

# **Tibet Oral History Project**

**Interview #68M – Lobsang Tenpa (alias)  
April 5, 2010**

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# TIBET ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

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## INTERVIEW SUMMARY SHEET

1. Interview Number: #68M
2. Interviewee: Lobsang Tenpa (alias)
3. Age: 71
4. Date of Birth: 1939
5. Sex: Male
6. Birthplace:
7. Province: Utsang
8. Year of leaving Tibet: 1959
9. Date of Interview: April 5, 2010
10. Place of Interview: Kalachakra Hall, Camp No. 3, Doeguling Settlement, Mundgod, Karwar District, Karnataka, India
11. Length of Interview: 1 hr 39 min
12. Interviewer: Rebecca Novick
13. Interpreter: Namgyal Tsering
14. Videographer: Ronny Novick
15. Translator: Tenzin Yangchen

### **Biographical Information:**

Lobsang Tenpa is from a village very close to Lhasa. His parents admitted him as a monk in Gaden Monastery at the age of 13 to prevent him from being sent to school in China. Earlier to that he passed his time grazing goats and sheep. Lobsang Tenpa was very happy to become a monk and stayed at the monastery until age 20.

Lobsang Tenpa shares how his life at the monastery came to an abrupt end in 1959 due to the unrest in Lhasa. He describes in detail how the monks from the three great monasteries of Sera, Drepung and Gaden were given weapons by the Tibetan Government to protect their monasteries from Chinese attack. Lobsang Tenpa recounts the difficulties they faced while going to the Potala Palace to get the guns and the very tense situation in Lhasa on March 10, 1959.

After a brief training on how to use the guns, Lobsang Tenpa and his fellow monks were delayed in returning to Gaden Monastery and could not do anything to protect it because the Chinese had overtaken Lhasa by then. They fled to join the resistant group, *Chushi Gangdrug* [Defend Tibet Volunteer Force], and Lobsang Tenpa describes his experiences with the *Chushi Gangdrug* guerrillas and an encounter with Chinese troops. The might of the Chinese army forced them to flee to India arriving in Mon Tawang, where they had to beg for food.

### **Topics Discussed:**

Monastic life, invasion by Chinese army, resistance fighters, March 10<sup>th</sup> Uprising, Chushi Gangdrug guerrillas, escape experiences.

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## Interview #68M

**Interviewee: Lobsang Tenpa [alias]**

**Age: 71, Sex: Male**

**Interviewer: Rebecca Novick**

**Interview Date: April 5, 2010**

Question: Please tell us your name.

00:00:15

**Interviewee #68M: Lobsang Tenpa.**

Q: His Holiness the Dalai Lama asked us to record the experience of older Tibetan men and women so that we can share this with younger generations of Tibetan and also with Chinese to show the true story of what happened in Tibet and what life was like in Tibet.

**#68M: Okay.**

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

00:01:09

**#68M: Yes.**

Q: If you want to take a break at anytime, just let us know, yeah?

**#68M: Okay.**

Q: If there's a question that you'd rather not answer, just don't feel any pressure to answer. Just say "I'd rather not answer that."

00:01:40

**#68M: Okay.**

Q: I have to ask this question. If this interview was shown in Tibet or China, would this be a problem for you?

**#68M: Since it is about their [the Chinese] doings, if our names are shown the relatives might face problems. They [the Chinese] are not stable. They might say, "Your relative has done like this" and there might be the danger of the relatives being charged.**

Q: Do you have relatives in Tibet? Who are there?

00:02:15

**#68M: I have my older brother and youngest sister.**

Q: Can you just tell us about your early life in Tibet, your childhood?

**#68M: The recollections [I] have are when I was around aged 6 or 7. At that age, I used to graze animals. My family was farmers and I have grazed goats and sheep as well as cows.**

[Interpreter to interviewee]: Please look at me when you talk.

**#68M: Okay.**

Q: How old were you when you were sent to join the monastery?

00:03:38

**#68M: I went to the monastery at the age of 13.**

Q: How did this happen? Whose decision was it?

**#68M: My going to the monastery happened like this: It was 3-4 years after when the Chinese had arrived. They said that the young children must go to school in China. When it was said that [I] must go to school, since we were the tenants of Jangtse Datsang [one of the divisions of Gaden Monastery]—unless one received the *choedoe* [?], one could not become a monk at Jangtse Datsang—so my parents went to the monastery; Gaden Monastery was close to my house and [they requested of the officials, “This child is being asked to be sent to school but we have no such wish. Please perform the *choedoe*.” Then the *choedoe* was performed and [I] became a monk.**

Q: Who was trying to recruit you to go to school in China?

00:05:06

**#68M: The district [authority] sent a notice to the estate [holder] who informed the family that children of my age—there were two or three of them—were to go to school, sent to school. The Chinese gave the orders to the district [authority] and [he] sent the message to the estate [holder], who is like the leaders we have here in the camps. He collected the parents and said that they must send their children to school.**

Q: So it was at the advice of the monastery that he joined the monastery?

**#68M: No, no. The Chinese said that [I] must go to school and the parents did not wish to send me. So that was why a *choedoe* was requested and [I] became a monk.**

Q: So it was your decision?

00:06:28

**#68M: It was not my wish; it was my parents' wish.**

Q: Did any of your brothers and sisters end up going to school in China?

**#68M: Nobody went.**

Q: Did you ever meet anybody who went to school in China and came back?

00:06:59

**#68M: I went to Tibet in the year '93 to meet relatives. I met two from my village who were sent to school in China, but returned just two or three months later for some reason and were working as farmers.**

Q: Because we hear that many Tibetan children were sent to China for this education, but we meet very, very few of these people in exile. So perhaps you know, did most of these people then choose to stay in Tibet and if they did choose to stay in Tibet, why did they choose that?

**#68M: I did not meet such people. Two children [from our village] had gone and they'd returned after two or three years. They were living in our village and working as farmers. [They] did not fulfill the objective.**

Q: Do you know if there are such people who studied [in China now living] in India?

00:08:34

**#68M: [I] did not see any.**

Q: My question was actually why did these people not come out from Tibet? Why does he [you] think they stayed in Tibet? The children who were educated in China; why did he think they stayed in Tibet?

**#68M: Passes were not easily issued to people from my village to visit [India]. The farmers do not have much income to be able to escape. Money was very scarce. There were none from my village who were able to come to India.**

Q: So it was the poorer kids who went to...

00:10:05

**#68M: The village was close to Lhasa. One only depended on the fields for livelihood and everyone owned enough stock of grains to last 2-3 years. Though one owned grains, purchase and sale was banned. If there were problems in certain areas due to drought, they requested to sell grains. When I went there in '93, there was drought in Tsang region and the crops dried up in the fields. At that time the cost of grain was 14 *yuan*. They asked to sell grains for 14 *yuan*. Otherwise one was not allowed to deal in grains.**

[Interpreter translates "14 *yuan*" [Chinese currency] as a kilogram]

**#68M: That was not a kilogram. The measurement in Tibet was *bo*. They accounted 20 kilograms as one or two *khel* [a measurement]. [Grain] was not weighed in a scale. *Bo* was**

**a square measurement tool made of wood and it corresponds to about 20 kilograms. One paid a price of 14 *yuan* for that.**

Q: How far was the monastery from your house?

00:12:10

**#68M: It took about two and half hours between the monastery and our [village] as one must cross a mountain pass.**

Q: Do you remember your first day at the monastery?

**#68M: I did not have many feelings then. [I] was taken to the monastery early in the morning before dawn. Father accompanied [me] and we met the officials who were to give us a receipt for the *choedoe*. After receiving the receipt, one could not just join any *khangtsen* [a smaller community within a monastery in which monks of one geographical area live] as one wished. Those [people] that belonged to the estates close to the monastery were assigned to a newly formed *khangtsen* in Gaden [Monastery] called Dangnyen Khangtsen. [I] could join this and none else.**

Q: Can you describe though from a child's point of view, you as a 13-year old boy what it was like to join the monastery? The first time, the first day, what did you see? What happened? How did they keep you? Describe as much as you can what it was like?

00:14:06

**#68M: On the first day that I joined the *khangtsen*, there was an Amdo Lama—our *khangtsen* was assigned to the people of Amdo too—an Amdo Lama called Shapdungsang had arrived. That day this Lama was bestowing religious instructions to the *khangtsen* [monks]. [I] was taken to the quarters and my head shaved. [My] monk's robes were not ready, so I was dressed in borrowed robes and taken to the prayer assembly. I felt that it was a good omen that the lama had arrived on the day I joined the monastery.**

Q: What did you think about becoming a monk? What was your feeling about becoming a monk?

**#68M: I felt that it was a good omen that day and hoped that I would be able to continue to be a good monk. When I lived at home I could only graze the goats and sheep and work in the fields. So I felt happy that I could become a monk.**

Q: How long did you stay at this *gonpa* 'monastery'?

00:15:49

**#68M: I lived in the monastery from the age of 13 to 20. And then [I] escaped in the year '59. [I] could not remain there.**

Q: Let's go back to the beginning, yeah? So at the monastery, what was your interaction with the Chinese who were in the area? What was the relationship between the monks and the Chinese army?

**#68M:** [I] did not have any close friendship as we lived in the monastery. There was no reason for the Chinese to come to the monastery and form any contact. Let alone that, even to this day the villagers do not have much contact with the Chinese. They were solely engaged in earning a livelihood from farming. There was no contact.

Q: Can you describe how this changed?

00:17:23

**#68M:** Yes, they [the Chinese] brought about change in the Tibetan Government. His Holiness the Dalai Lama was invited to a party at the Chinese camp called Silingpur. Some noblemen of the Tibetan government discussed that if His Holiness was invited to the party, he would be captured. They understood that and so he was escorted out of Norbulingka all of a sudden. Before the invitation, [I] think it was the 9<sup>th</sup> day of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Tibetan lunar month that...

Q: 5<sup>th</sup> Tibetan Lunar month?

**#68M:** It was on the 9<sup>th</sup> day of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Tibetan lunar month of 1959 that the order came from the Tibetan Government that weapons would be provided to guard Gaden [Monastery]. Therefore, monks were asked to come to collect weapons. That very night 300 monks—150 monks from Shartse [Division of Gaden] and 150 from Jangtse [Division]—went to Lhasa to collect weapons. The main reason [for the distribution of weapons] was not to fight, but to protect Gaden [Monastery] in case of an attack. So that's how we went to Lhasa.

Q: Who came to the monastery and gave weapons to the monks? Other monks came?

00:19:57

**#68M:** The Tibetan Government [provided the weapons] to protect Gaden [Monastery].

Q: How was this described? Were the monks asked to volunteer or were the monks, all of them asked to take weapons and take up arms against the Chinese? Or were they asked to volunteer? Or was it an order?

**#68M:** The government said, “Send [monks] to receive weapons for the protection of Gaden [Monastery].” The order came to Gaden Lachi ‘Main Office.’ It passed to the *datsang* ‘division of monastery’ and then to the *khangtsen*, which was to send a certain number of monks depending upon the strength of the *khangtsen*. The bigger *khangtsen* would send 12 [monks] and the smaller ones six [monks]. This was done through volunteer.

If there were not enough volunteers, [monks] were selected after *sanril* [means of divination in which names are written and enclosed in a ball of dough which are then rotated in an urn in front of a Buddhist image and the name which falls out of the urn is selected] before the protective deity. My case pertained to *sanril* before the protective deity. The other five volunteered.

Q: You volunteered?



[Interpreter to interviewer]: Yeah, he volunteered.

Q: Why did you volunteer?

00:21:46

**#68M: I did not volunteer. Our *khangtsen* was one of the smaller ones and six men were required to go. There was one person short as six were needed. In the [*khangtsen*] were 26 [monks] who were neither old nor small. Our names were written down and *sanril* was offered to the protective deity. My name was chosen through the *sanril*.**

Q: How many monks from Gaden Jangtse?

**#68M: There were 150 from Jangtse [*Datsang*] and 150 from Shartse [*Datsang*]. A total of 300 went to receive weapons.**

Q: They did not bring weapons to the monastery. They asked you to go and get weapons from somewhere?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Yes?

Q: You were told to go and get weapons from somewhere else or the weapons were brought to you?

00:23:06

**#68M: [We] went to fetch [the weapons].**

Q: Can you describe what was going on in Lhasa during this time?

**#68M: There was so much unrest in Lhasa that we could hardly go there. We left in the night to fetch the weapons. After we crossed over the Gaden pass and reached Bakashoe on the Lhasa side, the [monks] from the other *khangtsen* had already left. We were among the last ones, the six of us.**

**We saw a cart pulled by two mules and carrying wood. We requested him [the cart man] to unload the wood at Bakashoe and take us to Lhasa as we needed to reach there before daybreak. He refused to unload the wood. Then we drank some tea by waking up a family in the night. We drank tea and ate *pa* ‘dough made from *tsampa* and tea.’ Then we carried our stuff which was mainly *tsampa* ‘flour made from roasted barley.’ Day broke when we reached Nambay near Dechen. Once it became daylight, one could not pass over the Kuru Bridge. People were not allowed to move up and down.**

00:24:17

**It would be difficult [for us to cross the bridge]. There was a pock-marked monk called Barza of Samlo Khangtsen of Gaden [Monastery] who used to blow the conch. He hailed from Nambay. The elders knew that his home was located there. We went to his home and requested that a cart be sent for the six men to pass over the Kuru Bridge. It was quite a**

distance; a cart would have to travel over two hours. He [the family member of Barza] agreed and loaded [the cart] with hay and hid us in it. We hid in the straw and passed over the Kuru Bridge where there were many Chinese guards but we were not stopped. [The cart] was allowed to pass as it was laden with hay. That's how we managed to go [to the Potala].

Q: What was the feeling amongst you and your fellow monks that you were going to go and fight and take up weapons? What was the feeling? What was the discussion?

**#68M:** [I] was not scared at that time as [I] was just 20 years old. We never wore laymen's clothes except robes in the monastery. As soon as I was chosen through the *sanril*, while I went to visit various holy places, I sent someone home with the request, "Please send my layman's clothes. I have to go for such and such a thing."

Father came along with the man at around dusk. Father said, "If you do not wish to go, I will seek a substitute. I will pay and hire someone." I said, "I sought the advice of the *geshe* 'monk with degree in Buddhist philosophy' and high lamas and they have advised me, "Today when the opportunity has come, you must go. Later although an opportunity might arise, but it will be difficult to get guns so you must go this time." "Since I have received such advice, I wish to go," I told my parents. I told them that I wished to go.

Q: Had you ever used a gun before?

00:29:44

**#68M:** No, [I] had not. I did not know how to use it. It was a 303 [rifle]. [We] were given a gun and 200 bullets each. It was on the morning of the 11<sup>th</sup> day.

We reached Lhasa on the 10<sup>th</sup>. At around 3:30 in the evening we went around the Bakor 'Central Square' but all the shops were closed. [People] had dug wells inside [their yard] as no one could go out to fetch water. Government soldiers went around putting up posters urging the Tibetans to resist and not be misled by them [the Chinese]. The soldiers went to the top and showed their guns. A little after they'd left after putting up the posters, the Chinese arrived and removed the posters and put up posters describing the Chinese' implementation of liberation. It was chaotic. The situation was on the verge of a battle on the 10<sup>th</sup>. We arrived in Lhasa on the 10<sup>th</sup> day of the 2<sup>nd</sup> month of '59.

Q: The 150 monks from Jangtse, of them had many of them used guns before?

**#68M:** There were some who had, but most of them had never handled [guns].

Q: Were most of the monks then in ordinary dress?

00:32:37

**#68M:** Everyone was in ordinary clothes. None wore the monks' robes.

Q: When you changed your dress from the monk's robes, was there a ceremony that you took part in? Did you give back your vows?

**#68M: There was no [ceremony] when you changed your dress. Normally when we went home, we used to take off our monk's robes and wear layman's clothes. When we reached the monastery, we put away the layman's clothes and wore the monk's robes. [I] did not particularly feel anything.**

Q: My question wasn't really about the dress, but did you give back your vows against killings since you were going to get weapons to fight?

00:34:13

**#68M: I was young in age at that time and initially I did not know how to use a gun. On the morning of the 11<sup>th</sup> we went to the Potala, to the Tse Shokang—the one who did the distribution [of weapons] was Gyakpon Kedam-*la* who worked later for the Home Department [in Dharamsala, India] and passed away—it was Gyakpon Kedam-*la* who brought out the guns and distributed them.**

Q: So the person in-charge, the monk in-charge, so there was like a senior monk who was in-charge of the whole group?

**#68M: He [Gyakpon Kedam-*la*] was the Commander-in-Chief of the Tibetan Government army.**

Q: So he was not from the monastery?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Not from the monastery. He guided everything to the monks.

[Interviewer to interviewer]: He was not a monk?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: He was not a monk.

Q: Was he a monk?

00:36:14

**#68M: No, no, no. He was someone with a rank in the Tibetan Government army.**

Q: What was his name?

**#68M: Kedam-*la*. Gyakpon Kedam-*la*. He expired in Dharamsala.**

Q: Kedam-*la*, was he in-charge of all the monks who fought from all the different monasteries, from Sera and Drepung as well as Gaden?

00:36:53

**#68M: No, no, no. Gyakpon Kedam-*la* was the one from the Tibetan Government who opened the lock [of the armory] and taught us to use and clean the guns. Besides a leader each from Shartse and Jangtse [divisions of Gaden Monastery], there was no Tibetan government soldier [that led us].**

Q: Can you describe what happened when you got to the place? Where were the weapons, for example?

**#68M: The weapons were stored at the Potala Palace. It was in the lower part of the Potala Palace, in one of the lower floors.**

Q: It was stored underground, underneath the Potala. How did you access this place?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: How did...?

Q: How could you get inside? Was there a door? You said underground, I don't understand.

[[Interpreter to interviewer]: There's a room ...

[Interviewer to interviewer]: There's a room under the ground?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Room under the ground, so from that they...

[Interviewer to interviewer]: Like a basement?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Basement, yeah.

[Interviewer to interviewer]: Basement at the Potala. I see.]

Q: How many weapons were there?

00:38:42

**#68M: The 300 men were provided with 300 guns along with 200 bullets and a *serto* [?] each. The guns were packed in the boxes just as they had been received from England. There were packs of five guns and five *serto* each. Then the metal supports were removed and the wooden boxes pried open. We were then given the guns. The barrel and every part [of the guns] were covered in a butter-like thing called grease. Water was boiled in a huge cauldron in the ground of the Potala, but there was nothing to be added to the water. We rinsed [the guns] in the hot water and washed the grease away.**

**After they were cleaned, we were each given a drier which in Tibet was made of tails tied together and dried the barrels. We were taught how to clean, how to load five bullets and how to close the lock and to pull the trigger when faced with an enemy. Gyakpon Kedam-*la* taught us that.**

Q: Do you remember any of the names of the guns?

**#68M: [They] were called 303. Bullets had to be loaded one at a time. [They] did not work automatically.**

Q: Was it a short or long one?

**#68M: They were long, about this long [gestures off camera].**

Q: Can you describe the kind of training that you received?

00:41:24

**#68M: First [we] were made to clean the grease with hot water. After cleaning, in order to dry them, there was a metal wire attached to a thread. When the wire was pushed through the barrel, it emerged at the other end. At the end of the thread was attached a tail. When the tail was pulled [through the barrel], it removed dirt or water from it. That was how one must dry [a gun]. After the drying, it was inspected and we were given five bullets each and taught how to load the bullets. Each man was given 200 bullets. A gun could hold only five bullets at a time; five bullets at a time.**

Q: And what kind of actual training—using the gun did you have? What kind of target practice?

**#68M: We were taught only fleetingly that this was the way to load the bullets and to shoot. Everyone collected for about half an hour once [the guns] were cleaned and Gyakpon [Kedam-la] took up a gun and demonstrated, “This is how it is done and this is the way to load the bullets. In case you do not have to shoot, if you close this metal piece the bullets cannot fire.” That was the training as it was a sudden thing. From the 300 men, perhaps 25-30 might have seen and fired a gun. Those coming from the eastern regions had used them. Those of us from Utsang had never handled guns.**

Q: You were never actually taught how to shoot?

00:44:01

**#68M: [I] was never given any special lessons.**

Q: Where did this training take place? Did this training take place underneath the Potala? Where were you?

**#68M: That was in the Potala Palace.**

Q: Where in the Potala?

00:44:30

**#68M: In the lower part.**

Q: Approximately, I know it is difficult, approximately how many guns did you see in that basement?

**#68M: The 300 monks received 300 guns from the piles of boxes. The rest of the boxes were stacked as high as the sky. That was one [room] and in another room, there were wooden racks where guns attached with red tails were stored and they looked a sea of red. Those were the old ones which had already been used. We received new ones from the**

crates which were just opened. Each [crate] was packed with five guns and five *serto*. [We] were provided new ones.

Q: You said that it was made in England.

00:46:02

**#68M: They were English [made]. The 303 were from England. It was called *Engi khadum* ‘English-made short-barrel.’**

Q: Right now I want to stop asking questions and I want you to tell me what happened from the point where you finished your half-hour training and I’d like you to just describe as much in detail as you can what happened after that?

**#68M: [We] received the weapons on the morning of the 11<sup>th</sup>. We were able to leave from the Potala Palace only at about 2:30 in the afternoon. If we went down towards Shol, the Chinese had secretly learned about our receiving arms and had announced over the loudspeakers that the rebels were being provided with weapons that day. So we would not be able to pass from there. We took the route from behind the Potala to Nango where there was the elephants’ waterhole. Gyakpon Kedam-*la* led the way armed with a short-barrel rifle and we followed him. We took the back route from the Potala until the point where the elephants used to be fed water.**

Q: Elephants?

00:47:31

**#68M: There was a waterhole. There were two elephants in Tibet and a place where they were tied and a waterhole where they drank. We were escorted up to there by Gyakpon Kedam-*la*. “There’ll be no problems from now onwards.” When we climbed down to Nango from the Potala, [we] could see the fox holes at the Chinese army camps and everywhere else, which were positioned with canons. It was scary. Gyakpon Kedam-*la* said, “There’s no need [to be scared]. If they have positioned canons there, we have them positioned from the Potala. It does not matter. They will not fire and even if they do, we can counter them.”**

Q: That was on the 11<sup>th</sup> day of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Tibetan lunar month.

**#68M: It was on the 11<sup>th</sup> day.**

Q: It must correspond to March of the Western calendar, right?

00:48:55

**#68M: Yes, it was March.**

Q: Had His Holiness left by then?

**#68M: No, he had not left. The attack in Lhasa occurred only in the night of the 11<sup>th</sup> at around 11 or 12 o’clock. When we climbed down from the Potala to Nango and passed the**

sandy area, the two leaders [of Jangtse and Shartse] had hired horses from Lhasa and sent two monks to Sera [Monastery] to seek shelter, “[We] are 300 [monks] from Gaden who have been to get weapons. Please give us shelter at Sera for tonight. Tomorrow we will cross the mountain pass. The weapons are to be used to protect Gaden [Monastery].”

When we reached the ground in the morning, two monks on horseback arrived and said, “It is not possible to shelter at Sera.” There was a Chinese electricity center situated behind Sera though I have not seen it. [The two monks said,] “A huge number of Chinese soldiers have arrived at the electricity center. You will not be able to pass through and we cannot be responsible.”

When [shelter] was refused, [we] passed between Sera and Drepung [Monasteries] where there was a water mill to prepare *tsampa* for His Holiness the Dalai Lama called Gyami Tulkhor. We arrived at the water mill around 5:30 in the evening and then climbed up the Gala, a very steep pass which animals could not negotiate. It was just about possible for single men to walk. Those in the lead crossed the pass at around 11:30 and those bringing up the rear managed to cross only around 12. And only then did we hear the sound of shelling in Lhasa. It occurred in the night of the 11<sup>th</sup>.

Q: What was the place where the two elephants were kept?

00:51:42

**#68M:** That was where the elephants drank water. There was also a house which was that high [gestures off camera]. Nearby was a waterhole to which we were guided.

Q: How far was that?

**#68M:** You mean where the elephants were fed water?

Q: Yes.

00:52:41

**#68M:** If one climbed up from Shol, one reached the [Potala] Palace. Once at the Palace, except for proceeding towards Nango from the back of the Palace, we could not take the front route because the Chinese were in the know. Knowing that [we] had gone to fetch weapons, they believed we'd come through the front route. So instead of that, we took the route through Nango. Once one climbed down from the Palace, one was there where the elephants were given drinking water.

Q: And at that point, were the monks from Drepung and Sera—did you all join together?

[Interpreter translates as: At that point, were all the monks from Jangtse and Shartse together?]

**#68M:** Ye, [we] were together. We walked in two rows, Shartse in one and Jangtse in the other. We walked in two rows.

Q: And then?

00:53:51

**#68M: And then before those at the rear could cross the mountain pass, Lhasa was attacked. Then [we] reached Phenpo. We spent the night at the monastery called Phenpo Langdhang.**

Q: Where?

**#68M: Langdhang. We spent the night at Langdhang Monastery and reported to the district and estate [officials], “The weapons we possess are for the protection of Gaden. Lhasa has been attacked last night. Therefore, our weapons must reach the monastery. Please get some horses ready.” The next day about 150 horses were ready which was divided among the various *khangtsen* depending upon the strength of monks.**

**The rest who did not get horses went looking for horses in Phenpo. There were many horses hidden in the valley which [we] took. [We] could see Gaden across the river. We found that there were 300 surplus horses which were sent back. We crossed the river on horseback and once we reached the base of the mountain pass of Gaden, all the horses were returned.**

Q: And at this point what was your understanding of what was happening in Lhasa? You said earlier that you had heard that His Holiness had been invited by the Chinese for the show and your concern for the safety. So what was your understanding of where His Holiness was at this point?

00:56:39

**#68M: His Holiness the Dalai Lama had left by the evening of the 8<sup>th</sup>.**

Q: Where?

**#68M: He had left towards Lhoka.**

Q: So by the 11<sup>th</sup>, His Holiness the Dalai Lama...

00:56:51

**#68M: He'd left. If he had not, it was impossible to leave because Norbulingka was shelled, felling all the trees and killing many people. The people had gathered at Norbulingka and there was no way to enter through the gate as it was blocked.**

Q: So you never went to the Norbulingka?

**#68M: [We] did not go to the Norbulingka. We could not take the main route and detoured through Phenpo. We reached Gaden on the night of the 12<sup>th</sup>. We spent the 13<sup>th</sup> day there. If possible we should have gone on the night of the 12<sup>th</sup> to protect the area that had been assigned to each *khangtsen*. But we said, “It's been very difficult for us today. Kindly excuse us. Tomorrow morning we shall go to our respective area.” So in the morning of the 12<sup>th</sup> [13<sup>th</sup>], we went to the assigned location.**



Q: Were there Chinese troops surrounding Gaden at that time?

00:58:30

**#68M: There were no Chinese.**

Q: And whose decision was it to go and protect Gaden? Was it the monks' decision themselves or was there somebody from the Tibetan army who was giving these instructions?

**#68M: It was the order of the Tibetan Government.**

Q: Okay, so you reached Gaden and so then did you surround the monastery? Is that what you did?

00:59:12

**#68M: Yes, we remained there on the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> and on the evening of the 14<sup>th</sup> just before it became dark, a messenger was sent from the *khangtsen*, "Everybody's leaving. Lhasa has been defeated. What are you doing on the hill? Come back." We were called to the *khangtsen*.**

Q: Everybody just dropped their guns and...

**#68M: [We] took the weapons on the way to India.**

Q: So you never saw any fighting in Lhasa?

01:00:02

**#68M: The fight was over and Lhasa was defeated.**

Q: Did you see any fighting?

**#68M: No, [I] did not see because we had crossed the mountain pass on the night of the attack. And then many noblemen arrived saying that Norbulingka was conquered. Some noblemen were even captured [by the monks] in Gaden suspecting them to be spies [for the Chinese]. When they [the noblemen] arrived in Missamari [Assam, India] they said, "You were the ones that captured us. You must be living there in undefeated Tibet. Even after we told you the truth, you captured us." Some of the noblemen were locked up because they said that [Tibet] was defeated.**

Q: Did you ever question the orders that you were given that you were told just leave Lhasa when there's a lot of fighting going on? Did you have any conflict in your mind about following these orders?

01:01:16

**#68M: Many [monks] who did not have weapons fled and we were the ones that possessed weapons. If we took the weapons with us when we left for home or left them in the monastery, they would be confiscated and [we] might also face punishment. Since we**

possessed the arms and as everybody else was fleeing, the six of us decided to escape and did so on the night of the 14<sup>th</sup> through Lhoka.

Q: Well, actually that's my question because they were told to run away, but I was wondering if he [you] wanted to stay and fight.

**#68M: At that time it was known that there was the famous *Chushi Gangdrug* [Defend Tibet Volunteer Force] at Lhoka.**

Q: Where?

01:02:38

**#68M: At Lhoka and Yarlung Phodang. They were in the direction of Lhoka and we concurred, "We will leave from here and go and join the *Chushi Gangdrug* in Lhoka. United we might be in a position to confront them [the Chinese]. Let's go there." That's where all of us were heading.**

Q: How many of you were going to join there?

**#68M: There were the 300 of us [who received weapons at the Potala] and many other monks who joined [the *Chushi Gangdrug*]. There were some of them who'd joined it two or three months earlier to the attack [on Lhasa]. Our group joined after the attack took place. The 300 of us joined the *Chushi Gangdrug* at Yarlung Phodang.**

Q: All of them went to Lhoka?

01:04:10

**#68M: Yes, [we] joined. That was because we carried weapons. They [*Chushi Gangdrug*] did not admit those that did not have guns.**

Q: Okay, but there's a difference between force and welcoming, yes? Forcing is when you say, "You must do this" and welcoming is "Come and join us." So what was it like? Were they forced or were they welcomed?

**#68M: No, [*Chushi Gangdrug* guerrillas] did not allow those that possessed weapons to go through. They blocked the way and said that [we] must join them. There were people who carried guns that were their personal possession. They too were kept back.**

**It was useless for them [*Chushi Gangdrug*] to capture people when they did not have weapons. They let men without guns to pass through and stopped all those who carried guns; those who possessed pistols.**

Q: No, this I understand but I'm trying to find out whose decision it was, yes? It sounded like it was his [your] decision. He wanted to join. Nobody forced him.

01:05:43

**#68M: We had to join because we possessed guns.**

Q: Did you join because you wished to?

**#68M: One had to join whether one wished to or not. Nobody with a gun was allowed to pass through.**

Q: Okay, so Lhoka is quite some distance from Gaden Monastery. You're saying that there was 300 monks, all carrying weapons and just walked to Lhoka without any problem, no interception by the Chinese?

01:06:35

**#68M: [We] were not all together. [We] were in numbers of 12, six, five or two. Everyone was scattered. However, since we were small in number, the six of us went in a group. Initially, [we] went to Won and spent two nights there. Then we went to Yarlung Phodang and joined the *Chushi Gangdrug*. After joining the *Chushi Gangdrug*, they provided food rations in the form of *tsampa*, butter and meat. After the rations were distributed we were told, "You cannot remain like this. There is a unit of the *Chushi Gangdrug* at Kongpo. You must go there to assist them."**

**Three of us were sent from [Yarlung] Phodang towards A- Lhagyari and to Kongpo after crossing a mountain pass. [We] went there. We left in the night and crossed the mountain pass. At around 11 o'clock the next day we reached a place called Ney Sumdho. If one continued onwards, there was A-Lhagyari; if one crossed the mountain pass on this side it was Yarlung Phodang and in the other direction was Tsethang Dukhor. It was an intersection of three regions.**

**[We] camped there at around 11 o'clock. While [we] were there, the *Chushi Gangdrug* unit that was based in Kongpo arrived on horseback bearing flags. [They asked], "Where are you going?" [We replied that we] had been sent from Yarlung Phodang to [Kongpo]. "You cannot go there. [You] must go to Tsethang Dukhor." "[We] cannot go to [Tsethang] Dukhor because it has been defeated. Perhaps even Tsethang Gonpori is filled with Chinese. We took a detour and arrived here. There is no way," we replied.**

01:08:00

**"[We] must go there," they said. The *Chushi Gangdrug* [guerrillas] possessed good horses and continued their journey. They did not break to make camp. It was a distance of four hours to Tsethang Dukhor. The six of us owned not so good horses and we followed them, at times riding [the horses] and at times leading them. And when we reached Tsethang Dukhor, we did not even find time to make tea. [We] entered the home of a family and took the black tea that was ready and gave them some tea leaves in exchange and ate *pa*. Then a conch was sounded. When [we] went on the roof, [we] saw that the *Chushi Gangdrug* men were going back. So we quickly drank the tea and followed them. They went to Lhagyari but we could not reach it that night. So we stayed [the night] with a family just before reaching Lhagyari.**

Q: When you reached Lhoka and you saw the Tibetan resistance army, can you describe what it was like?

**#68M:** At that time we did not have any facility while the *Chushi Gangdrug* had everything ready to wage a war. Even though they were collected from the people, there was food and a choice of horses. We did not have that and so were forced to follow them wherever they went. We did not have any confidence.

Q: Had you actually used your gun by this point?

01:11:18

**#68M:** And then we journeyed to Lhagyari but could not stay at the palace of Lhagyari because the *Chushi Gangdrug* [guerrillas] had occupied it. We stayed at the monastery of Lhagyari. I do not know the exact date, but [we] were informed that there would be a meeting the day after the next day and that [we] were to come to the palace. [We] went to the palace, which was full of *Chushi Gangdrug* [men]. It looked grand with guards posted at the gate. We were 300 monks who were seated near the staircase.

The Commander-in-Chief was Bapa Yeshi. He was actually a monk of Drepung Loselling. He said, “The monks must do well. When [we] lived in Tibet, the monks led in front or brought up the rear with pride. Now-a-days upon reaching here [they] are like thieving dogs who keep their tails between their legs. [You] should not be like that. [You] should do more. As a [member] of the *Chushi Gangdrug*, [you] must go up the highest mountain or wherever it is necessary. [You] should lend assistance.”

Q: What kind of training did he get at Lhoka?

**#68M:** [We] were not given any training. The speech was given and that night the *Chushi Gangdrug* left from there. They also took along a few of our men who owned better horses. They were to carry guns and ammunition. We were not told to join them. The next day when we went to take a look at Lhagyari it was empty; everybody’d gone away. So we felt that it was useless for us to remain there and left. Just before reaching Chumdhyang, [we] encountered the Chinese. In the morning a white Chinese airplane flew overhead, which [I] think parachuted men.

One would reach Diguthang after journeying across Yadho Dakla. That was the place [Diguthang] where the English or the Americans air-dropped a huge number of the Tashi Kharing guns. We planned to go to that place. The white airplane had parachuted all the [Chinese] troops in the valley and they guarded the mountain pass. So there was an encounter and a lot of firing. At that time, Phara’s Gen Buthi who is famous for having been killed by hot iron in Bhutan was there.

Q: Who?

01:15:10

**#68M:** He was called Gen Buthi, Phara Buthi or Shengo Buthi. Phara Buthi was like our Commander and carried a Tashi Kharing gun, while all of us were armed with English-made short-barrel rifles. [He] fired several shots from the Tashi Kharing. They [the Chinese troops] strode 10 at a time. The first 10 came and lay flat and then the next 10

arrived and fired their guns. They came in that way. So [we] could not continue our journey from there.

All the horses that we owned were kept with a keeper at the base of the hill. Everybody lay flat on the ground and fired, but [I] do not know if anyone was killed because I did not know to handle a gun that well. Those that were used to might have killed one or two. They [the Chinese] crept forward on the sandy ground and we fired at them from our side.

Later several shells were fired at the village called Chumdhagyang where a great number of soldiers, monks and lay-people were assembled. Everybody scattered in a rush but none were able to cross the mountain pass of Yadho Dakla. So taking a detour through a valley, [we] journeyed through Nyen and came away. The mountain pass was blocked.

Q: Lobsang-*la*, can you describe that battle you experienced?

01:18:09

**#68M: I did fire several shots but did not actually see or feel that anyone got killed or fell. Two horses belonging to the six of us were killed from their [the Chinese'] shelling. The horses got hit.**

Q: How many monks were killed? Do you know?

**#68M: The area where most of the people got killed was at a higher ground from the village of Lhagyari where many shells were fired. [I] did not see how many were killed there. We did not climb up there. When the shelling started there, we went lower to the village by the river. Two of our horses were killed during the shelling, two horses belonging to the six people.**

Q: This particular battle, this is the first time you had shot a bullet from your gun?

01:19:51

**#68M: That was the first time.**

Q: Anything else?

**#68M: After that we did not encounter any Chinese.**

Q: What was your opinion of Bapa Yeshi? What kind of a person was he?

01:20:38

**#68M: Andrug Jindha [Andrug Gonpo Tashi], Bapa Yeshi and Amdo Lekshey were the Commanders-in Chief. The main Commander-in Chief was Andrug Gonpo Tashi. Next to Andrug Gonpo Tashi was Bapa Yeshi.**

Q: Of *Chushi Gangdrug*?

**#68M: Yes, of *Chushi Gangdrug*. The main Commander-in-Chief was Andrug Gonpo Tashi. The other leaders below Andrug Gonpo Tashi were Amdo Lekshey, Bapa Yeshe and such.**

Q: I know about this, but my question is what impression did he have? What kind of character? What kind of person was he? Was he an inspiring person?

01:21:45

**#68M: As for attitude, as soon as we met at Lhagyari, though he was himself a monk, he was very angry with the monks for not taking part in the battles. The monks did not loot the villages and were being humble but he [complained], “The monks are not doing enough. While in Tibet the monks led from the front and brought up the rear in pride. Now they are like thieving dogs. They walk with their tails between their legs. They are not capable.” He was livid. From the way he spoke, he was very angry. He derided [us] a lot.**

Q: So when you heard this speech, what was going through your mind? Were you agreeing with what he was saying?

**#68M: I thought, “I do not know how many Chinese they have killed during the encounters because the *Chushi Gangdrug* Force is based in different areas. This is the first time we met and he is demeaning monks. He is debasing monks to a great extent when he is himself a monk.” And I felt sad.**

Q: Did you meet Gonpo Tashi?

01:24:29

**#68M: [I’ve] not seen Gonpo Tashi. Gonpo Tashi did not come to the army camp at Lhoka. [I saw him] later when he arrived in Assam [India]. [I] did not see him at that time.**

Q: So what happened after this one engagement that you had with the Chinese parachuted from the airplanes and you fought that battle and some people died? Can you just sort of tell what happened then after that?

**#68M: We continued to be chased. [Chinese] airplanes flew from the directions of Lhoka and Tsona. Airplanes followed us from Tsona until [we] reached the border of the Monpas [people of Mon Tawang, Arunachal Pradesh, India]. They [the Chinese] kept dropping men to pursue us. We were ahead and they pursued, thus avoiding an encounter. Airplanes pursued us between Tsona and Tawang.**

Q: The battle that you described, was that at Yarlung Phodang? Where was the battle that you described happen? Where was it...?

01:26:16

**#68M: It was at Chumdhagyang in the direction of Lhoka.**

Q: Yes?

**#68M: The name of the village was Chumdhagyang and it was in the direction of Lhoka.**

Q: And Yarlung Phodang?

01:26:34

**#68M: If one went around [Yarlung] Phodang like this [uses left hand to indicate], one reached...A-Lhagyari. Travelling in this direction from A-Lhagyari brought one to Chumdhagyang. If one crossed the mountain pass at Chumdhagyang, one arrived in Diguthang. The way to Diguthang was blocked. So we took a detour and reached Nyen. After Nyen we reached Tsona and from Tsona to Tawang.**

Q: But then it [pre-interview form] says that you tried to get to Kongpo, but Kongpo is east of Lhasa. Why was he trying to go to Kongpo?

**#68M: [We] could not get to Kongpo. When we reached Ney Sumdho, where we camped at the intersection of the routes to Yarlung Phodang, Lhagyari and Tsethang Dukho, the *Chushi Gangdrug* [men] at Kongpo arrived there and said, “[You] must go to Tsethang Dukho and cannot stay here. We are the men [of *Chushi Gangdrug*] in Kongpo and its useless [for you] to go to Kongpo.” The army camp at Kongpo was being moved. So we followed them to Tsethang Dukho.**

Q: Where were you trying to get to though by going through Kongpo? What was your ultimate destination? Where were you trying to go because Kongpo is east?

01:28:25

**#68M: [Kongpo and Lhagyari] were in different directions. [We] crossed the mountain pass at Yarlung Phodang and reached Ney Sumdho. [At this intersection] one direction led to Tsethang Dukho and another to Lhagyari. Crossing over a mountain pass at Lhagyari through Salam, one would reach Diguthang. We tried to go to Diguthang but did not succeed. Travelling right into the valley from there would take one to Kongpo.**

Q: Which other routes did you take besides Lhagyari?

**#68M: From Lhagyari [we] took a detour to Nyen and then reached Tsona—from Nyen and then to Tsona.**

Q: And Assam?

01:29:42

**#68M: Mon Tawang and then [we] reached Assam. [We] arrived at Missamari [Assam] from Tawang and stayed there for about a year.**

Q: How many made it out with you to Tawang and Assam? How many? How many made it with you? How many came with you?

**#68M: There were a lot of people in Tawang.**

Q: How many were with you?

01:30:16

**#68M: There were six men who possessed weapons and four or five that did not in my group. Altogether we were 11 or 12 men.**

Q: Can you tell us anything else that happened on the way: any incidents, any events, any challenges?

**#68M: When we reached Nyen, one of our colleagues said that he did not have a good cup to drink tea from. He entered the kitchen of Nyen Simboe Shika [an estate] and pulled out a drawer but did not find one. He said that he entered another room and pulled open a drawer and found many *tanka karmo* ‘Tibetan currency,’ *dhayen* ‘Chinese silver coins’ and a gold earring. He’d brought the gold earring, but not the *tanka karmo* and others. He came back and told the group. There was an older monk in the group called Tenpa Wangdak. He said, “You are going to war but you have stolen someone’s article. Take it back at once. Otherwise it is not proper.” He was made to take it back. Other than that there were no other items that were brought.**

Q: How about food?

01:32:47

**#68M: When we were to reach Mon Tawang the day after the next, we ran out of *tsampa*. The only *tsampa* we had was what had been rationed at Nyen. [We] did not imagine that we’d have to walk for such a long distance and had not brought much food. When we were to reach Tawang the day after the next, we ran out of *tsampa*. However, we had a lot of butter. So we prepared tea using the butter and drank good tea with a sprinkling of *tsampa*. [We] ran out of *tsampa*.**

**Once we arrived at Tawang, the Indian government air-dropped and provided us rice, wheat flour and lentils. [We] got food to eat but also begged in the villages of Mon Tawang. They’d give black grapes and *kongtsam*, which was *tsampa* made from buckwheat. [We] cooked it in a pot adding some butter to it. It tasted like *tsampa*, like *pa*.**

Q: *Pa-la* ‘respectful term for father,’ I asked you this question before, but I just want to make one hundred percent sure that at no time did you participate in a ceremony to give back your *vinaya* vows, the vows you had taken as a monk? At no time, you are saying that there was no time where you gave back your vows?

[Interviewer to interpreter]: Many of the monks who went to fight, they actually gave back their vows, right? Because they took vows against killing. So they had to give them back in a formal ceremony, sometimes just in front of a lama very quickly and sometimes in a big group of people. I heard this many times but I just want to clarify with him. He never gave back his vows. When you become a monk, you have to follow *vinaya*, yes? One of the big rules of *vinaya* is you take this vow never to kill and especially never to kill human beings. So he never participated in a ceremony to give back his vows? Do you understand?



**#68M: I was a young monk at that time and had not taken my *gelong* ‘fully-ordained monk’ vows. One could take the *gelong* vows only after one had reached the age of 25. It was also compulsory to take the vows before one crossed 25 years of age. I was 20 years old at that time, so I had taken my *getsul* ‘novice’ vows and not the *gelong* vows. [I] did not get the chance to give back my *getsul* vows. When the situation was so tumultuous where could one go to give back the *getsul* vows?**

**[I] went to fetch weapons and came to Gaden [Monastery]. Within two days Gaden was lost and [we] came away. Now to whom can one go to give back the *getsul* vows? [I] could not give it back.**

Q: Was there ever any conflict in your mind between being a monk, being Buddhist and fighting?

01:37:17

**#68M: Of course, there was sin if one killed a person. However, since it was for the cause of a nation, perhaps it was lesser in degree. It was a different matter if one killed for a personal matter. It was not that. Whether one was capable or not, one did it for the service of the nation, so I think it might not be detrimental.**

Q: *Pa-la*, could you please look at Namgyal when you answer a question?

**#68M: Okay.**

Q: Thank you. What happened to your teacher at Gaden Monastery, your teacher from Amdo who you loved so much? Do you know what happened to him?

01:38:29

**#68M: [Speaks before interpretation is complete] [I] had a teacher but he was not from Amdo. He was an Apo Ho, a Horpa.**

Q: Were you able to contact him later?

**#68M: [I] did not have any contacts. He was not able to remain at Gaden [Monastery]. When the Chinese implemented Democratization of Liberation Process in ‘62, monks were not allowed to remain in Gaden [Monastery]. So he went to my house. He was actually from Jangpa. While living at [my] home, like the people of the village he performed forced labor [for the Chinese]. He transported soil and stones and grazed sheep.**

**The Chinese collected all the sheep and created a nomad group. They made another group consisting of cows and oxen. Another group of farmers worked in the fields. In that way many different groups were created. I heard that he was later assigned in the shepherd group. [My] teacher grazed sheep and then passed away.**

[DVD ends abruptly; last 15 minutes of interview are missing.]

END OF INTERVIEW