

Tibet Oral History Project

Interview #35 – Tsering Tashi
June 27, 2007

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INTERVIEW SUMMARY SHEET

1. Interview Number: #35
2. Interviewee: Tsering Tashi
3. Age: 71
4. Date of Birth: 1936
5. Sex: Male
6. Birthplace: Phenpo
7. Province: Utsang
8. Year of leaving Tibet: 1959
9. Date of Interview: June 27, 2007
10. Place of Interview: Thekchenling Monastery, Old Camp No. 2, Lugsung Samdupling Settlement, Bylakuppe, Mysore District, Karnataka, India
11. Length of Interview: 2 hr 0 min
12. Interviewer: Martin Newman
13. Interpreter: Lhakpa Tsering
14. Videographer: Tsewang Dorjee
15. Translator: Tenzin Yangchen

Biographical Information:

Tsering Tashi's recalls working from an early age in the fields with his parents. Since they did not own their land, they had to work twice as hard to pay taxes. When the Chinese arrived they began demand grains from the farmers. Two years after the Chinese' arrival, Tsering Tashi's father died while working at a Chinese construction site. It fell upon Tsering Tashi to take care of his family because his older brother was a monk living in a monastery.

Being young and daring, Tsering Tashi decided to join the *Chushi Gangdrug* Volunteer Force in their fight against the Chinese. When their resistance efforts were crushed by the Chinese military, Tsering Tashi escaped to India with the remaining guerrillas. Crossing over the mountain passes, the Resistance Fighters reached Tawang in Arunachal Pradesh, India, where they survived by taking turns begging.

After spending four months in the extremely hot region of Missamari and watching six or seven Tibetan refugees die each day from the poor conditions, Tsering Tashi was sent to construct roads in Bomdila. He subsequently joined the Indian army in 1961 and later settled in Bylakuppe in 1975.

Topics Discussed:

Farm life, taxes, life under Chinese rule, Chushi Gangdrug guerrillas, escape experiences, life as a refugee in India.

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Interview #35

Interviewee: Tsering Tashi

Age: 71, Sex: Male

Interviewer: Martin Newman

Interview Date: June 27, 2007

Question: Please tell us your name.

Interviewee #35: Tsering Tashi.

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

#35: Yes, you have my permission.

Q: Thank for offering to share your story. During the interview if you wish to take a break or stop the interview at any time, please let us know. If you do not wish to answer a question or discuss some issue, please tell us.

If this were shown in Tibet or China, would this be a problem for you?

#35: There will be no problem.

Q: We are honored to record your story and appreciate your participation. So to begin, I wonder if you could tell us something about your life in Tibet, growing up before the Chinese invasion.

#35: Before the arrival of the Chinese, I was about 13 or 14 years old.

Q: And where did you live?

#35: I lived in a place called Langdhang Zong, Phenpo Langdhang Zong.

Q: How many people were in your family?

#35: My parents, two sons and three daughters; five children.

Q: What did your parents do? What kind of work did they do?

#35: They were farmers.

Q: What did they raise?

#35: Grains, peas, wheat, potatoes and radishes. Mostly grains, peas, and wheat.

Q: Did you go to school? Or did you work on the farm helping your family?

#35: We had to help our parents. We had to look after the cows; there were horses. Taxes were high. We had to pay taxes. Taxes were very high.

Q: What do you...is there anything that stand out in your memory from that time about your life that is very special to you?

#35: I remember everything about when I was in Tibet.

Q: You remember everything, but is there any one memory that comes to your mind more often than others about your childhood?

#35: About work?

Q: Work or anything.

#35: Mostly it is agriculture work, taxes and working for the landowners—very difficult. Our land belonged to the Army and...We were very close to Lhasa. If you crossed a mountain pass, you reached Lhasa. Government taxes were high, from the north, from Kham. Even as children, we had no free time.

Q: Why do you think you remember that in particular? Was that very unpleasant for you or why does that stand out?

#35: When tilling the land?

[Question is repeated.]

#35: Yes, the land is ploughed by using *dzo* 'animal bred from a yak and a cow' and the seeds sown. *Dzo* plough the fields.

Q: So that was not a happy memory. Is there any particular happy memory that you have from that time?

#35: I have not been very happy. A year or two after the Chinese came, my father died. Taxes were very stringent. I was the only son with three sisters and my older brother, a monk, was sent to serve a Lama in Kham. I have never been happy, burdened by the taxes.

Q: Can you tell me what the landscape looked like in your village?

#35: No shops in our district, all were agriculturists.

Q: Did you hike up those valleys?

#35: What?

Q: I am curious to know what the areas surrounding your village that you saw everyday as you walked around there looked like. I wonder if it's possible for you to describe a little bit of what it looked like.

#35: All plains. All were fields, no forests, nothing.

Q: Covered with fields and no forest. Was it a mountainous area?

#35: There were mountains nearby but no forests.

Q: What did you do to protect yourself from the cold?

#35: It was very cold. Around the time of Ngamchoe [the 25th day of the 10th Tibetan month], it starts to snow. When there's snow, there's not much work and the mountains are covered with snow. The pass has snow, so in order to go to Lhasa we have to go around Phenpo. Phenpo is a big place and it takes three days. The route from our place takes just two hours to reach Lhasa.

Q: In the cold, how do you protect yourself? By lighting fires or wearing warm clothes?

#35: Yes, we had warm clothes for winter like here.

Q: At what age did you get married?

#35: I married when I was around 37, after I reached India.

Q: So you were not married before?

#35: No.

Q: Okay. When did you notice that things in your village were beginning to change— that something was happening in Tibet?

#35: When we fled, it was with the *Chushi Gangdrug*. I did not notice much at that time.

Q: I want to go back before you were in the *Chushi Gangdrug* army. Why did you decide to go into the *Chushi Gangdrug* army? What was happening that made you think you needed to do that?

#35: At first the Chinese gave some money, taxed us a little. Later they told the wealthy families to bring this and that. Then my father worked on the road construction for the

Chinese where he drowned. I also worked there and later ran away and stayed at Phari, and then joined the *Chushi Gangdrug* .The Chinese were fighting and treating the people badly, everybody did and I too went away.

Q: I would like to talk about that in a little bit and find more about that. Why did you think the Chinese came in the first place to your village? What did you think they were doing there?

#35: They came and gobbled up our country. They were very bad. Even little children in Lhasa used to fight with them and I had rage because my father died because of them.

[Question is repeated.]

#35: The reason is they came to invade our country without any reason.

Q: To invade. But at first you said they did not cause trouble and they were good. Is that correct?

#35: Yes.

Q: And then how did it change? When did you notice that the Chinese stopped being good and started doing other things?

#35: Later, when they started becoming forceful. Money is a scarcity in our village, so they demand us to bring certain measures of grain and peas and we were forced to do so. First they gave us some money, but later, nothing.

Q: They took all the food. What did you feel at that time? What did you think when you saw that?

#35: Everybody knew they were bad, even little children. Animals were dying, taxes were unending, from the north, from Kongpo. We had to take the grains over the high pass into Lhasa. There was only one district and it was the people of this district who had to transport [the grains]. There was no payment for this. The Tibetan government did not pay us and for generations we lived on the land and house; and from the Chinese we received nothing.

Q: And what else did they do?

#35: It was the food grains—the grain, peas, and wheat. Potatoes and radish were in small quantity.

Q: Did they treat the people in the village poorly or did they just take the food and that was it?

#35: The Chinese collected these food grains in another district to be taken to Kongpo, Lhasa, and the north. These are all taxes.

Q: Right. But were they cruel to the villagers? I know they took their food. But were they physically cruel to the villagers?

#35: When the Tibetan government says that we have to give such and such a measure and that they will come to collect it, we have to give it. This is the order of our Government.

[Question is repeated.]

#35: No, nobody was physically cruel.

Q: Then when the Chinese took the food, was there food enough for your family and other people in the villagers to eat?

#35: We had enough. The agricultural land was vast though money was a scarcity. There are plenty of grains and peas. The whole area is covered by arable land.

Q: So there was additional food, so you could survive?

#35: Yes, because of the agricultural land.

Q: What happened that made you decide: "I must join the resistance, or I must fight the Chinese?" What events occurred that made in your own mind, said, "I must do this now."

#35: Close by our village, there were many single Khampa men who were going [to join the *Chushi Gangdrug*] and we single men of our village used to tell each other that it was good to go too. So that's how I went.

Q: At a certain point there were people from Kham who were coming through the village, and they were... Or maybe not coming through the village, but they were communicating that we have an army and we need people to resist the Chinese. And that's how you decided to do that?

#35: Yes.

Q: What did your parents think of that?

#35: They did not know. My mother was there and my relatives, but my father was dead. They didn't know.

Q: What about your brothers? Did they join the army as well?

#35: Only after the fall of Lhasa, they came from there with guns.

Q: Did you join the army?

#35: Later at Lhoka, I joined the army.

Q: Where did your parents think you went when you left if they didn't know you joined the army? What did they think happened to you?

#35: I had already left my village because of the exorbitant taxes. The other members in my family were just my sisters, so I had left for Phari when I was about 15 years old.

Q: You joined the Khampas, where did you first go when you joined them?

#35: When I heard there was going to be fighting, I liked it. We were going to challenge them [the Chinese]. There were many Khampas and it was at Shenyen Diguthang. I had never fought before and I liked it. I was fearless.

Q: You felt happy and that was a good thing to join. But where did you go? Did you go to the mountains? Did you do...was there some place where you could fight the Chinese? Where did you do this one?

#35: It was at Diguthang in Lhoka, the place where the *Chushi Gangdrug* was first formed.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: I am trying to understand the location when he joined. Did they go to a camp? Did they go across the border somewhere else? Where did they group, so they could fight?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: The place is called Diguthang.

Q: Where is that?

#35: Very close to India, near Lhopra, toward Tsona. From Bomdila, it's very near.

Q: How many people were with you in this camp?

#35: There were the Khampa divisions and the Amdo divisions. When we arrived it was around 15-16 days since the formation of the army. Khampa and Amdo people were accepted into their particular groups. Since we were from central Tibet and could not join the groups, we were kept at the office.

Q: How many people were there? Approximately?

#35: Perhaps 4,000 to 5,000.

Q: 5,000 Khampas or *Chushi Gangdrug* men?

#35: Altogether. There were not many from the central part of Tibet. They were mostly Khampas and Amdos. This number was not stable. People kept coming... today, tomorrow and every day they kept coming.

Q: Can you tell me about your first encounter with the Chinese?

#35: This was at Tsethang.

Q: Were you looking for them or were they looking for you?

#35: We were looking for them.

Q: What happened? Can you describe what happened?

#35: We were in three or four groups. There is a hill called Gampori. Some took this route and some went through the plains. If Tsethang is here, Gampori is here and on the other side is a Chinese army camp.

Q: And what happened?

#35: We went in the darkness and by daylight we surrounded the place and started firing.

Q: Can you describe that?

#35: I don't know how many of them were killed. They had dug bunkers while we were out in the open. We lost one man during the first battle.

Q: Did you...were any of your friends or fellow soldiers, people you knew, killed?

#35: No I did not know. We were about 42-43 men from central Tibet and divided in two groups. We would be sent anywhere, at times to deliver letters as we knew the area. There were no telephones like here. We would go on horsebacks to wherever they told us to go.

Q: Everybody in your group returned safely?

#35: No, not all. When we fled to India, we were only 22. We had lost 20. From 42, only 20 were left. It's not known whether they were arrested or killed by the Chinese.

Q: How did you feel when you returned and saw how many people you had lost?

#35: We fought three times at Tsethang before we came to India. There is a place called Ron where another group fought and there too a person came to deliver a letter.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: I was asking the question about how he felt.

#35: About five to six people were left holding the horses, while we were in small groups fighting separately. All were not together. In each place would be about five people. Even when we fled, it was each one's own decision. I felt very sad when about 20 colleagues couldn't make it.

Q: I am sorry to hear that. What enabled you to continue and to keep your spirits up?

#35: The rage was growing in me when it seemed futile because the outcome depended on the weapons and the strength of the army.

Q: But how did you keep your spirits and your will to fight?

#35: We kept on fighting and at the same time retreating. Lhasa had fallen by then. We continued towards Yarlung and then fled.

Q: Yes, but what was your...at that time, were you—this is a hard question—were you determined or were you angry or you decided I will fight to the end, no matter what? What was your state of mind?

#35: No, I didn't think I would die. I was determined to fight and thought perhaps more will join us and maybe we will win. I did not fear death.

Q: What kind of weapons did your army have in facing the Chinese?

#35: A gun called Tashi Kharing given by America and a pistol.

Q: Were you on horseback?

#35: On horseback.

Q: After the first battle, what happened next? How did the second battle occur?

#35: The second battle did not happen with our group. It was somewhere else. Places had been divided and it did not happen in our area.

Q: Where were you?

#35: I was at my place where I was stationed—at Tsethang.

Q: I don't understand. After the first battle, Tsethang is...when did you fight again?

#35: Three times at Tsethang. The first battle was fought and after a month or two, the next was fought. The last battle was the one we lost about 20 men. For a month, we tried to stop their [the Chinese] water supply but did not succeed.

Q: In the last battle, again were you seeking the Chinese or were the Chinese pursuing you?

#35: We attacked them. This time we were not alone, there were a lot of men.

Q: What happened...What you said was you lost 20 men in that battle. Were many Chinese killed?

#35: There's no knowing how many Chinese were killed. There was a hillock and underground tunnels and the area was very secure. We had no bombs. I only know how many of our people were killed, but not how many of them were killed.

Q: So what happened after that battle? Where did you go?

#35: Then we retreated towards Tsona. Andrug Gonpo Tashi had fled. Everybody was fleeing and I was following.

Q: At this time, did you have any knowledge of how your family was?

#35: No knowledge at all. I was in the *Chushi Gangdrug* and in Lhoka, and my family was in Phenpo. I didn't know anything.

Q: From the point you joined the army, you heard nothing from your family?

#35: Nothing at all.

Q: After the last battle you fought, how were you able to flee to India?

#35: After we lost the battle at Tsethang, we retreated and following the majority of the people fleeing, we crossed the pass called Bumla which is in Tawang.

Q: Tawang is in Tibet?

#35: It is in India, on the border. Earlier it was in Tibet, now it is in India.

Q: What was it like when you arrived there?

#35: I felt very sad in Tawang. Because before we reached there, we had to give up our arms to the Indians. It was very sad; all the arms were piled up and left there.

Q: Yes. And then what happened? You handed over your weapons and I imagine all of you were just feeling terrible because of what had just happened. What did you do next?

#35: After we had given up our guns, we had nothing to do but just receive the food rations that they gave us. We had to give up the arms as all the others before us had done from the pile we saw.

Q: At that time after all you had been through, what did you think would happen to Tibet?

#35: It's a very pathetic condition for Tibet. I heard that relatives who were escaping were killed on the way, so many things I heard. I felt very sad. Our country was lost.

Q: Did you think you would ever be able to return to Tibet?

#35: There were many of us thinking about returning to Tibet. When we had decided to go to Tibet the next day, the Indian security surrounded us and made us give up our arms. About 50 or 60 of us had wanted to go back to Tibet. Without the guns, there was no use going back. If we could have, it was very simple to go back at that time. There was just a pass to cross and on the other side was Tibet.

Q: Did you think you would be able to return later?

#35: Yes, I thought so.

Q: When you were on the Indian side and feeling so bad... Was there anyone else there... Did you have any friends there? Were you able to console each other?

#35: Only those that were with us.

Q: And what was your living condition like there?

#35: There were about 22 of us. Some were grazing the horses; some went to transport food rations that were being dropped from the air, which would fetch us some rice. Daily four of us would go to the nearby villages to beg; we took turns to do this. So in this way we stayed in Tawang for sometime and then were sent to Missamari. Here we were provided with rations.

Q: What did you do?

#35: I used to cook for everyone.

Q: Very good. Good profession. Had you cooked before? Or was this completely new for you?

#35: First time. I had never cooked earlier.

Q: You were a cook in Tawang. How did that come to be, that you became a cook?

#35: There were 22 of us. Four would go to beg for *tsampa* 'roasted flour.' Most went as transporters for the food rations dropped from the air and they received some rice as payment. And someone had to cook the food, so two of us stayed back to cook.

Q: So you volunteered to do that or someone assigned you the job?

#35: The elder among us assigned the jobs, telling us to either go beg for alms or graze the horses; after all, they were our horses. There was no force; it was up to us if we did not want to do it.

Q: What did you like to cook the most?

#35: Rice and *dhal* 'lentil/bean stew.' [There were] no vegetables to cook.

Q: Was that all there was? Was that the extent of your...the food that you had?

#35: Sometimes those four who went to beg would bring back some meat and except for that, nothing else.

Q: I see. And then you cook that?

#35: No one had money to buy vegetables. Even if they had, nobody would reveal it.

Q: How were the health conditions in the camp there? Was there a lot of sickness?

#35: I didn't face any health problems.

Q: You didn't, but how about the other people?

#35: All were fine.

Q: Very good. Did you find yourself at that time while you were there, were you thinking of your family?

#35: I used to think of them, but there was no way to send word to them, nor could they send word to me. There was nothing to do.

Q: So it was hard to think about them knowing that they could not be with you?

#35: I thought about my parents, relatives, and my country.

Q: Did you dream of them?

#35: Yes, I dreamt of them a lot.

Q: I want to back up a little bit and ask something we haven't covered. I wonder if you had been religious at any time in your life.

#35: At around the age of 14, I became a monk. My father was then living. I was about three years in Sera Monastery.

Q: How long were you a monk?

#35: About three years. Then my father died and due to the high taxes, I had to help my mother and sisters.

Q: That makes sense. You had to leave the monastery to help your mother.

#35: I did not leave the monastery. I took leave during the summer to help at home with the field works. In winter I had to go back to the monastery.

Q: So why then for only three years. Didn't you want to continue there or did something prevent you from continuing?

#35: When you were in the monastery, you had to learn the texts. During summer I helped my mother. Well, then I did not stay in the monastery; I ran away.

Q: So if I understand correctly, you would have continued to be in the monastery if you could have, if it was possible.

#35: One had to learn the texts from the teacher and join in the prayer assemblies at the monastery.

Q: Would you have liked to do that?

#35: When the country was lost I had regrets, but not at the time of leaving the monastery as I was young.

Q: But I am still not there—if the Chinese had not invaded, if your father had not died, would you be staying in the monastery today?

#35: Yes, I would have stayed as a monk.

Q: Okay. So let's come back to Tawang; after you left Tibet did you have any information as to what happened to the Dalai Lama?

#35: His Holiness had left ahead of us when we were in Tsethang. He was escorted. When we learned that Andrug Gonpo Tashi had left for India, we escaped, as he was our army commander. His Holiness was already in Tawang.

Q: What were your feelings and thoughts when you heard that He had escaped to India?

#35: I was very sad. When in Missamari, the elders were sent for road construction. The middle ones went to fight at Mustang. The young were sent to school—a school was started there. But this did not last and later they were sent for road construction to Punjab and Kulu. If one were a little educated, he could go to the Tibetan government in Dharamsala.

There was nothing to do but just receive the food rations. It was hot. Daily at least 8 or 9 people died, every day in Missamari. There were at least 8 or 9 corpses every day. Later the dead were just buried in the sand on the river bank. If they were buried today, the next day the jackals would have found them. It was very sad. It was very hot.

Q: I don't know how he...Let me go back and ask the question again. I was asking about your feelings about the Dalai Lama when you learned that he had escaped; what your thoughts and feelings were?

#35: His Holiness had arrived in Mussoorie when we were in Assam. I used to be very sad. As I had come from Tawang, I wished that I would be sent to work on the road construction there. Then it was impossible to go back to Tibet. I was feeling very sad. I wished I would be sent to Tawang, Bomdila where people were being sent for road construction because I was familiar with the place.

Q: So let me go back to Tawang and when you were cooking. How long in total did you stay in Tawang?

#35: About 15-20 days and then we were sent to Missamari, depending on who had arrived there earlier.

Q: You were there not a very long time in Tawang and Missamari is in India. Is that correct?

#35: It is in Assam. That's the place that all the people who were escaping reached.

Q: Who sent you to Missamari?

#35: It was the Tibetan and Indian governments who sent us. Those who had reached it earlier were sent ahead and so on.

Q: Did you want to go?

#35: Yes, there were many houses built and food and clothing were given to the escapees.

Q: I want to understand a little more clearly after the Indian and Tibetan authorities sent you to Missamari. How did you feel about that? Did you want to go?

#35: There were no other options. The Tibetan and Indian governments said we had to go.

Q: How did you go to Missamari? How did you get there?

#35: Walking. There were no vehicles at that time.

Q: How far was it?

#35: It took two days walking; two days from Tawang to Bomdila and two days from Bomdila to Missamari. Total four days. We had to carry our food on our backs. There were no vehicles and no roads.

Q: Was that difficult for you?

#35: Yes, it was very difficult. We had to climb up the slopes, then go down and then climb up again.

Q: It was physically difficult. Was everybody able to get to Missamari?

#35: Yes, everyone.

Q: When you got to Missamari, what was it like there?

#35: At Missamari they gave us clothes and daily food rations.

Q: What was the climate like there?

#35: It was extremely hot, very, very hot. You can't stay there in clothes like these. It's the same these days, too.

Q: What did you think when you reached this very different kind of weather and climate? How difficult was it for you to adjust to that?

#35: We faced a lot of problems because of the heat. The heat was extraordinary. It was impossible to stay there. We were scared because many were unable to adjust to this place and died. Everyday there were deaths.

Q: Did people you know die there?

#35: None from my group.

Q: But you knew others who died?

#35: Yes.

Q: What did they die of? What caused them to die?

#35: It's the heat and the place to which they couldn't adjust.

Q: Just because it was hot, did they become sick or did something else happen?

#35: I think it is the heat and maybe the food too.

Q: What kind of food were you eating there?

#35: They would give us milk powder, sugar, and tea leaves to make sweet tea, besides, of course, flour and rice and different kinds of vegetables.

Q: And they died because of the food; that there was some bad food or what about the food made them die?

#35: There was no meat or butter. The ration was rice, flour, and sugar; just about enough. As we were cooking together it was sufficient.

Q: So there was no protein. There was some kind of malnutrition. You had been a cook in Tawang, what did you do in Missamari?

#35: Here it was so hot. We used to take turns cooking.

Q: How long were you there?

#35: Three to four months, maybe four months.

Q: You mentioned earlier that, how many people daily were dying there?

#35: Daily six or seven; every day.

Q: What did you think would happen to you?

#35: I used to feel very sad there, but helpless. There was an Indian hospital and they gave medicines, but in spite of that people died because of the heat. The clothes we had were also thick.

Q: To you personally, what did you think would happen? Did you have any idea where you would be going or how long you would be staying in Missamari? What were you thinking?

#35: No, I didn't want to stay in Missamari. I wished to be sent to Gangtok or Bomdila, where people used to be sent for road construction. Finally after about 4 months I was sent as a part of the *Chushi Gangdrug*.

Q: Did you think you would get to Gangtok or what did you think would happen?

#35: I was sent to Bomdila.

Q: Before you went to Bomdila when you were very sad and feeling despair, what gave you hope?

#35: I never wanted to stay in Missamari but ardently hoped to be sent for road construction. They put me in a school, but I had no wish to remain here.

Q: I understand but what I am asking is what gave you hope for the future to keep you going?

#35: So many people died and I didn't want to stay there. So many were dying and I never even thought of my parents and relatives.

[Question is repeated.]

#35: I wished to be sent for road construction and thought of nothing else.

Q: Because you heard there was road construction there and that's what you wanted to do?

#35: Those places are very nice with moderate climate. There were hundreds of Tibetans working for the Indian government. The climate is very good, even now.

Q: Better climate. But you went to Bomdila. Where is Bomdila?

#35: It is in between Tawang and Missamari. You come down from Tawang and went up from Missamari. Its two days from Tawang. Bomdila is a district, it's a big place.

Q: Did you walk there too?

#35: Yes. There were no vehicles, no roads at that time.

Q: What was life like in Bomdila?

#35: We worked on road construction. We were ten in a group and one cooked. Work started in the morning at 7 o'clock and finished at 4 in the evening. I was happy.

Q: What kind of work were you doing?

#35: Building roads for vehicles.

Q: No cooking?

#35: Yes, I cooked. I cooked for ten people.

Q: And you did road construction also?

#35: Yes.

Q: You were happier there?

#35: Very much better. The place is nicer.

Q: The climate was better there for you?

#35: The climate was very good.

Q: How long did you stay in Bomdila?

#35: I worked on the road construction in Bomdila for around 6 months and then I was sent to the Indian Army.

Q: What were the living conditions in Bomdila? Did you live in tents; were there shacks; did you live outside; how did you live there?

#35: Under tarpaulins. The sides were covered with hay and bamboo and the top was tarpaulin.

Q: Was there enough food there?

#35: We got food rations. We also had money, so we could buy food if we needed.

Q: What kind of thoughts was going through your mind?

#35: The thought of going back to Tibet was there in my mind, but I couldn't do anything.

Q: You were in Bomdila for 6 months. Were your friends still with you in Bomdila or were you with a completely different group of people?

#35: There were people from different parts [of Tibet].

Q: Were you with people from your same province?

#35: Only one person.

Q: Were you friends?

#35: We were from the same district. Our homes were quite close by. He is now dead.

Q: Did you feel alone in the camp there?

#35: Though we come from different parts, there were many monks from Sera whom I knew or had seen earlier.

Q: Were there men and women in the camp or were they strictly men?

#35: There were married couples. Ten people were provided with one tarpaulin shelter.

Q: There will be a tent for women and a tent for men?

#35: All together.

Q: Were they living in the same tents?

#35: They were living elsewhere, they were among the general public. Where I was, there were no women. It was under the *Chushi Gangdrug* group, ex-guerrilla fighters. There were about 270 men.

Q: I am wondering if any of the men at that point who were not married ended up meeting women and getting married in any of these camps.

#35: Not in our group. The *Chushi Gangdrug* group was completely apart from them. Maybe there was some plan in this by the Tibetan government. We had a leader and we had to be ready to go wherever called. Later it broke up.

Q: That was an army camp of the *Chushi Gangdrug* army. How did you come to be that you joined the Indian army?

#35: It was the advice of His Holiness the Dalai Lama that 13 young men, unmarried and without children should join the Indian Army as pioneers. We were from different parts of Tibet—from Kongpo, Tsang, Amdo, and Kham. I was from the Lhasa side. They picked up people from different parts. There were no women and children and all the men were around the age of 25-26. That was in 1961.

Q: So you volunteered?

#35: No, I was picked and asked if I wanted to join the Indian Army and I said yes. I was sent by the person who was in charge. They had 12 men ready and wanted a person who could lead them and so I was selected.

Q: Were you happy to do that? Was that something you wanted to do?

#35: I wanted to go when I heard that it was the army.

Q: Did you think when you joined the army you would be fighting the Chinese?

#35: That was it. There are many Indian army companies stationed at the border. When we joined the army, they didn't give us army training or arms. We were in a different department, the intelligence department.

Q: When you joined the Indian Army, did you think that there would be war between the Indians and the Chinese?

#35: Yes, I did. Indians have a huge army and were prepared.

Q: What did you end up doing in the army?

#35: Our job was to show the way to the troops who were not familiar with the area. We had army uniforms, summer and winter sets. They gave us food. We were not given guns, which is understandable since we were not trained. In the morning, we were together with 15 to 20 Indian soldiers, who would call either one or two of us and we would have to go with them into the hills to show them the path.

Q: You were searching the roads, whom were you searching?

#35: Army leaders or intelligence people would come who had to go towards Tawang. They would have maps with them and whether we knew the way or not, we had to find it for them. Other than that we had no work.

Q: How long were you in the Indian Army?

#35: From 1961 to 1962, until the war in Bomdila.

Q: You were a year in the Indian Army?

#35: Yes, a little over one year. After the war in Bomdila, we fled and joined the 22 company at Dehradun.

Q: In all this time, what was hardest for you?

#35: Nothing. I was young and nothing was difficult. I had no relatives, no wife, and no children.

Q: Did you miss having a wife and children at that time?

#35: At that time my aim was to be in the army and be able to go back and fight. There was no fear in me.

Q: Just thinking of the possibility of fighting?

#35: Yes.

Q: So the total time you were in the army was how long?

#35: A little over one year. I was 24 when I left the Indian Army.

Q: Where did you go when you were through the army?

#35: If you walked for 15 days from Bomdila towards the tribal lands, you reached a range of snow-capped mountains. And we had to cross over those. We were there with the Indian army for around eight months in the snow.

Q: When the service in the army was finished, where did you go?

#35: When India and China fought in 1962, and lost Bomdila, we fled back to Missamari and Guwahati. Then I joined Unit 22 in Dehradun. If we went to Shillong, the Intelligence Department would have taken us back. But Tibetans in Guwahati heard that people were being enlisted in Unit 22 at Dehradun. So instead of going back to our previous

department, we went to Dehradun. Twelve of us reached Dehradun. Only one man was missing, I don't know what happened.

Q: When you were discharged from the army, you went to Missamari. Is that correct?

#35: Missamari was on the way.

Q: After you left the Indian Army, you went to Missamari and what happened then?

#35: After fleeing Bomdila, we reached Guwahati in Assam. Here the Tibetan government officials were enlisting people into Unit 22 at Dehradun. We were told that after training for six months, we could go back to Tibet. So we joined it and did not return to the Indian Army.

Q: And were you trained for six months in this army?

#35: Yes, I joined Unit 22 in Dehradun for this training to go back to Tibet.

Q: What kind of training did you get specifically?

#35: There was no going back to Tibet. We learnt to do parachute jumps and other things. Nobody sent us back to Tibet after six months.

Q: Were you not allowed to do the training?

#35: During the time we were there the company was newly formed and there was no such specific thing as a six-month training period. These days it is there. We cleaned our rooms and at times learned to handle guns. In 1964, they took us for parachute jumps.

Q: How many people were with you during the training?

#35: Each group had about 135 people and there were different groups.

Q: After your training period, what did you all do?

#35: After six months, there was no one to send us back and so time passed by. In 1966 I was sent to the border.

Q: To the border area to do what?

#35: To protect the border in case of a war between India and China.

Q: To protect the border from the Chinese?

#35: Yes.

Q: How long did you do that work?

#35: Three years in Wolung.

Q: Three years. So you lived for three years on the border of India and China?

#35: Sometimes about 30 of us would be taken towards the Tibetan border, but not where the Chinese were. There are hills and there were Indian and Tibetan army camps. They [Indian soldiers] wouldn't let us go. Each army had their part of the land to protect. So even though we were on the same side, they would not allow us to go to the other side.

Q: Did you and your friends feel like taking a few shots?

#35: We could see the smoke from the Chinese side and at times, they would be working outside; we'd look furtively and they did too at us. There was an army camp at the top of the mountain and beyond that we would not be sent.

Q: So in the whole time you were protecting the border, did you ever encounter any Chinese troops?

#35: No, we did not meet any Chinese troops. We saw the smoke and them working in the vegetable gardens.

Q: Were you happy at this time? How did you feel doing patrol duty?

#35: I had great hope to confront the Chinese. The Indian government will not permit us to fire at them. We had to wait for their order and without that we could not fire, though I very much wanted to.

Q: After the three years where did you go?

#35: After three years we had to go back to Dehradun and the next group would take our place. Then I was sent to an army camp at Biladhing [?] a place near Tawang—very close to Tsona and Bhutan—for one year. Since I had stayed in these places earlier, two of us went there.

Q: What did you do there?

#35: Same thing as before. This is a border area and there was only one Army Company. The other side is Bhutan and there is Tsona, Tibetan side.

Q: I hear that you spent a lot of years in military. What point did you finally come to Bylakuppe?

#35: In 1975 I came to Bylakuppe.

Q: How was it for you here?

#35: I liked it here as there are many Tibetans doing farm work, though I don't have any land.

Q: Were you in the army all the time up until 1975, in military service?

#35: Yes.

Q: You came here in 1975; Bylakuppe was already established by then. What did you do? What kind of work did you do?

#35: My wife had two acres of land. So I cultivated that for a few years and then I went to sell sweaters.

Q: Where did you meet your wife?

#35: I have a relative here in Gulledhalla. I met my wife when I had come to meet my relative.

Q: How soon after you arrived here, did you meet her?

#35: In 1967 I came here to meet a relative. My relatives said, "You cannot remain like a monk," because although in the early days monks engaged in studying the dharma, now that was not possible. So it was best to get married.

Q: Was it arranged by them?

#35: Yes.

Q: Do you have children?

#35: Yes.

Q: How many?

#35: Seven children.

Q: It was a good arrangement.

#35: [Laughs]

Q: Who arranged the marriage?

#35: My relative.

Q: Which relative? I didn't know you had relatives here.

#35: Now he is dead. My uncle.

Q: Your uncle came to Bylakuppe before you?

#35: He was here in 1962, right at the beginning when the Guledhalla camp was formed.

Q: Did you ever hear any word about what happened to your family in Tibet?

#35: I had heard about them earlier through my relative.

Q: What did you hear?

#35: My mother was dead and, of my three sisters, the youngest was dead. Two are still there; one who is older than me and one younger.

Q: When is the last time you had any contact with them?

#35: I heard [from them] first in 1965-66. At that time my mother was alive.

Q: When was the last time?

#35: Last year. One of my children went there.

Q: What did your child say upon his return here?

#35: It's my daughter. She told me about my place. She has been to Gaden, Drepung, and Tashi Lhunpo Monasteries for pilgrimage. She went to my home and met all my relatives. She had to stay at Lhasa.

Q: She has come back here?

#35: She doesn't live here. She's in Canada. She went [to Tibet] from there.

Q: What advice would you give the next generation of Tibetans living in exile? What would you want to tell them?

#35: Abide by the words of His Holiness the Dalai Lama. Preserve your religion and education. I have two little grandchildren and I tell them the same. I know only a little Tibetan but no English. I teach them.

Q: What would you do if it were possible for you to return to Tibet?

#35: Will I be able to go back to Tibet? The younger generation keeps in touch [with relatives in Tibet] through the telephone. It is difficult for me now. I have to apply for a

pass from India and my hearing and eyes are not good. The youngsters should keep in contact.

Q: A problem with your sight. What do you hope will be preserved about Tibet?

#35: Whatever His Holiness the Dalai Lama says.

Q: For future generations, what would you want preserved?

#35: That is it, to do whatever His Holiness says.

END OF INTERVIEW