

# **Tibet Oral History Project**

Interview #63M – Kalsang Thakhay  
April 8, 2010

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# TIBET ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

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## INTERVIEW SUMMARY SHEET

1. Interview Number: #63M
2. Interviewee: Kalsang Thakhay
3. Age: 75
4. Date of Birth: 1935
5. Sex: Male
6. Birthplace: Bhendho Chingkhoh
7. Province: Dhoday (Amdo)
8. Year of leaving Tibet: 1959
9. Date of Interview: April 8, 2010
10. Place of Interview: Kalachakra Hall, Camp No. 3, Doeguling Settlement, Mundgod, Karwar District, Karnataka, India
11. Length of Interview: 2 hr 39 min
12. Interviewer: Rebecca Novick
13. Interpreter: Namgyal Tsering
14. Videographer: Ronny Novick
15. Translator: Tenzin Yangchen

### **Biographical Information:**

Kalsang Thakhay was born in a village near Rikong in Amdo Province. His parents eloped to China because their parents opposed their marriage and he was left with his grandparents at the age of 3. Before age 4 he was sent to the local monastery as a monk where he lived until age 12 when he and another monk ran away to go to Lhasa. They spent a year en route in Kongpo constructing roads for the Chinese. Kalsang Thakhay recalls his good fortune of receiving blessings from His Holiness the Dalai Lama on his journey to China in 1954.

Kalsang Thakhay joined Gaden Monastery near Lhasa and worked in a monastery store and as a teacher. In March of 1959 monks were requested guard the Potala Palace. Kalsang Thakhay volunteered and describes how the monks received weapons from the Tibetan Government and were barely trained by soldiers. They were told to go and guard their monasteries, but Lhasa was bombed that day. The monks were then ordered to join the *Chushi Gangdrug* guerrillas.

Kalsang Thakhay recounts an incident where the Chinese shot at the Tibetans from an airplane and the guerrillas shot back. He witnessed the final moments of the resistance movement when some wanted to stay and fight and others felt it was useless and wanted to flee. Kalsang Thakhay later joined the Indian army with the hope to return to Tibet and fight against Chinese soldiers.

### **Topics Discussed:**

Childhood memories, monastic life, Dalai Lama, first appearance of Chinese, invasion by Chinese army, resistance fighters, Chushi Gangdrug guerrillas, life as a refugee in India.

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## **Interview #63M**

**Interviewee: Kalsang Thakhay**

**Age: 75, Sex: Male**

**Interviewer: Rebecca Novick**

**Interview Date: April 8, 2010**

Question: So please start by telling us your name.

00:00:17

**Interviewee #63M: Kalsang Thakhay.**

Q: His Holiness the Dalai Lama asked us to record the experiences of older Tibetans to share with the younger generation of Tibetans, with the Chinese people and with people in the outside world to document the true history, culture, beliefs and experience of the Tibetan people.

**#63M: Okay.**

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

00:02:00

**#63M: Yes.**

Q: Thank you very much.

**#63M: Okay.**

Q: If anytime during the interview you want to stop or take a break, you could just let us know.

**#63M: Okay.**

Q: If there's any question you'd rather not answer, just tell us and that's fine.

00:02:33

**#63M: Okay.**

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

**#63M: I do not have much to say about that.**

[Question is repeated]

00:02:59

**#63M: [I have] absolutely no problems.**

Q: Thank you. We really appreciate very much your taking the time to talk to us today.

**#63M: Okay.**

[Interviewee, interviewer and interpreter are looking at a map of Tibet]

**#63M: Can you find Rikong [near to birthplace]?**

[Interviewer points to Labrang Tashi Kyi on the map]

**#63M: It is located between Labrang Tashi Kyi and Rikong.**

Interpreter: [Points to map] Here's Rikong.

00:03:23

**#63M: Rikong is very close to us. It is half a day's journey on horseback.**

**#63M: It is close to Rikong. It is a day's walk from my village to Rikong and half day on horseback.**

[Interview resumes]

Q: How old were you when you became a monk?

00:04:22

**#63M: I became a monk when I was about 3 and half years old. The reason being that my parents—to put aside shyness—fell in love. My father's family was poor while my mother's was richer. They were not allowed to be together, so three years after I was born, my father took my mother and eloped to China.**

Q: Did they take you with them?

**#63M: No, [they] did not. I was left behind. [I] was left with my grandparents and they fled to China. They spent about 6-7 years in China. In the meanwhile my grandparents took care of me and left me at the monastery at around the age of 4.**

[Interviewer to interpreter]: He became a monk because his mother and father...It was a love match and their families did not agree with this match. Why did the families not agree to the match?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Because his mother was richer and father was poor.

Q: The father and mother went to China. What was the reason they went to China? So they could live together more easily?

00:06:25

**#63M: Yes.**

Q: Did people in your region, did they speak Chinese as well as the Tibetans?

**#63M: No, [no one] spoke Chinese; it was only Tibetan. [We] only spoke Tibetan; the Amdo dialect and not Chinese.**

Q: And where you were growing up in your area, in the mid to the late '30s, were there any Chinese people who lived there? Did you know any Chinese people?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Late when?

[Interviewer to interpreter]: He was born in '35. So we're going into like '35-'40, in that early period, did he ever see any Chinese?]

00:07:40

**#63M: There were no Communist Chinese in Amdo. China was ruled by Chiang Kai Shek and there were no Communist Chinese then. Later Chiang Kai Shek battled with Communist Chinese and prevented them from coming into Tibet.**

Q: By the Siling?

**#63M: Yes, the Siling.**

Q: In which direction does Siling lie?

00:08:12

**#63M: China was ruled by Siling and there were no Communist Chinese then. The Siling [Chinese] countered the Communist Chinese for 13 years and did not let the Communist Chinese into Tibet. Much later, after about 13 years or so, the Siling were on the verge of defeat.**

Q: Were the Siling Mongolians?

**#63M: They were Muslims. The Siling [Chinese] fled to Taiwan. They countered [the Communist Chinese] in that way.**

Q: The Uyghurs?

00:10:19

**#63M: You mean the Chinese of yore?**

Q: Yes.

**#63M: The Chinese [people] earlier to the Communists were Muslims.**

[Interviewer to interpreter]: What was ruled by Muslim Chinese?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: The Chinese were ruled by...The government of the Chinese were under the Muslims, not any other religions or communists.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: Which kingdom was under the Muslims?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Totally Chinese, under the Muslims—we call them East Turkestan.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: You're talking about an area of China, not the whole of China.

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Not whole of China. Different parts.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: Your talking about Eastern Turkistan.

[Interpreter to interviewer]: East Turkestan, Mongolia. All the Muslims, Chinese. The Chinese ruled during that time.

Q: Where did your mother and father go to in China for six years?

**#63M: They fled to the direction of Siling. I do not know which region it was. [They] fled towards Siling.**

[Interviewer to interpreter]: So Siling is Eastern Turkistan?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Eastern Turkistan.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: That is the name for Eastern Turkistan.

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Yeah, Siling.

Q: Why did they come back after six years?

**#63M: [Speaks before interpretation is complete] They returned with a child; a daughter had been born who was about 3-4 years old. They lived there for around 4-5 years and then returned to Amdo along with the daughter.**

Q: And why did they come back to Amdo?

01:12:48

**#63M: Then they came back home to Tibet.**

Q: Do you remember going to the monastery the first time when you were three and a half? Do you remember it?

**#63M: I do not remember it except what the elders told me about it. I have no recollection of my own.**

Q: Can you describe an early memory of being in the monastery? What do you remember first?

00:13:40

**#63M: I cannot recall much. I had a teacher who passed away at the age of 85. He was like my parents and everything to me. He brought me up. I cannot recall much about that period.**

Q: What was the name of the monastery where you went?

**#63M: The name of the monastery was Khongmong Gonpa.**

Q: How long did you stay there for?

00:14:26

**#63M: I was in the monastery for about 14, 12 years...[I] cannot recall much. The Communist Chinese arrived when I was 11 years old. Perhaps I was there for 11 years.**

Q: Can you describe a little bit about that time in the monastery? What it was like for you?

**#63M: After 4-5 years my parents returned from China. My mother received her share from the family and they [father and mother] lived separately [from the family]. They lived separately [from the family]. I had my teacher and read and learned the scriptures. [I] spend time in that way.**

Q: Do you remember missing your mother and father?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Still?

[Interviewer to interpreter]: No, at that time.

Q: Do you remember missing your mother and father?

00:16:11

**#63M: Only at times like when it was Losar ‘Tibetan New Year.’ Then I used to be called home but stayed only a day or so. I went to my parents, spent a day and returned to the monastery.**

Q: How far was the monastery from your family home?

**#63M: It was very near.**

Q: How many hours did it take?

00:16:58

**#63M: Perhaps it was a distance of half an hour.**

Q: On foot?



**#63M: On foot. If one looked from atop, one could see the village. The monastery was located on the hill and one could see the village down below.**

Q: Did your mother and father come to the monastery often to see you?

00:17:36

**#63M: They came during Losar and not often.**

Q: What do you remember learning in the monastery?

**#63M: The teacher used to teach me the scriptures.**

Q: The scriptures and writing?

00:17:54

**#63M: Writing was not taught. [I] was taught reading and memorizing the scriptures.**

Q: I want to ask some more questions about the Chinese Muslims in the area. You know, what was the level of population of Chinese Muslims in your area?

**#63M: [I] wonder how many there were. Long ago China did not belong to the Communist Chinese. China was not Communist. Chiang Kai Shek of Siling ruled China. The country of China was ruled by Chiang Kai Shek.**

Q: Was he the king?

00:18:57

**#63M: Yes, Chiang Kai Shek was the king. It was not Mao Zedong.**

Q: What was the name?

**#63M: Chiang Kai Shek.**

Q: What period are we talking?

00:19:59

**#63M: [I] was small then.**

Q: How old were you then?

**#63M: About 3-4 years old.**

Q: What was the relationship like between the Amdowas [people of Amdo] and these people?

00:20:39

**#63M: Relation...in the sense that he was the king.**

Q: Wasn't there any relation with the Amdowas?

**#63M: He was like our leader.**

Q: Of the Amdowas?

00:20:49

**#63M: Yes. Long ago it was like this. There's some misunderstanding between us [interviewee and interpreter] in this conversation. Initially the Communist Chinese did not have any power because they were bandits. They forcefully came and occupied one land after the other and grew in size. Once it became big, it battled against Chiang Kai Shek in China. The battle took place for 13 years during which time Chiang Kai Shek did not give them authority in Tibet. After 13 years Chiang Kai Shek lost the war and then the Communist Chinese arrived [in Tibet]. Once they came, the army of Siling no longer existed. The one called Siling Tushi left by flight to Taiwan. He is in Taiwan though I do not know if he is living now.**

Q: My question was more to do with the relationship between the Amdo people and the KMT, Chinese Muslims he said were part of the KMT [Kuomintang, Chinese Nationalist Party]. What was the relationship like? Was it good relations? Was it difficult relations? What was the general feeling like within the community?

**#63M: [Chiang Kai Shek] was the king.**

Q: People to people not political...

[Interpreter to interviewer]: It is like that. Chiang Kai Shek was—we accepted him as our king. The Amdo people were under him.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: Yes, my question has to do with the relation between the Chinese people who lived in his area and the Tibetan Amdo people? Was it good relationship between the Chinese people and the Amdo people?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: What he is saying is that the Chiang Kai Shek people and Amdo was one group. They were ruled by Chiang Kai Shek. So he accepts that Amdo was under Chiang Kai Shek. He is the king and everything to them during that period. And that means one kingdom or one rule, like that.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: I just want to pursue this a little bit more, Namgyal-*la*, because even though it is under one king, there could still be problems between people, yes?

Q: So the Amdo Tibetan people and the Chinese people in your area got along very well?

00:24:24

**#63M: There were no [frictions]. They did not interfere with the Tibetans.**

Q: However, since the Tibetans were different, did most of the Amdo people accept that they were a part of them?

**#63M: Yes, they did. We paid our land tax to them [KMT]. We paid an annual land tax which was remitted to them.**

Q: Did you have Chinese friends?

00:25:23

**#63M: No, [I] did not. I was small and did not have any friends then. I was too small to have friends. I was living on a hilltop as a monk.**

[Interviewer to interpreter]: Do you think he understood the question, Namgyal-*la*? Do you think he understood the question that I was trying to ask?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: He said that...

[Interviewer to interpreter]: I think we need to just have a...just one second, yeah? Because Ronny [videographer] understands the question I'm trying to ask.

[Videographer to interpreter]: Here sometimes there are problems between the Muslims and the Hindus. Were there any problems there between the Tibetans and...

[Interviewer to interpreter]: Do you understand? Not about the government.

[Interpreter to interviewer]: I said that Amdo's religion is Buddhism and they [the Chinese] are Muslims, so any difference between these communities...

[Videographer to interpreter]: Were there problems, fights, you know?

Q: Were there any tensions between these communities?

00:27:25

**#63M: There was nothing like that at all. [We] were close to Siling and the District Administrator of Siling was known as Siling Tushi. He was a Muslim. He never harmed those that practiced the [Buddhist] dharma.**

Q: You mean the tax payers?

**#63M: No, those of us monks who were engaged in practicing the dharma. [He] did not cause any harm to the monks. However, one had to pay the annual land tax without fail. It was in the form of grain and the quantity depended upon the land holding. Someone like you [interpreter] had to go and deliver it there.**

Q: There were the common people like the Muslims and the Tibetan Amdo people. Were there no problems among the common people?

00:28:11

**#63M: None at all. [They] were very cordial.**

Q: So you stayed at Khangmong Gonpa for 11 years and when you were 14, what happened then?

**#63M: Well, after that...By then the Communist Chinese arrived in my village.**

Q: When you were about 14 years old?

00:29:19

**#63M: [I] was not 14. I was about 11 or 12 when the Communist Chinese arrived in my village. Prior to their arrival, the Siling [Chinese] had fought them for 13 years. After 13 years the Siling were defeated. When that happened, Chiang Kai Shek ordered every family to send a man to the army because he was losing the war. He needed men to fight. So our village was taxed and men were collected. Many people of our village joined the army. Each family was required to send a man. And then for about a year, they resisted the Communist Chinese.**

Q: What happened after those people joined the army?

**#63M: [They] joined the army and were defeated after a year or two. Chiang Kai Shek's army lost. The majority of the men from our village were dead. Naturally when one went to fight, one could get killed. Some of them escaped and returned to the village. After about a year, the Communist Chinese captured them. Indicting them of being Siling troops, they were captured and imprisoned. They remained in prison for about a year. Much later the other men [Communist Chinese] killed them. I will relate how [they] were killed.**

Q: Did anyone from your family go to fight?

00:32:33

**#63M: No, there were none from my family.**

Q: You didn't go?

**#63M: No, I was small, just a child of 11 years. People of my village participated.**

Q: So this is 1946. What did you see?

00:32:53

**#63M: I was very young then. The [Communist] Chinese gathered the people of our village saying, "Only one person per family can stay back and the rest must come to a meeting." I was a monk then and was living in the monastery. When the people of the village went there, [I] heard that there were eight men who were brought out from prison. Eight pits were dug and the eight prisoners had their hands tied behind their back and wooden placards with red writings on their back. The eight men were made to stand next to the eight pits. And then he gave a speech. I was told that the leader made a speech.**

**I was a small child and was living in the monastery. I am recounting what I heard. I did not witness it, but it happened in my village. After the speech was over, each man was made to stand next to a pit, facing the pit. Four to five steps behind each man stood a soldier with a gun. The prisoners stood in line next to the pits and Chinese [soldiers] stood behind them with guns. The leader gave the order counting “one, two, three” and the prisoners were shot here [indicates the back of head] and [I] heard that they fell headlong into the pits. The brains oozed out of the heads and they were unrecognizable. That was how the eight men were killed. After that the people were told, “You can throw dust and cover [the pits].” This was clearly witnessed. I did not see it myself, but it happened right in my village.**

Q: Was it [writing on placard] written in Chinese?

00:35:57

#63M: Both in Chinese and Tibetan.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: He doesn't know what it says because it was in Chinese?

**#63M: I heard the letters were red and written in both Chinese and Tibetan [declaring] what he [prisoner] had done, his name and everything.**

Q: His name?

**#63M: Yes, his name, what he had done when he was in the [KMT] army, how many Communist Chinese he had killed, all of these were written on it.**

Q: When did you leave the monastery? How old were you?

00:38:01

**#63M: [I] think I was 12 but I cannot recall. [I] was about 12 or 13 years old. I left the monastery and came to Ladang Tashi Kyi. It was at a distance of a day's journey from my village.**

Q: Where?

**#63M: Ladang Tashi Kyi. Tashi Gomang, it's in there [points to the map]. [I] came there and spent a year in that monastery.**

Q: Was it a monastery?

00:38:30

**#63M: Yes, it's a monastery. It is one of the biggest monasteries in Amdo. It was the monastery of Amdo Jamyang Sharpa. I spent a year there. [I] think I was 13 when I left my village to go to Tashi Kyi, which is a day's journey. I stayed a year there.**

Q: And how many monks were there?

**#63M: There were 3,500 [monks]; I mean in Ladang Tashi Kyi. In my local monastery there were not many monks, only about 80.**

Q: You were 13 years old. What do you remember about your time at Tashi Ladang?

00:40:01

**#63M: I was a monk there and attended the prayer assemblies.**

Q: What else did you do?

**#63M: [I] did not do any work. [I] attended the prayer assemblies and read the scriptures a little and just stayed there. There were no particular tasks to do.**

Q: How long did you stay at Tashi Ladang?

00:40:28

**#63M: One year; a little over a year.**

Q: And then?

**#63M: And then I came to Lhasa. I had a companion and both of us came to Lhasa.**

Q: Was the companion a monk?

00:40:46

**#63M: Yes, he was a monk.**

Q: Where did you stay in Lhasa?

**#63M: Would you like [me] to relate the journey or not?**

Q: No.

**#63M: There's a lot to recount about the journey, but it's of no use relating that...**

Q: Right. And after you reached Lhasa?

00:40:57

**#63M: After reaching Lhasa, I joined Gaden Monastery.**

Q: How long did you stay there?

**#63M: I stayed eight years in Gaden Monastery. It took me a year on the journey from my village. It took a year on the way because I was young then and there were no vehicles in those days. One had to walk and carry one's load and beg for food along the way. [We]**

were young and spent two to three days when [we] arrived at good locations. In that way it took me a year and seven months to travel between Amdo and Lhasa.

Q: A year and seven months?

00:41:44

**#63M: Yes, a year and seven months because I spent a year in Kongpo at a place called Popa. It was close to Kongpo. I stayed a year at this place.**

Q: Was it nearby Kongpo?

**#63M: Yes, it was nearby Kongpo. The place was Popa Yulgong Lungpa. I spent a whole year at this place.**

Q: Was there a monastery?

00:43:03

**#63M: There were no monasteries. I served as a servant to a family. At that time the Communist Chinese had started to construct drivable roads from Kham and had reached the place called Popa Tamo. There was no road towards Kongpo. It had not been constructed. Therefore, as a servant of the family, I went to construct road.**

**The family paid me wages. I was like a beggar and they paid me to go and built roads. That was the year His Holiness the Dalai Lama went to China. The Panchen Lama left for China through Lhasa, Tsang and Changjang while His Holiness the Dalai Lama left for China through Kongpo. I was in Kongpo at that time.**

Q: It was 1954 when His Holiness went to [China]. Did he actually see His Holiness' entourage passing through?

**#63M: Yes, I saw [His Holiness]. I saw him at the place called Thokmey. His Holiness spent a night at Thokmey. When His Holiness arrived from Kongpo, the people of Kongpo carried His Holiness' personal belongings on their back until Kongpo Layak. From Layak, the people of Popa carried the personal belongings until Popa Thokmey. His Holiness spent a night at Popa Thokmey. There were no vehicles and no horses. His Holiness was on foot. It was a day's journey. The road was bad.**

Q: From where?

00:45:44

**#63M: Between Kongpo and Popa. The region was called Popa Lolen and located between Popa Thokmey and Kongpo. There were no roads at all and no bridges over the rivers. *Ding* [rope and saddle contractions used to transfer people across rivers] were stretched across the rivers. Ropes [shows thickness of right arm] were stretched across over the huge rivers and one had to go across the ropes.**

Q: What kind of rope was it? Was it just one rope?

**#63M: There were two ropes, to go to either side. The ropes were made of bamboo skin twisted together. The ropes were stretched across the river and the ends tied to rocks on the banks. One had to go across that. There was something like a saddle made of wood which was tied to the rope. The person sat on it and held the rope and then the rope was pulled. One had to go across that [contraption] as there were no bridges at that time. The Chinese were making attempts to build a bridge across that river.**

Q: Did His Holiness go across that bridge?

00:46:34

**#63M: Yes, he did.**

Q: What year was this?

**#63M: When was it when His Holiness went to China? I cannot recall.**

Q: How old were you?

00:48:26

**#63M: I was 17 or 16. I reached Lhasa when I was 17. [I] might have been 16 then.**

Q: Can you describe what you personally saw and witnessed when His Holiness stayed there? You said you got the opportunity to meet him. What actually happened? Can you describe what your meeting was like?

**#63M: I saw [His Holiness] very close. I received blessings from his hands. During the day, we carried the personal belongings while His Holiness walked. [The route] was through a forest and the mud came up to here [gestures off camera]. There were no horses and vehicles. His Holiness was on foot and we who were carrying the things were in the mud. There were ladders to climb in the jungle and that's how we came through the mud. The villagers had made arrangement of tents and His Holiness spent the night there at Popa Thokmey. His Holiness gave hand-blessings to the people. His Holiness gave hang-blessings that night.**

**The next morning we carried the personal belongings—there were many in the entourage—we carried all the things on our back and went up to Popa Tamo. Chinese vehicles had arrived at Popa Tamo. It was a journey of almost a day. [We] carried the things until there and from Popa Tamo His Holiness left in a vehicle.**

Q: At that time you were working on the road construction for the Chinese.

00:51:32

**#63M: Yes, I was constructing roads.**

Q: How long did you work on the road construction?



**#63M: I spent almost a year working on the road construction.**

Q: My question has to do with: were Chinese people also going to receive blessings from His Holiness or was it just Tibetans?

00:52:05

**#63M: There were many Chinese. They just stood guard and did not come to see him. They were building a bridge across the river in that region. Since there was no drivable road for a distance of one day, the materials for the construction of the bridge had to be transported by many thousands of Siling army prisoners who they [Communist Chinese] had captured. They carried [the materials] from the vehicle up to Popa Thokmey. The Siling soldiers whom they had captured earlier were transporting the materials then. Poor things, some of them had developed sores on their backs and were unable to carry. So they'd placed a wooden base on their shoulders over which they carried the iron rods for the bridge.**

Q: From the border, right?

**#63M: Yes, from the border. [They] were building a bridge across the river. Earlier they'd built a rickety wooden bridge, but flood waters had washed it away. Then they were planning to build a new iron bridge and the earlier Siling troops were transporting the materials.**

Q: Did you have any warning that His Holiness was coming through or did it happen suddenly? Did you know for sometime that he was coming and you anticipated him coming?

00:55:20

**#63M: [I] heard a few days earlier that His Holiness was coming. All people in the region were Tibetans and an announcement was made that His Holiness was coming.**

Q: So it must have been a very exciting feeling?

**#63M: Everyone was happy. All those people who carried the effects [of His Holiness and entourage] were volunteers.**

Q: Did you feel very happy then?

00:56:02

**#63M: [I] was extremely happy.**

Q: Was it the first time you saw His Holiness?

**#63M: Yes.**

Q: When you met him and you received this blessing, what kind of impression did he make on you?

00:56:28

**#63M: He did make a speech, but there were so many people that I did not hear it. There were no loudspeakers like we have here. So though he did make a speech during the audience, I did not hear much.**

Q: Were you surprised by what he looked like?

**#63M: I wondered in my mind where His Holiness was going. If he was going to China, I was worried as to what the Chinese would do.**

Q: Had you ever seen a photograph of His Holiness before or a painting? Did you know what he looked like before you met him?

00:57:48

**#63M: [I] had seen [photographs]. There were photographs long ago.**

Q: So you knew he was going to China. Did you know why he was going to China? Did you know that he was going to meet Mao Zedong?

**#63M: The Panchen Lama and His Holiness had been invited by Mao Zedong. [I] wondered why but I did not understand the reason.**

Q: When you got to Lhasa, what did you do there?

00:59:07

**#63M: I arrived in Lhasa from Kongpo and went directly to Gaden Monastery. I joined the Jangtse Datsang 'division' of Gaden Monastery as a monk. I stayed in Gaden Monastery for eight years. And then in the year '59 I escaped to India.**

Q: For a kid from your region to go to one of the big monasteries in Lhasa, this was quite a special thing, wasn't it?

**#63M: Of course, it was considered [very important]. If [a monk] from our village went to Lhasa and studied there for about three years in one of the great monasteries [Sera, Drepung and Gaden Monasteries] and returned, he was held in esteem like a lama. An old monk who has never been to Lhasa would have an inferior seating to a young monk [who had studied in Lhasa]. Once someone had studied for three years in one of the great monasteries of Lhasa and returned to the village, he was considered like a lama.**

Q: So why were you selected to be sent? Were you particularly a good student?

01:01:40

**#63M: I decided on my own [to go to Lhasa]. I thought it was worthless if I did not visit Lhasa. If I could go to Lhasa I would be valued more on return. "He has not been to Lhasa. He has been to Lhasa." There was so much of difference between someone who has not been to Lhasa and someone who has. A person who has visited Lhasa was considered a**

better person. That was because long ago for us to travel to Lhasa from Amdo there were no vehicles; one had to walk and there were only two routes.

One of the routes was through Changye, a nomadic region and the other through Gyatse Shongmarong, which goes through Ganzi and Chamdho of Kham Province. The journey through [the latter route] took three months on foot provided the person proceeded directly. If one came through Changye, it was difficult to cross the rivers. Traversing through villages meant that though there were big rivers, there would be bridges or boats. The journey took three months.

Q: It was your idea, so you approached your teacher or the abbot and said, “I want to go to Lhasa”?

**#63M:** [I] was a small child and ran away. When [I] ran away, [I] did not inform the teacher who was at the monastery. For almost a month, I and the companion discussed that we should go to Lhasa. Normally, in order to earn food along the way, travelers carried some goods like needles—there was a needle called Amdo *goray*—mirrors, which was mirror on one side and aluminum on the other and very light in weight, and *shingar*, a kind of sweet wood which was expensive but light to carry. [We] purchased all those items and kept them ready a month earlier. I enquired from those [monks] who’d been to Lhasa, “What are the things to do? What are the things needed?” and they gave us the information. So [we] readied everything. One night [I] lied to my teacher that I needed to go somewhere and set out carrying the goods.

Q: So you didn’t go with the blessing of your monastery?

01:05:42

**#63M:** No.

Q: That’s very interesting. So when you got to Gaden Jangtse then, because your monastery hadn’t arranged it, was it difficult to get accepted then? Because there was no arrangement had been made from his monastery...

**#63M:** It was easy to get admission. We had our particular assigned group.

Q: As a person from Amdo?

01:06:24

**#63M:** Yes, as a person from Amdo. Take me for example, the *datsang* was Gaden Jangtse and the assigned house was Gaden Samlo *khangtsen* [a smaller community in a monastery, in which monks of one geographical area live]. Each one knew his assigned group. One could immediately get in. One approached the *khangtsen* teacher and he allotted a teacher. For three days, the teacher provided clothing and food. After three days one would be allotted a *shakhang* of his own.

Q: What’s *shakhang*?

**#63M: *Sha*, meaning a room to stay. One would be allotted a room in three days. For three days the teacher would take care. One was allotted an empty room and had to live in it.**

Q: Was every monk provided with a room?

01:07:55

**#63M: Yes, he was allotted one. At times when rooms were scarce, two monks would have to stay [in one room].**

Q: So you were 17 at this time?

**#63M: Yes, about 17.**

Q: Then what was the next significant event in your life after that?

01:08:23

**#63M: [I] lived in the monastery for eight years. One could not sit idle as a monk of one's respective *khangtsen*. A duty was allocated. After three or four years, [I] was allocated the duty of the *khangtsen*'s store manager. The store manager was responsible for all the work of the *khangtsen*. Then two years after that I became the *khangtsen* teacher, which is a term of one year. I was the *khangtsen* teacher in the year '58 and in '59 [I] had to escape here [India].**

Q: Do you ever remember any serious sickness in the monastery that affected the monks?

**#63M: [I] did not face any problem.**

Q: You did not face any problems during the eight years there?

**#63M: No.**

Q: There were no epidemics and people dying?

01:10:04

**#63M: No, nothing like that happened.**

[Interviewer to interpreter]: The other monk that you interviewed, he's from Drepung, yeah, the one who talked about the small pox?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Yeah.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: He's from Drepung.

Q: Did you hear about what happened at Drepung with so many monks getting sick?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: He also said in Sera and Jangtse and every monastery it happened.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: Yeah.

[Question is repeated.]

**#63M: [I have] never heard about an epidemic.**

Q: Alright. So what happened to you in 1959?

01:10:52

**#63M: In '59?**

Q: Yes.

**#63M: On the 7<sup>th</sup> of March 1959, an order came to Gaden Monastery from the Tibetan Government. It said that [monks] must go to guard the Potala. Our *khangtsen* was obliged to send 11 members. One hundred and thirty-one men from Jangtse [division] and 131 men from Shartse [division]; 232 [?] men were to go to guard the Potala. Such an order arrived.**

**Our *khangtsen* held a meeting on the 8<sup>th</sup> evening. All the monks were called and the young monks were told, "If any of you wish to volunteer, do so." So 11 of us volunteered to go to guard the Potala.**

Q: How many monks were there in total?

**#63M: In the *khangtsen*?**

Q: Those sent to guard the Potala.

01:11:58

**#63M: There were 232 men from both Shartse and Jangtse [divisions]. When this figure was divided among the *khangtsen*, we [Samlo *khangtsen*] were obliged to send 11 monks. So 11 of us volunteered and we were told, "On the evening of the 9<sup>th</sup> you must reach Lhasa and arrive at the Potala on the 10<sup>th</sup> morning. You cannot walk in groups of three or four on the way but must go in twos. [You] cannot go in a group. Some of you must cross the Gaden River and take the detour to reach Lhasa." So some [monks] went in vehicles, some in carts but mostly alone. We were to reach Potala in the morning.**

Q: Two hundred and thirty-seven from each monastery or from...

[Interpreter to interviewer]: From all the monasteries.

Q: The 237 men...

**#63M: ...thirty-two.**

Q: The monks were from which monastery [division]?

**#63M: There were 131 men from Jangtse and 131 from Shartse with a total of 232 men who were asked to go to guard the Potala in Lhasa.**

Q: How many people were from your *khangtsen*, from your house?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: 11.

Q: No, no, no. How many people altogether existed in your *khangtsen*?

**#63M: You mean in our *khangtsen*?**

Q: Yes.

01:14:57

**#63M: There were almost 100 monks.**

Q: If they only asked for 11 from your house and almost everybody volunteered, how was it decided which 11 would go?

[Interviewer to interpreter]: Do you understand? He said that almost everybody in his house volunteered. So there are almost a hundred people but there were only 11 who were required to come. So how was it decided that those 11 would be the 11 to go?

**#63M: The order was for only 11 to go.**

Q: So the first 11 who said yes, those were the ones picked. So you were very eager to volunteer, yes?

01:16:00

**#63M: I was doing it for my country as I knew what the Communist Chinese were doing. I was enthused that I would do it for my country, whether it was to fight or whatever it was that I had to do.**

Q: I heard in some monasteries, they put different names in a bowl and picked the names out of the bowl. They didn't do that in your *khangtsen*?

**#63M: It did not happen. [We] volunteered.**

Q: But this was also volunteer. This was also a volunteer situation. It's just how they picked...because there were so many people who wanted to volunteer. Do you understand? So they had to put the names in a hat and then they pick them.

01:17:24

**#63M: Yes, it might have happened. That's possible but it did not happen with us. The volunteering began 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> and when the 11<sup>th</sup> was up, it stopped. If there were any volunteers after that, he could not [take part].**

Q: So you reached the Potala on the morning of the 9<sup>th</sup>. Were you in your monk's robes or were you in ordinary dress?

**#63M: [We] were in monks' robes.**

Q: You were still in your monk's dress?

01:18:06

**#63M: Yes.**

Q: Can you describe—you take your time, please—what happened when you reached the Potala in the morning of the 9<sup>th</sup>?

**#63M: We assembled in Lhasa on the 9<sup>th</sup>. Our *khangtsen* owned a house in Lhasa in which all the 11 men gathered at night. During the day, some had taken the route through the right and some through the left and everyone assembled there that night. On the morning of the 9<sup>th</sup> [10<sup>th</sup>?] we went together to the Potala. [We] thought we'd have to stay at the Potala and [we] needed something to eat and drink. So we carried *tsampa*, firewood and containers to prepare tea on our backs with the intent to stay at the Potala.**

**When we reached the Potala, we were told, "You must return immediately. You must return immediately to the monastery. [You] must go to guard your monastery." That was the order we received. So by *khangtsen* we were provided with guns from a hall by the government.**

Q: Where were [the guns] kept?

01:19:19

**#63M: In the Potala.**

Q: Which room in the Potala?

**#63M: In the Potala. You know the red Potala building. It was right next to that.**

Q: Right inside the palace building?

01:19:30

**#63M: It was in a corner.**

Q: Was it a big building?

**#63M: It was a big building.**

Q: How much of arms were there?

**#63M: We were not allowed inside the room. We were told, "You can sit there." There was a sort of a courtyard where we were kept back. There were 200 men.**

There were government soldiers and aristocrats who arrived and—you know we had big lamps in Tibet called *chaksho*—they lit such big lamps, opened the door and entered the armory. We were not let inside. They went in. Guns were packed in boxes of this length [gestures off camera]. Each box contained 10 short barrel English-made guns. The guns were attached with a knife [bayonet] each. There were 10 guns in each box. They brought them out, each box being carried by two soldiers. They brought them out and provided each *khangtsen* with guns equivalent to the number of men. [We] were given guns that way.

Q: You received the order on the 7<sup>th</sup> of March. Why did it take two days to reach the Potala?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: They were asked to reach in the morning, the Potala.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: They were told to meet ...

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Only in the morning.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: I see, on the 9<sup>th</sup>.

Q: You said that the guns were in boxes. Do you remember anything on the boxes? Can you describe what the boxes looked like? Were there any numbers or any words or anything?

01:23:19

**#63M: No, I did not see. The guns were covered in grease. Each man received a gun. [We] were all monks and there were some who had never touched a gun before. We had to wipe away the grease with our *zen* ‘shawl-like monk’s upper garment’ and *shanthap* ‘monk’s lower garment.’ Nobody knew how to pull the trigger or load bullets. There were a few of us like me who had seen the teacher’s gun under the bed back in the village. [I] used to handle the gun in the absence of my teacher, so I understood the working [of a gun].**

**The government soldiers demonstrated how to pull the trigger, load the bullets and aim the gun. The soldiers taught fleetingly to those that did not know. That was it once the guns were wiped clean. The order was given, “You have to go immediately to your monastery with your guns. You cannot stay at the Potala. Take the route at the back of the Potala and detour through Sera [Monastery] and Phenpo and return to Gaden [Monastery].”**

Q: You were ordered to go back?

**#63M: “Go back to guard your monastery.” That was the order given. Once again they said, “You cannot go together but in twos. The guns cannot be seen.” So we hid the guns beneath the *zen*. On the other side of the river of Lhasa, two or three years earlier the Chinese had set up canons in the ground to fire at the Potala, Norbulingka and likewise at the Drapchi Army Unit, Sera, Drepung and all. Canons were fixed underground. Pits were dug on the other side of the river and only this much [shows a length of one foot] of the tip of the canons could be seen. There was not one person to be seen as they [the Chinese] were in bunkers. In any event they could just fire the canons. So they said, “You should not be seen as the Chinese will fire.”**



Q: The canons belonged to the Chinese?

01:25:31

**#63M: Yes, they belonged to the Chinese. They had made all such preparations two years earlier. Where could [we] shoot? There were no targets. The government soldiers stood aiming their automatic guns from the windows of the Potala, but where could they shoot? Who can you shoot at when you cannot see any people? One cannot shoot.**

Q: Was it a bolt-loading gun—you put one bullet at a time?

**#63M: One [bullet] at a time. It was English-made short-barrel rifle and took only one bullet each. You move the *portho* [?] once and then reload. [Makes sign of pulling trigger and reloading.] Only one bullet at a time.**

Q: Were you...during the training, was there any time you discharged your weapon? Did you ever fire a bullet during the training? Was there any target practice?

01:27:46

**#63M: I knew a little [about guns] from before. [I] knew how to move the *portho* and such things. So when I saw the other guns, [I] could understand it. Some of the other [monks] did not know how to move the *portho* and did not know how to load the bullets. Whether one knew it or not, there was nothing to do but take [the guns].**

Q: Why did your teacher have a rifle?

**#63M: Long ago when the Siling battle was lost, [KMT soldiers] fled and were pursued by the Chinese. The Siling soldiers fled into our monastery. What my teacher did was to take away a [soldier's] gun and hide it beneath his bedding. He provided him with a monk's robe or a Tibetan dress and sent him away. The gun was left there. It was empty without a bullet and as a child I used to play with it when teacher was not there. So in that way, I had seen a gun.**

Q: So going back to this training, so you were taught how to...you cleaned your gun with your robes. No one was taught how to shoot the gun during the training?

01:30:21

**#63M: They instructed, "Load the gun like this; shoot like this by looking through the hole." It was a fleeting one, maybe an hour. It was some soldiers of the government [who gave the lessons].**

Q: What was the target that they...?

**#63M: Nothing was put up [as target]. A mark was made and if that was the enemy, "Look through the hole and pull the trigger. Load the bullet like this." That was the lesson and nothing beyond.**

Q: Nobody actually shot?

01:31:11

**#63M: No, no.**

Q: Okay. Then you were sent back to your monastery to guard the monastery and then what happened?

**#63M: Then we climbed down at the back of the Potala. We hung the guns over our necks and covered them with the *zen*. When we walked towards Sera [Monastery], two monks from Sera came on horseback. “You must not come to [our] monastery. If you do, the Chinese will fire at our monastery and destroy it. Please do not come to the monastery. Take the other route close to Sera [Monastery] and go.”**

Q: And then?

01:32:49

**#63M: And then we went through a valley near Sera and crossed a mountain pass. After crossing the mountain pass, [we] arrived in Phenpo.**

Q: Yes?

**#63M: We were in a place called Phenpo in Tibet.**

[Discontinuity in video]

**#63M: When we reached the top of the mountain pass, it was about 12 o'clock. By then Lhasa was targeted. [We] could hear the sound of canons. We heard canons being fired at the Norbulingka when we reached the top of the pass. There was a little snow atop the pass and then we went down. We did not know that Lhasa was lost at that time. We arrived in Phenpo where there was a monastery. All the monks gathered in the monastery. It was about 10 in the morning.**

Q: Where?

01:33:43

**#63M: In the place called Phenpo. We arrived at a monastery there. Everyone assembled there at around 4 in the morning. It was the morning of the 11<sup>th</sup>. Lhasa was shelled at around 12 in the night of the 10<sup>th</sup>. We were atop the pass and reached Phenpo the next day. From Phenpo we left for Gaden the same day. We did not have anything [to ride] and it was very far. Gaden was located in one direction and Phenpo on the other.**

**The Commander sent a message to the villagers to bring horses, but it was not easy to get 232 horses. About 80 horses were brought, but what could 232 people do with 80 horses? The Commander ordered, “Go into the village and each of you should bring a horse.” So we did and within an hour, each of us got a horse. In order to return the horses, we took along the owners of the horses, too. We rode the horses and left.**

Q: Were you able to get to Gaden?

**#63M: Yes.**

Q: Did you reach Gaden?

**#63M: Yes, we did.**

Q: Then what happened?

01:36:34

**#63M: In the evening when we reached Gaden...**

Q: What was the date?

**#63M: Is it not the 12<sup>th</sup>? Perhaps it was the 12<sup>th</sup>. We lost [Lhasa] on the 10<sup>th</sup> and were in Phenpo on the 11<sup>th</sup>.**

Q: Did you hear the news that Tibet was lost?

01:36:48

**#63M: On our way from Phenpo, we met a few dung-sellers on donkeys coming from Lhasa.**

Q: Dung?

**#63M: Dung which were used to make fire. They used to load the dung on donkeys. They were coming through the Phenpo Gola route while we were leaving Phenpo. On enquiry they told us, "Lhasa was shelled last night but the Tibetans are the winners." They said that but, of course, the Chinese won and [we] did not.**

Q: Did you hear that His Holiness the Dalai Lama had left?

01:37:25

**#63M: No, nobody heard that. Nobody heard that His Holiness had left.**

Q: When you reached Gaden on the 12<sup>th</sup>, did you hear that His Holiness had left?

**#63M: [We] had not heard that His Holiness had left. Then some [monks] who were able to escape from Norbulingka arrived at the monastery. They said, "[We] have lost and His Holiness has left." That was the first time we heard about it. [We] had not heard it earlier. Around late afternoon a few *tsedung* 'monk government officials' arrived on horseback. They'd escaped from Norbulingka and arrived at Gaden. Only then did the monastery officials accept [the news of defeat]. Earlier when anyone said that Lhasa was lost, they were caught and locked up saying, "How can [we] lose? [We have] not lost. It is a lie. You**

are lying.” They did not believe [the news] and [we] at Gaden did not know that Lhasa was defeated.

For those of us who owned guns, we were told that we would have to guard the monastery. The four sides of Gaden were divided among the various *khangtsen*. [We] dug bunkers to get ready to fight and waited. A little after noontime, the aristocrats arrived and only then did [the monastery officials] accept [the news of defeat].

Q: And then?

01:40:50

**#63M:** And then the monastery officials ordered the *khangtsen*, “Those of [your monks] who own guns must go to Lhoka.” The *Chushi Gangdrug* [Defend Tibet Volunteer Force] was based in Lhoka. “You must leave immediately to join the *Chushi Gangdrug*,” that was the order. We were in the hills then and our *khangtsen* called us back saying, “Those of you who have guns must leave immediately.” That was it. [We] were wearing robes and carrying guns; each gun having 230 bullets that were received from the Potala. So [we] carried the guns and except for the clothes we were wearing, we had nothing else like blankets. [I] carried a little *tsampa* and then left.

Q: Who gave this order?

**#63M:** The *lachi* ‘group of officials’ of Gaden.

Q: What was his name? Do you remember his name?

01:42:50

**#63M:** I cannot recall the name of the abbot. The Commander of the Jangtse Unit was called Phara Phathi. Do you know the man who was subjected to hot iron in Bhutan? Yes, he was the man. He belonged to Phara Khangtsen.

Q: That’s a very familiar name for some reason.

**#63M:** [Speaks before interpretation] He was our Commander.

Q: He is the head of the army?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Yeah.

Q: So he went with them to Lhoka?

**#63M:** He was with us.

Q: Did he join the *Chushi Gangdrug*?

01:43:49

**#63M:** When we left, we had no knowledge of where the *Chushi Gangdrug* was.

Q: So you could not join it?

**#63M: We did join it. We did reach there. I met the one called Amdo Jinpa Gyamtso at...Was it called Dolma Lhakhang or something in Tsethang? It was in Tsethang at Lhoka. I met Amdo Jinpa Gyamtso there. We were 11 men who were all from Amdo.**

**When we met the Amdo Commander, he said, “You must join the Amdo Division.” They stopped us saying, “You are Amdos. You must stay here with the other Amdos.” He did not let us proceed. The rest of the people fled away. The 11 of us joined the Amdo Division of *Chushi Gangdrug*, but [we] hardly found any time to stay. Just after an encounter, everybody fled because His Holiness the Dalai Lama had already left.**

Q: So each region [of Tibet] had their leaders [in the *Chushi Gangdrug*]?

01:46:06

**#63M: There were different groups.**

Q: The Amdos were separate and...

**#63M: Actually it was a force made up of soldiers belonging to all the three provinces. However, there were separate units and commanders. Amdo Jinpa Gyamtso was [commander] of the Amdo group. From the Kham group, it was Andrug Tashi. From the Tsang region, it was...What was his name?**

Q: Who was it from Kham?

**#63M: Gonpo Tashi.**

Q: I want to just back up a little bit and I know it's difficult, but try not to get too far ahead because I do have some questions, yeah? So the head of *lachi*...*lachi* is a...? What is *lachi*? I don't understand it.

[Interpreter to interviewer]: *Lachi* is...Three big monasteries, for example like Jangtse and Shartse [divisions of Gaden Monastery], [lachi] is the head.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: Oh, so means it's like a head.

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Head of two big monasteries.

Q: So the abbot of Gaden Jangtse, this fellow Phara Phathi, he described him as the head of the Gaden Jangtse army. Why did he describe him as the head of the Gaden Jangtse army? Did he go with the army?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: No, no, this was the head of [Gaden Jangtse] and he ordered [them] to join the *Chushi Gangdrug*.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: So he was not the head of the army?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Head of the...

[Interviewer to interpreter]: He was the head of Gaden Jangtse. He was the abbot.

[Interpreter to interviewer]: And he ordered to...

[Interviewer to interpreter]: He ordered everyone to join the army.

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Those who had rifles...

[Interviewer to interpreter]: That they should join the...

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Join the Chushi Gangdrug.

Q: Phara Phathi, where was he from? What region...?

01:47:54

**#63M: He was the commander of the Jangtse Unit.**

Q: No, no, no. What district was he from? Kham, Amdo, Utsang?

**#63M: He was Jangtse's...**

Q: Where did he come from?

**#63M: He was from Kham. [He] was a Khampa. He belonged to Jangtse.**

Q: Did he go to Lhoka with them?

01:48:32

**#63M: When we reached Lhoka, we did not know where the *Chushi Gangdrug* was. Some of [the men] were at Tsethang Gonpori while Andrug Gonpo Tashi and group were arriving somewhere through Kongpo from Chankiang. Most of the *Chushi Gangdrug* guerrillas were camped at Tsethang Gonpori. We reached the Dolma Lhakang [Temple of Goddess Tara] at Tsethang Gonpori at night fall and met Amdo Jinpa Gyamtso who said, "You should join us as you are Amdos." So we joined the Amdo Division.**

Q: [In Tibetan] You do not know if Phara Phathi went to Lhoka?

**#63M: [I] do not know.**

Q: So what happened at Lhoka? What happened?

01:50:34

**#63M:** So what we did was...Jinpa Gyamtso said, “Now we must...” There was a temple called Ponpo Lhakang in Lhoka, which was the first temple to be built in Tibet by King Nyatri Tsenpo. It was located on the top of a hill. That was where we met Jinpa Gyamtso and he said, “There’s no use if you leave from here. There’s nowhere to go. I have the word of His Holiness the Dalai Lama. If you can resist the Communist Chinese in this region, that will be a success. Once they push through from here, there’s no [hope]. We’re going to stay right here.” That was the order he gave.

There were almost a hundred men with horses. They were sent atop Tsethang Gonpori from the back of the hill. The horses were left in a village and the men climbed up the pass. They were guarding the place. We were almost a hundred foot soldiers, who did not have horses. There was this temple called Ponpo Lhakang which was located atop a hill. The foot soldiers were left there saying, “You should guard this place.” If the Chinese arrived—the route passed through Tsethang, Dolma Lhakang and here [Ponpo Lhakang]—and “There’s a chance if we can resist them here. If not everything is lost. I have the word of His Holiness.” We were not allowed to proceed, so we stayed there.

01:52:28

While [we] sat guarding the hill, Chinese airplanes arrived. It was a four-engine plane just like [we] have in India. The *Chushi Gangdrug* [men] were holding fort at Gonpori. *Chushi Gangdrug* soldiers were on top of the [hill] called Tsethang Gonpori. They possessed guns to destroy airplanes which they had set up on top of the hill. There was this hill called Tsethang Gonpori. Tsethang was a village located lower and the *Chushi Gangdrug* soldiers were holding fort atop the hill. Guns were set up to fire at planes and on the ground. The *Chushi Gangdrug* [men] had set up guns.

The Chinese airplane did not go to Gonpori because they knew that they would be shot at. It flew towards Tsethang Tandi, Dolma Sungjon and towards where we were and then they started to fire. The gun was an American gun that we [later] used in the [Indian] army. It was a type of gun that could hold 150 bullets, an automatic type. They started to shoot as the plane was flying. [I] had no knowledge where the bullets were flying. As the cartridge fell through the air, since it was empty [I] could hear the whirr sound and then the “thud” as it fell to the ground. There was fear in [me]. They dropped a bomb on Tandi. None of the people were harmed except a nun who was injured in the leg.

Q: How many planes?

01:56:57

**#63M:** There was one airplane.

Q: Were you still in robes at this time? Where you still wearing monk’s robes?

**#63M:** I was wearing a *chupa* ‘traditional coat’ at that time. I cannot remember, but I got a *chupa*.

Q: When did you get the *chupa*?

01:57:28

**#63M: I gave a *zen* and exchanged it for a *chupa* with a villager.**

Q: Did you participate in any kind of ceremony to return your vows before you went to join *Chushi Gangdrug*?

**#63M: No, [we] did not. [We] did not do anything special.**

Q: As a monk...

**#63M: One must give back the vows, but we did not get the time to give it back. There was no time at all, though in actuality one must do it.**

Q: I just want to ask, Jinpa Gyamtso who led the Amdowans, where was he from? I mean not region but like was he from Lhasa? I wasn't clear on who he was, Jinpa Gyamtso.

01:58:50

**#63M: He came from Amdo. He came from Amdo and lived in Lhasa. When the *Chushi Gangdrug* was formed in Lhasa by the three provinces, he was the Commander of the Amdo Division.**

Q: Were there many nuns who were part of *Chushi Gangdrug*? You mentioned a nun who was injured. Were there many nuns?

**#63M: [Speaks before interpretation is complete] She was not hit by a gun. It was a bomb. They [the Chinese] fired guns as well as dropped bombs from the plane. [They] dropped a bomb at a place called Tandi. They were shooting as they circled. Tandi was quite a large village and [they] dropped a bomb on it. When the bomb was dropped, except for a nun who was injured in the leg, no one else was harmed.**

**[I] did not know where they were shooting. When the empty case of the bullet dropped, it whirred in the air and it was scary. [I] do not know where the bullets fell.**

Q: Were there many women fighting in *Chushi Gangdrug*?

02:00:38

**#63M: There were none in particular. There might be wives whom some men might have brought along from their villages. I do not have much to say about it.**

Q: And then what happened?

**#63M: The airplane came and we waited there until evening. Towards evening around 3 o'clock, almost a hundred Tibetan government soldiers could be seen returning from Tandi and Tsethang.**

Q: From where were they returning?



02:01:43

**#63M: They were coming from Tsethang through Tandi Dolma Sungjon. They had been guarding various areas. They were all coming together to Lhoka. Now they were fleeing.**

Q: [They] were fleeing?

**#63M: Yes, [they] were fleeing. The Chinese could not be overcome. Amdo Jinpa Gyamtso was staying in a village near Ponpo Lhakang. He was there in the village along with two soldiers who blew the bugle. We were on the hill and the horsemen were on the top of the [other] hill.**

When the government soldiers arrived, their leader and he [Amdo Jinpa Gyamtso] had a discussion, "There is nothing to do but leave. The Chinese have arrived in Tsethang." The other soldiers of *Chushi Gangdrug* were everywhere, on both sides of the river. Dust hung thick in the air and those who owned horses were racing away. The foot soldiers were [also] fleeing. Everyone was running away; running away towards India.

"What is the use of a few of us standing guard here?" said the government army leader. He and Amdo Jinpa Gyamtso had a discussion, "Let's go now" but Amdo Jinpa Gyamtso said, "I am not going. I have the word of His Holiness the Dalai Lama. I will resist the Communist Chinese in this very region and will not go anywhere." He was insistent. The government soldier said, "Do not do that because there is nothing but defeat. Let's go now." So the bugle was sounded.

Q: By whom?

02:03:22

**#63M: By the soldier who was with Jinpa Gyamtso. The bugle was sounded because all the soldiers were atop the hill. When the bugle was sounded, all the horsemen and the foot soldiers came down. And then we had to flee. There was nothing to look back for.**

Q: So Amdo Jinpa Gyamtso said that he received instructions directly from His Holiness the Dalai Lama?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Yeah, he said that. He said earlier that when they reached that Ponpo Lhakang, he said that he was given instruction by the Dalai Lama and if we stop the Chinese from here, then we can stop [them] otherwise [once] they cross this, then we cannot fight or we cannot control the Chinese coming against us.

Q: When Amdo Jinpa Gyamtso blew his conch and gathered the meeting, do you remember what he said? Do you remember his words?

**#62M: What is left to say? He said, "Now [we] have to go." We proceeded and reached Yadho Dakla, a mountain pass. There was a monastery, the name of which I have forgotten. [He] stopped us at the monastery. Everybody else was gone. Jinpa Gyamtso**

would not let us go and dispatched a soldier each to the mountain's sides with guns and said, "Do not let anyone go. Everybody stay here for the night."

Q: Where?

02:07:05

**#63M: At Yadho Dakla. There was a monastery at Yadho Dakla, but I do not know the name. [We] were stopped and spent a night there. We the 11 monks stayed in a hut where hay for the animals was stored. We received some food for the night from the monastery. We were quite a number of people there.**

Q: Yes?

**#63M: There were many people who were fleeing and everyone was stopped there.**

Q: By Amdo Jinpa Gyamtso?

02:07:41

**#63M: Yes. [He] would not let us go and there was nowhere to run away. [He] said we'd have to confront the Chinese when they arrived. When day broke there was no one. Even Jinpa Gyamtso was not to be seen. When the monks woke up, not a soul was to be seen. Everybody had escaped in the night. There were a few old monks with us who were escaping and whom we'd met up at Lhoka. When we looked, everybody was gone.**

**Then we hurriedly came away. We crossed the pass but the old monks could not walk. What could we do? There were some nomads on another hill. We went there and drove some yaks. [We] loaded our things on them and took along a man to take back the yaks. We loaded the things on the yaks and fled.**

Q: *Pa-la*, can I ask you...The decision to leave and to go to exile that must have been quite a big decision to make, you know. Should we stay and fight? Should we go? So was there some discussion that you had amongst you and your friends about what to do?

**#63M: [We] did not get time to make [any discussions]. When one person fled, the next followed him and so on. There was no one to talk to and no one who gave orders.**

Q: Did you ever fire your rifle?

02:11:31

**#63M: [I] did not get the chance to fire the rifle. No, I did not get the chance to fire the rifle.**

Q: What about your friends from your *khangtsen*?

**#63M: Nobody got the chance.**

Q: Was there ever any conflict in your mind being a Buddhist, being a monk and joining a resistance force where you were expected to use your gun?

02:12:15

**#63M: I felt that I must do something for my country and my people. There was bitterness in my heart for the murders committed by the Chinese in my country earlier. I felt that I must confront them.**

Q: This guy Amdo Jinpa Gyamtso, how would you describe him? Was he a good leader, do you think?

**#63M: He was a good man. I had not spent time talking to him. As the Commander of the Amdo Division, he gave instructions at Tsethang for about an hour telling us to stay back during the escape journey. Besides that, I have not spoken to him nor did I know him. Long ago His Holiness the Dalai Lama gave a Kalachakra in Norbulingka. At that time...**

Q: When was the Kalachakra?

02:13:41

**#63M: I do not know. A Kalachakra was given at Norbulingka by His Holiness. I do not know the time. A golden throne was offered to His Holiness then and it was said that Amdo Jinpa Gyamtso was the donor of the golden throne, which was why he became renowned.**

Q: Because he actually made the offering of the golden throne. Did you receive any extra training at Lhoka?

**#63M: We did not get any training. However, the *Chushi Gangdrug* Force was based there in Lhoka and they had their own men. We fled when Tibet was defeated and joined them en route upon being ordered to do so. We were not actually *Chushi Gangdrug* [men]. *Chushi Gangdrug* was a separate entity established a year or two earlier at Diguthang with their respective commanders and people from the three provinces.**

Q: The feeling amongst you and your friends from Gaden Jangtse, was there a feeling that you had a chance, that it was possible to win this? Did you feel that it was possible to win this battle?

02:16:40

**#63M: We thought we would win and never ever thought that we'd lose at that time. I thought we would win. Had one known that such a situation as this one would come about, we would have different thoughts while leaving the monastery, as each of us had some belongings of our own, whether it was money or something else. There was not any thought except to go to Lhoka [to fight] and then return to the monastery. I never ever thought that we would go to a foreign country like this.**

Q: Is there anything that you... Looking back now with hindsight—do you know the word hindsight, where you have this experience and now you can look back... Is there anything you would have done differently?

**#63M: I do think like that but now it's too late and useless.**

Q: What do you think [you could have done differently]?

02:18:14

**#63M: That I had not done right when I was young. If one had some education, it is so helpful now. Lacking that, [I] have not been able to do anything for my country nor do I have anything personally. I feel in my heart that this life has been sort of wasted.**

Q: You never killed anybody, so you never broke a root vow. You could have continued being a monk. Why did you choose not to continue to be a monk?

**#63M: Once our country was lost and [I] reached India, I joined the [Indian] army with an aim to serve my country. I was 14 years in the army. [I] received trainings to kill people, drank alcohol, smoked cigarettes—did things that were against monkhood. Apart from women, [I had] done everything else. So it crossed my mind that this was not the right thing for a monk to do. I decided to leave monkhood and thought that if I had a child or two, they might be of help to the country in the future. Then I left monkhood.**

Q: When you joined the Indian army, did you join with an expectation that you would possibly be able to see action back in Tibet?

02:21:35

**#63M: Yes, I did. When [I] joined the army we were told, “You have to train for six months. After the 6-month training period, you will have to go back to Tibet.” [I] was so happy that [I] left the industry in Dalhousie and joined the army. They paid us a salary every month in the army but we said, “We do not need money. We need training to fire guns and to fire artilleries so that we can go back to our country.”**

Q: What kind of action did you see in the Indo-Sino war?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Sino?

[Interviewer to interpreter]: Oh, Indian-Chinese war. It's called the Indo-Sino war of 1962.

Q: What kind of action did you see?

**#63M: No, no [I did not take part]. I was in the army at that time, but we did not have to take part. Our unit began in '62 in the [India] army.**

Q: Some Tibetans have taken part, isn't it?

02:23:26

**#63M: In '62?**

Q: Yes.

**#63M: Against the Chinese?**

Q: Yes.

02:23:28

**#63M: [I] wonder where it took place. That was so long ago. Yes, it took place in Gangtok [Sikkim]. It happened long ago in Bomdila.**

Q: I was curious, you know you said that your big regret is that you didn't receive a good enough education, but you received the classic education of a monk and you went to one of the three most important monasteries in the whole of Tibet. So you received a very, very good monk's education. What more education are you talking about?

**#63M: Well, for one I was young at that time. I was a child and young children cannot think on broad terms. I was 11 or 12 when I lived with my parents and did not know much about the dharma. It was only what the teacher taught and nothing further than that. Once I reached Lhasa, I was there for a few years and studied a bit during that period, but did not take much interest. I was young at that time.**

Q: When you came into exile, what border did you cross? Did you come through the Indian border?

02:25:39

**#63M: We fled from Gaden Monastery.**

[Question is repeated.]

**#63M: It was at Mangola.**

Q: Where is Mangola?

02:25:50

**#63M: It is in the direction of Assam. We fled to Lhoka from Lhasa. And from Lhoka, one reached Tsona. [We] reached Mon Tawang [Arunachal Pradesh, India] from Tsona.**

Q: First you left Gaden...

**#63M: Gaden to Tsethang in Lhoka, from Lhoka to Mon Tawang, Mon Tawang to Bomdila [Arunachal Pradesh] and Bomdila to Assam. Then we were in India.**

Q: You want to tell us anything about that journey?

02:27:02

**#63M: I did not face many problems [during the journey]. Thanks to the grace of His Holiness. Of course, there were some difficulties during the journey like not finding water or food at times, but you cannot consider these as problems.**

Q: Okay, I have one more question and you [videographer] have a couple of questions. You said that you thought it was better to stop becoming a monk, so you could have a family and have kids who can carry on the fight for the Tibetan people. So your children, are they active in the Tibetan cause?

**#63M: I have three children, but none of my children are as yet working for the [Tibetan] government.**

Q: Are they boys...

02:28:16

**#63M: Two daughters and a son.**

Q: What does your son do?

**#63M: He is in Sivsi [?].**

Q: Yes? In Sivsi?

**#63M: In Belgium. He's abroad. He has gone abroad.**

Q: Daughters?

02:28:36

**#63M: [My] older daughter lives here and is married. She has three children.**

Q: One of your daughters lives in Canada?

**#63M: Yes, one daughter is in Canada. One lives here.**

Q: How many grandchildren do you have?

02:29:35

**#63M: Three [grand] children. My older daughter has three children.**

Q: And others?

**#63M: The younger daughter has one child.**

Q: That's four, and the son?

**#63M: The son is married but he does not have children yet.**

Q: Okay, thank you. Ronny [videographer], what is your question?

[Discontinuity in video]

Q: So when you escaped and you crossed the Indian border into Assam, what point of your journey did you have to surrender your guns?

02:30:22

**#63M: [I] felt sad when I had to surrender the gun because I did not get to use it.**

Q: How did they take it?

**#63M: When we'd crossed the Mangola pass, there were Indian sentries posted there who collected the guns. They removed the *portho* and kept it with them. They wrote down the number and kept the *portho* with them. The frame was nothing but a piece of wood, which they gave back to us. We gave up the empty wooden frame of the gun at Mon Tawang. The main [part of a gun], the *portho* and the bullets were collected by the Indian sentries at the border.**

Q: Was that difficult then to give up your guns?

02:32:13

**#63M: Yes, it was. [I] felt, "I have not been able to use this."**

Q: Do you have anything that you still own that you brought out of Tibet, even if it's a small, small thing, a piece of clothing or anything?

**#63M: No, [I] have nothing. Even when I left my village, I did not bring a needle and thread from my home. As I told you earlier, except [for goods like] mirrors and needles, which I managed to buy myself, I did not bring even a needle and thread from my home. While in Tibet [Lhasa] after working hard for a few years, one would have some belongings, but I did not get to bring even a needle and thread. I had on my monk's robes, the gun and bullets and nothing else. When I reached India, I was practically a beggar.**

**When I arrived in Missamari [Assam], it was very hot and [I] did not have shoes on my feet. The clothes, having been made in Tibet were of woolen material, which had to be thrown away. I had practically nothing. Missamari was hot and I wore a pair of shorts and a vest; that was it. [I] had brought nothing.**

Q: Do you have anything to say to the...Any advice you want to give to the younger generation of Tibetans who are coming up now?

02:34:37

**#63M: [I] do not have any education to give advice. Soon after I left the army and came [to Mundgod], in those days the school children used to have a parade on the birthday of the Great Mother [mother of His Holiness the Dalai Lama] and I helped train the youngsters for a period of one year. Other than that, [I] do not have any advice to give.**

Q: Do you have any special advice now?

**#63M: No, what [advice] can I give? They will not listen to the old people. The youngsters will...**

Q: As an elder, it is your responsibility. Do you wish the youngsters would do this or notice something that they are doing wrong?

02:35:24

**#63M: I do feel so in my heart, but just thinking about it is not enough. There must be somebody to listen.**

Q: Even if they don't listen, it is your duty to give advice.

**#63M: [Laughs] If there is no one to listen, it is useless to feel in my heart.**

Q: Well, I will listen.

02:35:36

**#63M: If there is someone who will listen, I do feel like giving advice, "You should not do like this. Earlier in Tibet..."**

Q: *Pa-la*, give some advice.

**#63M: "One must not forget one's country, religion and culture. Due to the grace of His Holiness the Dalai Lama, we do not have any problems. However, one should never ever forget one's country. Please do not forget. One must not forget one's religion and culture." I wish to give such an advice. An old [man] cannot think anything else.**

Q: Thank you. I need to ask you one more time because you have just told us so much. If this interview was shown in Tibet or China, would this make a problem for you?

02:37:12

**#63M: No, there will be no [problem]. I have not told lies or any such thing. It is what I have witnessed myself. It is the very truth and there are no lies in it.**

Q: Can we use your real name?

**#63M: Yes, you can. I think its okay, but there is a slight difference in the name.**

Q: That is okay.

**#63M: Okay.**

Q: Thank you so much and I just want to say you don't sound uneducated to me at all.

02:38:10

**#63M: Once one does not have an education, enthusiasm is worthless. If one cannot use his fingers [to write] and does not have an education, even if one speaks from the heart, the**



**other person will not believe in you. So enthusiasm is worthless. When one does not have this, there's nothing to do.**

Q: Have you told your story to your kids?

**#63M: Yes, I do. I tell them all the time.**

Q: Yes, it's important to tell them.

02:38:56

**#63M: [I] tell them. At times they listen and at times they do not. I do tell them all the time. I tell the little ones, too.**

Q: Okay, that's good. I think that's very important.

[Interpreter requests interviewee to relate his story even if the children do not listen all the time.]

**#63M: Okay.**

END OF INTERVIEW