

Tibet Oral History Project

Interview #80 – Tenzin
July 5, 2007

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INTERVIEW SUMMARY SHEET

1. Interview Number: #80
2. Interviewee: Tenzin
3. Age: 74
4. Date of Birth: 1933
5. Sex: Male
6. Birthplace: Chugya
7. Province: Dhoday (Amdo)
8. Year of leaving Tibet: 1959
9. Date of Interview: July 5, 2007
10. Place of Interview: House No. 4 B, New Camp No. 7, Dickey Larsoe Settlement, Bylakuppe, Mysore District, Karnataka, India
11. Length of Interview: 2 hr 19 min
12. Interviewer: Rebecca Novick
13. Interpreter: Tenzin Yangchen
14. Videographer: Ronny Novick
15. Translator: Tenzin Yangchen

Biographical Information:

Tenzin was ordained as a monk in his village in Amdo at the age of eight. Years later, when the Chinese arrived in Amdo and began oppressing the villagers, he left for Lhasa hoping it was safer there. Tenzin joined Sera Monastery and later gave up his vows in order to volunteer as a security guard at Norbulingka to protect His Holiness the Dalai Lama from the Chinese.

Tenzin gives an eyewitness account of the events that occurred in Lhasa around March 10, 1959. He and perhaps over 1,000 men surrounded Norbulingka until the Dalai Lama was able to escape. Tenzin describes in detail the shelling of Norbulingka and the burning of the Jowo Ramoche statue by the Chinese.

After leaving Lhasa Tenzin joined the *Chushi Gangdrug* Guerrilla Force, but because they were ill-equipped, they could not withstand the weapons used by the Chinese. After being fired on by Chinese airplanes Tenzin and other *Chushi Gangdrug* fighters fled to India. Tenzin returned to Tibet in 1986 and 2005, visiting Norbulingka where he saw the Golden Throne, built for the Dalai Lama before he fled to India.

Topics Discussed:

Childhood memories, monastic life, life under Chinese rule, Norbulingka defense, March 10th Uprising, Dalai Lama's escape, Chushi Gangdrug guerrillas, escape experiences, life as a refugee in India.

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Interviewer: Rebecca Novick

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[Questions are asked by either interviewer or interpreter. In Interview #80, the interviewer directs questions to the interpreter, who then asks the questions of the interviewee.]

Question: We would like to go back a little further in his life to when he was a child. How old was he when he became a monk?

Interviewee #80: I was 8 years old.

Q: And how did he feel about it? Was he excited or was he scared? Does he remember how he felt about becoming a monk?

#80: When I was small, I was a sickly child and my parents said I should become a monk. So I became a monk.

Q: Where did he go? Which monastery did he join?

#80: I was sent to the Jachung Gonpa Monastery.

Q: What was his life like at the *gonpa*?

#80: I lived with my teacher in the monastery.

Q: He said he was a sickly child. What health problems was he suffering from?

#80: I fell sick as a child and it was our tradition that some sick children become monks, so that was why my parents sent me to join the monastery as a monk.

Q: Did he get better?

#80: When I was small my parents were unhappy with my condition and then I was made a monk. After I became a monk I was healthy.

Q: Did he get better right away or after some period of time?

#80: It happened gradually.

Q: Did he like his life as a monk?

#80: I sort of liked it as a child.

Q: Did he miss his family?

#80: I met my parents frequently. My parents lived nearby.

Q: Was it a big *gonpa*? Were there many monks there?

#80: There were about 1,800 monks at that time.

Q: It was a big *gonpa*.

#80: Yes, it was big. Do you know about the Gye Tsongkhapa?

Q: Yes, I do. I am also a *Gelugpa* 'follower of the Gelug sect of Buddhism.'

#80: That was Gye Tsongkhapa's monastery.

Q: Wonderful.

#80: I have a picture of Jachung Gonpa, which I will show you later.

Q: I would really like to see that. Thank you. What are the kinds of things he learned as a new monk? What are the kinds of things he learned?

#80: As young monks we had to give a test of memorizations starting from the basic scriptures.

Q: Did he already know how to write and read or did he learn that once he went to the monastery?

#80: No, I did not know [to read and write] at all. There were no schools in my village and it was very isolated. People worked on the agricultural lands and the children tended the animals. That was how everything was. No one was educated.

Q: At that time were there any Chinese in the area, in that part of Amdo?

#80: There was the Kuomintang [Nationalists], but no Chinese. There was no Khungtengtang [Communists].

Q: What was the relationship like between the local people and the Kuomintang Chinese?

#80: The Tibetans had their own freedom. We did not have to fear them like we did the Communist Chinese.

Q: So there weren't actually a lot of interactions between the two?

#80: There were no interactions at all. Each earned his livelihood. The Kuomintang had entered Tibet for years and occupied many areas. The Kuomintang's presence was there in Amdo and in Kham.

Q: How long did he stay in the *gonpa* for?

#80: I was there from the age of 8 to 24.

Q: Did the monks of the monastery interact with the community very much like going to *pooja* 'rituals of worship' for the local people when they died or when they needed special *pooja*?

#80: Of course, they did that. The people were great believers of the dharma.

Q: What other things did he learn at the *gonpa*? What else did he learn apart from reading texts? Did he learn any special skills like butter sculpture or sand *mandala* or dancing?

#80: No, I did not. There were many monks in the monastery, but all the monks were not similar. Some engaged in doing work, though there was no agricultural work. Mainly my parents left me with my teacher because I was poor in health. I had to study the dharma because that was the rule of the monastery. However, I did not become an excellent monk.

Q: What was his daily routine like? Could he describe a typical day from when he got up in the morning to when he went to bed, what he did?

#80: After I got up in the morning, I went to another teacher—not my teacher with whom I lived—from whom I learned the scriptures. Then I returned to the room and did some work. That was how it was.

Q: He stayed in the same room as his teacher?

#80: Yes, I lived with one teacher.

Q: Who was the teacher he lived with?

#80: He did not teach me. There was another teacher who took scripture lessons.

[Question repeated.]

#80: He was one of the elder monks who had studied the scriptures during his time.

Q: Did he take care of him when he first joined the monastery?

#80: Yes, he did.

Q: Why was it decided that he would go to Lhasa? Was it his decision or did his teacher sent him?

#80: I was in the monastery until the age of 24. For about an hour every morning I learned the scriptures. Then I returned to the room and did some tasks if there were any. We did not have school like in the foreign countries. A teacher had only one, two or three students whom he taught the scriptures.

Q: Where did he go after he reached the age of 24?

#80: I came to Lhasa at the age of 25. The reason why I came to Lhasa at the age of 25 was that the Chinese had arrived in Amdo region when I was 16 years old.

Q: The Communist Chinese?

#80: Yes, the Communist Chinese. They gradually inflicted misery and by the time I was 22 or 23, the suffering was terrible. When I was 25 years old I thought that I would suffer much living in my village and that it might be safer in Lhasa as the three great monasteries of Sera, Drepung and Gaden were there. I made that decision myself and came to Lhasa.

Q: What kind of suffering did he see?

#80: It was to the monastery administration and not to me personally. In the early days, we had sponsors who helped maintain the monastery, but that was totally banned. All the farm products were taken away by the Chinese government; if it was taken by the Chinese government, the monks had nothing to eat. I made up my mind to go to Lhasa. There was no one who advised me to go. I sort of secretly escaped.

Q: How long did it take to travel to Lhasa?

#80: I did not come walking. I traveled by a Chinese vehicle, but the road was very bad. It took me 12 days to reach Lhasa. In India we would call it a very rough road. They [the Chinese] had made a very poor road then.

Q: He actually went by car?

#80: Here we would call it a truck. It was a lorry. There were no buses then.

Q: Did he go with other monks or was he the only monk from that monastery?

#80: There were other monks and also people from Lhasa and Kham who had visited Amdo and were returning [to Lhasa]. I traveled with them.

Q: Were some of the others trying to get away from the things that were happening in that region as well and seeking refuge in Lhasa?

#80: Yes, they were all escaping. There were none who were eagerly going to Lhasa with joy.

Q: Does he remember anything that happened on the journey? Is there anything that he remembers particularly about that journey?

#80: The vehicle traveled very slowly on the way. Then the vehicle had to rest as the road was bad. That was why the journey took 12 days.

Q: Nothing happened on the way?

#80: No, nothing happened. After leaving behind Amdo, we reached Changthang, a desert region where the vehicle was stopped for three days. I was greatly worried that the vehicle would not be let through, but they let us through. Some were not allowed to proceed.

Q: Who stopped the vehicles?

#80: That was the Chinese.

Q: Were they questioned?

#80: I heard that we might not be allowed to proceed, but there was no questioning. Those people that came after us were stopped and turned back. It happened many times. We were lucky that we could reach Lhasa.

Q: Was this the first time that he'd ever been to Lhasa?

#80: Yes, it was the first time.

Q: What did he think when he arrived driving through the city? What impression did it make on him?

#80: As I saw Lhasa, my heart did not like it. Never mind making me happy, it made me not like it. The reason why I did not like it was that Lhasa was surrounded by Chinese buildings.

Q: What was the feeling in the city? Was there a lot of tension in the city among the Tibetans?

#80: Naturally there was fear. The people were afraid and it was a dangerous period.

Q: What monastery did he join?

#80: I met a trader from my village in Lhasa and I served as his servant for a few months. He was selling some wares and I helped him. I had brought some butter with me from my village, which I sold as well as assisted him. I stayed that way for a few months.

Q: So when he says businessman what exactly was he doing? Was he doing bookkeeping or what was he doing for the businessman?

#80: The businessman had various goods for sale just like in India and I assisted him in selling them.

Q: Was it by the wayside?

#80: Yes, it was by the road. In the evening I went my way.

Q: Has he intended to join the monastery in Lhasa and changed his mind or had that not been his intention?

#80: People I knew told me that it was not good for me to live that way, so I joined the Sera Monastery in Lhasa and stayed there for three months.

Q: At Sera, were the monks discussing the political situation in the city?

#80: I was living at Sera Monastery for my sustenance. [I thought] if the majority of the monks did not undergo suffering, I, too, would not. That was the reason I stayed at the monastery.

[Question repeated.]

#80: All the monks were in a panic. Except for wearing the monks' robes, there was no peace of mind at all.

Q: Did they talk openly with one and another or people sort of kept quiet about things?

#80: Yes, they did talk about it. Everyone was filled with anxiety as to what the Chinese would do next. We talked secretly among friends and endured anguish in our hearts.

Q: What were the Chinese actually doing at this time? What was their presence in the city and what were they actually doing?

#80: The Chinese are all about machines and arms. Orally they said that they were going to develop Tibet. However, their actual intention was nothing but to destroy Tibet at that time.

Q: What were the Chinese doing with the machines and arms?

#80: They had three military camps in different areas [of Lhasa]. Those were large army camps. I do not know what was there because we cannot go near them.

Q: Was there any propaganda happening in the city either through literature or through loud speakers or radio or any other form?

#80: They had set up loud speakers in the Bakor area of Lhasa. At that time they [the Chinese] did not like the famous foreign country, the United States of America. They always announced something about the “expansionist-oriented” United States. Then they asked His Holiness the Dalai Lama to attend a meeting. Until then, the Tibetan government had sent noblemen as representatives.

Q: Did he know about the political situation in China? Did he have access to that kind of information about what was going on in China during that time?

#80: No, we never heard such news. Let alone news of China, we could not even learn of news, like from here to Hunsur [a town 30 miles away from Bylakuppe]. We did not have telephones like we have here. That was the situation in Tibet. For example, a battle was going on in Lhoka and it was not known in Lhasa. Lhasa was being destroyed and the *Chushi Gangdrug* Force in Lhoka had no knowledge about it.

Q: When he heard that His Holiness was being invited to the meeting, what did he think?

#80: His Holiness was being invited to attend the meeting and if he did, the Chinese planned like this: invite His Holiness to the meeting, put him in a vehicle, invite the Panchen Rinpoche from Tsang, put him in the vehicle, take them to Dhanjo behind Lhasa where there was an airfield, put them on the plane and take them to China.

Q: Was he still a monk at Sera at this time when this happened?

#80: Yes, I was in Sera Monastery. I do not know the corresponding date in the Western calendar, but it was on the first day of the second Tibetan lunar month that the turmoil began in Lhasa. A Chinese spy came to invite His Holiness. The people came to know that the person was a spy who had come to invite His Holiness. So he was stoned to death in front of Norbulingka [summer palace of His Holiness].

Q: He was a Tibetan?

#80: He was a Tibetan, but in the pay of the Chinese.

Q: Did he see this happen or did he hear about it?

#80: I was at Sera Monastery then. When the incident happened, a messenger came to Sera Monastery to relate the news.

Q: What happened then? What happened to him? What did he do?

#80: At Sera Monastery we were given the message [from the Tibetan government], “The life of His Holiness the Dalai Lama is in a very difficult situation. We require people to come as security guards at Norbulingka.” Then I went to Norbulingka as a security guard. I told my teacher at Sera Monastery, "I am going to Norbulingka. The message is that young people who wish to must come to the Norbulingka. I am going." However, my teacher refused to allow me to leave saying, "If you go, you have to join in the battle. Are you capable? You cannot do it." Then I told my teacher, "Teacher, I wish to go. Even if I die, that's okay because I will die at Norbulingka. I have to go. Please do not stop me." My teacher replied, "If you are that enthusiastic, you may go," so I went to Norbulingka.

Q: Did many monks volunteer at Sera?

#80: Yes, there were many that went. I was not the only one. Many of the younger ones went.

Q: How many?

#80: I do not know how many went from the other *khangtsen* ‘houses.’ From my *khangtsen* around 50 monks left. There were different houses [in the monastery].

Q: What happened when they reached the Norbulingka? What did they do?

#80: We had nothing with us when we went to Norbulingka except our enthusiasm. We went because we received the message from the Tibetan government. Now for example, this is the Norbulingka here [gestures]. We were stationed behind Norbulingka. The area was called Nordhoe Linka. His Holiness was living inside Norbulingka. The front was called *shung-go* ‘main gate’ and it faced Lhasa. One side was known as *tago* and another *shargo* ‘eastern gate.’ The back of Norbulingka was called *nup-go* [western gate].

There at the back of Norbulingka were about 400 Amdo guards consisting of traders in Lhasa, monks from Drepung, Sera and from everywhere. On the *tago* side there were about 400 guards from Kham. On the opposite side were stationed the main Utsang Tibetan army of Lhasa, so three of the sides were very well guarded. The main gate in the front was not guarded, but it was watched by the usual guards. At that time I was at Norbulingka.

Q: So they were broken up into regions rather than from what monastery they were from. Were they given weapons?

#80: Yes, we were given guns and bullets by the Tibetan government.

Q: Had he ever used a gun before?

#80: Before I left [my village] Tibet I used to practice shooting. We practiced shooting because we were fearful of the Chinese then, so I knew to handle it.

Q: Was there any training given to the other people who hadn't used guns before?

#80: Yes, they were given lessons. They would be practicing outside. If there was no knowledge [of handling guns] at all, it was difficult. Each of us had a little knowledge or the confidence that we could learn it, which was why we had volunteered.

Q: What was his experience of using a gun before?

#80: In the early days there used to be many thieves and robbers. There were guns in my house and I'd seen them [family members] firing the guns.

Q: And the kind of gun it was, was it a kind of gun where you actually put powder in and pound the powder down or what kind of gun was it?

#80: There was a catch where you put the bullet in. Each could hold six bullets. You pushed the bullets in and pulled the trigger [gestures]. We had to practice for a few days at Norbulingka.

Q: It was a different kind of gun from the one he was used to?

#80: They were different guns. In my village I had seen my relatives use the guns, but I did not [handle myself]. Those guns that were provided at Norbulingka were short barrel rifles, which were made in England and brought through India.

Q: Was this a day after His Holiness had been invited to that performance or how long after did he arrive there?

#80: We went there the next day. The spy had gone to invite His Holiness the Dalai Lama one evening and that night—I do not know about Gaden Monastery but—we received word at Sera and Drepung Monasteries, which are close to Lhasa. The message was, "His Holiness the Dalai Lama's life is in danger. We need volunteers to come and protect him." After the message was delivered, each one made up his mind to go. That was how I went.

Q: When he got there, how many people were surrounding? Could he estimate how many people were surrounding the Norbulingka? Was it many, many, many people?

#80: It was full of people. I cannot guess a figure. It was said that there were 400 people from Kham, 400 from Amdo and 400 Utsang security guards, so there were definitely more than a thousand.

Q: What happened then?

#80: A Tibetan government official made an announcement at Norbulingka, "You must fight hard. Everybody must join and fight hard because we are in a very dangerous situation." They [the Tibetan government] provided us with guns and bullets, but there

was neither tea nor a bowl of *tsampa* 'flour made from roasted barley.' Each of us had to carry our food at that time.

The turmoil occurred on the first day of the second Tibetan lunar month. Now we know that the uprising took place on the 10th of March [according to the Western calendar]. So the battle took place in the morning of the 11th day of the second Tibetan lunar month. We were armed with guns and bullets, but we didn't get to use them. The reason why we didn't get to use the guns was that they [the Chinese] fired artillery shells from far away. The guns were useless.

Q: Was it the first day of the second Tibetan lunar month?

#80: The turmoil occurred at Norbulingka on the first day of the second Tibetan lunar month. We went there on the second day. I cannot forget that.

Q: When was it when the Chinese fired the artillery shells?

#80: That was on the night of the 10th and morning of the 11th of the second month. It was very early, before daybreak. That day corresponds to the 10th of March.

Q: How did they respond?

#80: We were outside the compound wall. We were stationed there armed with swords and guns to prevent the Chinese from entering. The Chinese were firing at us from a distance. The shells were this big [gestures]. They were fired from long distances. Our people had no knowledge because we had never fought a war. Let me show you [gestures]. This is the compound wall, which runs around Norbulingka. Scaffoldings were made in the walls just like the construction people do in order to build the high walls. Sandbags were heaped atop the walls and behind that we waited with our guns. What was the use when the walls collapsed during the shelling? The walls came tumbling down and there was nothing to do.

Q: And this happened at night?

#80: That was in the night. It was at 3 o'clock before daybreak. I still can remember the time too.

Q: Were many people killed? Did you see many people killed?

#80: We were in our particular area, hiding behind the wall. [To interpreter] Do you know Amdo Jampa who lives in Camp Number 10 [Tibetan settlement, Bylakuppe]? A shell fell on a group of people that belonged to his village and eight of them were killed. I saw this with my very eyes. I was in the bunker that whole day. They [the Chinese] kept firing right from morning.

Then in the evening at around 5:30 p.m. or 6 o'clock, a bugle was sounded. It was the sound of a Tibetan bugle. The Tibetan government had soldiers in certain areas to sound

the bugle. The announcement was "Each one of you should try to get away from here. It is useless now [to fight]." The situation was futile; dust was everywhere. During the shelling, all the dogs panicked and lay close to us. They frothed at the mouth in fear. If a shell landed on that side, the animals ran to us and if a shell fell on this side, they ran to the other side. The leaves on the trees fell off. They [the Chinese] were firing machine guns and artillery shells. They had no dearth of bullets. We were armed with guns, but we could not use even one bullet—such terrible things happened at that time.

Q: What was the weather like? Does he remember what the weather was like that night?

#80: The weather was cold. It was around spring then. It was cold and we felt very cold. We were wearing *paktsa* ‘fur.’

Q: So what did they do then?

#80: I thought I would lose myself to the Chinese and had a lot of fear at that time. On the night of the eighth day [of the second Tibetan lunar month], His Holiness the Dalai Lama was escorted out of Norbulingka. On the morning of the ninth, noblemen [of the Tibetan government] came around and said, "Do not worry about His Holiness the Dalai Lama. He has been escorted away. Everyone must fight hard. However, you don't have to worry about His Holiness. He has been escorted out." When we received that message, we became pleased in our minds. I wondered, "Where has His Holiness been escorted? Has he gone to Gaden Monastery?" I never knew that he was going away to a foreign country.

[Tape change]

Q: It is because of the bravery of people like him that His Holiness is safe.

#80: [Becomes very emotional]

Q: I just wanted to back up a little bit, when he got to the Norbulingka, did he engage in a ceremony to return the vows of a monk before he took up the rifle?

#80: Yes, we had to return the *getsul* ‘novice’ vows at Norbulingka. We already returned that at Norbulingka. You have to hold a gun in your hand. You are carrying bullets. In the battle you have to kill, so we had to return the *getsul* vows. I had given it back already. At that time, the situation was so desperate that even monks were forced to join the army.

Q: Was there a feeling of regret in his mind at all during the ceremony?

#80: My only thoughts were for the defense of Tibet and the safety of His Holiness the Dalai Lama, and the hope for happiness in Tibet. Other than that I did not have any regrets at that time when I returned the *getsul* vows.

Q: Now let's go back where he was in the foxholes and maybe he can just continue from that point. What he saw, what happened, in as much detail as he wants to tell us?

#80: In the foxhole, I prayed that if a bomb fell on me, it should strike me in the head and kill me instantly. If one did not die and was taken to a Chinese hospital, he would be treated and might recover. Then he would be tormented. That was our fear at that time.

Q: Then?

#80: There was such panic in my mind. I did not think that I would be able to escape. If I did not die [after being injured] the Chinese would treat me and make me well. If I recovered, they would make me suffer. That was my fear at that time.

Q: And then what happened?

#80: Towards evening just before sunset, I crawled on the ground to a clump of trees and then escaped towards Sera Monastery. In order to flee to Sera Monastery, between a hill and Norbulingka was a swampy area called *gyamtsoe chumuk*. It was muddy and my legs got stuck in it and I faced a lot of difficulties that night. When I reached the hill, towards one side was Sera Monastery, Tibet's Sera Monastery. I intended to go there. I wanted to get some *tsampa* and some money that I had in my room. I thought I could take those and then join the *Chushi Gangdrug* Force.

However, I could not go there because of the shelling. I climbed up the hill and just before I reached the peak, the Chinese burned the Jowo Ramoche—that is not the Jokhang. It was just before dusk and we could see it from the hill. The fire was burning. I kept my gun down and sat crying there. After sometime I climbed the peak and then went down the other side of the hill. I spent the night at the base of the hill. The next morning I left taking the route through Phenpo and joined the *Chushi Gangdrug*.

Q: Is that the statue in the Jokhang or where was it?

#80: The Jokhang of Lhasa is the main one. The Jowo Ramoche [idol] was cut by the Chinese and half of it taken to China. When foreign visitors asked why the Jowo Ramoche was not there, the Chinese brought it back and it was rebuilt. The consecration ceremony was performed by Alak Kirti Rinpoche. As the consecration was going on, a rainbow appeared on the head of the Jowo Ramoche. The people of Lhasa had great faith in Kirti Rinpoche. Long back I saw a picture of Kirti Rinpoche's visit to Lhasa—though the consecration ceremony was missing—in Camp Number 2.

Q: The burning of Jowo Ramoche, did it take place before or after the consecration by Kirti Rinpoche?

#80: That was much earlier; the consecration had already been done long back. The Jokhang of Lhasa faces India. The door of the Jowo Ramoche faces the east. The temple was set on fire and the statue was inside it. Have they [the interviewer and videographer] been long in Dharamsala? Then they must know the Gyutoe Datsang. The Jowo Ramoche was the temple of the Gyutoe Datsang.

Q: How did he know it was burning? He was actually able to see it?

#80: I could see it burning from the hill. That was why we sat there crying. This is not something I heard someone talk about. I saw it with my very own eyes.

Q: Then what happened after he saw this?

#80: The Ramoche was burning and I thought we humans would of course suffer when even the Jowo Ramoche is being burned. I cried for sometime and then as the sun was setting, I climbed down the hill. The next day, I went through Phenpo to join the *Chushi Gangdrug*.

Q: When he joined them, how many of them were there?

#80: It is not possible to say how many guerrillas were there. There were many people from Kham and many people from Amdo. The majority of the people were from those regions. The Commander of the Kham army was Andrug Gonpo Tashi. Amdo Jinpa Gyatso was the Commander of the Amdo army. There were many commanders, but they were the main leaders. Andrug Gonpo Tashi was from Lathing. He was the main person who organized the *Chushi Gangdrug*. When the Chinese were occupied with the *Chushi Gangdrug*, His Holiness the Dalai Lama could be escorted to India. If not for the *Chushi Gangdrug*, it would have been difficult to escort His Holiness to India.

Q: Was he in his monk's robes still at this point?

#80: Monk's robes? No, no. I was in pants and shirts. I was dressed so from the Norbulingka days. From the day I left Sera Monastery, I was dressed in pants and shirts and not in monk's robes.

Q: Then what happened when he joined the *Chushi Gangdrug*?

#80: The Chinese came from everywhere and they were fighting from the sky. I was not among the first fighters of *Chushi Gangdrug*. I joined the *Chushi Gangdrug* after the tumult in Norbulingka. I didn't get to stay there for long; I could stay for only about 15 days. Then we kept changing places, moving from one place to another.

Q: Did he ever meet or see Gonpo Tashi?

#80: Yes, I saw him. After coming to India I saw him in Missamari. You can see his pictures in the books in Dharamsala.

Q: Did you see him then [when you were fighting]?

#80: Of course, I saw him in the *Chushi Gangdrug*. He was a very fine-looking man. However, Amdo Jinpa Gyatso was not good-looking. In terms of wealth he was a very rich

man. I told you earlier that I lived in Lhasa assisting a trader from my village. At that time people were joining the *Chushi Gangdrug*. As I looked down from the third floor of a building in Lhasa, I could see Andrug Gonpo Tashi and others organizing the *Chushi Gangdrug* and then leaving for Lhoka. Lhoka was where the *Chushi Gangdrug* army camp was based. Lhoka was close to Lhasa. The army camp was in Lhoka. I looked down carefully at them and thought, "What good work they are doing to protect the dharma of Tibet." It was the same with Amdo Jinpa Gyatso. I saw him then. When I was in the *Chushi Gangdrug* I looked at them carefully because they are popular people. Then after coming to India, I saw Andrug Gonpo Tashi in Missamari.

Q: He says he was handsome. Can he describe what Andrug Gonpo Tashi was like?

#80: He was very handsome. He had a good physique and big face. He was a good-looking man. Long back I saw some Tibetan New Year's cards, which had the face of Andrug Gonpo Tashi on them. He was handsome. In the books in Dharamsala, you can see Andrug Gonpo Tashi's pictures.

Q: I am definitely going to look that up, investigate it more.

#80: You can see [his pictures] in the book of *Chushi Gangdrug*. His Holiness the Dalai Lama likes Andrug Gonpo Tashi very much. He [Andrug Gonpo Tashi] was so enthusiastic that he sacrificed his life. It was the same with Amdo Jinpa Gyatso.

Q: When he said that he joined *Chushi Gangdrug*, was it a matter of just going up to the resistance soldiers and just saying, "I want to join you guys"? Was there any discussion? Did they ask him questions? How did that happened exactly?

#80: Anyone who wanted to join was most welcome. There was a dearth of men then. At that time they needed men who could sacrifice their lives.

Q: And he was ready to do that?

#80: I joined the group of Amdo Jinpa Gyatso. He announced, "I need 500 men. I can provide food for them and purchase horses for them. I can meet all these expenses. You must fight hard." When I joined his group, there were only a little over 400 men. Besides him there were Amdo Lekshay and Amdo Zampa who were also commanders. There were many others, but he [Amdo Jinpa Gyatso] was the chief. Among those from Kham were Ratuk Ngawang, Alo Chonzey and Alo Dawa. I know all of them. They were commanders in the *Chushi Gangdrug*. The supreme chief was Andrug Gonpo Tashi.

Q: Who was supplying the *Chushi Gangdrug*?

#80: I carried the gun that was provided to me at Norbulingka in Lhasa.

Q: Who was supplying the food? Where were they getting their food?

#80: We purchased our food or they [the *Chushi Gangdrug*] distributed *tsampa* and food that were collected from the people.

Q: So when he said for 15 days he was running here and there, can he describe exactly what they were doing and where he was going?

#80: When the Chinese arrived, we fled and they fired from the sky. We did not have the chance to fire at them because they fired artillery shells at us from long distance away.

Q: What was the sense of camaraderie between the men who were fighting? What was the feeling between these men? Did they create very close bonds very quickly?

#80: At the time the camaraderie among the men was very good because everybody was suffering. Everyone was united and friendly.

Q: And then what happened?

#80: Then some people from my region climbed up the Tsethang Gonpori [a hill] and there we lost many people. I did not go to the hill. The hill was surrounded by Chinese and they [the Chinese] fired artillery shells at them. Once you are on top of a hill, there is no other way except to come down, so we lost many men. Many from my region died there.

Q: Where is Gonpori?

#80: Tsethang is in Lhoka. There was Lhoka, Tsethang, Tangtu Dolma Rangsho and Senye. The Tsethang Gonpori is a hill in the center of an open ground. They [the guerrillas] climbed up the hill and then the Chinese surrounded it. We suffered a big loss.

Q: How many died?

#80: About 12 or 13 people from my region [in Amdo] died. There were many deaths, but I don't know about the others.

Q: Was he there? Did he witness this?

#80: I was nearby Tsethang Gonpori. I was not there at the spot.

Q: So he was seeing this?

#80: I saw two dead. Their bodies tumbled down the hill. They were from my region.

Q: What did he do then?

#80: We retreated when the Chinese came and they fired from the airplanes. That was the course of action. We couldn't fight them. Before the war in Lhasa, the *Chushi Gangdrug* succeeded in resisting the Chinese. They blocked roads and pushed boulders down on the

Chinese vehicles from the hills. They were also able to ambush them a few times. Enthusiasm and great planning were there, but the result was not much. They [the Chinese] could not be defeated. Their weapons were mighty. Their bullet stocks had no end.

Q: Did morale in the group that he was in change after the event at Gonpori? Did the morale get lower?

#80: We were filled with dread of the Chinese. We did not know how to fight the war. They [the Chinese] were so powerful that they only fired from far away. If they were close by, we could fire at them and they would fire at us. However, that was not so. They were so far away. They fired artillery shells at us. They fought that way in Lhasa too.

Where enthusiasm was concerned, whether it was the people in the *Chushi Gangdrug* or those that went to Norbulingka, everybody volunteered for the defense of Tibet and her religion. In my case also I did not volunteer because I was highly capable. I made up my mind when I thought that His Holiness the Dalai Lama's life was in danger. It was not because I was courageous or capable. I was not that competent. Our opposition was too powerful.

Q: Then?

#80: Just as I said all the people of Lhasa feared that they were bound to suffer. Keeping the safety of His Holiness in mind, I made the decision and joined [the *Chushi Gangdrug*]. Initially when I joined, I thought I would fight in the war, but then I found out it was futile. They [the Chinese] were so mighty and fired at us. The weapons in our hands were useless because they [the Chinese] didn't come near us. Take Norbulingka for example, they fired artillery shells at it from a great distance. When night fell, they burned bright lights and fired shots from a tank, a vehicle that looks like a bulldozer. That happened at Norbulingka after night fell.

Q: It is completely understandable Norbulingka would have withstood this.

#80: We had decided in our hearts that we'd go to Norbulingka to fight a war. However, the strategy of the [Tibetan] government was to mislead the Chinese. The Tibetan people surrounded and guarded Norbulingka with His Holiness inside the palace. Then they were able to escort His Holiness away. Even after His Holiness was escorted out, they pretended that His Holiness was still inside. They were secretly able to take His Holiness away without the knowledge of the Chinese. His Holiness pretended to be a *Chushi Gangdrug* guerrilla and rode away on a horse on the night of the eighth.

On the morning of the 9th we were told that His Holiness had been safely escorted away and that we were not to worry. We were told to fight well in the battle. However, in order for us to fight well in the battle, they [the Chinese did not come close but] fired shells and destroyed all the buildings and trees. We were helpless. If the battle were hand-to-hand combat, we would have used our swords to kill them or be killed. It was not like that.

Q: What happened after the 15 days of being in the *Chushi Gangdrug*? What happened after that? What did he do?

#80: I engaged in resistance during the 15 days. If we were in one place, the Chinese fired from the airplanes and pursued us on the ground. We ran away to another place. In a day or two, they [the Chinese] arrived again and we had to be on the run again. Carrying on in this fashion, we reached India.

After I joined the *Chushi Gangdrug* at Lhoka, the Chinese fired from the airplanes. Their bullets were large ones. However, I was able to escape to India. Yes, I did join the *Chushi Gangdrug*—I was not among the first people—but we did not fight at all. When the Chinese came, we resisted and then fled. That was the pattern. We were trying to safeguard our lives once we were at Lhoka.

Q: What part of India did they enter? What part of the Indian border?

#80: When we left Lhoka in Tibet, we reached the place called Yando Taklha. Yando Taklha is at the end of Lhoka's territory. Then we came to Mangola [a mountain pass]. Mangola was the main route taken by all the people who fled Tibet. One had to climb up in the snow and then come down the other side. After journeying for three days, we reached Mon Tawang. I first reached Mon Tawang, the east of India.

Q: How were they received by the Indian border police? They must have looked pretty rough by this time and pretty imposing. How did the border police receive them?

#80: Just before reaching Mon Tawang was a big river. It was difficult to cross the bridge. The bridge was a very weak one where just humans could about pass, so we left the horses there. Then we reached Mon Tawang. We met those people who had escaped earlier. The Indian government air-dropped food parcels in the forests of Mon Tawang for us.

Q: What happened then?

#80: The food was divided among the people. Thanks to His Holiness the Dalai Lama who requested that the Indian government immediately provided sustenance by airplane, as there were no motor roads in Mon Tawang. Vehicles couldn't go there. Food was dropped from airplanes, which were distributed.

Then we slowly walked to Bomdila. Even His Holiness had walked at that time. From Bomdila I went to Missamari. Majority of the *Chushi Gangdrug* men reached there. There were the monks of Sera, Drepung and Gaden Monasteries. However, there were no people from central region of Tibet because that was not the route they took. They came through Gangtok and Nepal. Most of the people of Kham and Amdo took the route through Mangola.

Q: Who were they receiving instructions from at this time? Was there somebody in their group, I'm assuming they were separated from the leader. Who were they receiving instructions from what to do?

#80: The leaders of the *Chushi Gangdrug* were there. The Indian government had built bamboo houses in rows. Thirty people, whether they were from Kham or Amdo lived together in each bamboo house. The Indian government provided the provisions. We stayed there for about two to three months.

Q: Who was the leader of the *Chushi Gangdrug* you received instruction from?

#80: There was no [*Chushi Gangdrug*] because we were cared for by the Indian government. There was no one [from whom we took instructions] at that time as the Indian government was provided for us.

Q: He said he met Gonpo Tashi in Missamari. Can he describe that meeting and what happened and what was said at the meeting?

#80: No, I did not talk to him. I looked at Andrug Gonpo Tashi and Amdo Jinpa Gyatso. They were famous people and I watched them. I was happy to see them because they were good people. I spoke to Jinpa Gyatso because he is an Amdowa [a person from Amdo.]

Q: What was Amdo Jinpa Gyatso like as a person?

#80: He was lean and tall. He was a very honest and frank person. He was not a highly educated man, but was renowned for his wealth. When the Golden Throne was constructed for His Holiness in Tibet, he was one of the major sponsors. Of course he was not the only person.

Q: Was he at the *Kalachakra* at Ramoche in 1958 where His Holiness sat on the Golden Throne? Did he attend that *Kalachakra*?

#80: I was not there when His Holiness sat on the Golden Throne. I reached [Lhasa] a little after that. The main sponsors for the Golden Throne were the wealthy Khampas and Amdowas. Not only Khampas and Amdowas, but there were also people from Utsang. The Golden Throne and table were there at Norbulingka.

Q: Does he know this *Kalachakra* that His Holiness gave sitting on the Golden Throne? Was it at Norbulingka or was it at Ramoche?

#80: It must have been Norbulingka, but I was not there. I reached [Lhasa] after the *Kalachakra*.

Q: Can he describe the Golden Throne a little bit?

#80: I have been twice to look at the Golden Throne.

Q: What did it look like?

#80: Oh, it was large. The Golden Throne is large and even the table next to it is made of gold. It was incredible. I have not seen it, but heard that the Chinese have carted it away to China. Then when some foreign people asked about the Golden Throne, they [the Chinese] brought it back to Lhasa.

Q: Can he describe how the Golden Throne came to be? How the funds were raised to create it?

#80: The sponsors for the Golden Throne were those wealthy people of Tibet. They sponsored the *Kalachakra* and constructed the Golden Throne for His Holiness the Dalai Lama. They were mostly the rich people and also as is our tradition, there were many who made offerings even if it was just 100 *rupees*. Due to the effort of everyone, the Golden Throne was created. There were a few main sponsors.

Q: Was it like a special occasion since it was a very, very special throne; it wasn't created very often. What was so special about it?

#80: It was the enthusiasm of the sponsors and people of Tibet that God in flesh and blood would sit on the throne and give a *Kalachakra*. It was not that His Holiness demanded a golden throne. That was not the reason. It was created by the enthusiasm of the people.

Q: When he was in Missamari with the rest of the *Chushi Gangdrug*, did they think that they were going to regroup and attack again across the Indian border? Was that the kind of discussion of regrouping and trying to fight the Chinese again?

#80: At that time there were meetings, but nobody knew what steps to take in the future. If we were to go back, it would have to be back to Lhoka. There was no one who said, "I will be the sponsor and you should fight." Each one had to seek his way.

I don't know after how many months it was when the army [guerrilla force] in Mustang [Nepal] was established. Do you remember that? Mainly it was the *Chushi Gangdrug* at Mustang. The army regrouped at Mustang prepared to fight in the future. Later it did not work out and disbanded. The place [Mustang] was at the Nepal border. The influential people did make a preparation at Missamari and regrouped the *Chushi Gangdrug* at Mustang.

Q: Did he go to Mustang?

#80: No, I did not go. From Missamari I went to work on road construction near Dalhousie, which is close to Dharamsala in Himachal Pradesh. Those that went to Mustang left about a year after that.

Q: What happened between that time and him arriving in Bylakuppe?

#80: I worked as a laborer building roads in Chamba for two years. It was a very dangerous place with rockslides. Twenty-two people perished under such a rockslide. There were many monks of Sera, Gaden and Drepung Monasteries. Then I took leave and worked in Simla as a coolie for three years. Later I took up the job of a cook at the Tibetan School in Chota Simla. I served as a cook for seven years. After that I came to Bylakuppe.

Q: I wanted to get him to paint a picture, if possible between battles what it was like in the camps. Did the men make jokes, did they drink and did they play cards? What were they doing when they were waiting for battle to begin and between battles?

#80: You are asking me questions and I would like to know if I am answering correctly. I am speaking frankly. I am not a good speaker and have never been one. I am also not one who speaks highly of himself. You know, there are some people who extol one's achievements. I am not one. Fearing for the life of His Holiness the Dalai Lama, I volunteered to go to Norbulingka. I am not a capable person. Joining [as a guard at the Norbulingka] in great eagerness, I suffered no damage to my life and thanks to the volunteers at Norbulingka and the *Chushi Gangdrug* guerrillas, His Holiness could be safely escorted to India. That was most fortunate. Isn't it enough now? People volunteered at Norbulingka in enthusiasm. Then the *Chushi Gangdrug* guerrillas enthusiastically escorted him [His Holiness] on the way while the Chinese were distracted. Such was the happenings then.

Q: Tell him it's is perfect. It's very exciting; its' like watching a movie.

#80: They [interviewer and videographer] are traveling for the sake of the cause of Tibet, spending their money. I know they are doing so for a great cause. That is very good that they are working hard for the Tibetan issue. When we first arrived in India, you [interpreter] were young and perhaps in school, but we felt that we were bound to suffer. I never thought that I would be this happy then.

Q: I am so glad to hear that. That's great. A lot of soldiers don't like their superior officers. I want to know how the soldiers felt about Andrug Gonpo Tashi, especially since he was a rich man; he was unlike them. First of all please tell him that I am very happy to hear that he is happy. I think he deserves much happiness and I'd like to know why he feels so happy.

#80: Long back we came to India and had to make a life for ourselves. We had to work to fend for ourselves. Then we came to the settlement where the Indian government provided us with houses and lands. Thus, we were able to survive. Then the monasteries and the students of the school and the people of the settlements progressed. When there is development and no suffering, one is happy. That is one. Then people anywhere in the foreign world—it's natural for the Tibetans—heed the words of His Holiness the Dalai Lama and lend him help. That makes me happy. I am speaking the truth.

Q: What did the men do when they weren't fighting or running here and there? When they were camping what did they do? What did they talk about and how did they pass the time?

#80: We were in fear and just ran here and there. Though we had the intention to fight, they [the Chinese] did not come close [for us to fight]. It was misery all the time and where could there be any happiness then?

Q: Many soldiers don't really like their superior officers, how did they feel about the people in charge of *Chushi Gangdrug*?

#80: There was no reason why I should not like them. They were enthusiastic and were opposing the Chinese by taking the lead in the *Chushi Gangdrug*. I felt happy on seeing them and never had any dislike towards them.

Q: How did he feel about Andrug Gonpo Tashi? How did he feel towards him?

#80: I cannot explain that. He led the *Chushi Gangdrug* with great enthusiasm. Didn't he? He sacrificed his life, gathered the people and made plans to resist the Chinese. Whether he was able to resist [the Chinese] or not, his thoughts were great.

It was the same with Jinpa Gyatso. He was an immensely zealous man. I don't know the details of the sponsorship of Andrug Gonpo Tashi. However, Jinpa Gyatso spent his own money to feed the men. He had said, "I am able to feed 500 men in the *Chushi Gangdrug* for five years." I heard him speak so at that time; that was for the protection of Tibet's dharma. Actually there was no chance of success for the army [*Chushi Gangdrug*]. If a battle was going on in Hunsur [a town at a distance of 30 miles from Bylakuppe] one didn't know about it here. There were no telephones. It was just a case of stubborn foolishness as there was no chance of a success.

Q: Tell him thank you so much for sharing his story with us that was fascinating and he told it so well. Thank you very much.

#80: I have to thank you for coming to ask someone like me who doesn't know anything. Whatever was there in my mind, I have related to you clearly. There is no scope for lying because most people know about the story of the *Chushi Gangdrug* and in the case of Norbulingka, people know about the story of Norbulingka. Isn't that so? If I were to lie, that would not succeed.

Q: Is there anything that we left out of his story?

#80: I don't think there's anything left. You asked me all the questions and whether it'll be beneficial or not, I have answered you frankly.

Q: Does he think about Tibet much these days?

#80: I have gone back twice, so I will talk about that. I went to Tibet in 1986. At that time my father was living and I had many relatives, so I went to meet them. I went to see the Golden Throne at Norbulingka that you asked me about now. I went to Tibet a second time in the year 2005. When I went the first time, my monastery was completely destroyed by

the Chinese; there was nothing. There were plans of rebuilding it. The construction was very well done by the time I visited two years back. There is much progress in Lhasa. Again, I went to see the Golden Throne at Norbulingka.

Q: Was it shocking for him to see the changes that have taken place there?

#80: When I visited the first time, it was so-so. Among all the monasteries, if you saw the Gaden Monastery, you would feel depressed. The whole monastery was destroyed. Except for a little bit of reconstruction, it has still not been re-built. In Sera Monastery, the Sera Je section has fared better. The rest is not yet rebuilt.

The city of Lhasa is very well constructed. That is the place where the tourists come. For one, it is the place where foreign tourists and many people from China arrive. Lhasa is the foundation, so it is very well maintained. Whereas the monasteries...It is said that our people and the Chinese together destroyed the monasteries and now it is very difficult for the reconstructions to take place. There is no progress for the monasteries.

Q: And the Golden Throne was still there in 1986 and was it still there in 2005? I heard it had been taken away then.

#80: I saw the Golden Throne in 1986 and once again in 2005. Yes, the throne was there. Norbulingka has a palace; a very good palace and around it runs a wall. The walls are not in a good condition. I saw them repairing the walls.

Q: Is that the wall he had fired from in foxholes?

#80: Norbulingka has a boundary wall. We dug the earth [near the outer wall] and sat within it, with our bodies not being seen at Norbulingka.

Q: Which was the wall that was being repaired?

#80: That was the main wall, the old boundary wall.

Q: Is that the wall near where he hid then?

#80: No, it was not that.

Q: Were there two boundary walls?

#80: There is the outside and the inside of the wall. [Scaffoldings] from where we could fire our guns were made at some points, but not all around the wall. When I went back, I did go around [the boundary wall of Norbulingka] to locate those places where we hid, but I could not as trees have been planted. I could not recognize those places.

Q: Did people ask him about His Holiness when he went back to Tibet?

#80: Of course, they would ask that. It is natural in Lhasa [for people to revere His Holiness], but in the family home where His Holiness was born in our region, many people visited there to make prostrations at the empty house. His Holiness is revered in the whole of Tibet.

Q: In light of the interview now, how do you feel about the dissemination of this interview in the world? Would it be better if we changed your name? How do you feel in general now about this interview going out into the world?

#80: I have not spoken about anything that would cause me any problems. Speaking the truth would not be harmful. Would it?

Q: Would he like us to change his name? We could easily do it.

#80: I have not been able to lead [the Tibetans] into opposing the Chinese. That is the truth. When I went back in 1986, the Chinese took me to their office. They invited me for a meal and called me to their office and said, "Were you among those that went to Norbulingka long back?" I didn't have to keep it a secret; they knew everything.

Q: They knew?

#80: They knew it. After I had escaped to India from Norbulingka, to people in my village, the Chinese said, "The reactionary went to Norbulingka. We have killed him and finished him off."

Q: So when he was in the office and he said, 'Yes, I was at the Norbulingka,' what did they do?

#80: They said that in my village, not at Lhasa. They told relatives in my village that I had gone to Norbulingka, was killed and that they should have no hope for me. They said that to my people in my hometown.

Changes took place in Tibet in 1979 and 1980. Religious freedom was given during the time Deng Xiao Ping was in power. It was not so under Mao Zedong. In 1979 and 1980 people could go to and from Tibet to visit relatives and there was religious freedom. A monk of Sera Monastery [in Bylakuppe] was not sound of health and mind, so he lived in Nepal instead of staying at the Sera Monastery. Before he left for Nepal, he came to my house [in Bylakuppe] to do some *pooja*. He went to Nepal and then to his village in Tibet in 1979-80. In the village he told them about me, that I was living in the south of India in a settlement. They [the relatives] replied, "Please do not lie to us. He went to Norbulingka and was killed there. Please do not lie to us. Our relative is no more." That was how they replied.

Q: Did the police just let him go and give him a warning?

#80: That happened not in Lhasa, but in my village in Amdo. The Chinese said, "It is good of you to come to your village. It is not like what it was earlier. Things are much better now." They were trying to bring back all the people. They did not show any hostility to me.

Q: This is the last question. If the young generation of Tibetans in exile would listen to him, what advice does he have for them?

#80: Only the advice of His Holiness the Dalai Lama would be helpful. What would be the use of advice from someone like me? It is difficult. Nobody would like it. Everything has changed these days. From 100 percent, I am among the one percent; the other 99 percent have progressed. One man called Amdo Lala says that people from this age differ from those of the olden times. If one who does not have education advises the younger generation, would it help? Let alone children of other people, your own children would hardly listen to half of what you say these days.

Q: One of the purposes of the project is to educate the younger generation the things that his generation went through and how much wisdom they have and what they can learn from them.

#80: His Holiness the Dalai Lama gives a lot of advice. I have heard that about three to four years back, His Holiness said in the United States of America, "You [Tibetans] have all come to this foreign land and are financially well-off. There are many [Tibetans] in India who are very poor. It would be good if you could help them." It's good if people pay attention when His Holiness advises, otherwise, it is difficult. However, when it comes to His Holiness' words, I do not say that the younger generation does not listen to them. All the youngsters are good. However, it is futile for someone like me to advise [them]. Even if it is very small child, he has devotion for His Holiness.

[Interviewee rolls out a picture on the table and explains]: This is a picture I brought from my village two years back. [Pointing in the picture] This is Jachung Gonpa here. This is the main assembly hall. This temple here is the temple where the Je Tsongkhapa lived. That is the picture of Je Tsongkhapa's tutor, whose monastery this was. Je Tsongkhapa was brought to this monastery. That is Je Tshongkhapa and this is Gyalwa Sonam Gyatso, the 5th Dalai Lama. He came to this monastery and brought great progress to it.

Q: How much was destroyed by the Chinese?

#80: The entire monastery. There was nothing left. [Pointing to picture] This is Gyumed Datsang. This is Dhunkhor Datsang and that is Menpa Datsang.

Q: Where did he live?

#80: I used to live there earlier. [Pointing to right end of the picture] It was very easy [to escape] towards the back of the mountain from there.

END OF INTERVIEW