

Tibet Oral History Project

Interview #22C – Paljor Thondup
August 3, 2014

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INTERVIEW SUMMARY SHEET

1. Interview Number: #22C
2. Interviewee: Paljor Thondup
3. Age: 65
4. Date of Birth: 1949
5. Sex: Male
6. Birthplace: Dongpa Mayma
7. Province: Dhotoe (Kham)
8. Year of leaving Tibet: 1959
9. Date of Interview: August 3, 2014
10. Place of Interview: Tibetan Association of Santa Fe Community Center, Santa Fe, New Mexico, USA
11. Length of Interview: 1 hr 28 min
12. Interviewer: Marcella Adamski
13. Interpreter:
14. Videographer: Tomas Haywood
15. Translator: Tenzin Yangchen

Biographical Information:

Paljor Thondup was born in a village called Dongpa Mayma in Kham Province. He belonged to a large family, which was one of the richest and most powerful in the region. His father was second in command to the district's chief. He describes their wealth in terms of land and animals. He recalls his early nomadic family life, and especially the Tibetan mastiffs that were used to protect their animals from wolves and bears.

Paljor Thondup was taught reading and writing at home by a tutor during the summertime. The rest of the year he didn't have much to do because the nomadic families were miles apart from each other so he had no one to play with except his cousin. Paljor Thondup greatly enjoyed the annual horse racing festival and visits to local monasteries.

Paljor Thondup talks about his first encounter with the Chinese and their cunning tactics used to lure Tibetans, which then changed to harassment and the subjugation of Tibet. After some of his family members were arrested, the remainder of his family decided to escape to Lhasa. The city was crowded with other refugees, visitors for the Monlam Festival and His Holiness the Dalai Lama's final examinations in Buddhist philosophy and the invading Chinese Army. His family continued on towards Nepal, having to hide from and battle with Chinese troops along way.

Topics Discussed:

Kham, childhood memories, nomadic life, education, festivals, first appearance of Chinese, invasion by Chinese army, resistance fighters, escape experiences.

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Interviewee: Paljor Thondup

Age: 65, Sex: Male

Interviewer: Marcella Adamski

Interview Date: August 3, 2014

[Interviewee speaks in English. No interpreter required.]

Question: Please tell us your name.

00:00:08

Interviewee #22C: My name is Paljor Thondup.

Q: His Holiness the Dalai Lama asked us to record your experiences, so that we can share your memories with many generations of Tibetans, the Chinese and the rest of the world. Your memories will help us to document the true history, culture and beliefs of the Tibetan people. Do you give your permission for the Tibet Oral History Project to use this interview?

#22C: Yes.

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

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

#22C: No.

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

#22C: [Nods]

Q: Paljor-*la*, can you please tell us when you were born and where you were born?

00:01:13

#22C: I was born in a village called Dongpa Mayma in the area of Nangchen. There are known to be 25 different provinces or districts under the King of Nangchen. So my birthplace was one of the 25 districts.

Q: And that's in what province?

#22C: That is in the Kham area.

Q: In the Kham area. And what year were you born?

#22C: I was born...actually my birthdate is 1947 but my passport says I was born in '49. So officially I'm born in '49.

Q: You could be two years younger.

#22C: Well, when we went to India all our people got messed up. Not many people remember when they were born. So...plus my age got reduced by two years.

Q: Well, we'll go with that and what was the nearest temple or monastery to your house?

00:02:30

#22C: The nearest was called Barmaygong, Barmaygong.

Q: In the village where you were born like about how many families were there, would you say?

#22C: I think about, probably about...it's a nomadic community. So they didn't live together like in a town or city. It's more like ranches in the West. People owned like areas, many acres because the nomadic families have many yaks and sheep, goats, mules, horses. So in that area probably about 3-500 families. It's a large, you know...

Q: ...community.

#22C: ...large...

Q: ...terrain.

#22C: ...community, yeah terrain.

Q: A large swath of land.

#22C: My family actually owned about 18 square miles.

Q: And how many animals did they have about?

#22C: We had yaks, actually *dri* 'female yaks.' You know, most people refer to yak as the animal and people say 'I had yak-butter tea,' which is not true because yak is a bull. So what you get milk is...the female yaks are known as *dri*. My family was rather wealthy in the nomads and one of the richest families and very powerful family.

Q: Had they been in that area for generations?

00:04:20

#22C: Yeah, for many generations.

Q: Do you know how far back? Did your father ever tell you or your parents?

#22C: I'm not exactly sure but I know five or six generations.

Q: 18 square miles and so you have the yaks, *dri* and what else?

#22C: Yaks, sheep, goats. My family probably had about several hundred yaks, couple of thousand sheep and few hundred goats, about 20 or 25 horses and mules, and three big Tibetan mastiffs.

Q: Tell us about that. How big are they? What are they like?

#22C: They're really huge. They're almost resemble a kind of lions.

Q: Really?

#22C: Yeah, and currently, I think early this year a Chinese bought one Tibetan mastiff for \$1.9 million. They're known to have some kind of blood of lion, but I think that is more mythology than you know, fact. But they are huge. They are highly priced and a very rare species. They only exist, live in nomad areas. Nomadic families have a lot of dogs to protect their animals from wolves and you know, Himalayan grizzly bears. So it's necessary to have as many dogs to protect their animals.

Q: Right. Like say a man is six foot tall. How high would the mastiff be? How tall?

00:06:17

#22C: Mastiffs...I would say at least by four feet.

Q: Really?

#22C: Yeah. It's almost like, same size as an average lion, a real lion.

Q: Yeah. Well, we don't have too many lions around. That's why I asked. [Laughs] But pretty big and very bulky?

#22C: Very bulky and very hairy on the head side. It's almost resembling to that of a male lion.

Q: Yes, it sounds that way.

#22C: Yeah.

Q: Did you have a...were you afraid of them? Did you have them as friends?

#22C: No because we knew our own dogs. Dogs are, you know, known to be man's best friend. And they are very protective of the family members but they are very ferocious and very dangerous to strangers and, you know...Because in Kham area there are lot of

bandits, lot of horse thieves. You know, Kham is a very interesting place. Almost, most of the highest Tibetan lamas are one or another time born in Kham and many Tibetan heroes also come from Tibet...Kham area. And great scholars, a lot of them also happen to come from Kham area. But then horse thieves, famous, notorious bandits, cut throats, they also happen to be from Kham. So Kham, you know in my book I said, "Kham is a place where the good and the bad and the ugly people..." [Laughs] It's a place where really action is happening in Tibet in the old days.

Q: In the old days.

#22C: Yeah.

Q: And the energies can go in very negative or very positive ways.

00:08:13

#22C: Yeah. And also Khampas are known to be warriors.

Q: I know.

#22C: They are the ones who actually brought His Holiness the Dalai Lama safely all the way from Tibet to India with the help of, you know Khampa guerrilla fighters.

Q: So when you had...I just was intrigued by the story of the mastiffs. Did you or were you able to get close to them at all as a child or a young boy?

#22C: Oh, yeah. I used to play with them.

Q: Used to play with them!

#22C: Yeah, because they usually in the daytime... we had two kinds of dogs. One is called the loose dog, one that produce sound, bark at people. The mean ones are usually chained to a post and only released at night to protect the animals. If they ever come out of the post or break the chain loose, they will certainly bite somebody to death. They are very ferocious.

Q: So that was the first kind of dog.

#22C: Yeah.

Q: And the second?

00:09:24

#22C: The mean ones are usually chained.

Q: The mean ones are chained...of those two kinds. Mean or...?

#22C: There's an analogy to the political activities of the Chinese today. The mean dogs are the killers and the biting dogs they are behind the scenes just like the Chinese. The Chinese used Tibetans as the loose dogs, the one that barks at everybody, you know. Lot of times you see in Lhasa, lot of Tibetan Government officials are complaining, saying some bad things about the Dalai Lama, but the Chinese are the ones who's making them say such, make such statements.

Q: So they are behind the other dogs.

#22C: Yeah, they are behind the scene.

Q: You sound like you had a very, very prosperous family. So what was it like growing up as a little boy in your family? Tell me some of your activities like did you go to school? Did you...?

#22C: That's one of the problems that we had in Tibet. Only monasteries institutions are the learning place and mostly it caters for the monks. So there are not many schools in Kham area. My parents used to bring a tutor in summertime and taught me how to read and write in Tibetan, you know. Otherwise, as a child nomadic family is very boring because your nearest other family may be miles away. So there's no one to play with unless you have lot of children within the family.

Q: And how many were in your family? Paljor-*la*, how many children?

00:11:23

#22C: I was the only child.

Q: Really?

#22C: Luckily I had another cousin-brother. So two families lived in the same area of 18 square miles. So ended up playing together all our life. Actually we grew up together. We've gone through all the ups and downs of life, you know, coming from Tibet, escaping, and we were also involved in guerrilla warfare at the age of 13 until 16. So my cousin-brother was the only playmate I had. Other than that it was...for a child to live in a very isolated, you know remote area wasn't all that fun.

Q: No, it sounds like it was boring at times.

#22C: Yeah, but I think when you are brought up in such an environment there's no further expectation. So you just naturally accept whatever the situation is. You get used to it.

Q: No idea of anything different.

#22C: Yeah.

Q: And what were your parents like? Can you say a little bit about your father and your mother?

00:12:46

#22C: Actually, we had a large family. I had four uncles and granduncle, great grandfather. My father had three, you know, three brothers; including himself, four brothers. We were born...our family was rich and also we call it *genpo*, that's a minister next to the chief. Each of these 25 districts had a *ponpo*, which means leader or chieftain. My father's position was secondary to the chieftain.

Q: ...of your district?

#22C: Yeah of our district.

Q: Was he a...?

#22C: He was a...quite a character.

Q: Was he?

#22C: Very dignified, very kind but at the same time very mean, you know, a very sort of...not very jolly type, always very determined, you know. Most Khampas you'll find them very determined people, very serious people.

Q: What about your mother? What was she like?

00:14:10

#22C: My mother was actually the gem of the family. She's the home minister. She took in charge of the whole home and fed everybody well. My mother and my grandmother were the real bosses at home.

Q: You said it was a...obviously, you were in a nomad family but did you have a homestead, a place where you stayed most of the time or did you travel with the...?

#22C: We had a winter place, which has a small house, and also we had another house. One of my uncles was a monk, so he had a house by the monastery. But in Tibet because the pastures for the animals...usually they move two or three times in a year to, you know, for better grazing. The only place you spent more time is the winter place, which is much lower and more warm so that the grazing summer time, they save the grass for the winter. Otherwise, they keep moving around you know, different areas.

Q: That's interesting. You save the grass in the wintertime; you're not grazing there.

#22C: Yeah, winter lower place, specially areas that has southern exposure for the sun.

Q: You didn't have school except for the tutor that came in the summertime. You didn't have a lot of playmates. So how did you occupy yourself as a child? What...?

00:16:00

#22C: Actually I hated my tutor because he was very strict.

Q: Was he?

#22C: He came with a pointer, you know a little two or three feet bamboo stick. My uncle taught me alphabet of Tibetan, which I memorized within a couple of days without actually recognizing each character. So I say...I will look around somewhere else and I say, “Ka, kha, ga, nga...” [Tibetan alphabet] Then they figured out that I memorized without really knowing. So the pointer came. So I have to point each letter.

My uncle [tutor] was more clever because instead of normal, you know alphabet a, b, c...he would point in the middle or up and down and everywhere to make sure that I recognized those letters. So my tutor turned the pointer into a weapon of, you know, punishment. He would make me palms up and he hit both with the stick. So I used to run away and join with our shepherds, people herding the animals, you know. Then come home little scared, you know, but... So he became little more careful because after all he was paid to teach me, not to punish me.

Q: Exactly. He did it to learn some kind of teaching methods.

#22C: Yeah. Well, I think it’s sort of like...when you have a monk teacher, they in monasteries they are very well disciplined. There are strict rules. So when he was brought as a tutor he applied the same principle, monastic rules.

Q: But it sounds like you got protection from your family. They said not so much because this child will run away.

#22C: Yeah because actually he’s beating up the son of a, the only son in the family and it’s a big family.

Q: Was that unusual to be an only child?

00:18:26

#22C: Yeah, I think in my case because...well, I think it depends on the family. They probably wanted more children than one but you know, sometimes you can’t have it. You know that’s mother nature.

Q: So were you considered very special to your parents because you were the only son?

#22C: Yeah, I was the only heir to them, you know the family wealth and position. If the Chinese would not have invaded Tibet I would probably become a...you know, the position of my father, which is next to the chieftain.

Q: What a different turn of events your life has been!

#22C: Yeah, well the subjugation of Tibet by China has turned everything upside down.

Q: So why don't...when did...when were there any sort of noteworthy changes in your childhood? What are some things that happened that you remember that began to change you or your life experiences began to change?

#22C: The most interesting part of the nomad family was there were many monasteries in the area, you know in our district. Lot of the monasteries have special prayers that goes on for weeks and then the most interesting part was called *cham*, lamas' mask dance. Those were the sort of most entertaining part of the, you know life, especially in summertime.

Then also we have festivals where they do sort of horse race. People came out for, you know, days, at least seven days to eight. Then they raced horses and also it's almost like a fashion show also. They bring all the jewelries. Every district they collect all jewelries and then they pick the handsome guys and beautiful girls and they decorate with all the, you know, ornaments from the whole village. Those were the most fun part of the life.

Q: It almost sounds like a cultural beauty contest.

00:20:57

#22C: Yeah, it is a cultural beauty contest. The horse race is only just part of the show. That's when they compete the clothing, you know jewelry and ornament and the weapons, the rifles and the swords, you know, everything was actually for show.

Q: Must have been beautiful.

#22C: Including the tent.

Q: Really?

#22C: They have very beautiful, decorated tents.

Q: It sounds like a peaceful time, I mean.

#22C: Oh, yeah. Until the Chinese screwed up everything in Tibet, Tibet was one of the most peaceful; you know, countries in the world.

Q: When you...from the time you were a little boy did you go to those special festivals?

#22C: Oh yeah. We never missed it.

Q: You never missed it and did...you know when you said they would pick the most handsome man and most beautiful woman, will the village dress them up to be a representation or was it just...?

#22C: Yeah, they are like beauty pageants from every village.

Q: Is that right? Did they pick a winner or something?

#22C: No, there's no winner.

Q: Just everybody looked beautiful.

00:22:13

#22C: Yeah, everybody looks beautiful because when you compete in picking a winner that increases problems of jealousy, you know, losers and winners.

Q: Just looking...

#22C: This is more like nature of marathon rather than race.

Q: Yeah, it sounds beautiful. What were some of your favorite memories of the festivals like, did you like the horse racing or the costumes? What did you enjoy?

#22C: I enjoyed mostly the horse race at which people shoot targets while the horse is running really full speed or they hang on the side, pick up greeting scarves, *khata*, when they're riding, you know. I think some of the Native Americans do that, you know when they are riding they disappear on the side of the horse hanging by the, you know... So the Khampas, they reach down on the ground, pick up objects from the ground. Those are much more fun.

And among the monasteries, every time they do the dance, they have this, you know wrathful deities, you know, the masks. Then there are some clowns. Those are much fun for the kids. They are also poking fun at people and audience and mostly among themselves. They are the people who make, you know, laugh.

Q: They made you laugh.

#22C: Yeah.

Q: Because you grew up in a nomad family, were you ever allowed to ride or participate in any of the races?

#22C: I wasn't big enough to ride those fast horses. It's rather dangerous, too.

Q: Yeah, they are.

#22C: Yeah.

Q: So you were quite young at that time.

00:24:11

#22C: Yeah, but we did our own...not officially, but you know...without the saddles...my cousin and I we raced other people's, you know, use other people's horses when they are loose and we run them whole day until they sweat like crazy, but we never did that to our own horses. [Laughs] We almost turned into horse thieves.

Q: To keep playing....

#22C: Yeah.

Q: ...you borrowed somebody else's.

#22C: Yeah.

Q: What cities or villages were these held in? Can you name the towns or villages where the horse races and the festivals were held that you went to?

#22C: This is called Dongpa Mayma.

Q: Dongpa?

#22C: Yeah. So the chief and his ministers choose certain areas...

Q: Where it would be...?

#22C: ...which is centrally located so that everybody, you know, from every corner of the district could come.

Q: ...of the Kham?

#22C: And also large plain area where they can put up, you know hundreds of tents, you know. The whole district will be there, so...

Q: Duma?

#22C: They also have to have some, a little hill because one of the things in the horse race we call down-race, very steep, you know... They go up, they do the fire pooja, you know *lhapsang*, the burning of the juniper leaves and all that the Tibetans do. They go around three times and then they go up the hill and then they race down, very steep. That is one of the most dangerous. You know, if your horse falls off, you know, it can break your neck, you know can break the horse's legs but people still do that. It's just like Italy, you know the bull...

Q: ...fight.

#22C: ...fight.

Q: In Spain you mean the fighting of the bulls.

#22C: Spain, yeah.

Q: It's like that, yeah. Exactly. So Duma, that was what it was called, the area?

00:26:27

#22C: Dongpa.

Q: Oh, Dongpa.

#22C: Yeah, Dongpa. Dong is actually wild yak.

Q: That was in Kham, in the Kham area.

#22C: Yeah, in Kham.

Q: And so what happens? You're going to these probably; let's see nineteen...you're born in '48. So like around 1958 you would be about 10 years. Were you going...?

#22C: Eleven, I think.

Q: You were about 11. So you were going from the time you were 3, 4, 5 years old.

#22C: Yeah.

Q: Every year.

#22C: Every year, yeah. We attended all the horse races and we attended most of the close monasteries, their functions, you know.

Q: I see.

#22C: And their *cham*. Cham is the Tibetan lamas' mask dance.

Q: And these were held what month of the Tibetan year?

#22C: Depends on the tradition of the monastery and which sect it is. You know the four major sects of Tibetan Buddhism? Most of them, you know, were Kagyu and Nyingma.

Q: Most of them and then when did...did anything begin to change in your area as you were growing up in your early adolescence or anything?

00:27:47

#22C: Not so much in early, but except when the Chinese came in.

Q: What do you remember about that?

#22C: The first, encounter with the People's Liberation Army, one time it was in summertime. There were about 70 Chinese soldiers come over. We had never seen Chinese before except some Muslim Chinese business people who used to sell clothing and candies

and you know sugar, tea, etc. So one day all of a sudden we heard...Summer is the most busy for nomads because they do the milking, making butter, cheese and everything. All of a sudden people were shouting and saying, "The Chinese are coming. The Chinese are coming."

One of our mastiffs got loose, so he bit seven or eight Chinese. Then one of my uncles got hold of the dog. Then the Chinese turn around and try to shoot the dog after the fact and my father pulled out his handgun at the Chinese. Then they kind of cooled off.

At that time the Chinese were very nice because Mao himself has instructed not to even take a grain of rice from the, you know, people. So those were the days that they were trying to, you know, pay for everything, be nice, you know, every time, you know, but they got worse and worse. But in the beginning they strictly followed Mao's instructions.

My great-grandfather who was over 80...we heard this rumor that Chinese were eating the old people and little kids. And you know, during the Great Leap in China, and the [Cultural] Revolution millions of Chinese, you know, died of starvation. So with that rumor we heard that they start eating the old people and children who are not very energetic to work, make a living. So I was hiding behind my great-grandfather.

00:30:41

My [great] grandfather, he went out and brought a long sword. He put it on the side. Then he got up again and brought an axe. He also put that on the side. So we stayed, you know and the Chinese came very friendly and my mother gave them some tea, then yogurt and with what we call *doma*, which is wild, small sweet potatoes. First they hesitated because that looks like little worms, you know. When they found out it was sweet potatoes, they enjoyed it. They drank milk and yogurt and they stayed overnight.

They made their own food. They made noodles and my father gave them one sheep to be butchered. So with that meat they made a big, you know, big pot of noodles. They gave me a lot of candies. They gave my father a couple of bottles of whiskey, Chinese, and for the family they... They brought a lot of posters of Mao and most of the Chinese leaders in a group picture. That was their propaganda to introduce to the Tibetans who the leaders were besides Mao. One of the most famous posters was Mao swimming in a lake or something. That was Mao's brainwashing, you know, how common he was, you know.

Later we found out that we were not on the menu for dinner. [Laughs] So I came out of hiding, and my great-grandfather finally relaxed. Later I asked him why he did bring the axe. He said since he was so old, the sword may not be, you know, very efficient but he said that with the axe he just drop it, you know. He was very brave. He was a very famous Khampa warrior in his own right at that time when he was young.

Q: So with the axe he could use it if he needed to.

#22C: Yeah, he thought that the axe was a better weapon than a sword.

Q: So did they...once you gave them the sheep and they made soup and all that, did they leave?

00:33:25

#22C: Yeah, and then they paid for everything, yeah.

Q: And then what happened?

#22C: Then they left the next day.

Q: They did.

#22C: Yeah. So that was a kind of nice encounter.

Q: You would have been about...

#22C: But then ever since the Chinese got worse and worse, you know. They become more rude, more, you know, impolite.

Q: But you, the first time you saw them, what would you say how old do you think you were about?

#22C: Maybe 4 or 5.

Q: Really? You have a strong memory of that.

#22C: Oh, yeah.

Q: When's the next time that...what happens next in your life that stands out as significant?

#22C: Significant in terms of China relation or Tibet?

Q: Oh, your our own life, just your own life, could be either.

#22C: Well, I don't particularly recall anything more significant than...

Q: ...than that?

#22C: Yeah.

Q: And then what?

#22C: Until the Chinese came and then...

Q: Tell me about that.

00:34:32

#22C: They started treating Tibetans as if, you know, like they're showing we have the power in their hands.

Q: How did...?

#22C: They start interfering [in] the local laws of the land.

Q: What I'm interested in...because that is a well-known history, but what the thing that no one knows is what you saw with your own eyes. So can you try to remember how you saw the Chinese taking away the land or what you saw or, you know, remember just from your own experiences? If you don't remember it, you don't remember, but I'm trying to get like first-hand accounts of what an individual life like yourself might have experienced when the Chinese came in, not so much the general history. Do you understand the difference?

#22C: Yeah, I think the most bothersome was the Chinese were beginning to introduce communal system, which means the individual families never earn anything and they were trying to turn it into, you know common properties.

Q: Right.

#22C: So they will say, "You will no longer be the owner."

Q: Did they say that to your father?

#22C: Yeah, they were saying that they're going to introduce system that everything belongs to everybody equally.

Q: But you were only a little boy. Did you understand that?

00:36:18

#22C: I wasn't really that much concerned.

Q: You weren't that concerned?

#22C: Yeah.

Q: No, you didn't know what it meant.

#22C: Yeah.

Q: Did your...?

#22C: I was more interested having fun playing as a kid than what the Chinese may do or may not do.

Q: Exactly. So when did you begin to get scared?

#22C: There was one time whole Chinese... that was just before we left Kham. There was a whole garrison of the army along with some of the chieftains from other districts came to

our place. They came there overnight and then we heard that some of our people, our relatives had a clash with another district people, with some Chinese people, army. They killed two people from the other district and one Chinese. So what happened was, what we found out was...see in Kham there's always friction, conflict between different districts. And people...

Q: Friction between the different districts.

#22C: Right.

Q: Just normal friction, everyday.

#22C: Yes.

Q: Kham fight or friction.

#22C: Yeah, they're always fighting. Sometimes caused by bad marriage between two or sometimes caused by horse thieves. They steal horse from one district and then they pull [follow] the tracks, you know. And then they steal more horses from here as a revenge and then gunfire, you know killing people and anything they would. So it turned out these people were coming to our territory with horse people, with rifles and guns with Chinese and other people from another district. In reality they were trying to retrieve some stolen horses. Those horses were stolen by another district, but they took it in our territory and then went the other side. So it may look like our people stole the horses.

Q: Yeah.

00:38:56

#22C: So these Chinese soldiers as well as the other Khampas following the horse, you know, footprints leading up to our territory. We always have surveillance, you know people who always watch the border to see if anything is coming from other districts. So they saw a lot of horse people with rifles and guns and they alerted our people. So in Tibet if you see a number of horse people with guns, normally it's taken to be enemy, you know.

Q: Of course.

#22C: So they attacked them at night and killing some Chinese as well as some others. So the Chinese sent all the soldiers to our...to arrest those people and most of them are relatives from our village but they [Chinese] actually lied. They said these people will have to go to the town called Zathur where the major Chinese army base was. There they established military justice system, you know, military court. So they said they will decide the fate of these, you know, people.

Q: Because they had killed Chinese soldiers.

#22C: Yeah.

Q: And because they thought that they were...

#22C: ...they were...

Q: ...bandits

#22C: ...bandits or they were...

Q: ...horse thieves

#22C: ...they were attackers from not the district...

Q: ...from another district

00:40:46

#22C: Yeah. Our village or district at that time was fighting many other districts.

Q: They were.

#22C: Yeah, in Kham area it's like the old Wild West. This Kham is Wild East. [Laughs] It's always fighting.

Q: I lost the point when they shot the Chinese soldiers, were the Chinese just riding by themselves with guns? Was there a reason why they were coming?

#22C: Yeah, they were retrieving the horses.

Q: Okay, the Chinese were retrieving the horses.

#22C: Yeah, and the horse tracks followed to our territory.

Q: Why were the Chinese going after the horse thieves? Why...?

#22C: Because the horses belonged to the Chinese army.

Q: They belonged to the Chinese army. They didn't belong to another Khampa district.

#22C: No.

Q: They were...

#22C: But they brought some of the other district people to make more people, fighting people.

Q: I see. They brought some...they were going to help the Chinese retrieve the horses.

#22C: Right, right.

Q: And that...

#22C: Because they knew the land much better than the Chinese.

Q: Of course.

#22C: Yeah.

Q: The horse thieves went through your...

#22C: ...territory and then they went to other place. See, suppose this [indicates top of table] is our territory and this [indicates space at right side of table] is another district where the horses were stolen and these guys lived over here [indicates space to left of table]. So what they did instead of going like this [points around edge of table] which will lead the horse tacks right into their territory, instead they went through our place [points right across table] and went. It looked like we stole the horses.

Q: So when your...when people from your district saw men coming with guns, they just went to protect themselves.

#22C: Yeah.

Q: They didn't know what was going on.

00:42:38

#22C: They took them as approaching of enemies...

Q: I see.

#22C: ...to invade us.

Q: I understand now. And then so they shot and some Chinese were killed.

#22C: They attacked. They ambushed them at night and killed two Chinese and two people from the other district.

Q: Okay.

#22C: At that time the Chinese surrendered because they were outnumbered, outgunned by our people. So later more Chinese came to arrest these people and saying that the matter would be resolved within a few days and that there will be some, you know compensation for the loss of life as well as replacement of stolen horses. But later we found out who stole the horses. So there was no blame for us to...for the stolen horses. However, because of killing two Chinese soldiers and two other people, the Chinese came to arrest those guys by lying saying that it will only take a few days to settle the case and pay

compensation, but actually they took them to a town called Zathur and then Cheku where, you know the big earthquake took place.

Q: Yeah.

#22C: Yeah? And then they finally took everybody to Xining, Qinghai with the...a place in Amdo where—the Dalai Lama’s birthplace. And they never released these [people]; these all died in prison. That was the beginning. We knew that...those half of the people were our relatives and cousins and you know. That was the issue that my family had [with the Chinese] taking all our friends and relatives and never to be seen again. We knew and that’s why when we left Kham along with this big lama Tai Situ, he was also escaping from their area, from Derge. Derge and Nangchen are border, like two districts. His birthplace is my birthplace.

Q: So let me just get something. So the Chinese said, “We’re just going to take you to a court system, have a hearing...”

00:45:17

#22C: Decide the case a couple of days...

Q: Try the case a couple of days but your relatives never came back.

#22C: They never came back. They all died in prison.

Q: They all died. So how long...?

#22C: Because you know why they said that the case would be resolved within a few days? If we knew we were never going to see them we would have fought...

Q: Yeah.

#22C: ...the Chinese.

Q: Yeah, of course.

#22C: Everybody would have attacked the Chinese.

Q: Yeah, you would not have let them take them away. But how old...many days and months passed when you realized your relatives were not coming back and then your family decided to leave Kham? What...?

#22C: Yeah, within a year because when we heard that they were taken all the way to Xining, which is Qinghai Province...

Q: Yeah.

#22C: ...and that was far away. We knew anybody who went up those prisons, hard labor camps never returned. So that's when we decided that we're never going to see them again.

Q: Okay.

#22C: That's when we decided to leave, you know.

Q: To leave Kham?

#22C: Kham, yeah.

Q: That's to leave...to leave your homeland...

#22C: Oh yeah.

Q: ...you've been for hundreds and hundreds of years.

#22C: Yeah.

Q: Many generations.

#22C: Yeah, it was a big decision.

Q: Were there any other bad things happening around you besides that a couple of relatives that you loved had disappeared in prison? Were there any other bad things happening in Kham?

00:46:45

#22C: Because Chinese were becoming more and more strict.

Q: In Kham?

#22C: Yeah.

Q: What were they doing?

#22C: They are interfering in the local justice system, which was replaced by the army, you know, court of law. They are also reducing the power of the chieftains. Some of them being bribed, you know getting boxes of Chinese silver coins. Some are taken to Beijing, high lamas and chieftains for brainwashing. When they came back nobody really wasn't talking about anything but China. So they are scared. They [Chinese] showed all these armies, weapons, you know, bombs. They [Tibetans lamas and chieftains] said, "Well, you know. We can't really, you know..."

Q: So the brainwashing worked. It frightened a lot of them.

#22C: Yeah, they scared the hell out of you.

Q: They really got scared. They said, “We better not protest the Chinese.”

#22C: Yeah, because...

Q: Did they start working for the Chinese then or just try to keep everybody...?

#22C: Yeah, they're just keeping quiet.

Q: Keeping quiet. They want you to stay...

#22C: And prepare to leave, you know. So everybody came to realize that sooner or later we will be under the Chinese rule.

Q: Wow. Had you heard of any killings of Khampas or Khampa nomads, settlements anywhere before you left?

00:48:15

#22C: Well, in some parts of Kham they were already fighting against the Chinese.

Q: So you heard, your family heard that?

#22C: Yeah, we heard the news that there was friction between the Khampas and the Chinese.

Q: In where? Did you...?

#22C: In Kham area.

Q: In the Kham area?

#22C: More close to Chinese borders.

Q: Right.

#22C: They started...the invasion of the Chinese in eastern part of [Tibet] soon after Mao gained communist, you know in China. They started invading eastern part of Tibet in 1949.

Q: Right.

#22C: So we left '57 in Kham area. So in between those 12 years we knew that the Chinese were destroying monasteries and killing Khampas, you know.

Q: I understand that you knew that but did anything happen in your own family? Was there anything, you know, was there any danger to your father, your mother, to monastery near you, you know what I'm saying? Did you...you knew out there something was happening but did anything happen...?

#22C: To us personally the arrest of our relatives, that was the number one factor...

Q: That was number one.

#22C: ...which led to our escape, our leaving our, you know hometown 18 acres...you know square miles. That was the decision because we were totally convinced that the Chinese were up there to get us...

Q: Yeah.

#22C: ...sooner or later. There was not much hope except the fear.

Q: That you would be targeted.

#22C: Sooner or later we will be part of, you know Republic of China, People's Republic of China, not as Tibet independent.

Q: Was there before you traveled to Lhasa because that's where you went, right, to Lhasa?

#22C: Yeah.

Q: Before you left was there any shooting or killing right in your area or any...?

00:50:27

#22C: We escaped. I remember the day we left we had this huge tent made of yak hair. From our winter area we moved to our summer area when that was not the time because our winter area is a major travel route. From Kham they go through our property to go for pilgrimage to Lhasa or Mt. Kailash. That was to avoid the people seeing us. So when we moved to the summer place, you know, a couple of months earlier.

One day I saw my parents and my uncles, they were cutting the yak tent and turning it into smaller, in two pieces; two pieces can be carried by a yak. So then I knew. My father and my cousin's father he was also, you know, one of the ministers and my uncle, two uncles they were always having conversation behind the wall, away from the family members. Me and cousin, we used to listen to that. They would tell us not to tell anybody, which we didn't. We heard that they were planning to escape.

So there was discussion—which route, you know, to go to avoid the Chinese because once we leave that area, because our family is well known and the Chinese may, you know, follow us. So they moved to the summer area, reduced the size of the yak tents, and they had another *ba*—*ba* is the tent—and then I had a half brother and they called my half brother and his mother and left the weaker animals with them to take care because we were to cover all the way to Lhasa, which is far, you know, a great distance.

So one night when it was getting dark they loaded up all the yaks and mules and, you know, we took off. We traveled the whole night and in the morning we came as if another, you know...they put up all the tents, looks like we had been in that area like forever. There

were no...that happens to be not the travel route. They knew. They never traveled on the main route. Within a week we were far away from our district. We passed two other districts and we met up with Tai Situ's group. So then, by then there were a lot of Khampas actually going towards...

Q: Lhasa?

00:53:53

#22C: ...towards Lhasa because many of the Kham areas were already overrun by the Chinese. And also we saw a whole bunch of Chinese. That was the first time I ever saw a bicycle in my life, and also the Chinese jeeps, you know four-wheel drive. One time there was in the far distance...it didn't look like a horse but going really fast. So we took off on our horse and we chased this guy. Turns out he was on a bicycle. [Laughs] He got scared because we were coming after; he thought we were bandits and he pulled out a little handgun, you know. We said, "*Miyo, miyo*. We are not enemy." Then he figured out we were village kids who'd never seen bicycles. We were not a threat to him.

Then all of a sudden there were Chinese camps making route from Kham to Lhasa. That was in preparation for the invasion. They were saying, "We're here to help you. We will build airports and make you routes." So that's when we started seeing all these little jeeps. One day a little village kid, he told me he saw a ghost, a monster. He said this has big eyes, you know shining and often made a big noise and he was actually saying this creature is furry with bad smell. Actually it's exhaust pipe, gas. The way he described was like a huge monster. Soon when we saw the army jeeps and trucks, you know he said...there were the parents and the kids going one after the other. So these were the small jeeps and military trucks. He thought these were little monsters. So that was the first time we saw the modern...

Q: So how long did it...you were moving. How many were in your group that were moving? When you started out how many? Just you...?

#22C: There were almost like two or three hundred people.

Q: Wow!

#22C: Tai Situ has a large group. When he left there were many disciples who also want to follow him.

Q: So when you were taking your tent apart and breaking it smaller, the *ba* and you were breaking it, were you all with 200 other people?

#22C: Yeah, each one had their own.

Q: Had their own thing?

#22C: But mostly it's...most people had canvas tents.

Q: Tents, right.

00:56:54

#22C: We were nomads and usually *ba* is lot warmer, you know and more heavier.

Q: I want to go back and get the name please of the...was it the lama who joined your group? Who was he?

#22C: Tai Situ. T-A-I and the second S-I-T-O. Is that right?

[Someone off camera]: U.

#22C: U.

Q: Tai Situ.

#22C: Yeah.

Q: What was his monastery? Which one?

#22C: Monastery is in east district called Palpung. Palpung. Pal...

[Someone off camera]: Palpung.

Q: P-A-R

[Someone off camera]: P-A-L Palpung

Q: Oh, P-A-L-P-O-N?

[Someone off camera]: P-U-N-G

Q: B-U-N-G

[Someone off camera]: Palpung

Q: Okay.

#22C: He's one of the four highest lamas in Kagyu...

[Someone off camera]: Kagyu lineage.

#22C: Kagyu lineage. There are four next to...

[Someone off camera]: ...Karmapa.

#22C: ...Karmapa. Karmapa is the head of the Karma Kagyu. There are many different Kagyus but it's Karma Kagyu. This was the 16th Karmapa. Now the one we have in Dharamsala [India] is the 17th Karmapa.

Q: Yes. So this Tai Situ was the highest...?

00:58:30

#22C: Yeah, he's one of the four highest next to the Karmapa...

Q: Okay. Thank you.

#22C: ...in the Karma Kagyu lineage.

Q: Okay, and then how many monks came with him? Many?

#22C: I don't remember. There was a large group.

Q: Quite a lot. So they were...

#22C: Yeah, but many you see...he was a highly revered lama in Kham area, especially in my district in Nangchen. So when he left many of his disciples joined, not because they were afraid of the Chinese but because he was...

Q: ...he's their teacher.

#22C: Yeah, he's a teacher and he's leaving his monastery. So people assumed that something bad is going to happen and they couldn't give up the separation from, you know, his disciples...that would be their teacher.

Q: Yes, they didn't want to lose his guidance.

#22C: Right.

Q: So everybody...many, many people from Kham are leaving. Why are you choosing to go to Lhasa and not somewhere else? Why Lhasa?

#22C: Lhasa is the center of Tibet. That's where the Dalai Lama and the Tibetan Government stay.

Q: So what were you hoping?

#22C: From there the Tibetan guerrilla warfare had been started. So lot of the Khampas wanted to join the...

Q: *Chushi Gangdrug* [Defend Tibet Volunteer Force]

#22C: *Chushi Gangdrug*.

Q: So we were talking about your going to Lhasa.

#22C: We knew that much of Kham area was already invaded by the Chinese. We heard the stories and then we start seeing people escaping, leaving Kham area. So that's our final, you know, warning...

Q: Yes.

01:00:25

#22C: ...that sooner or later the Chinese are going to, you know, take over Tibet but Lhasa was on our way. Yet there was some hope that if we resisted and fought against the Chinese by joining the *Chushi Gangdrug*, there would be a chance for us to win and not lose our country. So actually people were never giving up. Even when we reached Nepal, you know, border area we're still planning to go back to Tibet one day.

Q: I know.

#22C: So nobody actually gave up. Eventually we had a...actually no means of survival. The only thing that we had was our weapons and horses. So eventually we lost the animals on the way.

Q: So we're talking about on the way from your home in Kham?

#22C: Yeah, and travel to central Tibet.

Q: How long did that journey take for you to get to Lhasa?

#22C: Almost six months.

Q: Wow!

#22C: Yeah, because see, when you have animals we can't travel more than seven or eight miles a day because then animals get exhausted. So we traveled from...we started really early morning like 4 o'clock. Then we came by 12 and that was to save the animals for grazing and also resting. So we moved very, you know, very slowly.

Q: No Chinese soldiers or military were stopping you or attacking you?

01:02:12

#22C: At that time because a lot of Kham area people are already leaving. So they...it was the custom also to go to Lhasa for pilgrimage. You know to see the...

Q: Yeah.

#22C: So they couldn't tell whether we're escaping or we're going for pilgrimage or you know...all this traveling.

Q: So it really took six months. Were your animals able to survive the journey into Lhasa?

#22C: To Lhasa, yeah.

Q: Yeah. What happened when you got to Lhasa? Excuse me; let's get the age. What age were you at this point? How old?

#22C: I think I was like 12 or 12 and half.

Q: Twelve and a half. Okay. And so you get to Lhasa. What is your first experience of seeing Lhasa?

#22C: Lhasa was the biggest city I've ever seen. It was so crowded and the Potala was so huge. You know as a kid, 13 or 14 I don't remember, our vision of Lhasa and the Potala was like huge; nomadic area we don't see that many houses or people but at the time because the population of Lhasa has been increased by the Khampas and pilgrims and also it was the time when Lhasa had this big prayer festival, Monlam Chenmo.

Q: Monlam.

#22C: Yeah, and also which coincided with Dalai Lama's final examination [claps hands to indicate Buddhist debates].

Q: You arrived just in time for that?

#22C: Yeah, I saw that.

Q: You saw it?

01:04:11

#22C: I was watching from one building from the roof and Dalai Lama was doing [claps hands], you know, the debate.

Q: Wow!

#22C: And then *Chushi Gangdrug* was also in Lhasa. It was estimated the largest population ever took place in, you know Lhasa.

Q: Largest number of visitors.

#22C: Yeah. And plus the Chinese army. So it was very crowded.

Q: So what happened when you got to Lhasa then? What happened?

#22C: We went there for pilgrimage. I think we almost stayed like throughout the Monlam Chenmo, maybe about two or three weeks. After we left Lhasa, maybe about a month later

Lhasa was overrun. Then we heard the news on the 22nd the Dalai Lama had escaped on the 17th...

Q: March.

#22C: Yeah, in March. Then we saw a lot of the Central Tibetan Army. Some of this army...a part of the Tibetan Army was also from Shigatse, the seat of the Panchen Lama. So they were leaving and going home, you know, after we lost the country. We bought quite a few rifles from them. First we asked [them] to join us fight and they said no way that they're going to fight there. So we took their rifles, bullets and give them a couple of horses and a few bags of *tsampa*, you know, barley flour and that was what they needed to travel to their hometown Shigatse. We needed the rifles and the ammo. Ammo got so scarce that lot of times we had to trade one bullet with one sheep.

Q: Wow!

01:06:36

#22C: We were not supplied by the CIA, you know. Later, you know helped a lot of the *Chushi Gangdrug* dropping weapons. Part of the weapons never got distributed because we were run over by the Chinese army before they could distribute them.

Q: So if you...you were there for Monlam, then you know, His Holiness...then there is the whole attack on the...

#22C: There was...

Q: ...Lhasa

#22C: One day while we were in Lhasa, you know, we play in the whole town where everyday...Lhasa was very small actually. As a kid we were always running around and it was free; we can go to any temple without any restriction. One day there was a big lining up. All Tibetan soldiers are pointing guns in every direction from Norbulingka, the Jewel Park, Summer Palace to the Jokhang. Then they brought the Dalai Lama to the Jokhang to do his final...I think one was to participate in the Monlam and the second part was he was doing his debate for his final examination.

So we were there that time and my cousin and we were on the roof. We could see the debating, you know the monks going [moves hands in debating manner]. We didn't know what was happening. We'd never seen people go like this to the Dalai Lama, you know. That was a most interesting part. But then there were too many Chinese. So it was kind of scary. Not as children our age; we didn't know what to make of the Chinese, but our elders were already complaining and, you know, they were...we had already left our area, Kham. Now there was not much hope to stay in Central.

So before that...one of the reasons we're doing this in Lhasa because everybody else is going to Lhasa but never thought of going any further. We have heard about India. One of my uncles was on pilgrimage to Mountain Kailash. Then he proceeded further into Nepal

and Varanasi on pilgrimage. So he used to tell us story about how he traveled. So from there we kind of got, you know little of geography lessons and little map in our mind. He described the train that he took. He said they call it the rail but he calls it *rili* in Tibetan, you know, pronunciation. He said the *rili* looks like a...in the distance he said it looks like a snake. In close up it is a whole town, one house catch to the other. [Laughs] So villages moving along on iron rope!

Q: He's describing the train in India.

01:10:11

#22C: Yeah, in the distance he says it looks like a snake. In close up he says a whole village is moving houses, you know chained one after the other. So that's the only story we heard that there was a country, you know, called Nepal and India. So then everybody was leaving when we saw Lhasa was invaded. Nobody was staying; everybody was running towards, towards west.

Q: Where you in Lhasa when it was invaded?

#22C: No, we left Lhasa.

Q: You'd already left.

#22C: After a month.

Q: After a month.

#22C: We were...our family was, most of the family was...came near Tsurpu, Karmapa's monastery...

Q: Ah...yeah.

#22C: ...which is about two days' journey from...

Q: ...from Lhasa.

#22C: From Lhasa.

Q: From Lhasa. Is it into Utsang?

#22C: Yeah?

Q: Is it in Utsang?

#22C: Yeah, Utsang.

Q: It's in Utsang. So two days...

#22C: Yeah, Lhasa. Today it's four hours drive from Lhasa.

Q: Do you...?

#22C: That time we had to walk, almost two days.

Q: Got it. So you left Lhasa after two months and you went...

01:11:24

#22C: Tsurpu, Karmapa's monastery.

Q: Okay.

#22C: From there we learned [about a] lot of people escaping and said the Dalai Lama has already left on March 17th. We got the news...all those Chinese crackdown and killing about, I think about 80,000 people that day, bombardment. After Dalai Lama left, you know, they bombarded the whole Norbulingka, which was surrounded by the...

Q: They think 80,000 people were killed?

#22C: At that time, yeah.

Q: What did your family do next?

#22C: At Tsurpu most Khampas are there to see the Karmapa for his divination but Karmapa wasn't doing any divination in fear of the Chinese. He also left the same day that His Holiness the Dalai Lama left, and Tai Situ, all the lamas. Instead Karmapa, he would give his famous, you know black pills. He would send all the Khampas to a hermit, a yogi who's always meditating in the caves, Tsowang Khampa, Tsowang Rinpoche. He was very well known for his divination. So my father, my cousin, we followed them. They went to see this yogi for his divination. He said something funny that we had to figure out what he actually said. [Laughs] He said straight forward. He said, "*Bhaysay ringo dinpa thang, shayluk thakpay dakyon.*"

01:13:31

So he said to the question whether it is better to stay somewhere in central or just keep going as far away as we could, you know. In answer he said, "Wouldn't it be...What will be the difference between the wild yaks roaming in the mountains, in the snow mountains of the Himalayas than sheep lined up to be butchered?" So our parents they interpreted this statement as the wild yaks roaming freely in the mountains, of course, are far better, safer than the sheep to be butchered, you know, lined up to be butchered. So we chose to be the wild yaks.

But ultimately it all came down to about the same. There are only two survivors, me and my cousin-brother. Everybody else in my family and his family got killed. Eventually, everybody died except two survivors. So in a sense he was right. Even though wild yaks,

you know...another one is I think he was saying, “Die here sooner or die somewhere [else]. What will be the difference?” So, the wild yaks weren’t safer than sheep to be butchered.

Q: So what did your family do?

#22C: So we decided to leave. We headed towards Nepal. It almost took more than a year to get there.

Q: Why so long?

#22C: As I told you, you can’t travel more than four hours a day.

Q: Were you still bringing your animals with you?

#22C: Yeah. We’re mostly on horses.

Q: How many animals would you think were in your caravan?

01:15:52

#22C: Most of them we lost. Some of them we sold. We traded. You know we bought more guns and ammos, and more horses and mules because the yaks and sheep, they don’t travel fast, especially the sheep and goats.

Q: What were you going to do with the weapons?

#22C: To fight. That’s our only means of survival.

Q: If you ran into trouble.

#22C: Yeah.

Q: Did you run into any...?

#22C: Yeah, we run into Chinese many times.

Q: Did you really?

#22C: Yeah.

Q: And you had to fight your way out?

#22C: Yeah, yeah.

Q: Khampas all the way.

#22C: Yeah, we fought, you know, all the way through until we got to Nepal.

Q: At that point, were the...?

#22C: What happens is the Chinese knew that everybody was heading towards either India or Nepal.

Q: Exactly.

#22C: So pretty soon they occupied most of the major routes. So we couldn't go. That's one of the reasons we couldn't travel straight because we had to avoid the Chinese and travel mostly at night and hide in the mountains in the daytime. So that also delayed our, you know...

Q: Exactly.

#22C: ...journey.

Q: And about how many people would you estimate were in your group at that point?

01:17:20

#22C: Couple of hundred, but there were lot of other Khampas also heading towards the same. So we would camp maybe miles apart, you know. Everywhere there were tents. Everywhere there were all different groups because usually Khampas, they're clan oriented, you know, people. They always hang around with their own village people. They feel safer. And then some joined together. Then there were two school of thoughts, one saying that it was safer to travel with a large group with more guns and more you know, people. Others said, "No, that's easy for the Chinese to spot, you know. Smaller is safer."

So according to their plan, some traveled in a small group, some joined together, different Khampas, you know, traveling together and have the women and children and older people travelling together and able-bodied fighters turn into two groups. One group went ahead and one group stayed behind and in the middle we have all the kids and children and...

Q: That's where you were.

#22C: Yeah.

Q: What do you remember about that journey? Any memories of your own?

#22C: Yeah, I was... During this escape...the whole Chinese invasion made...an encounter on the way made my life grow faster. So I lost my innocence as a child. I was forced to grow fast. By the time I was at the age of 13, I was already a fighter. I fought many battles with the Chinese.

Q: Did you?

#22C: Yeah.

Q: Can you tell me about one of them?

#22C: One, I think one most fierce fighting was, I had this pony, horse. It's a special breed from one area in Kham called Dhoshue. They're small. Because I was small I couldn't mount the big horses. I have to find a rock or stepping stone or something. But for this little guy I can jump over it. That horse got stolen one night. Most of my family moved as we were escaping. So my father and two of my uncles, myself—four—then two brothers from another family, the six of us we went to retrieve my horse. There was another village on our way. This is well passed Central Tibet. They [villagers] didn't know much about the Chinese and they were not planning to, you know, run away. They are nomads. They have a lot of livestock but they didn't like the Khampas either. We went directly to their chief and told him that his men were responsible for my horse. The chief agreed to look for...he finally brought...in two days brought back my horse. Apparently it was his people that had stolen. You know, we ruffled up feathers a little bit as Khampas, you know.

01:21:31

That night we were coming back to catch up with our group. We are two days behind our main group and we ran into a large group of Khampas. There are almost like 500. They camped in a...between two rocky mountains and a big river in the middle. There is only [one] way [which] is east to the west. There's no other way, you know. My father was by nature, he was a trained guerrilla fighter, you know. He is always very observant about everything. He said, "This is a very dangerous area." He said, "Either we go west or..." [It's] too blocked. There's no way you can, you know, get away because of the mountains and the river.

So he made us...we came there with the others, you know 500 other people. He made us sleep without, you know untying our *chupa* 'traditional coats,' you know, belt. So we kept our weapons ready and slept just like this [leans head back]. Around, I think like 1 or 2 o'clock in the morning there's a whole commotion going and screaming and...All of a sudden those big—what do you call—flashlights. These are called not flashlights...

Q: Flares. They are flares.

#22C: Flare.

Q: Flare.

#22C: Flare!

Q: Flare, flashes. Flares.

#22C: They were shooting flares in the sky followed by machine guns. And both sides were blocked, the Tibetans in the middle. Then when they are shooting, when the bullets hit the rocks on both sides of the mountains, it looks like we were getting fired from all directions. And then the animals are usually tied down by a rope, a short rope, which in turn is tied to a long rope. The one long rope may hold like 10 or 15 yaks or couple of horses. So lot of people, elders and kids were killed, actually trampled by animals caught on the ropes.

Q: Stampeded.

01:24:19

#22C: Yeah, and people didn't know where to run. So six of us got on our horses after firing a few shots but, you know, we didn't know where to fire. So we just [fled in] one direction. Killing everyone on the side and we got, you know, we just narrowly made it. It's actually, we were really lucky to get [away] without a scratch. So all these people—500, I think half of them got killed or captured, you know, never seen again. That was one of the worst things.

Q: It sounds horrible...

#22C: Yeah.

Q: ...like a nightmare.

#22C: Those are like nightmares.

Q: Those are nightmares, yeah.

#22C: But equal number...more Chinese actually died that night. You know why? They shot each other. They were firing indiscriminately from both sides [with] Tibetans in the middle and the bullets just went right over [crosses arms] to each other. So the Tibetans say there was the local deity, you know, the spirit of the mountain that killed the Chinese. So anyway, can we end?

Q: Yes. It sounds like we could end at this very exciting place but you did make it. Just in summary you continued on your journey, and then you went to Nepal?

#22C: Yeah, then I went to Nepal. We went to Nepal, still with the parents and from Nepal we moved to Dholpo.

Q: Oh, yeah.

#22C: First in Nepal we were in Mustang.

Q: Yeah.

01:26:11

#22C: We were about to join the *Chushi Gangdrug* but then they had some dispute on the leadership thing. So we had our own group of Khampas. We started our own corporation, guerrilla warfare, and we crossed the border and ambushed the Chinese food supply, weapon supply. That was also our means of survival because we had to steal animals, food supply from the Chinese supplies.

At that time there were not many routes. So everything was transported by yaks, you know. So which was good advantage for us because we knew the area lot better than the Chinese. We go with a group behind enemy line and cut up their food supply and then [bring] to our camps. So we operated that for many years.

Q: Was that in the Mustang area or where?

#22C: Dholpo.

Q: It was Dholpo?

#22C: Dholpo and Mukum. Those are border areas in Nepal.

Q: Yeah, got it. So that's what you did for many years.

#22C: Yeah, until almost everybody got killed except...

Q: ...of your group?

#22C: Yeah.

Q: Almost everybody got killed?

#22C: Yeah, most of them got killed. Every time we went out we lost few good fighters. Then all our fighters dwindled into, you know, a very small group.

Q: Well, I understand that you must go now to work at your own center.

#22C: Yeah.

Q: You want to say the name of your center?

#22C: Project Tibet.

Q: Project Tibet, here in Santa Fe?

#22C: Yeah, you've been there.

Q: Yes, I'm going to come again, I hope. I want to thank you very much for your story and giving us so much of your time.

END OF INTERVIEW