

# **Tibet Oral History Project**

Interview #26 – Thupten Chonphel  
July 1, 2007

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# TIBET ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

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## INTERVIEW SUMMARY SHEET

1. Interview Number: #26
2. Interviewee: Thupten Chonphel
3. Age: 72
4. Date of Birth: 1935
5. Sex: Male
6. Birthplace: Lhorozong
7. Province: Dhotoe (Kham)
8. Year of leaving Tibet: 1959
9. Date of Interview: July 1, 2007
10. Place of Interview: Tibetan Co-operative Society Meeting Hall, Lugsung Samdupling Settlement, Bylakuppe, Mysore District, Karnataka, India
11. Length of Interview: 2 hr 5 min
12. Interviewer: Marcella Adamski
13. Interpreter: Tenzin Yangchen
14. Videographer: Jeff Loda
15. Translator: Tenzin Yangchen

### **Biographical Information:**

Born in Kham Lhorozong, Thupten Chonphel lived with his parents and six siblings in a remote village. At the age of 10, he joined a Bonpo monastery, but alternated his time between helping his parents at home and studying at the monastery. The Chinese arrived in their village in 1949 and villagers were forced to transport Chinese supplies on any animals they owned.

When the Chinese oppression increased, Thupten, Chonphel along with about 100 people, tried to resist and fight the occupation. When the the *Chushi Gangdrug* Volunteer Force entered his region, he joined them and fought with weapons they received from the United States. After the fall of Lhasa, over 3,000 guerrillas began to flee along with thousands of other Tibetans.

After 11 months working on road construction in India, Thupten Chonphel went back to Mustang and joined the *Chushi Gangdrug* again in 1960. They received more weapons from the United States along with the arrival of six Tibetans trained by the CIA, but food was scarce and they suffered greatly. After fighting for nine years, Thupten Chonphel went to Nepal and later to India , where he took his vows at a Gelugpa monastery.

### **Topics Discussed:**

Kham, childhood memories, monastic life, life under Chinese rule, forced labor, resistance fighters, Chushi Gangdrug guerrillas, escape experiences, life as refugee in India.

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**Interviewee: Thupten Chonphel**

**Age: 72, Sex: Male**

**Interviewer: Marcella Adamski**

**Interview Date: July 1, 2007**

Question: Perhaps you can begin by telling us where you were born.

**Interviewee #26: I was born at Kham Lhorozong.**

Q: Was this a village or a city?

**#26: The village was called Lamlagon. The monastery was Lamlagon.**

Q: What was the name of the village where you were born?

**#26: It was called Sho-nga.**

Q: Was Sho-nga a small village or a town?

**#26: It was a small village.**

Q: About how many families lived there?

**#26: There were only seven families.**

Q: How about your family, who was in your family?

**#26: In my family were my father, my mother and six siblings. I was the eldest.**

Q: What kind of work did your father and mother do?

**#26: We were farmers. We worked in the fields.**

Q: Did you have many animals?

**#26: We did not have *dri* 'female yak' or yaks, but we had cows, goats, horses and donkeys.**

Q: When you were a little boy, what kind of responsibilities did you have?

**#26: I think I was born in 1936. Since I was old enough to remember, at times my parents worked in the fields and we also had goats, cows, horses and donkeys. I helped my parents with the animals, and though I could not work much in the fields, I went along with my mother.**

Q: Do you have any favorite memories of your childhood days?

**#26: The happiest times were at the end of summer and in autumn when there would be lots of fruit, like apricots and walnuts, in our region. Different types of fruit and flowers grew in summer.**

Q: Did you have time to play with the children or were you working most of the time?

**#26: We had time to play; we mostly played.**

Q: Were you considered a good boy? Were you quiet or what kind of a child were you?

**#26: I think I was quite a naughty child. I was not exactly a good child.**

Q: What would make a naughty child? What did you do?

**#26: I set fire to the woods and grass in the winter. In summer I loved rolling down stones from the hilltops. I also loved stealing apricots, walnuts and other fruit from my neighbors.**

Q: Why did you set fire to the woods? Was that an accident?

**#26: The winters were cold, so I just set the fire. There was no actual reason.**

Q: Can you describe your parents to me? What kind of people they were?

**#26: My parents were not educated. My father was a very simple man and was always engaged in work. He did not interact much with other people. My mother was very intelligent and smart. People of our village respected and feared her.**

Q: Had they both been born in that village?

**#26: Yes.**

Q: For many years your family lived there?

**#26: We were born there and died there. It was that way for most of the people.**

Q: What was the nearest city or town to the village Sho-nga?

**#26: The nearest town was Lhozong. There were over a 100 families. That was like our capital city. It took us about two days to get there from our village.**

Q: On horseback or walking?

**#26: It was two days on horseback and three if you walked.**

Q: So you lived in a very isolated part of Tibet.

**#26: Yes. Our village was very isolated.**

Q: Did you have enough to eat growing up and enough shelter from the cold?

**#26: We did not have any difficulties with food, though there was a lot of work to be done in the fields.**

Q: Can you tell me a little bit about your house? What was your house made of?

**#26: The house was built of wood, earth and stone as there was no cement. The pillars were wood; the walls were made of stones and mud. Our house had two floors.**

Q: Did your family go to the nearest temple, Lamlagon very much?

**#26: The family went to the monastery on festive occasions. People were allowed in the monastery on the 15<sup>th</sup> day of the first lunar month. On other days women were not allowed in the monastery. The day on which women were allowed was in spring, on the 15<sup>th</sup> day of the first lunar month. Another day was the first day of the fourth lunar month. Otherwise, women could not go without permission and were not allowed to stay overnight.**

**On the 28<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup> of the 12<sup>th</sup> lunar month, there was a *cham* ‘religious dance performance by monks’ for two days at the monastery. During this time a lot of people gathered. On those two days various types of *cham* with different masks like *Gyaka Atsara*, deer, deities, etc. were performed. Each day there were eight performances. It was very good.**

Q: You were seeing these as a little boy. What did that feel like to you?

**#26: I used to be very happy. Those were happy days. The people of the village used to come there in their best dresses. They brought good food for those two, almost three days. It was very eventful.**

Q: How old were you when this was going on?

**#26: I was under 10 years old. At the age of 10 I became a monk at the monastery.**

Q: How did you decide to do that?

**#26: My father and mother asked me if I wanted to be a monk and I said “yes.”**

Q: Why did you want to become a monk?

**#26: I thought it was good to be a monk. When I saw young monks of my age in the monastery, I also wanted to become a monk.**

Q: What was interesting to you about becoming a monk? What appealed to you?

**#26: As I was a child at that time I did not know much about the ways of life. I did not know that but it was my wish.**

Q: Did your parents have to provide any stipend or pay to the monastery for you to be able to go?

**#26: They didn't have to give a stipend to the monastery for me. However, they had to arrange for my food. But I didn't get to stay long at the monastery because there were only my parents who were working. We did not have servants. There were six children, four sons and two daughters and I was the oldest child. So, I stayed home to help and could not stay long at the monastery.**

Q: How long were you in the monastery before you returned home?

**#26: I got to stay a month or two at a stretch, for quite a long while. In one year I would spend about three or four months in the monastery learning the scriptures and other prayer recitations. I had an uncle there. Then when I was 14, the Chinese arrived. It was 1949 and I was 14 years old.**

Q: And what happened?

**#26: When the Chinese arrived, the opportunity for me to stay at the monastery still lessened because they gave us a lot of work.**

Q: You said that the Chinese arrived when you were 14 years of age. What happened when they came?

**#26: When the Chinese first came, they spoke very sweetly. They said, "We have come to help you. We have come to help bring development. We are the same. We are the same race, same color. We are brothers. We have come to help you. After we have done that, we will go back."**

Q: When they came, was this during the eight months that you would have been home from the monastery?

**#26: Yes, it was during such a time.**

Q: How far was the monastery from your home?

**#26: You would reach it in about four hours.**

Q: You were home helping your parents at around age 14 and the Chinese came. What did they do after they told you they were there to help you?

**#26: After the Chinese came, they frequently called meetings of the public. During the meetings they said what I mentioned earlier, "You need not have fear of our coming here. We have come to help you. We have come to bring development. We are the same. We are the same race and the same color. We must be united and bring development." For about three to four years, they said that—from 1949 to 1951-52.**

**Then after that they would say, "We must bring development and become one. We must unite. We have one enemy. That enemy is the United States of America. They are different from us. Their hair is yellow. Their eyes are white. Their noses are pointed. They are our enemies. We have to unite and face them."**

Q: What did you think about this kind of talk?

**#26: We had never heard of the United States of America at that time. I wondered what the Americans were like. They [the Chinese] said that they had yellow hair and white eyes. We had neither seen Americans nor had we heard about them. The Chinese soldiers had a type of shoes. Near the ankle area, the shoes had a round mark which they said was the picture of an American.**

Q: What did the picture look like?

**#26: It looked like a man working with a hoe. Just as they had described, he had a long nose. It was right there on the ankle joint part of the shoes.**

Q: Did you want to make the Americans your enemy?

**#26: I never thought that. I wondered what they were like and wished to see them. I wondered what these people were like and wished to see them, as I was a child at that time.**

Q: What did you think about the Chinese at this time, given all the directions they were giving you?

**#26: We did not trust the Chinese. They were talking in that way, but we did not trust them. We did not like them. They just spoke that way.**

Q: Was there any trouble for your family during that time?

**#26: Not particularly for my family, but they [the Chinese] were creating problems for all the people in general. The problems they gave us were when so many of their people arrived they couldn't bring all their things because there were no vehicles. In order to**



**bring their things, our horses and mules were used. We had to transport their things. We had to provide them with grains, *tsampa* 'flour made from roasted barley,' meat and they liked to eat a lot of chicken and eggs and pork, for which they taxed us.**

Q: Did they take these things from you?

**#26: They paid us a small amount. They didn't pay us the full price, but they gave us a small amount.**

Q: If the transportation didn't come to the village, did you have to carry the food to them?

**#26: We had to transport their loads. All the people of the region were required to do so.**

Q: How did they do it?

**#26: We transported the loads on the horses, yaks, mules, every kind of animal we had. Horses, yaks, *dzo* 'animal bred from a yak and a cow,' oxen, donkeys; we transported on all animals that we had.**

Q: Did the Chinese ever go to your monastery?

**#26: They didn't go the first time. They were there when they came later. They didn't do anything to the monastery the first time.**

Q: Did you still go back to the monastery three to four months of the year during this time?

**#26: Yes, I used to go there at times and join the prayer assemblies.**

Q: What if the people of the village didn't want to cooperate with the Chinese? What happened or did anybody?

**#26: If we didn't do their bidding, they would fine us.**

Q: Fine?

**#26: They would take money as fine from us. They had divided all the work among the people. Initially they taxed us on the basis of the land holdings. Around 1952, 1953 and 1954 they did so. Later it was not so when work increased. Later they made drivable roads from Chamdo to Riwoche, Riwoche to Tsawagon and Tsawagon to Dheshugon, a place behind our village. When the Chinese' motor road was being constructed, they drove animals belonging not only to us, but villages at a distance of about 10, 15 or 20 days away. If a family owned a 100 load bearing animals like horses, yaks, *dzo* and mules, they drove them all away.**

Q: Did the Chinese take them away?

**#26: The Chinese didn't take them away, but ordered us to come. We had to bring our own food and carry them with us. Then we had to transport their things. For example, if it was a distance of two or three days, they would load each animal for five times. They gave a minimal wage. They didn't pay the full wage.**

Q: What happened to you next? Do you continue to go back to the monastery and also cooperate with the Chinese so you don't get into trouble? What happened?

**#26: I went to the monastery and also did the work given by the Chinese. When the road was being constructed at Kongpo, if a family owned 10 load-bearing animals, at least five of them died. They died due to exhaustion.**

Q: During transportation in Kongpo?

**#26: The road passed through Dhenshugon, behind our village. As the road was being completed, the animals were gradually being driven further and further away from Longrap Tapa to the south of Kongpo. We went up until Kongpo. If a family owned 30 to 40 load bearing animals, we had to drive them all. The Chinese made a list right at the start. They had made a list of how many load-bearing animals each family owned. If a family had just one ox, he had to drive that too.**

Q: Were you getting any help from your spiritual teachers when you went back to the monastery? Did they tell you how to think about the Chinese or pray for them? How did you feel about them?

**#26: The Lamas did not take much notice. We went with the Chinese road construction up to Kongpo Nyitri. From Kongpo Nyitri, it was the people of Toe who did the work. Many of our animals died and we didn't have to transport from then on.**

Q: Why did the animals die?

**#26: It was between Longrap Tapa and Kongpo Nyitri. The distance was about 25 days if you walked. Longrap Tapa was the name of a Chinese bridge.**

Q: Did the animals get worn out?

**#26: They died due to exhaustion and lack of grass. They were overloaded and did not get proper grass.**

Q: What was going on where they were taking all the food? Were they building an army post or something?

**#26: The laborers constructing roads were all Chinese; there were no Tibetans. It was the food, drinks, clothes and things for the Chinese that we were transporting. Foods like rice and wheat flour and there were many tins, big ones and small ones.**

Q: What did the village people think about what was going on? You said your mother was very intelligent as well—did you have any ideas about what the Chinese were going to try to do?

**#26: Everybody was very unhappy at that time. There was no peace of mind. People said that something bad was going to happen.**

Q: And what would the worst be?

**#26: They spoke like they did earlier until the motor road was constructed up to Lhasa. Then in around 1955 to 1956, the Chinese said that we should follow socialism. They said socialism was very beneficial. What they meant by socialism was liberation. We did not know what socialism was. They were talking about equality.**

Q: How did you learn about that?

**#26: They said that there were two types of liberation. They said that we should be able to go through the way of peaceful liberation. But what they had prepared for was liberation through violence. We did not have peaceful liberation; it was liberation through violent ways.**

Q: What were they saying they were trying to liberate you from?

**#26: What they did was, they divided the possessions of the wealthy among the people. All the positions of the earlier leaders were abolished. To carry out the liberation process, they [the Chinese] had many enemies; *Ngadhak*, *Ngatsap*, the rich, the traders. The *Ngadhak* were the earlier leaders, the rich families and officials of the government. The *Ngadhak* were to be subjected to *thamzing* ‘struggle session.’ They suffered a lot. The lower strata of the society rose up against the upper.**

Q: Can you tell me, was that the kind of thing that was happening in your village?

**#26: When I left in 1956, they had not implemented it in my village. I went on a pilgrimage to Khawa Karpo in 1956. It took me a month to go to Tsawarong in Gyue and another month to get back. I went on a pilgrimage. At that time, the liberation process was taking place in Gyue. In my village, they had not implemented liberation, but were just talking about it. They were causing a lot of suffering in Gyue. I learned everything about the Chinese in Gyue.**

**When I returned to my village, I spoke to my parents and the fathers of the seven neighbors during the times we gathered for prayers. I told them, "If we remain like this, the Chinese will never let us live in peace. They are causing a lot of suffering to the people of lower Kham and we are bound to face the same. Before we face such misery, before we are separated because they forcefully take away parents and relatives, before such things happen, let us all leave our houses and lands and escape together somewhere." The people of my village were foolish and never listened to me.**

Q: How did that feel that no one believed you?

**#26: There was nothing I could do about it. I spoke to my mother and she believed me. However, my father said, "You are a very bad person. We brought you up from childhood and now you want to take me to a foreign land. I was born in this place and I will die in this village. I am not going away from my village." My father was very stubborn.**

Q: What had you heard happened in the village of Tsawarong?

**#26: I heard that the Chinese made a list of all the properties and animals of the families. Nobody had any rights. The Chinese had favored all the servants of the rich families and brought them to their side. These people were giving all the information to the Chinese. The houses and lands were taxed by the Chinese. The taxes they levied were such that in the end you had to give up all your possessions to them. From the list they had made, they would say, "You have to pay so much tax every month. For your animals, you have to pay so much tax. For the number of rooms in your house and the number of pillars of your house, you have to pay so much tax." In this way, they made it impossible to bear the taxes and finally you had to request them to take away all your things.**

Q: When you tried to warn your village and your family, you were about 21 years old?

**#26: I was about 21 or 22 years old. When I was 20, I left for the pilgrimage to Khawa Karpo.**

Q: What did you do when your father got frightened and angry at you, and your mother believed you? What did you do then?

**#26: The elders of the village told me, "You are just saying this. There are smarter people than you in the village. There are those we look up to and the lamas who are not alarmed. So is there a reason why we should feel that way?" My mother said that we couldn't leave our lamas and the monastery and go. But I told her, "We cannot think about the lamas and the monastery. They can be of no help to us. The lamas and all of us are sure to suffer. There will be no time to practice our beliefs like in the earlier days. If you do not leave now when we are all together, the Chinese will take your children away saying that they will join schools or the military. Then you will never see your children again." My mother believed me.**

Q: You really worked hard to convince them.

**26: I did. If they would listen to me, I thought we would go away leaving the fields standing with the crops.**

Q: If they left with you, where would you have taken them?

**#26: I thought I would take them towards Lhasa and then to India.**

Q: How many days a walk would it be to Lhasa?

**#26: We would reach Lhasa in about a month.**

Q: And nobody wanted to go?

**#26: Nobody wanted to go.**

Q: So what did you do?

**#26: I was quite helpless. The Chinese were slowly tightening the noose. We used to hear that 20 children had been sent to school and that 30 from another village were taken away to China. Some were taken here and some were taken there. Then they said we had to go on road constructions to a place which was at a distance of 15-20 days from our village. They also told some people to join the volunteer army. They were collecting many people. The work of this army was to inflict suffering on the influential people of the region.**

Q: How did you become so wise, informed and intelligent about what was going on when the people of your village were so uninformed?

**#26: I had heard when I went on the pilgrimage to Khawa Karpo through Tsawarong. Also there were many escapees coming who talked about the Chinese fighting in Amdo, in Ba by the Gongka Labrang and in Dege. Many people were fleeing and passed our village and they spoke about the terrible things the Chinese did.**

**There was a high lama called Gongka Lama and he fought the Chinese a great deal; and in Lithang also where the fighting started and in Amdo and Dege. In our village there was no one at that time who could oppose the Chinese.**

Q: When he said "with a high lama in Ba" who had fought with or do you mean against the Chinese?

**#26: He fought a great deal against the Chinese. It was the monastery and the villagers, who together fought against the Chinese.**

Q: And what happened to them?

**#26: They were ill-treated by the Chinese, which was why they fought back.**

Q: What happened to them?

**#26: In the end they were finished. The Chinese killed some, captured some and imprisoned the rest. Gongka Lama was killed. They were completely routed.**

Q: You couldn't move your family or your village, what did you do next?

**#26: Then around 1958, the Chinese didn't allow the monks to live in the monastery. They said the monks had to go to school, join the army or go to build roads. So about 20 of us—monks of our monastery in the age group of 18-22 and a few young men of the village—we opposed the Chinese and went to the mountains. We resisted the Chinese for about a year. We didn't live at home because if we did, the Chinese would have caught us. We destroyed roads. We couldn't face a large number of Chinese, so we attacked the small Chinese offices in the villages.**

Q: So about how large would you say the group of resistance fighters?

**#26: We were about 20 monks and about 50 young men, so we were less than 100.**

Q: They were boys from the village, some monks from the monastery and who else?

**#26: That was about it. There were no important people.**

Q: Was there a leader in the group?

**#26: There were the smarter ones who said we had to do this or that. There was no proper organization system.**

Q: Since you couldn't fight directly what did you do to hamper the Chinese in your land?

**#26: We did fight the Chinese and killed some. We killed about 26 of them.**

Q: What did you use to fight them?

**#26: We did not have weapons. If the Chinese were traveling on the road, we rolled down stones and logs from the hill tops. That was how we did. We blocked the way of the Chinese and then rolled down the stones. There were steep hills in our region.**

Q: You had no weapons?

**#26: Except for swords we had no weapons.**

Q: Did the Chinese fight back?

**#26: Yes, they did. They fired their guns on us. Some [of the resistance fighters] were captured, some were killed and some were able to escape.**

Q: And what happened to you?

**#26: Finally in November or December of 1958, the *Chushi Gangdrug* Volunteer Force and their leader Andrug Gonpo Tashi came to our village from Kham. So we joined the force and went away with them.**

Q: Was it the 11th or 12th lunar month?

**#26: It was the ninth or 10<sup>th</sup> lunar month corresponding to November or December.**

Q: Can you tell us about your leader? What was he like?

**#26: Andrug Gonpo Tashi was not a very tall person, nor was he highly educated. He was not a politician, but was a wealthy businessman. He was a very enthusiastic person and a great patriot. He was not an experienced politician, nor highly educated. He was not a politician.**

Q: How did you feel about joining the resistance fighters?

**#26: There was no place for me at the village. When Andrug Gonpo Tashi came there, it was eight or nine months since I had separated from my parents.**

Q: Do you have any idea, what was the force hoping to do?

**#26: I knew that. I knew they were going to resist the Chinese. About 500 members of the *Chushi Gangdrug* came there along with Andrug Gonpo Tashi. They came from Lhoka.**

Q: Didn't Andrug Gonpo Tashi come from Kham?

**#26: He was coming from Lhasa, from Chatsa Diguthang. They were coming from the northerly direction; Andrug Gonpo Tashi and his 500 men.**

Q: Lhoka in Kham?

**#26: Lhoka is in Tsona. The *Chushi Gangdrug* was based in Chatsa Diguthang. It was on the border of India, near Mon Tawang. That was the route His Holiness the Dalai Lama took [during his escape].**

Q: You got separated from your family because of the time that you were fighting in the village?

**#26: Yes, that is right. That was the time I was fleeing here and fleeing there.**

Q: He had run away when he got shot at?

**[Interpreter to interviewer]: That's right.**

Q: What did it feel like to be a guerrilla fighter?

**#26: I felt pleased, and I was now happy because we had comrades and a leader. Then Andrug Gonpo Tashi said we had to go to Lhoka, towards Tsona. After Andrug Gonpo Tashi arrived there, along with the men of Shotha Lhasum, we fought the Chinese at Powo Tamo and at Chungpo Thenshul. We fought at two places.**

Q: Powo Tamo and...?

**#26: We fought the Chinese at Powo Tamo and Chungpo Thenshul. Chungpo Thenshul is in the north and Powo Tamo is in the south.**

Q: Did you go to fight?

**#26: At that time I did not go because I did not have weapons.**

Q: Did you feel hopeful that you would be able to rout the Chinese from your country?

**#26: Andrug Gonpo Tashi told us that we would receive aid at Lhoka from the United States. He said the Americans would help us and we would get weapons.**

Q: Did they?

**#26: Yes, we received the things. There were guns, money and bombs. They dropped them from the airplanes.**

Q: Were you there when you received any of these things?

**#26: The things were received at Lhoka and at that time we were on the way. When we reached Jang Lharigong, we received news that Lhasa was lost and that His Holiness the Dalai Lama had escaped.**

Q: What did that feel like when you heard that?

**#26: I was numb. I could not think. I wondered what would happen but there were no thoughts like, whether this would happen or this would come to pass. There were no plans and no goals.**

Q: No future plans for you personally? Did the resistance fighters have future plans?

**#26: No, the fighters did not. Nobody had any idea. Nobody had any idea whether we would win or lose or whether we could resist the Chinese.**

Q: Those must have been difficult days.

**#26: Yes, we suffered a lot. We suffered terribly. We suffered during the day. We suffered during the night. The Chinese were pursuing us. We suffered greatly.**

Q: What kind of sufferings were they at this time?

**#26: We had horses at that time. We had journeyed for many months and the horses were tired and we had to leave them behind. We were fleeing day and night. When Lhasa was**



lost, the messenger came at Lharigong. Andrug Gonpo Tashi then changed our route. Instead of going to Lhasa, we went through Kongpo Gyamdha to go to Lhoka. There was a route through Kongpo Gyamdha to Lhasa, but we did not cross the Kongpo Bhala pass because if you did, you would reach Lhasa. We did not cross the Konpo Bhala pass and went towards Lhoka, towards the direction of India.

Q: From Kongpo Gyamdha towards India?

**#26: We went in the direction of Tsona, the escape route taken by His Holiness the Dalai Lama.**

Q: You said you took the road His Holiness took; did you choose that road because His Holiness took it or because it was a good way to get out?

**#26: We came through Wokha Zinkue, Sangri Khangmar, Dochen Thango, Lhagyari and Nyen towards Tsona. There was a mountain pass at Tsona and beyond that was Mon Tawang, the Indian border. His Holiness was able to cross this pass. When we reached there, the Chinese had blocked the mountain pass by arriving there from another route. We were not able to cross it.**

Q: Did you take this road because His Holiness took it or because it was a good way to go?

**#26: That was the main route.**

Q: What did you do?

**#26: The main road at Tsona was blocked, so we took a detour through Mango, where normally there were no paths. We came through rocky mountains and snow-capped mountains. We had to cross about three mountain passes. It was extremely difficult.**

Q: At this point how many resistance fighters were there in the group?

**#26: I am not sure how many there were, but everyone was there. Those who were at Lhoka were fleeing as also those who went to Kham and returned; they were also in the group. Everyone was there.**

Q: If you took a guess, how many would there be?

**#26: Perhaps there were about 3,000.**

Q: So 3,000 fighters were leaving Tibet on this road and they were blocked by the Chinese and they had to go around into the mountains. Where did they come out?

**#26: The final place we reached was Mon Tawang. We arrived there taking a detour. It was an area where the nomads went. Horses and mules could not pass and so most of them were left behind and they died.**

Q: Was the path so bad or broken up or steep or what?

**#26: The snow-capped mountain was like this [makes shape of a steep mountain with hands] and horses fell into the snow. There was just a path and on the sides were snow where they could get stuck. Some horses fell into the snow but couldn't die and would be struggling. We had to walk over them. There was no time to feel compassion.**

Q: So you walked and on horseback from Lhoka all the way to India?

**#26: Yes. The Chinese were pursuing us with airplanes at the border. They chased us with airplanes in the daytime.**

Q: 3,000 is a very large number of people. Did you have encounters with Chinese along the way trying to stop or fight you?

**#26: It was not just the 3,000. It was not just the guerrilla fighters. At that time His Holiness the Dalai Lama had already left, so there were the people and the monks of Sera, Gaden and Drepung Monasteries who were escaping. It was more than 3,000. There were over 10,000.**

Q: So it was a whole exodus of people?

**[Interpreter to interviewer]: Yes, that's right.**

Q: Was the leader Andrug Gonpo Tashi still with you?

**#26: He was. When we came through Mangon, we reached the India border in one day. We were stopped there for a day.**

Q: You were stopped at the Indian border?

**#26: Yes, when we reached the border between Tibet and India. There were guards posted there.**

Q: The entire column of people?

**#26: We were stopped there for one day. The Indian guards sent a telegram to the Central Indian government informing them that such people were arriving and whether they should be allowed to move through. The reply must have been to let us through as we were allowed to move on.**

Q: Did the guerrilla fighters have any guns with them?

**#26: Most of the fighters had guns. What happened at the border was: we had the guns but they did not take the whole gun away from us. They took the cartridges away at the border. The gun was made useless.**

Q: How many days or months was this after the Dalai Lama had left Lhasa?

**#26: It was about 20 days later.**

Q: Did you, at this point have any idea what happened to your mother, father, brothers and sister?

**#26: I never heard anything.**

Q: Never again?

**#26: It was in 1981 that a girl, not from our village, but from the neighboring village came [to India]. She had a little to say about them.**

Q: What was the news?

**#26: She didn't have any news about my family, but she told me the general situation about my village. She lived a distance of about four to five days away. After that in 1982, a girl from my village came here. She was able to tell me more, though due to her young age, she didn't understand much. At that time my father had passed away and also my two siblings.**

Q: Your brother or sister?

**#26: My sister had passed away and so had my brother. My brother had been killed in 1960 by the Chinese.**

Q: A sister had also died?

**#26: Yes, my younger sister had also died.**

Q: You were a monk, even part-time for many years before you became a guerrilla. Did being a monk help you be a guerrilla, or was it a problem for you to have been a monk and then be a guerrilla?

**#26: Well, it was not just me but it happened to many other monks. We could no longer live in the monasteries and we couldn't live in the village. We were forced to face the Chinese and everyone was revolting. I cannot remember any other particular thoughts.**

Q: And what situation was that?

**#26: The situation was very pathetic. When we were escaping and reached the Indian border all our food stock, which we had brought from Tibet, was exhausted. When we crossed Mangon it was around the third lunar month and raining heavily, the path was extremely bad. We had to walk this way for 12 days until we reached Mon Tawang. At Mon Tawang, the Indians gave us food rations. They provided us with rice, sugar, *dhal*, tea leaves and oil. The difficulties we faced were indescribable.**

Q: Once you reached India, did you try to become a monk again or join a monastery?

**#26: On reaching Mon Tawang, we were stopped there for about 20 days. Then we were sent to Missamari in India. We were in Missamari for about two months. All the Tibetans were kept together there and the Indian government was very kind to give us food. They have been of great help to us. They were providing food for everyone everyday. Besides food, they gave us cotton clothes. The Indians even provided us with plates and cups. We walked for seven days from Mon Tawang to Missamari.**

**The Indians had constructed bamboo huts for the Tibetans to stay. The bamboo huts were huge, like halls where 70 people could stay. Each house had about six doors. The houses were very good with the walls made of bamboo and roof of straw. There were about 100 such huts and I was in number 72. That was one camp and there was another camp at a distance of about four or five miles. I do not know the strength of people there because I didn't go there.**

**They [the Indians] provided us, besides food, with medicines. They gave us pills for diarrhea, headache and fever. The most important being that we suffered from fever, mostly. We were used to cold weather and now we were in India in the summer, so we suffered from fever. They gave us medicines.**

Q: And did you ever join a monastery again?

**#26: No. We were in Missamari for about a month and 20 days. Then we went to Sikkim for road construction work. That year, there was an extra sixth lunar month. It was during the latter sixth lunar month that we went to Sikkim for road construction work.**

Q: Under the Indian government?

**#26: At that time Sikkim was not exactly under India. It was sort of autonomous.**

Q: And then what happens in your life next?

**#26: We were in Sikkim for about 11 months doing road construction work. Then once again I went back with the *Chushi Gangdrug* to Mustang. It was in 1960.**

Q: What made you go back?

**#26: I went to join the army. We were told that the *Chushi Gangdrug* had to go to fight the Chinese and that the USA would provide us with weapons. We were told that we had to go and fight the Chinese in Tibet, so I joined the army.**

Q: Who told you that?

**#26: The leaders of the *Chushi Gangdrug* told us. Andrug Gonpo Tashi and Sey Gyalo Dhondup told us.**

Q: So where did you go back to?

**[Interpreter to interviewer]: To Mustang.**

Q: And what happened in Mustang?

**#26: We reached there in 1960. About 1,500 people gathered there. We hardly had anything to eat. It was worse than in Tibet. It became very difficult for us to find food. We didn't have clothes; we didn't have food to eat. It became extremely difficult. However, things improved in 1965.**

Q: You were there for 5 years?

**#26: I was there for ten years. I was there from 1960 until 1969.**

Q: What did you do between 1960 and 1969?

**#26: On the 15<sup>th</sup> day of the first month in 1961, a USA airplane came and dropped us weapons. There were not many weapons, but about 300 guns—but there was no food. They were giving money for our food to Gyalo Dhondup and we were given it through him. However, Nepal was far away and we couldn't find transportation for our provisions and so we suffered a lot. Some of us even had to boil leather and eat it. We sold all our personal belongings to find something to eat. The leader at Mustang was Bapa Gen Yeshi.**

Q: Were there Chinese in that area?

**#26: The Chinese were on the other side of the mountain. It was the border between Tibet and Nepal. We were based in Nepali territory along the border. The Chinese were on the other side of the mountain.**

Q: You were there for nine years in Mustang. Were you preparing to fight or protect the land? What were you doing?

**#26: We went to fight but not a proper battle. We went in small groups. We went to ambush the Chinese vehicles which were passing by. We also seized goods that were being transported. We accomplished quite a bit.**

Q: You didn't have any fighting?

**#26: We did, but they were not major battles. We did kill a few people.**

Q: Where were the convoys going?

**#26: They were traveling from Tsang to Ngari.**

Q: What were you feeling as an individual in those days?

**#26: At that time I used to hope that I would be able to go back to Tibet.**

Q: Was there any spiritual support or practice going on?

**#26: No, I didn't do much practice. We had quite a lot of work to do. We were living at the border of Tibet and our provisions had to be purchased at Pokhara in Nepal. We couldn't find transporters and so we had to carry our provisions ourselves for a distance of two to three days journey. We lived in a very isolated area.**

**We were not in a village, but lived in the hills right at the border where there were no other people. We were at the border of Tibet and Nepal, but we lived in Nepali territory. If we traveled for one day, we would reach Tibetan territory. On the 15<sup>th</sup> day of the first lunar month of 1961, an American airplane arrived. Besides guns, they dropped six Tibetans who had been trained in the USA. They had learned to handle guns and about secret services, so these six people were dropped along with the weapons.**

Q: What did they do?

**#26: The six men were teaching us. They were teaching us how to fight, how to hide and teaching us the secret maneuvers. They taught us how to use a gun, the mechanisms of the gun, how to place bombs and how to fire artillery.**

Q: Did their support and education give you a new sense of hope?

**#26: Yes, it raised our hopes greatly. Those six were not the only ones. Later 30 men arrived from the USA through India.**

Q: Who had been trained in the United States?

**#26: They had been trained for six months in the United States.**

Q: Do you know where they were trained in the United States?

**#26: I don't know that. That's a secret and they won't reveal.**

Q: What were you planning to do at that time?

**#26: At first we did not know how to use the guns dropped by the Americans. They taught us how to use them, how to dismantle and put them back. There were guns, artillery and machine guns—about three types of guns. They taught us how to set up bombs for destroying houses and bridges. We also learned mapping, measuring degrees and distances and the military maneuvers. We also learned drills.**

Q: How did you like this kind of life, compared to being a farmer or a monk?

**#26: It happened naturally. There was no choice for me. I had no power over it. Times became like that.**

Q: It was your fate?

**#26: Yes, things automatically follow fate. Again in the 11<sup>th</sup> month of 1962, an American airplane came. The American airplanes came three times. At first when the American airplane came, we did not understand. Pakistan and the United States had very good relations at that time. Bangladesh was under Pakistan then. There was East Pakistan and West Pakistan. Bangladesh used to be called East Pakistan. The other Pakistan was called West Pakistan because it lies in the west. Bangladesh was East Pakistan and it was one country with Pakistan. The airplane used to fly from Dhakha.**

Q: What did that airplane bring that came in the 11<sup>th</sup> month of 1962?

**#26: It brought weapons. There were guns, bullets and artillery.**

Q: When you were staying in Mustang, about how many fighters were there with you?

**#26: There were 1,500. At that time we faced a lot of sustenance problems, though in actuality it should not have been so. I didn't know it at the time I was there, but later I heard that for the 1,500 men and 1,500 horses, the United States had been providing \$8 per day per man and horse. It [the funding] was coming via the hands of Sey Gyalo Dhondup. He had given us a lot of loss. Perhaps at that time a dollar was worth 11 Indian *rupees*.**

**Later, Gen Yeshi announced the account report and said, "We are facing a lot of scarcity of food. If we take into account the cost of provisions and transportation, it works out to 6 Nepali *rupees* per person per day. We do not have a country and cannot collect tax from anybody and we cannot print money. We have to spend about 100,000 *rupees* per month which is very difficult." Six Nepali *rupees* a day was nothing because there was eight U.S. dollars per person.**

Q: What did the group think about the Americans giving this kind of support?

**#26: The soldiers thought it was very good. We used to think very highly of the Americans for their aid.**

Q: Did you wish you had had more support in the days that followed?

**#26: We felt that. We had hopes that the aid would continue.**

Q: And did it?

**#26: The aid was stopped in 1972. When Nixon became President of the United States, he developed good relations with China and stopped the aid. I heard that supporting us was not the policy of the American government, but it was done by the office of the CIA.**

Q: Is there anything else you would like us to know about that period of Tibetan history so we can save it for posterity?

**#26: That was a short story because all the little details are not there. When we were in Mustang, we used to go to the north. The Chinese in those areas called meetings of the nomads in summer and autumn. Perhaps they [the Chinese] were lecturing the same things that they did to us earlier. At such times, about 50 to 60 guerrillas would drive away the yaks, goats and sheep belonging to the Chinese and also kill the Chinese who were 10, 15 or 20 in numbers. Such events happened several times and the news was conveyed to the United States.**

Q: Did the Chinese live in the north?

**#26: They were living in Tibet in the north. Mustang was located between Taksam Liktse and Toe Ngari. We were able to ambush their vehicles twice; seven vehicles the first time and one vehicle later. How we destroyed the seven vehicles was: we lay in wait for two to three nights by the roadside. When the vehicles came along, we would be in two groups, one group at a point by the roadside and the other at a little distance away. As the vehicles came, the first group would allow them to pass while the other group would block their way. Then the first group closed in and blocked the road so the vehicles were sandwiched. In this way eight vehicles were destroyed and all the people in them killed. Later as a test, we placed some bombs provided by the United States on the road and destroyed some vehicles.**

Q: After 1969, how did you leave Mustang, what happened that made you leave?

**#26: I left Mustang in 1969 because I was not happy. There was no unity in the force. There were two groups, one side led by Gen Yeshe and the other by Sey Gyalo Dhondup. They did not get along and I was not happy.**

Q: Where did you go?

**#26: Then I came to Nepal and stayed there for almost two years. I did some work and worked in a restaurant for about 11 months. Then in 1970, I came to Dorjiden [Bodh Gaya in India]. I was a Bonpo monk earlier and I became a Buddhist and took my monk vows**



**from Kyabje Ling Rinpoche [senior tutor of His Holiness the Dalai Lama] and I lived in a monastery in Dorjiden.**

Q: We have one brief question. When the groups were fighting and you were not happy, what was the difference of opinions about in the groups?

**#26: I was a common man and did not know exactly what it was between the leaders, but it looked like Sey Gyalo Dhondup had not been fair with us. Gen Yeshe was not in the wrong. Sey Gyalo Dhondup was not fair with us.**

**As I told you earlier, for the 1,500 men and 1,500 horses, irrespective of whether they were men or horses, each was provided with eight U.S. dollars per day. When things became better at a later date, Gen Yeshe told us, "Each person's expenses for a day are 6 Nepali rupees. We have no country, so we cannot print [money] nor collect taxes. We have no factories, nothing. We are refugees and that is a lot of expenses and we have to think hard."**

**He was giving us a hint. Look at the difference between eight U.S. dollars and 6 Nepali rupees. At that time Sey Gyalo Dhondup was our leader and the [Tibetan] government's Chief Cabinet Minister. What he had done was: he had started an organization called *Chikdil Tsokpa* 'United Association.' Under this organization were many carpet factories in Simla, Nepal and Dharamsala. The funds meant for us had been diverted to these factories. We were made the losers.**

Q: And what would you have like it to have been spent on?

**#26: I think it should have been spent on what it was meant for. The United States of America sent it for resisting the Chinese in Tibet. I think it should have been spent for that purpose. I think it shouldn't have been spent on something else.**

Q: And that was the reason you left?

**#26: That is right. I was not happy.**

Q: Thank you for clarifying that.

**#26: [Nods]**

Q: You were a Bon monk back home in Tibet, and then in Kathmandu you became a Buddhist monk, what branch was that?

**#26: I joined the Gelugpa sect. Personally, I do not have any discrimination among Gelug, Sakya, Nyingma or Kagyu sects.**

Q: You were in Nepal for nearly two years, is that right?

**#26: Yes, I was there for almost two years. It was a year and nine months.**

Q: And what did you do?

**#26: As I had no money, I worked for five to six months. I worked on house construction. Then for about 11 months I ran a restaurant at a place, which was at a distance of about six hours away from the capital of Nepal. There was a huge electricity generation site and it was on the way to Kyirong in Tibet. Tibetans called this place as Chomgyal and the Nepali name for it was Tusani [?]. I ran a restaurant there for about 11 months.**

Q: What kind of restaurant was it?

**#26: A Tibetan had a restaurant. The owner of the place was a Nepali, but since he [the Tibetan] had been running it for a long time, the rent was not raised. At that time we had to pay a monthly rent of 100 Nepali rupees. I was there between 1969 and '70. We served rice, *dhal* and potato dishes. We also served an Indian dish called *aloo samosa* [fried potato dumplings].**

Q: Did you take it on lease from the Tibetan?

**#26: Yes. I had a partner, a monk who was from Kham. We both ran it together.**

Q: And then how did you get to Bylakuppe?

**#26: In 1994, we were in Bodh Gaya and there we had some misunderstandings. Then I came here.**

Q: You mean when you ran the restaurant?

**#26: No, no. In 1970 I moved to Bodh Gaya from Nepal. In Bodh Gaya there was a Gelug Monastery where Kyabje Ling Rinpoche was the Abbot. I took my monk vows and lived there for 24 years, from 1970 to 1994. We had some arguments regarding the administration of the monastery. Then I came here. We had some problems.**

Q: That was 1994, then what happened?

**#26: Then I came to the Sakya Monastery here [Bylakuppe]. At that time I brought along four monk students. The Kyabje Tindhu Rinpoche [Chief Lama of the Sakya Monastery in Bylakuppe] was alive then.**

Q: And how has it been for you to be here?

**#26: I have been happy here. It's been good here. The worst that happened was the passing away of our Chief Lama. Tindhu Rinpoche passed away and that has been very difficult.**

Q: When did that happen?

**#26: Tindhu Rinpoche passed away in 1999. He has been reborn and he is six years old. He was reborn in Dekyiling in Dehradun.**

Q: How were your Buddhist beliefs in nonviolence affected by the violence you saw or you endured?

**#26: That has given me a great loss, but it was the enemy who did not let us live [in peace]. I faced great difficulties and did not receive the opportunity to study and practice dharma. I did not get the chance for religion or leading an ordinary life. My life has been sort of worthless.**

Q: What do you think should have been done to help the Tibetan people?

**#26: Tibetans have great difficulties and help can come in many ways. The present situation of the Tibetans is extremely urgent and difficult. Though Tibetans do not face economic problems, the political situation is very difficult because it is a question of whether the Tibetan people and culture will survive.**

Q: What do you hope will be preserved about Tibet for future generations?

**#26: Our culture and tradition should be preserved by the younger generation, and also the Tibetan language and script; secondly the Buddhist dharma, which is serving the people of the world, and may be completely destroyed. We have to preserve these.**

**Another danger is that His Holiness the Dalai Lama is getting older and on the other hand the Chinese are tightening their grip. Everyday thousands of Chinese are arriving in Tibet and the Tibetans are becoming a minority. So the Tibetan language, script and traditions are being influenced by the Chinese. That is one of the great problems.**

Q: What advice or message would you like to give the next generation of Tibetans living in Tibet or in exile?

**#26: To be able to advise others, I do not have education. My life has been worthless, with neither dharma practice nor a normal layperson's existence. I do not have the ability or confidence to advise others. However, I think they should work hard towards preserving Tibet's culture, just as His Holiness the Dalai Lama advises. As per His Holiness' advice, they should behave well and preserve Tibet's culture. I think it is important that they heed the advice of His Holiness the Dalai Lama.**

Q: Given that His Holiness is asking for a nonviolent approach to working with the Chinese and given that you were a soldier who fought the Chinese, what is your feeling about this issue?

**#26: I do not think that fighting a war is good. Certainly the peaceful way is the best for both the sides.**

Q: Is there anything else that anyone wants to ask?

**#26: I received two letters from my home, one in 1994 and another in 1985 asking me to return. I could not go to Tibet because I cannot think of going back to Tibet when His Holiness the Dalai Lama is living in India.**

Q: Why do you think the nonviolent way is better than the violent way?

**#26: The nonviolent way is the best for both the sides. There would be no loss of life and property for both the sides. If it would work out, it would hurt neither humans nor animals.**

Q: But it's difficult when one side is being violent and the other side is not being violent.

**#26: That is very difficult.**

Q: Do you have anything else you would like to add before we end this interview, for which we thank you very much?

**#26: I am one of the older persons of the Tibetan community. If I had education, I should put my story in writing. However, I can neither write nor speak well, so it could not be done. Today you have given me a great opportunity to tell my life experiences and I am very grateful to you. I feel I have received a golden opportunity.**

Q: We would like to send back a copy of this interview to the community and you will be able to listen to it and maybe use the ideas to finish your book.

**#26: Thank you very much.**

[Interpreter explains the release form and interviewee signs it.]

END OF INTERVIEW