

Tibet Oral History Project

Interview #29C – Thupten (alias)
November 15, 2014

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INTERVIEW SUMMARY SHEET

1. Interview Number: #29C
2. Interviewee: Thupten (alias)
3. Age: 74
4. Date of Birth: 1940
5. Sex: Male
6. Birthplace: Lhasa
7. Province: Utsang
8. Year of leaving Tibet: 1959
9. Date of Interview: November 15, 2014
10. Place of Interview: Sakya Monastery, Seattle, Washington, USA
11. Length of Interview: 1 hr 10 min
12. Interviewer: Marcella Adamski
13. Interpreter: Khenrab Palden
14. Videographer: Tony Sondag
15. Translator: Tenzin Yangchen

Biographical Information:

Thupten was born in Lhasa in 1940. His farming family used to cultivate crops, but migrated to Lhasa when they were unable to pay taxes to the local chieftains. Thupten explains the regular tax in the form of grains and the *wulak* or labor tax that people had to perform. The imposition of taxes adversely affected the lives of some farmers if they were unable to pay and had to then pay interest as well. Thupten describes the games he played as a child and expresses his desire to go to school.

Thupten's parents began weaving carpets and pillows after moving to Lhasa. He describes how carpets were hand woven, where the materials came from and how the designs were copied from a sample. Thupten recalls his induction into monkhood at Sera Monastery when he was 9 years old and his excitement at becoming a monk so that he could finally get an education.

Thupten talks about his own experience of being a monk and touring various places with his teacher on pilgrimage. He gives us an account of the Chinese presence in Lhasa in 1959. Thupten was one of over 500 monks of Sera Monastery who went to the Potala Palace to fetch guns. He recounts being fired upon by Chinese soldiers, fleeing from his monastery and finally making the decision to leave the country. During his 3-month escape on foot, he encountered immense hardships along the way to Assam in India.

Topics Discussed:

Utsang, childhood memories, taxes, monastic life, pilgrimage, invasion by Chinese army, escape experiences.

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Interview #29C

Interviewee: Thupten [alias]

Age: 74, Sex: Male

Interviewer: Marcella Adamski

Interview Date: November 15, 2014

Question: May I please have your name.

00:00:08

Interviewee #29C: Thupten.

Q: Where were you born, Thupten?

#29C: [Speaks in English] I'm born in Tibet in Lhasa.

Q: Lhasa? And what year were you born?

#29C: Lhasa.

Q: What year?

#29C: It was 1940.

Q: How old are you now?

#29C: I am 75 now.

Q: Thupten, you were born in Lhasa. What was the nearest monastery to your family home?

#29C: The nearest monastery from Lhasa—there are many small monasteries that need not be mentioned—the nearest monastery is Sera.

Q: Your parents, like what did your father do for a livelihood?

00:01:18

#29C: Father's livelihood was farming.

Q: What kind of crops did they raise?

#29C: The crops in Tibet are wheat, peas, and then barley; wheat, peas and barley.

Q: Was your family farm owned by your parents or was it part of a monastery?

#29C: I mentioned earlier that in the old days [we] farmed lands as tenants.

[Interpreter interprets as: We paid tribute to Gaden Phodrang ‘Tibetan Government.’]

#29C: It was not Gaden Phodrang.

[Interpreter to interviewee]: It isn’t? Is it after [you] moved to Lhasa?

#29C: After arriving in Lhasa, after that we did not grow crops. Earlier we did. After coming to Lhasa [we] did not grow crops but earned a living by weaving carpets.

Q: May I ask what part of Tibet was your family from before they came to Lhasa?

00:02:46

#29C: [My parents] farmed lands.

Q: Yes?

#29C: [They] were farmers before coming to Lhasa.

Q: No, where did [they] come from?

#29C: From Tsang.

Q: Tsang part. Utsang.

#29C: U means Lhasa and Tsang is different. Tsang and Utsang.

Q: I see, from Tsang. How many days walk to your family home in Tsang?

#29C: It is something like eight days from Lhasa.

Q: Very far away. Eight days walking. Where you born in Tsang or in Lhasa?

#29C: I was born in Lhasa.

Q: You were born in Lhasa. So your family had already moved...

#29C: ...in Lhasa.

Q: Born in Lhasa. Why did your father move to Lhasa?

#29C: Oh, it is this. We have this one called *ponpo* ‘leader’ or *pon* ‘chieftain/warlord.’ Finding it difficult to live in the place due to suffering caused by some *pon*, [my parents] moved to Lhasa.

Q: Like refugees?

#29C: Yes, from there.

Q: For people who don't understand Tibetan history, can you please explain who were the warlords and what did they do to the people?

00:04:56

#29C: This is how they caused suffering. In general there is the *tel* 'tax' and *wulak* 'labor tax,' the Tibetan taxes, right? When one is unable to pay tax or finds it difficult to pay tax, one is forced to go into exile in desperation. Such taxes continue from one generation to the next. A son would...if it was my father, should I be living in Tibet now, I would also have to bear that. Had the event of '59 not happened I would have to continue with that. Since this had to be continued from generation to generation, unable to endure the difficulties [my parents] were forced to come to Lhasa.

Q: Were the warlords associated with the monastery or were they just individual, powerful, evil men?

#29C: [Laughs] There were many like that in Tibet. There were individual landowners like the one that caused us suffering and then there were tenants of monasteries that suffered. Yes, there were many.

Q: What was the name?

#29C: The name of the family that caused us suffering is Janyel.

Q: Janyel?

#29C: [They] are called Janyel.

Q: Tenant is what they are called?

#29C: We are the tenants of Janyel. Janyel are the leaders and we are their tenants.

Q: Did he work for himself or did he work for a monastery?

00:06:59

#29C: For his individual self. There were many like him.

There were many. There were many like that in the monasteries.

Q: Some from monasteries, too?

#29C: Yeah, too much, too much.

Q: So there was in the culture powerful men would be very evil and they would take money from the poor people?

#29C: It was not actually money. It was not money in our case. What entailed for us was this. For instance, the tax we had to pay was in the form of grains. It is grain tax. It is the same in the case of monasteries. The taxes were in the form of grains. The nomads in Kham paid butter and cheese as tax while in the central part it was grains and such; the tax was mainly grains. If one failed to pay the grain tax, an interest was levied. Then there was interest imposed upon the interest and it became extremely difficult.

Q: If you were forced and if you paid tribute to the warlords, did they protect you or give you any benefit?

00:09:08

#29C: [Laughs] It does not look nice for me to talk about something like this. It is like bad mouthing your own race. The fact is there is no “thank you” for paying taxes but if you were unable to pay tax you would likely receive a beating.

Because of this reason His Holiness the Dalai Lama speaks strongly about democracy these days.

Q: He wanted to change the taxation system, but he was forced to leave before he could make the changes?

#29C: [His Holiness] could not, but had already started it.

Q: How old...You were born in Lhasa. What are some of your first memories as a little boy growing up in Lhasa? What can you remember, any stories, any pictures?

#29C: Special stories in Lhasa as a child...it is just playing as a child. In general a big story would be the battle at Sera [Monastery] when I was a toddler. Do [you] know about the Sera battle? Have you heard of it? There was the Sera battle. The Tibetan Government was at war against Sera.

Q: Against Gaden Phodrang?

00:11:37

#29C: Against the Gaden Phodrang. At that time there was gunfire and soldiers marched by. There were not many troops but a small number marched by. I heard gunfire and about the capture and imprisonment of Reting Rinpoche as a child and used to be scared on seeing such. Soldiers used to enter houses for inspection and I used to hide behind doors as a little child. When it was said that soldiers were coming, I feared being killed and hid behind doors as a little child. That was how I felt at that time during the Sera battle. The battle had begun when I was little.

Q: Do you...even though you were little but since you...did you see people shooting? How do you know there was a war?

#29C: I was in Lhasa when the battle took place. The battle occurred in Lhasa. Sera is close by; it's the nearest monastery. During the battle gunshots were exchanged, *dhag*,

***dhag, dhag.* Reting Rinpoche was captured and imprisoned in the Potala in Lhasa. Though I was a little child people used to talk about it and one was not allowed to move outside because a battle was going on.**

Q: Rejing...?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Reting Rinpoche.

Q: Reting. Was he...which monastery did he belong to?

#29C: Sera Monastery.

Q: He belonged to Sera and he was arrested and taken to the Potala Palace?

00:14:12

#29C: The place where he was captured was Reting in Jang. He had a small monastery in Jang. [He] was in Jang Reting at the time of capture and brought to and imprisoned in the Potala by soldiers. He was the regent prior to that, the regent before His Holiness the [14th] Dalai Lama's reincarnation was born.

What I have seen as a little child then was when Reting Rinpoche was imprisoned in the Potala, the entire Potala Palace was engulfed in a cover of some sort of fog and could hardly be seen. I saw this as a little child.

Q: Why was Reting arrested? Why was he imprisoned?

#29C: There were many reasons for Reting Rinpoche's arrest. Prior to that Reting Rinpoche was the regent. Then the regency changed and Taktra Rinpoche became the regent after Reting Rinpoche. Reting Rinpoche recognized His Holiness the [14th] Dalai Lama. Soon after Reting Rinpoche, Taktra Rinpoche took over as Sikyong 'Political Leader' and then much later Reting Rinpoche...as a child I did not know about the internal matters or what transpired between them. I had not asked and nor did people talk much about such things in Tibet. I do not know what the problem was. After Reting Rinpoche, it was Taktra Rinpoche and during this period [Reting Rinpoche] was arrested.

Q: And then when you...what kind of...you said your parents moved to Lhasa and they owned a store or business. What kind of shop did your father start?

00:17:53

#29C: Carpets, [my parents] wove carpets.

Q: Weave carpets. How did they...did they know how to do that before they came or did your parents learn how to do that in Lhasa?

#29C: [They] knew from before. In the region of Tsang carpet weaving was common.

Q: Did your parents have a shop all by themselves or did they join a bigger company of carpet makers?

#29C: After weaving, [the carpets] are embossed, cleaned and delivered to shops.

Q: Did the shops belong to you or to others?

#29C: The shops belong to private individuals and [the carpets were] delivered there. [The carpets] there were for sale. [Parents] went to sell [the carpets] there.

Q: Sold to people or sold in bulk?

#29C: No, when you finish [the carpets] were delivered to the shops.

One cannot weave 10, 15 or 20 in the house.

Q: You didn't have a shop of your own, right?

00:19:27

#29C: We did not own a shop.

Q: Did you help with the weaving?

#29C: I have done yarn rolling and a little bit of knotting when I was small.

Q: How many children were in the family at that...how many children did your parents have?

#29C: There were three or four.

Q: Three or four children at that time? Were you the oldest one or the baby?

#29C: I am the oldest.

Q: Oh, you're the oldest one. We're actually in a room where there's a rug now. Did your parents make a carpet this size or is this too big?

#29C: [Laughs] We did not have a house to make a carpet of this size.

Q: The carpet that's in front of us is about 10 feet x 12 feet, so too big. What size carpets did you make? Can you tell us?

#29C: Six and six; six by six.

Q: Six by six inches?

#29C: Feet.

Q: Feet. Six by six feet. Okay. What were the carpets used for?

#29C: Well, in Tibet the carpets...here you have the sofas but there were no sofas in Tibet. So the carpets were used on *boldhen* ‘mattresses.’ They were mostly used on mattresses.

Q: Did you also make pillows?

#29C: Yes, pillows too.

Q: Mattresses and pillows together?

#29C: Yes, different things were made.

Q: What did you fill the *boldhen* with? What was inside?

00:21:53

#29C: Inside the *boldhen*...this is complicated. There is the *lapu* ‘fur of musk deer’ [from] the animal called *lawa* ‘musk deer.’

Q: *Lawa*?

#29C: *Lawa*, the animal.

Q: Antelope?

#29C: Could be. The fur of the animal *lawa* was brought from a great distance, perhaps Kham but [I] do not know for certain. Stuffing the fur of that was considered the best.

[The fur] was acquired from areas in Kham and around Lhasa, and not particularly Kham. It might be available around Lhasa. I do not know where [the fur] came from.

Q: Where did the designs come from for the carpet, I mean for the pillows?

#29C: Pillow or *boldhen*?

Q: No, the design, the shape, the design.

#29C: The design for weaving a carpet like this?

Q: The design, right?

#29C: The drawing.

Q: Yes, drawing.

#29C: The drawing...here and in India, there is the drawing for the carpets, but I never saw that in Tibet being young, never saw it. Those that knew wove from memory.

This is done...if a carpet like this has to be woven...if a carpet like this has to be woven, [a sample carpet] is inverted and placed on top of the loom. The back portion [of the sample carpet] is turned to us [the weaver]. [Bends down to touch rug on floor] When you look at the back, the design with the number [of knots] used is visible. Weaving is done by copying from [a sample].

Q: Did you learn how to weave rugs?

00:24:31

#29C: I have done a little bit of weaving when younger.

Q: Did you any other memories of grow...like in Lhasa like when you were 5 or 6 or 7 did you play around the streets or go to shops? What did you do?

#29C: Strolling around?

Q: Like strolling or visiting relatives?

#29C: Me?

Q: Yes, you.

#29C: I see. When I was little it was mostly playing, but in Tibet there was not anything like going strolling. There were not any such places to go. It was mostly playing and the playing was not impressive like here. You know the *apchu*?

Q: *Aptho*, playing with stones?

#29C: *Apchu*. There is something called the *apchu*.

Q: Carom board.

#29C: It is not carom board. It is called *apchu*. There is the one called *apchu* acquired from the knee of animals; gotten from goats and sheep called *apchu*. This was played much. [The *apchu*] was polished and sharpened and made into different creations. These were the games played.

Then there is *dokyi* 'rejoice with friends' for little ones, *dokyi* with friends. Two or three neighborhood children got together. [We] were children and it is not actually *dokyi* but it was called *dokyi*. [The friends] met together for tea and such. Other than that [I] have not been out much.

Other than that there were no outings like it is done here. That was not the practice in Tibet.

Q: Yeah, I get it. What about...were you going to school at anytime?

00:27:24

#29C: I did not go to school then.

Q: Never went to school. What happened to you when you were 8, 9, 10? What was going on in your life?

#29C: At the time I was 8 or 9...just now they [interviewer] spoke about *room* ‘carpets,’ which [I] assisted and such. Other than that [I] did not attend school. Then they [parents] made me a monk and send me to the monastery all of a sudden with another monk. Then [I] was taken to Sera.

Q: You spoke about *room*...

#29C: *Room* means this [points to carpet on floor]. *Room* means this. When we say *room* it means these ones.

Q: I thought it was *domtsi*.

#29C: It is called *domtsi* and *room* as well. It is called *room* in Lhasa. Generally in India it is called *domtsi*. Otherwise, it is called *room*.

Q: Oh, what happened? Did you want to go [to Sera Monastery]?

00:29:00

#29C: I wanted to go then. Other children were attending school and [I] could not. So going to the monastery meant receiving an education. [Boys] liked going to become a monk and I did, too. Little [monks] are called *enchung-la*.

I remember this. There was a Chinese school then. It was the old Chinese [Nationalists] and not the new one [Communists]. I used to go many times to the old Chinese school because [I] wished to attend. I used to stare at the gate of the Chinese school because [I] had a desire to go there but I would not get admission. [I] used to have that desire then.

Q: Your parents didn't want you to help with the carpet factory? You were allowed to become a monk?

#29C: Generally, if one could get an education at the monastery...in Tibet if there was a boy it was the tradition to send [him] to the monastery. Moreover, there were two daughters at home. So they were providing enough help.

Q: I get it. What age...I'm sorry but what age did you go to Sera?

00:31:39

#29C: I was nearly 9 years old at that time. At the time of going to attend prayer assemblies of many thousands of monks, the monk colleague used to carry me on his shoulders.

Q: Carried on somebody's back because you were so little and it was far away? What was the reason?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Because it was too crowded, you know, thousand monks trying to get to a study session at the same time.

Q: Where were the study sessions held?

#29C: Where I was carried to is called *datsang* 'section in a large monastery' where the prayer assemblies are held. Where I studied is called *khangtsen* [smaller community within a monastery, in which monks of one geographical area live], *khangtsen*. At around the age of 9 or 10 I did not study much in the *khangtsen*. There was another teacher who did not particularly push too much. Then gradually the number of boys in our *khangtsen* grew. The boys failed to get a good education and then finally the *khangtsen* established a school with 50-60 boys similar to schools we have here. Then [we] started studying the scriptures.

00:33:19

[Speaks in English] 5,000 people, yes, lamas [in] one *datsang*.

Q: I see. When you began to get an education what form did that take?

#29C: Initially, you are keen to study as a little child. Never having done it before one is eager. Unlike here, in Sera and other monasteries as also in monasteries in India, we have to memorize texts a lot. Memorization is an everyday affair. If the teacher gave instructions of 3-4 pages today, it must be recited from memory to the teacher the next day. That is how it happened on a daily basis.

Q: What kind of a student were you? Good, bad, medium?

#29C: [Speaks in English] I am sometimes medium, sometimes bad. [Laughs]

Q: Was it hard to study?

#29C: Not particularly hard, but I was a little naughty.

Q: You were a little naughty.

#29C: [Speaks in English] Yeah, I think so.

Q: How can you be naughty in the monastery?

#29C: Being naughty...playing and not taking any interest in the scriptures is being naughty.

Q: Did anything change in your life in the monastery because if you went in...you were born in 1940 or 1939 and so, you go in the monastery, it's 1949 and so where are the Chinese at that point in Lhasa? Are there any in Lhasa or do you see any?

00:36:29

#29C: The Chinese were few. The Chinese were very few at that time. Was it in '56 that His Holiness the Dalai Lama visited China?

Q: '51?

#29C: Was it '51?

Q: It was 1956, yes.

#29C: In '55 [His Holiness] visited India and '56 China. At that time I was little and there were Chinese but very few. There were not many Chinese then.

Q: How does your life progress in the monastery? What are the next situations or events that you remember?

#29C: From becoming a monk at the age of 9 until around 14 I continued to study as a monk. At that time [I] never felt in my mind that [I] did not want to be a monk. However, when I was between the age of 14 and 15...we normally have three teachers in the great monasteries. As mentioned earlier one of the teachers was the one I left with from Lhasa when I first became a monk. He was in Lhasa. After leaving my studies at the monastery I was with this teacher. He left for Tsang; Tsang, Shigatse, Sakya. He took me along.

It was on a pilgrimage.

Q: So Sakya, Tsang...

Q: ...and Shigatse on pilgrimage.

#29C: Yes, on pilgrimage then.

Q: What was that like for you to leave Lhasa and go out like that?

00:39:26

#29C: At that time I was a child and felt stylish wearing clothes from Lhasa. [I] removed the monk's robes and donned layman's clothing. [I] possessed nice layman's clothes then and looked stylish wearing boots. [I] was happy and enjoyed [myself]. [Laughs]

Q: Just to experience being a layperson?

#29C: Experience in the sense...the teacher took [me] along then and [I] was happy because [I] had been a long time in the monastery since childhood. Now [I] was going out to another place that I had never seen, either the people or the place. And it was different from Lhasa, completely different.

At that time along with the teacher were two servants and three children; we were three children. He was on the way to Sakya from Shigatse.

Q: So you would be a little more anonymous if you dressed up as a regular person.

#29C: Though in layman's clothing monks have shaven heads. So everyone who saw would recognize a monk.

Q: They know. An escaped monk! In these travels did you learn anything about Tibet that was sort of eye opening and new for you as you were traveling to Sakya and Tsang, which you'd never been to and Shigatse? What did you see?

00:42:36

#29C: At that time there was a smattering of Chinese in Lhasa and then I reached Shigatse. One must travel many days through villages to reach the city. Then [we] arrived in Shigatse. We rented a room for the night in Shigatse. That night the Chinese showed a picture, a cinema out in the open. Our landlord spoke about the show and asked [us] to come along. That day I had been to eat in a restaurant. [I] was stylish having just arrived from Lhasa. Besides [I] was a young man, stylish, and went to dine in a restaurant.

After dining in the restaurant [I] returned and went to the show at night. Then the show got over and while we were leaving, people got scattered in the crowd. It was a dark night. People scattered and [I] lost the people I knew. I remained there not knowing where to go in the night. Later I reflected and the restaurant [I] had eaten at that afternoon came to mind. [I] walked up and down in the night and finally reached the door of the restaurant. And then having taken that road during the day I finally realized and returned to the lodging.

Q: You were scared. Missing in...

#29C: The Chinese were there then. The Chinese were there and [I] was scared that if caught [they] would create trouble. Do you [to interpreter] know the *tsekhang*? I wondered if I should stay [the night] between niches of the *tsekhang*. But [I] did not have to as by walking about [I] found the restaurant.

Q: *Tsekhang* means...

#29C: ...where *tsa tsa* [miniature conical figures molded of clay and used as offerings] are stored.

Q: Where grass grows outside?

#29C: No, no. They resemble stupa. There are those that resemble stupa in Shigatse.

Q: Oh, *tsa tsa* house?

#29C: Tsa tsa house. In Shigatse [tsa tsa houses] are long with gaps between rows of individual houses. [I] thought of staying in a gap if [I] could not find the way back but that was not necessary.

Q: You mentioned that there were more and more Chinese. When did you begin to see real problems in Lhasa when you went back to Lhasa? What year did you begin to see problems because of the Chinese?

#29C: What problem?

Q: The Chinese and Tibetan problem.

00:47:08

#29C: Oh, the Chinese and Tibetan [problem] was already there then when I left from Lhasa. It was already there. The Chinese had already arrived in Lhasa. The Chinese had also arrived in Shigatse. However, there were not many instances of the Chinese being cruel to the Tibetans then. The Chinese were gentle then.

Q: When did that attitude change of the Chinese?

#29C: When did it change? The change?

Q: Yes.

#29C: That grew worse year by year.

Q: Year by year, I see. Then what happened?

#29C: Then the year '59 was beginning. '59 began along with the suffering. Not '59, the suffering had already commenced in Kham in '57-'58. It had begun in Kham in the year '56. Then the Chinese gradually grew worse and worse, killing people as [they] came inwards.

Q: Where were you when the uprising took place?

00:49:02

#29C: I was in Gaden then, Gaden Monastery.

Q: What can you tell us about your experiences right before the uprising?

#29C: I, at that time...the Chinese...what to say...Prior to that the Chinese told me to come to school having selected monks from the monastery. I did not have much desire to go then because I had lived in Lhasa since [I was] little. While in Lhasa many children of Lhasa attended the Chinese school. I used to go to watch movies at the Chinese school along with the children. So I knew what movies the Chinese showed and what they did since childhood. By understanding that [I] knew the danger and what the Chinese would do, which was the main reason that led to my decision to flee in '59.

Q: Did you go to the Chinese school when asked to?

#29C: School children were allowed into the Chinese garrison to watch shows. I went along then. I could gain entry only with the children.

Q: Was it in Sera?

#29C: Not in Sera. I was in Lhasa, in the city of Lhasa.

Q: After joining Sera...?

00:50:58

#29C: Yes, sometimes I stayed in Sera and sometimes at home in Lhasa then. It was during this period that I used to go to watch the shows.

Q: [You] mentioned that the Chinese called you to the school.

#29C: That was a selection done earlier in Sera but I did not go. It is said some did go but I did not.

Q: Because we understand that we have to end this interview in 10 minutes I would like you to tell us a part that you think is important that you witnessed of the Chinese...the uprising in Lhasa because you have to leave in 10 minutes, I understand?

#29C: What I have spoken so far is about my life as a little child. That is not the only thing. Actually there is more to be told yet. From the day the attack began in '59...I went to the Potala Palace to fetch guns; there was cross-fire with the Chinese. Then after '59, on the 12th or 13th of October [?] His Holiness the Dalai Lama left Norbulingka. Subsequently, we started to flee from Sera. If I recount the journey until India it will take you another hour or two.

[Interpreter interprets above statement as: ...And then also when in 1959 when His Holiness went from Potala to Norbulingka, we were one of the first, among the first ones to come out and protest.]

Q: Where were you from when you came out and protest? Where were you at?

#29C: The protest at the time of His Holiness leaving the Norbulingka was over. After His Holiness had left, the people did not know about it. [They] had no knowledge where His Holiness had gone. And only then did the attack begin; the Chinese began to fire.

Q: Where were you? Were you in your monastery? Were you in the streets? Were you in the hills? Where were you?

00:54:10

#29C: I was in Sera on the day the attack began.

Q: You were in Sera. Did you...Were you a monk and then did you take off your robes? Or did you come outside as a monk and become a fighter?

#29C: I did not actually fight as in shooting. We removed the monks' robes and donned laymans' clothing and went to the Potala Palace to fetch guns, to the Potala.

Q: Potala?

#29C: Yes, that day.

There were many monks, nearly 500-600.

Q: From Sera?

#29C: Sera.

Q: And when you got to the Potala were you able to get weapons?

#29C: [We] could not get guns immediately. There were Tibetan soldiers there. Among us monks was one that was familiar having been to get guns earlier. He was familiar with the location of the armory and got the guns.

Q: Did you get a weapon and did you get bullets?

00:55:47

#29C: [Laughs] I got a gun, a gun and bullets. It was an old gun, painted and manufactured a long time ago...not paint, [I] should say grease. These were removed from the armory and distributed. [I] received around 200 bullets. Later some soldiers gave out superior bullets and [I] received around 50. So in total I received around 250 bullets.

Q: And then where did you go?

#29C: After receiving these, some suggested [we] to Lhasa but that was not possible because the Chinese were firing from every direction. If we ran out in the open death was a certainty. So we went to Sera.

Q: Went to Sera Monastery and what did you do when you were there? You had your guns and your bullets. What did you do in Sera?

#29C: As we walked to Sera the Chinese were shooting. There was a big Chinese garrison on the other side of the road to Sera. [The Chinese] were firing from there. There was shooting but we were not hit. I was with Palden, a co-student who presently lives in Sera. We were walking together armed with guns. The firing continued. I said, "There is a lot of firing upon us. We cannot remain here. Let's dash towards a niche."

We hid in a niche in the nearby park. Just as we sat down a bomb was flung. The bomb did not hit us because we were hiding in a sandy place. The sand protected [us] and we were not harmed. But there was so much dust [I] could not see my colleague. I ran away. My colleague is called Palden. I shouted through the dust, “Palden, Palden.” Palden was following [me] and answered. [I] realized he had not died and then we proceeded together. Such things happened.

00:59:04

He [Palden] is now in Sera, in India.

Q: When you called for him, did you connect with him and what did you do next?

#29C: We went together to Sera. It was nighttime when [we] reached Sera. On reaching Sera that night, everybody in Sera had come to understand that His Holiness the Dalai Lama had left. Everybody knew that His Holiness was no longer there. Then everybody’s spirit was down. “His Holiness is not here. Where could [he] be?” The majority had left; there were not many men in the monastery, just a smattering. Palden was with a few of us, “What to do? What to do?” “The others are leaving. Let’s go where they are going.” Then we left.

Though [we] were carrying arms, there was no opportunity to use the guns. Right from the time the Chinese entered Tibet, they had set up garrisons and made preparations. This was so in every Chinese garrison.

Q: Because you’re going to have to leave, can you tell us what happens? Just continue the story.

#29C: Okay. Then we left and reached Phenpo, reached Phenpo from Sera. There’s a place called Phenpo. On reaching there, the majority of the people had no idea of where they were going. There were no plans; we had just walked on. In Phenpo we found the place where we had stayed earlier.

We were six monk colleagues. The six monks were together. [Someone] said, “There is nowhere to flee. Let’s borrow monks’ robes from the nearby nunnery. Let’s don monks’ robes.” I said, “I am going away as I do not have any desire to live under the Chinese. I am going to go anywhere [I] can. If that is not possible I will jump in a river and die, but I will never live under the Chinese. You can stay if you so desire but I am going.” We could not reach an agreement. I was the youngest.

When we disagreed with, the father of the family we were staying with said, “Seek a divination. You should seek a divination and if it advises [you] to go, then those that do not want to go should get ready to go. Should the divination result indicate to stay; you, who wish to leave, should stay back. Do whatever the divination says.” We went to consult a divination. That night we sought the divination and fortunately the outcome was for us to leave. So I was the winner and then we left from there. [To interpreter] [You] have to translate to her.

The Chinese were dropping bombs from planes in Phenpo.

01:03:14

The main reason for my saying so [that I wished to leave] was because I had been to watch shows at the Chinese military camp with other children. I have seen how much suffering the Chinese caused upon winning a battle. That gave me the courage.

Q: And then what happened on the journey?

#29C: The journey was full of suffering. There was nothing to eat but the food people gave. In that way many that were fleeing together stayed back along the journey. There were monks and many others that remained and finally, wherever one went there were Chinese, wherever one went there were Chinese. Finally, actually we reached the place where the *Chushi Gangdrug* [Defend Tibet Volunteer Force] army camp was located.

Q: In Lhoka?

#29C: In Lhoka. When we arrived at the Lhoka military camp, we were stopped for 5-6 days saying, "What is the use of going to Lhoka. You must go to Lhasa to fight." We had come from Lhasa and knew that it was not possible to overcome the Chinese. They remained persistent. Then 5-6 days later they had to take flight too. [We] fled together. Along the journey wherever one went there were Chinese, whether one took this direction or that direction. Finally, at last we reached the region of the *lopa* 'tribal people,' the tribal people.

Q: Mustang?

01:05:16

#29C: Not Mustang but the actual tribal region. There is a tribal region that is part of Tibet. We reached there. The region is called Sanga Choeling. The tribal region is called Sanga Choeling. It is a Tibetan territory. [We] reached there. When [we] reached here, together with the *Chushi Gangdrug* we were 600-700 men. If I continue the story there is another hour.

Q: Is *lopa* located at the border?

#29C: [We] had not yet reached the border then.

Q: Is *lopa* close to the border?

#29C: Lhoka? Lhoka?

Q: *Lopa*.

#29C: *Lopa* is at the border.

01:07:16

We journeyed through the tribal region. Through the journey we did not have horses and were on foot carrying food. You did not have any other thing but your food. Then we gradually journeyed down from the tribal region. It is nearly impossible to recount the difficulties along the journey. The difficulties were beyond imagination such that one thought only of dying and not surviving. It is futile to recount such problems, as there is not much connection to them [interviewer]. Skirting this problem, we walked for three months until Assam. Three months from the Tibetan border to Assam.

Q: Well, this is a story that deserves more time. So I hope that we can find time to interview you again in the future. You have given us...we never...this is I think the first time we have interviewed someone who was the son of a weaver. We've never heard this story before.

#29C: [Laughs]

Q: And we have not heard many stories about warlords and people running away. That's a first time. So thank you.

#29C: [Laughs] It is a new story.

Q: And we have heard stories of monks fighting the Chinese. So we are happy to know that you were one of those.

01:09:30

#29C: I did not kill any Chinese in the fight.

Q: I understand but you were trying to protect the dharma.

#29C: Yeah.

Q: Yeah. Thank you very much.

#29C: You are welcome. Thank you so much. [I] wish to say thank you all for volunteering for the cause of the Tibetans. I have done nothing to be thankful, as this is our cause.

Thank you so much.

Q: We are honored.

#29C: I am extremely happy that you have followed the advice given by His Holiness the Dalai Lama.

Thank you so much. Thank you.

END OF INTERVIEW