured.

Q: Who was the American cameraman?

01:53:54

#63D: [I] do not know to which organization [he] belonged. Later we were derided severely by the Americans. At that time, the American weapon supply was kept under wraps. Presently it is known to all but it was a secret then.

Q: Did you supply the American with all the information?

#63D: Yes, the weapons bore American letters and he would naturally understand it. Actually he was an American but [he] was not from the organization that was helping us. This man sent the news everywhere in the world. They [interviewer and team] must have heard of it. He had photographed the vehicles too. Later the Americans said, "It is well done but just seven men should not have attacked two Chinese vehicles without knowing how many men were in them." That was an advice. The Mustang army attacked numerous times.

Q: Do you remember the name of the photographer?

#63D: [I] do not know. We had no education then and did not know who [he] was. [We] had no knowledge who [he] might be.

Then later in the year '67, 51 of us men went to attack the Chinese. However, the Chinese became aware and ambushed us. During this incident we suffered much loss. The Chinese lay in wait. We were around 52 men and with me in [my group] were 14 men. The 14 of us were to attack a Chinese post the next day. We had scouted and located a small Chinese army camp. We went to attack it. Earlier I had seen this army camp. Later, when we were to attack the camp the next day, I took 14 men up the mountain. [We] left at 6 o'clock in the morning and were in Tibetan territory. The Chinese became aware and ambushed us. The 14 men began to fight the Chinese at 6 o'clock in the morning and could not get out until 12:30. Ten men and horses were killed. Five men and five horses, 10 got killed.

Q: Five men and five horses?

01:58:09

#63D: Right. [We] lost all our weapons. [We] killed a number of Chinese but it was no use killing them.

Q: Amazing, absolutely amazing. And then?

#63D: That is about it. Then I was deputed to Tsang Nopru. I engaged in secret activities. Gyato Wangdu had arrived then. Gen Yeshe and he sent me on a secret assignment to Nopru. We were 10 men that were dispatched to Nopru region.

Q: Nopru?

#63D: Yes, a place called Tsang Nopru. Tsang Nopru. It is actually located in Nepalese territory but called Tsang Nopru. I lived there engaging in gathering information and such. All the activities concerned were secret. I stayed there until '74.

Q: You mean Gen Yeshe?

#63D: Yes, Gen Yeshe was our leader from the beginning and then Gyato Wangdu came as his assistant.

Let's leave out the part of the internal fight, as it is not good. And then the Mustang army was closed [down] by the Nepalese. The Nepalese destroyed the Mustang army and seized all the weapons. Then we left. The Mustang army was forced to surrender all the weapons to the Nepalese.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: The Nepalese destroyed the unit.

[Interpreter to interviewer]: The Mustang unit, yes.

#63D: Then I left with Wangdu. All the men in the army were expelled from Nepalese territory and around 12-13 leaders were captured and imprisoned. Dungyik Lhamo Tsering was captured and imprisoned by the Nepalese. Gyato Wangdu and us [in the group] carried weapons; when [the Nepalese] tried to capture Gyato Wangdu, [we] stopped it and then reached the border. The Nepalese lay in wait and killed five men including Gyato Wangdu and his servants close to the Indian border.

Q: Was Gyato Wangdu killed?

#63D: Yes, Gyato Wangdu was killed by the Nepalese. They took away horses, mules and religious idols. We lost a lot of things. From the 42 men, five were killed and the rest of 37 arrived in India.

Q: Why did the Nepalese suddenly turn on you?

#63D: During the time of the father of the Nepalese king that was killed during an internal quarrel, he helped the Tibetans and let us use their land. Before a month passed following the death of the father, his son took away all [our] weapons and did not let the [*Chushi Gangdrug*] soldiers stay in Nepal. The Nepalese caused immense suffering to the Tibetans. They waited for Gyato Wangdu on the way as we fled to India and shot him dead. The leader [king] of the Nepalese was the one that was killed along with his family. That was how the Mustang army was destroyed.

Q: At what point did you receive the audio message from His Holiness the Dalai Lama?

02:04:28

#63D: Four hundred Nepalese soldiers...it was more than 400. There were 4,000 Nepalese soldiers that arrived to forcefully take away the weapons from the Mustang army. We refused to surrender and Gyato Wangdu decided that we would not surrender but fight. The whole army [said], "[We] are determined. The leaders must not give up and neither will we. [We] will [fight] to death." During this time, [we received] His Holiness the Dalai Lama's advice that was recorded on a cassette, "Surrender [your] weapons. Surrender the

weapons to the Nepalese and do not fight. Give up the weapons to the Nepalese. Nothing will happen after the surrender. Surrender the weapons and do not indulge in killing and fighting.” If not for the message from His Holiness, we would never have surrendered our weapons. It was already determined that we would all die. And then we gave up the weapons.

Q: What effect did this have on the men, this having to give up fighting after all this time? What mental effect did it have on people?

#63D: Everybody was deeply saddened. Not giving up the weapons meant going against the words of His Holiness. His Holiness was precious to the people; nothing could be dearer than His Holiness. Not surrendering meant going against the words of His Holiness and giving up meant that what we had done for the cause of Tibet and the dharma had all been in vain. So 10-15 men shot themselves, cut their necks with knives, threw themselves into rivers or hung themselves then. We were filled with great anguish but were helpless, as that was the advice of His Holiness. That was the reason for surrendering the weapons; otherwise Tibetans would never have surrendered the weapons to the Nepalese; not even at the cost of life as we were determined to die to the last man.

Q: And *aku-la*, what did you do then?

02:08:10

#63D: I left with Gyato Wangdu then. When I was at Nopru, 400 Nepalese soldiers arrived to seize our weapons. I did not surrender my weapon and escaped to the mountains in Tibetan territory. From the 10 of us stationed there, two refused to join us. So the eight of us left to take a detour route from Tibetan territory to Mustang where Gyato Wangdu was at the base camp. The journey took seven days. There was a big Chinese army camp that the eight of us had to pass by on the way but I knew the region. I did not surrender my weapon and then joined Gyato Wangdu who was leaving for India. Wangdu was killed during the journey. And I reached India.

Q: And what happened to you?

#63D: We were helpless [after Gyato Wangdu] was killed. Then we came to a place called Pithoraga in India and were stopped there by the Indians. The Indians kept us there for a year and two months. [I] think we were around 32 men. We were there for a year and a few months.

Q: Which was the place in India?

#63D: Pithoraga. It is in Uttar Pradesh. It is called Pithoraga.

Q: Gyato Wangdu, what kind of man was he?

#63D: His Holiness the Dalai Lama held Gyato Wangdu in incredibly high esteem. During our audience with His Holiness [in Bodh Gaya] after the death of Gyato Wangdu, His Holiness said, “I feel the loss of a hundred men on the death of Gyato Wangdu. Not that I

do not value the people but Gyato Wangdu possessed courage and valor, education, enthusiasm, integrity and everything. However, it cannot be helped but I am deeply saddened.” We were able to spend an hour at this audience with His Holiness the Dalai Lama. If I went to Dharamsala now, His Holiness would know me. He would say, “Old man, you are one of those men who has struggled.” Yes, His Holiness knows me. I have lived in India since then.

Q: Can you just tell us what was it like to tell His Holiness your story directly to him?

02:12:53

#63D: [I] felt happy. Gyato Wangdu was sent to train in the United States in the year '55 and in '56 he was airdropped in Lithang. Gyato Wangdu has done much for the [Tibetan] Government. [He] was airdropped all the way in Lithang. However, help in the form of weapons could not be extended there since the Chinese had destroyed the Lithang army. In '58 he arrived in Nyarong when we were living in the mountains and spent 15 days with us. Then he left directly for India. [He] was a brave man.

Q: I just finally want to ask you as someone who's fought so much against the Chinese, what do you think about the self-immolations that are happening these days in Tibet?

#63D: [They] are very courageous, wonderful and sympathetic. The enthusiasm is great, as one can understand the pain of even a needle prick, and doing this for the cause of Tibet and the dharma is incredible. [They] are brave and we do need people who can actually do that but we in India cannot do so. [They] are passionate and incredibly brave. It is extremely difficult.

Q: Thank you so much. It's been amazing to hear your story, really, really fascinating. Thank you.

02:16:00

#63D: [Smiles]

Q: And I just have to ask you one more time, if this interview was shown in Tibet or China or anywhere else in the world, would it be a problem for you?

#63D: There will be no problem. What problem would there be? Perhaps there might be if one wished to go to Tibet but I'm 80 years old now and may live for just two or three years. There will be no problem at all. After what I have been through, [I] would not consider anything else as a problem. [I] do not have to fear or consider the Chinese in any way. [I] will have no problems and you can do whatever you like [with this interview]. You can do anything [with it] as long as it will help the cause of Tibet. [I] have no regrets whatsoever.

Q: I feel *aku-la* is ready to pick up a gun and go across the border.

#63D: [Laughs] [I] would if [I] could get a gun.

END OF INTERVIEW