

Tibet Oral History Project

Interview #40 – Thupa
June 25, 2007

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INTERVIEW SUMMARY SHEET

1. Interview Number: #40
2. Interviewee: Thupa
3. Age: 75
4. Date of Birth: 1932
5. Sex: Male
6. Birthplace: Tindho
7. Province: Dhotoe (Kham)
8. Year of leaving Tibet: 1959
9. Date of Interview: June 25, 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 28 min
12. Interviewer: Marcella Adamski
13. Interpreter: Tenzin Yangchen
14. Videographer: Jeff Lodas
15. Translator: Tenzin Yangchen

Biographical Information:

Thupa hails from a family of farmers and his father served as a leader of the region's nomadic division. Thupa happily became a monk at age 10 when his family carried out the tradition of sending the youngest son from the family to the monastery. He loved performing the *cham*, an annual Buddhist dance performance, and delighted in scaring the spectators with the masks worn by the dancers.

Thupa was given the job of treasurer for the Tindhu Tulku, a reincarnated lama, and was required to travel for trade to distant places. He found it difficult to remain a monk and received permission to leave the monkhood while retaining his position as treasurer. He later married the sister of the Tindhu Tulku.

The Communist Chinese entered Thupa's region around 1949. When fighting between Tibetans and the Chinese increased, Thupa was asked by the Tindhu Tulku's father to keep the Tulku safe. The Tibetans tried to impede the Chinese military and obstructed their water supply, but they could only temporarily stop the advancing troops. Thupa describes the many dangers he faced and was eventually able to escort his family and the Tindhu Tulku safely into exile.

Topics Discussed:

Childhood memories, religious festivals, monastic life, invasion by Chinese army, resistance fighters, life under Chinese rule, escape experiences.

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Age: 75, Sex: Male

Interviewer: Marcella Adamski

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Q: I would like to begin by hearing a little bit about your childhood in Tibet. For example what was your father's work in Tibet, your mother's work?

#40: My family was agriculturists as well as dairy farmers. Every place has a leader and my father was the leader in our area. My mother milked the *dri* 'female yak,' sowed the fields and did other household works. When I was about ten years old, I was admitted into the monastery as a monk. Later I left the monkhood and married.

Q: How long were you a monk?

#40: About nine years; since I was 10, I was a monk.

Q: When you mentioned your father as the head of the area, what was the name of your village and province?

#40: It was called Ga Kutsa in Tindho District.

Q: How many people were under your father's charge?

#40: He was not the highest leader of the area. He worked as a secretary for a leader who was called Khutsa Bekh. The story goes that under this leadership there were 360 families.

Q: Under the highest leader?

#40: No, not the highest leader. The highest authority was the King of Nangchen. Under the King were 25 *dhindo* 'military leaders' and under the 25 *dhindo* were 25 *ponkha* 'civilian leaders.' The Khutsa Bekh was one among them and he had several men working for him. My father was one of these men.

[Question is repeated.]

#40: Under the *ponkha* were two sections, the farmers and the nomads. My father was in charge of the nomads. There might have been around 80 to 90 families. I do not know the number of people since the custom of census was not there, but family-wise, you could say 80 families.

Q: That's very large.

#40: Yes.

Q: When you were a little boy, before you went to the monastery, what was the typical life for you? What did you do?

#40: When I was a little boy, I used to look after the little lambs and calves of the *dri*.

Q: Did you enjoy that work?

#40: I was very happy at that time.

Q: What other things did you do during the day besides taking care of the animals?

#40: Apart from these I did not have any other work. Then I was sent to the monastery.

Q: Was there any school for you before?

#40: No, there were no schools in our village. We start to study upon joining the monastery. I studied Tibetan and Buddhism for nine years.

Q: But when you were still a little boy, what was it like in your family life? What was happening? Were there many children in your family? What was your life like at home?

#40: I have two brothers and three sisters. From the three boys, I am the youngest. The three sisters are all younger to me.

Q: What was your mother and father like, did they have any special activities that you enjoyed or special festivals or holidays? What are your favorite memories of your childhood?

#40: When I was young, in summer, on the 1st day of the 6th month of the Tibetan calendar, we used to have a ceremony for invocation and offerings to the local gods. Everybody would gather together and we used to have horse races and target shootings for seven days. I think that was one of the happiest times.

Q: Did you race horses too?

#40: Yes, I have raced horses. I was one of the best. I was good at shooting. When I rode the horse, I would bend down and could pick up a *khata* 'ceremonial scarf' left on the ground, while on the horse. When I shot, I used to have a very good aim. I loved horses and guns.

Q: How old were you when you were doing this?

#40: When I rode I was about 8 or 9. Even after I joined the monastery, I would come home during the horse race. I rode horses after I became a monk; when I was around 11 or 12. We were allowed to go and attend this happy event.

Q: Do you have any other favorite memories of your childhood that you could tell us about?

#40: When I was very young, before I had become a monk, the younger children used to have feasts for 6 to 7 days. We would cook meat and sweet potatoes—that was the only thing we had. Then we drank milk and curd. During summer, we would put up tents and our parents would give us the chance to have fun. I remember those days.

Q: Tents on the pastures?

#40: Yes.

Q: What were the tents made of?

#40: During our time, cloth was very scarce. However, there were some wealthy families from whom we could borrow small tents.

Q: Did you stay overnight in the tents?

#40: At night we were too scared to be outside, we went home to our parents.

Q: I heard from some Tibetan children that there were some kinds of scary animals up in the mountains. Did you ever see anything that was scary for you?

#40: In my area there were bison, wild ass, deer and wild sheep. We did not have tigers or leopards or bears.

Q: That must have felt much safer.

#40: There were no forests in my place, so there were no tigers and leopards.

Q: Your mother was at home and cooking and taking care of the family. Do you remember what the favorite things you used to eat when you were growing up? What was your favorite food?

#40: After my mother had boiled milk and left it to cool, a cream would form at the top. She would then take the cream and mix blue cheese, add a little bit of curd and give it to me. That was very tasty.

Q: It sounds delicious.

#40: It was delicious.

Q: You mentioned this important job that your father had. Is there something that you can tell? When you were a little boy, did your father have this job where he was over those people that you talked about? Was that significant or important to you that he held this position?

#40: My father was working under this *ponpo* of our area. When people had disputes, it was my father's duty to hear both sides and then report the matter to the *ponpo*. When my father presented the report of the case to the *ponpo*, even though one of the sides involved in the case might be a friend of his and the other someone whom he was not on good terms, he was never partial in his dealings. So my father was very popular among the people as a just man.

Q: It sounds like you admired your father very much.

#40: Everybody in the village considered my father as a man of truth and fairness.

Q: Could you give me an example of what kinds of debates would he try to settle? What kind of conflicts?

#40: There were many different kinds of conflicts. Some regarding thefts of sheep; some about grazing lands when one may have encroached upon the others' grazing area; quarrels between husband and wife; and also murders. Initially it may be an argument, but slowly it could escalate into physical fights or murder.

Q: Were you able to listen in to these cases as a young boy?

#40: I never took much notice of these as a child.

Q: It's an adult kind of thing.

#40: [Smiles]

Q: Could you please describe just what your home was like? Was it way in the country or village? What was it like?

#40: As I told you earlier, we were both farmers and nomads. We had a house on the farm and mostly lived as nomads. We came to the farm during the harvesting season bringing all the animals with us.

Q: You had two houses?

#40: A house on the farm and we lived in tents at the nomad camp.

Q: And the whole family went?

#40: The whole family went. In autumn everyone came down along with the animals. There was a lot of grass for the animals after the harvest.

Q: What was your favorite season?

#40: I loved the 6th and the 7th months of the Tibetan calendar, when flowers bloomed on the ground and it rained from the sky. Animals became fat and the horses were at their best.

Q: Was there a temple nearby that your family went to?

#40: There were no temples close to our home. However, every region had two or three monasteries. We belonged to the Pangsha Monastery and this was where I became a monk.

Q: That's the next story I want to ask you about? How did you go from being a little boy at home to becoming monk?

#40: In my family, I was the youngest among the three sons. It was the tradition in our village that if there were three sons, the youngest would become a monk. If there were two [sons], the younger became a monk. If there were four, the youngest was the monk. It was always the youngest son and as I was the youngest, my parents said I had to become a monk and I was glad too.

Q: Can you tell me why you were glad to go?

#40: When I was very young I used to watch the monks perform a religious dance, the *cham*. I was fascinated by it and wanted to do it myself. That was the reason I wanted to become a monk. My parents told me to go and I was happy.

Q: You wanted to learn the dances?

#40: Yes, I wanted to learn, and I learnt. I was very nimble when I performed the *cham*.

Q: Can you do it today?

#40: Now I am old and I can't.

Q: What did you like about the dances? Was it the mask, the costume, the music—what was it?

#40: It was a child's fascination. It was the mask and the various brocade dresses.

Q: Were they very beautiful and scary?

#40: Yes. It is good, it is scary. I have performed different *cham*. When I was a child, I used to watch this character that wore a mask and went around towards the audience to scare them. I thought that was a lot of fun. Later, I used to scare the people the same way.

Q: How else did your life change when you became a monk at age 10? How else did your life change besides you got to dance and wear a mask?

#40: As I just told you, I thought it wonderful to perform the *cham* and frighten the people. For my parents, they had to make one of their three sons a monk. Whether they liked it or not, that was the tradition that the youngest become a monk. So that was how I became one.

Q: What were the changes in your life?

#40: If one stayed at home, there were no schools so there would be no opportunity for education or religious studies. My elder brothers do not know how to read and write. In the monastery we get to learn Tibetan and the dharma and I had a great interest to study.

Q: Were you considered a very smart little boy?

#40: Among his three sons, my father considered me the smartest. Generally speaking, I don't think I was that clever. I was agile in performing the *cham* and average in my dharma studies.

Q: Can you tell me what subjects you studied when you went to the monastery?

#40: We did not have subjects like those that are taught in schools these days. First we were taught reading and we had to memorize the Buddhist dharma texts. We did not have grades like Grade 1 or 2.

Q: Was that difficult to memorize all those texts?

#40: It was very difficult. We had to memorize the texts and then recite them to our teachers and abbots. If you failed they would beat you a lot.

Q: Were there any teachers that you particularly admire or remember from your childhood from your teachers in the monastery?

#40: Yes, I remember. The teachers, when we failed to recite the memorized text, would not give us permission to go to answer nature's call. I used to think very badly of them. However, when I look back, I am very grateful to my teachers, especially one called Chentse. I never used to like him then because he was very strict; he taught us and never allowed us to go out. Now I understand why and feel grateful.

Q: What was important to you that you learnt about your Tibetan religion when you were a young man, a young boy?

#40: The most important about the Buddhist religion for me, at that time, was the *Kyonjug*. This text came from India and was composed by an Indian pundit called Khenchen Shiwalha. My greatest interest was in this text.

Q: What did you like about what you learnt? Why was it important to you?

#40: It [the *Kyon-jug*] says that if you earn good merit then you will find salvation in your next life; if you sin, you would go to hell and one should not commit any kinds of evil on others. You will find all these in other Buddhist texts, but I found this particular text most interesting.

Q: How has that teaching helped you in your life?

#40: It helps to a certain extent. In my life I try not to cause harm to others—even to avoid crushing an insect; to help dogs who have their legs broken; to give alms to beggars however little it may be; feed the stray dogs and generally try to alleviate their sufferings. I think all these are the results of my religious study. But I cannot say that I am able to practice it 100 percent.

Q: Sounds like you learned a lot.

#40: [Laughs] We cannot learn much.

Q: You were in the monastery, you said about eight or nine years. Is that correct?

#40: For nine years.

Q: When you think back on those days are there any special memories or events that stand out in your mind?

#40: There are no special memories as such.

Q: Did you see your family at all when you were in the monastery for visits or go home?

#40: I used to go home once in a year. We were permitted to stay for about 10 to 15 days.

Q: What season did you pick to go?

#40: I used to go during summer that is the 6th month of the Tibetan calendar. This was the happiest time for the nomads and I used to ask leave from the monastery.

Q: Was that time of the horse races too?

#40: Yes, that was the time of the horse races.

Q: Good planning.

#40: [Laughs]

Q: What caused you to leave the monastery?

#40: I can't remember clearly, but I must have been around 17 years of age when I was given the responsibility as the treasurer of the Tindhu Tulku, reincarnate lama of the Sakya monastery. In this capacity I had to travel to Lhasa, Siling, Dhartsedho and Mongolia on business. During these business trips, all my colleagues were young men and so I couldn't remain a true monk.

Q: Can you share with us what made you want to leave?

#40: The main reason was the wild ways we followed.

Q: Could you name a few of the “wild ways”? We won't tell the monastery. Name a few, just a few.

#40: We went on a business trip to Mongolia. In the group all were young lay men, except for me and another monk. These young men used to go with Mongolian girls. So due to these reasons, I couldn't remain a monk.

Q: I understand Mongolian girls are very pretty.

#40: Yes, they are.

Q: Why did you go to Mongolia? I don't understand the reason?

#40: We traded with the Mongolians. They would give us grains, while we gave them leather, butter and wool in exchange.

Q: So it was a trade mission.

#40: Yes, that is right. We gave them leather, butter and wool in exchange for grains.

Q: How was Mongolia different than Tibet?

#40: The part of Mongolia we visited was called Saga Usu [?], which was right at the edge. We did not go right into Mongolia.

Q: Did it touch your part of Tibet?

#40: Yes, it is on the border. The place was called Saga Usu and it was not quite inside Mongolia.

Q: And there were traders there that you would meet?

#40: Yes, we met them.

Q: Was Saga Usu a city or a village?

#40: It was a small town. Most people lived in *tsingma* tents and the few houses that existed were not in good condition. We received the grains there.

Q: What is a “*tsingma*”?

#40: It's the material made from sheep's wool.

Q: Did you go a couple of times or just one time?

#40: I have been twice.

Q: Did you stay in Mongolia or actually come back to Tibet and leave the monastery?

#40: After the second business trip, I sought permission from the monastery to leave the monkhood. But I continued my work as the treasurer of the Lama.

Q: Where did you go to live after that?

#40: I lived in the house of the Lama for whom I worked as the treasurer. I didn't come under the rules and regulations of the monastery and I couldn't wear the red robes.

Q: Did you stay single or get married? What happens then?

#40: I remained single. I married in 1957, prior to the Chinese invasion.

Q: You married in 1957?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Yes.

Q: Who did you marry?

#40: I married the younger sister of the Lama for whom I was the treasurer.

Q: Is that the wife he is still with?

#40: Yes, she's the same person.

Q: That was a good blessing for the marriage.

#40: [Smiles]

Q: Did you have children?

#40: We didn't have children in Tibet, but we had two sons here [in India].

Q: You said you were married two years before the Chinese invasion and you were married in '57. When did you first notice that the Chinese were in Tibet?

#40: The Chinese had already arrived. They came to our village in 1949.

Q: When's the first time you knew or saw the Chinese were in your country?

#40: The arrival of the Chinese?

Q: Yes.

#40: The Siling Toegya were in our village even when I was born. The Communist Chinese arrived in 1949.

Q: Who was the Siling Toegya?

#40: They were Chinese, Chinese Muslims.

Q: The Siling Toegya was a leader?

#40: They were Chinese Muslims and they occupied our land since a long time back. I do not know the exact dates.

Q: What did they do when they came?

#40: We were under the occupation of the Siling Toegya Chinese. They and the Communist Chinese were fighting in Lando [?], a place in China. The Siling Toegya sent word to us that they were not able to continue the fight against the Communist Chinese due to their strength and asked us to send reinforcements. However, our leaders told them that our people were not trained to fight a battle and that, other than this, they would do whatever was required. So they wanted 1,000 male horses. The Siling Toegya lacked in horses and machinery, unlike the Communist Chinese.

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

#40: Since they did not have vehicles, it was for their army to ride. They wanted the best horses, which were young and male. These were collected under the leadership of the King of Nangchen, the 25 *dhindo* and 25 *ponkha* and given to the Siling Toegya.

Q: Against the Communist Chinese army?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Against the Communist Chinese.

Q: Did your king do that?

#40: We gave them 1,000 horses. Since there were no vehicles, it took around 25 days to a month to ride them to Siling. By the time they arrived, the Siling Toegya had lost the battle at Lando to the Communist Chinese. Mato, the leader of the Siling Toegya fled to Taiwan in an airplane. They owned 36 airplanes.

Q: What happened to the horses?

#40: The horses were offered to the Chinese. Our people, when they saw that the Chinese had won the battle, pretended that they had come to welcome the Chinese with the gift of 1,000 horses upon hearing of their arrival at Siling.

Q: Why do you think they did that?

#40: That's because they were scared. The Siling Toegya was defeated and the leader had already fled to Taiwan. Our people were scared to say that they had brought the horses for the Siling Toegya. So instead they told the Chinese that they were glad to see that the Siling Toegya were defeated, who were oppressing the Tibetans and that the horses were meant to be gifts for the Chinese.

Q: And the Chinese took them?

#40: Yes, they took them. When the King of Nangchen and his ministers came back, they brought with them three Chinese.

Q: And then what happened?

#40: Among the three Chinese, the leader was called Thepeya—I don't remember the names of the other two. These people went around the whole village and entered the monastery. When they saw the butter lamps, they asked what these were. Then they tapped the religious icons with a stick and said, "What is inside these? What is the use of this?" They didn't need any escorts, unlike those earlier Siling Chinese, but went around everywhere with a cane stick, particularly into the monasteries. They asked questions like, "What is the use of the butter lamps? Who will drink the water offerings?" When we said these were for the Gods, they would ask, "Are the Gods thirsty?" They would also visit the homes of our leaders.

Q: Then what happened?

#40: I am not very clear whether it was 1947 or '48 that the three Chinese came to our village. There were Siling Toegya leaders in our village who guessed that things would be bad. Some committed suicide and some went back to their country.

Q: How did the Tibetans feel about this incursion by the Chinese?

#40: At that time instead of considering it as an incursion, the people thought the Chinese were very helpful. The Chinese said they would abolish the oppressive rule of the Tibetan

leaders; they would bring about democracy; and they would lead us into the right way. With these reasons they deceived the Tibetan people who believed them. They appointed leaders from among the poor people and paid them well with silver coins.

Q: Did the Tibetan people believe these stories?

#40: As the people did not have education, they first believed them. The Siling Toegya had been cruel; they had confiscated properties and beaten people, while the [Communist] Chinese claimed they would help the Tibetans. So everyone believed them in the beginning.

Q: What did the Siling Toegya people do that was not good?

#40: Since the time I can remember, the Siling Togya were in my village. I do not know the year of their arrival. I have heard the elders say that we have been under the Siling Toegya for 36 years.

Q: What happens in your experience next? The Chinese come; they say that they are going to get rid of the unjust Tibetan leaders; they gave money; what happens next?

#40: The number of Chinese started to increase. Then in 1957, they proclaimed that there would be no private properties. All assets possessed by an individual or a monastery, would be the property of the public. No one person could own them but all belonged to the state.

Q: How did the people react to that announcement?

#40: Then at last the people realized that the Chinese were not good.

Q: What did they do?

#40: I told you that there were the 25 *dhindo* and 25 *ponkha* under the King of Nangchen. From among the 25 *ponkha*, four consisting of Tindhu, Wangpo, Poeri Miman and Shuman went to war against the Chinese at a place called Kharung. However, they had very little firearms—only the guns and bullets they had been able to conceal from the Chinese. Once they arrived, the Chinese had been very strict against possession of arms and it was impossible to acquire new ones. The Tibetans burned the bridge at Kharung and fought against the Chinese.

Q: Where were you when this was going on?

#40: The father of the Tindhu Tulku for whom I was treasurer was the leader of Tindhu. As he was one of the four *ponkha* going to war, he told me not to leave the lama at the monastery, as he could be easily targeted by the Chinese, but to escort him to the place where they were. So I was with him in Kharung.

Q: Where is Kharung in Tibet?

#40: It does not come under our area; it's connected to our area and falls under Nyamtso Pontsang.

Q: So you went with the Lama. Is that what you are saying?

#40: Yes, I went with the Tindhu Rinpoche.

Q: How did you feel when this was happening?

#40: I thought our world had been turned upside down. There was sadness, dejection and panic in me for what the Chinese were doing. They were mighty while we were powerless. There was no way we could face up to their might.

Q: You would have been how old at that time?

#40: I was around 24 years of age. At Kharung, we destroyed the Machi Bridge and then we build a camp and stayed there. We left 15 to 20 spies with telescopes on the mountain called Tonkho Rizong to watch the Chinese movements. From the top of this mountain, the bridge area was visible. The Chinese had arrived at the bridge site and were re-building it.

Q: They didn't want the Tibetans to interfere?

#40: Then we moved to Dhamdha from Kharung. Our spies saw that the Chinese were re-building the bridge and waiting on the other side of the river were hundreds of Chinese trucks.

Q: The spies were Tibetan spies. The Tibetan spies were watching the bridge?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Yes.

Q: How many hundreds of trucks?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: There were about 100 or 200 on the other side of the river.

Q: Were you part of the fighting force?

#40: Yes, I was a part of the fighting force. After they re-build the bridge, the trucks started to arrive. There were not many trucks, only 37.

Q: Did you fight them at any point?

#40: When the 37 trucks started to arrive, we were in fox holes waiting for them and they couldn't see us. The wives, children, lamas and the elderly were all at the camp a little distance away. We younger ones were waiting and then we fired at the trucks. We had arranged that we would fight the first five trucks with four men to one truck. The road was not good and narrow so that the trucks couldn't overtake each other or they would fall into

the gorge. We decided that once five trucks were taken care of, the rest would have to stop and then we would fight hand to hand with our knives.

Q: And then what happened?

#40: Our plan was four men for one truck and we were able to accomplish that. The five trucks stopped and then we, some with knives and some with axes moved forward. All the Chinese troops emerged from the trucks and then we fought. We lost twelve men that day, among them the commanders Poeri Miman, Tindhu and Wangpo. Now-a-days in a war, the commanders are found at the back, while in those days the commanders led the force at the front. It must have been around one in the afternoon that we started the battle and ended by sunset. There were some of us who had guns and I was one of them.

Q: What do you remember you were feeling during that battle? Can you remember your feelings and your thoughts?

#40: There was nothing but the thought of imminent death—just the thought of death. We fought until darkness fell and it was raining, as it was summertime. We couldn't see much in the darkness. Those dead were dead and we took the injured to the camp. The next morning we saw that 17 trucks were unable to move and were left behind. The rest were all gone.

Q: What feeling did that give you when you saw they were left behind?

#40: There was not much thought. I felt my country was lost. As for me, death could be either on this day or the next. The next morning we went to count the number of the dead Chinese. There were 62 Chinese and 12 Tibetans killed.

Q: Sixty-two Chinese?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Yes, and 12 Tibetans.

Q: Do you think your gun killed any of the Chinese?

#40: I did shoot quite a number of rounds, but I don't know if they killed any of the Chinese. I had a very good gun; it was a machine gun. That time it was like we were the winners and the Chinese the losers who had run away. Now we became overconfident; that was silly of us. We thought we could defeat the Chinese and asked the other *ponkha*, who had so far stayed away, to join us in conquering the Chinese.

Q: And then what happened?

#40: Our leaders approached the other *ponkha*, who had stayed away, to join us to defeat the Chinese or else they would be regarded as allies of the Chinese. So Khenma, Poeri Tonma, Nyeongsha, Amnye—all those *ponkha* came to join us.

Q: From the 25 *ponkha*, how many came together?

#40: We were already four, Tindhu, Wangpo, Poeri Miman and Shuman; then four more joined us Khangre, Poeri Tonma, Nyelong Sha and Amnye. The Chinese administration was located at Tindhu District, but there was not many troops—maybe just around 15 to 20 from the military group. We went to fight them at night. Though the Chinese were less in number, they possessed sophisticated firearms. We could not enter their houses, so we stopped their drinking water supply. We did not have bombs to destroy the houses the Chinese were living in; we just had guns and guns couldn't do that.

Q: How [did you stop the water supply]? You didn't have pipes then.

#40: They had to come to fetch water from the river. Since there were no pipes bringing water inside the house, they had to come to the river. We were watching the river banks day and night.

Q: And then what happened?

#40: So we were there cutting off their water supply. I am not clear, but it was less than a month, maybe around 20 days or so that they said they wanted to give up and asked us for water.

Q: You mean they prevented them from going to the water source?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Yes, to fetch water for themselves.

Q: How did they prevent them—by having guns?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Yes, they were waiting around the water source.

#40: There was a monastery and the path leading to the river was close to it. We were right inside the monastery, watching the river day and night.

Q: You were going to ambush them if the Chinese came?

#40: Yes, we killed some who came to fetch water. The Chinese would send Tibetans to fetch water.

Q: You killed the Tibetans?

#40: Yes, we killed the Tibetans. They would send women and small children to fetch water, but not men. We killed about five. Then one day they said they were going to surrender and two days later we saw red flags of the Chinese flying over their building.

Q: Where, on top of the houses?

#40: Yes, where they were residing. There were small red flags everywhere. We were wondering what it meant. After two days, at least 1,000 trucks of the Chinese including tanks rolled into the place. After every 20 trucks was a tank. Now there was no way we could fight them, only to escape. So we made our escape.

Q: Can you remember the exact year or day or month that this happened?

#40: Yes, I remember. It was in 1958; the 17th day of the fifth month of the Tibetan calendar. I don't know it in the Western calendar. It was during summer, not winter.

Q: What exact location are we talking about, when the tanks came in?

#40: The vehicles and tanks came from China, from Siling. I'm not sure if it was 1,000 vehicles, but it must have been around that figure.

Q: From Siling towards? What was the monastery he was in, when this was happening?

#40: The monastery is called Dhongtik Gonpa of Tindhu.

Q: Were you in the monastery when this was going on with your Lama?

#40: After we won the first battle, I was asked to escort the Tindhu Tulku back to his monastery and then return to the place of battle.

Q: You were there at the *gonpa* [monastery] where they were trying to fire on the Chinese?

#40: I didn't stay long at the Dhongtik Gonpa, maybe around two days. Then I went to bring the Tulku to his monastery. It took a whole day on horseback.

Q: You said there was nothing left to do but escape, so did you think about escaping?

#40: The horses were ready there. We were on the eastern side of the Drichu [Yangtse] River. I was told to leave at night for Ponshagon to escort the Tindhu Tulku, who was at his monastery there. It would take a whole day's journey on horseback from Tindhu to Ponshagon. The others would cross the Drichu, which is a very large river in coracles [small, round boats].

Q: Who was there at Ponshagon?

#40: The Tindhu Tulku was there. Earlier he was with us at the site of the first battle. After that I had escorted him back to his monastery at Ponshagon and then I returned to Tindhu.

Q: When you came back to Tindhu from Ponshagon, did you have to cross the Drichu?

#40: No, no. The Drichu doesn't run between Ponshagon and Tindhu. It's only when you go towards Lhasa that you have to cross the Drichu.

Q: So you went to fetch Tindhu Tulku from Ponshagon?

#40: Yes. I went in the night to Ponshagon. Then when the Tindhu Tulku and I had to cross the Drichu to flee, I went to talk to the boatman. The leader of my village was captured by the Chinese by then. Now my village was helpless. The sister of the leader was a nun. The leader was asked to come to Cheku for a meeting and captured there.

Q: So you and Tindhu Tulku could cross the Drichu?

#40: Yes, we crossed the river in a hide skin boat and the horses were driven into the Drichu.

Q: Who was in the group with you?

#40: There were five of us: a cook, a monk, a horseman—all belonging to the estate of the Tindhu Tulku—the Tulku himself and I.

Q: And where were you hoping to go?

#40: To Lhasa.

Q: Why Lhasa?

#40: Because the Tibetan government was there. We felt perhaps we would be able to face the Chinese there. Our main thought was going to Lhasa.

Q: Were you married at that time?

#40: Yes, I was already married. But my wife was not with me; she was living with her parents. I was with my Lama. They had crossed the Drichu further south. We met up two days later after crossing the Drichu.

Q: On the other side?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: On the other side of the Drichu River.

Q: What month were you doing that in? What season?

#40: It was in summer, around the 6th or 7th month of the Tibetan calendar.

Q: So this could have been 1958?

#40: Yes, it was 1958.

Q: Can you remember what you were feeling as you left your monastery and you traveled to escape to Lhasa? What were you feeling?

#40: When we had planned to cross the river the next day, I was feeling so miserable that it was the only night in my whole life I couldn't sleep at all.

Q: In your whole life?

#40: That was the only night in my whole life that I couldn't sleep at all.

Q: What were you thinking or feeling?

#40: The feeling that my country was lost and the fear of when would I meet a Chinese who would kill me. There was panic in me. On our escape, we reached Horsushen [?], which came under Nangchen rule earlier and was now under the Government of Tibet. The news we heard about Lhasa was not good. So instead of Lhasa, we turned towards the north.

Q: Where in north?

#40: I was not sure of where we were heading. It is a part of Tibet and we learnt that there were not many Chinese in the north.

Q: And where do you go when you go northwards?

#40: It's close to Xingjian. We did not reach there, but it's towards there. In the north there was no grass for the horses. The water was not drinkable and everywhere it was sand.

Q: Is Xingjian a big place?

#40: It's a country under China.

Q: Can you continue to tell us about your journey?

#40: There were many other people escaping, around 80 families or so. There we couldn't find anything to eat. However, there were wild asses and bison, which we killed and ate. We couldn't get *tsampa* 'flour made from roasted barley' or butter from anywhere or the meat of any other animal. Since there was no grass for the horses, we moved back the way we came. Now it was winter and snowing heavily.

Q: Where did you take them?

#40: Then we went towards Nachukha. It was a three-days' journey and we camped at a place. Two others and I dressed ourselves in the style of the Apoho, the locals of Nachukha, and went there to see if we could get any news.

Q: What did you find out?

#40: At Nachukha we heard there was turmoil in Lhasa and that the *Chushi Gangdrug* Resistance Force was formed at Chatsa Diguthang under the leadership of Andrug Gonpo Tashi and they were fighting the Chinese.

Q: Chatsa Diguthang, right?

#40: Yes, Chatsa Diguthang was where Andrug Gonpo Tashi had formed the army and was defending the country. I also heard that the United States was extending help by supplying weapons.

Q: Resistance fighters?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Resistance fighters, the *Chushi Gangdrug*.

#40: Then the three of us returned to the camp and related the news we'd heard. I told my seniors that it would be better for us to go towards the south and join the fighters in resisting the Chinese, and told about the aid they were receiving from the United States. We were unable to make a move to go there since all of our horses were too lean and weak. So we looked to the horses belonging to the Apoho and other surrounding villages. Some were bought; some horses were forcefully taken, while others were stolen. In the end we had about 70 to 80 horses. Then we made our way as far as Dikung. On reaching Dikung the father of the Tindhu Tulku died due to grief. He was very anguished. At that time we decided to go to Lhoka. I took his body to the cremation grounds at Dikung. From there I could hear the sounds of the bombings in Lhasa.

Q: What were you feeling at that time?

#40: Feelings? No special feelings. I felt everything was finished. Then we moved towards Lhoka. At Lhoka we found that there was no *Chushi Gangdrug*; it was routed. Some of the men were killed and the others had escaped escorting His Holiness the Dalai Lama towards Mon Tawang. I was the treasurer of the Tulku. As an incarnate lama, he had not allowed me to steal or forcefully take a horse from anyone. He said that he'd rather not reach anywhere than take someone else's horse. As those were his orders for me, I did not go against it. All the other people went ahead.

Q: Because of your poor horse, you and Tindhu Tulku were left behind?

#40: We didn't have money to buy a horse and Tulku forbade me to steal a horse; I could have done so had he allowed me to. Now everyone had gone ahead and we were left behind. The Tindhu Tulku was very fat and we all had to walk leading the poor horses. My wife and the Tulku had lost their father the day earlier. There were now three families left with us. Tulku's family, my wife's family and another family with five members who refused to leave his [Tindhu Tulku] side even though they had good horses. I argued with the Tindhu

Tulku saying “There were many other monks who allowed their assistants to get good horses even by force and now they have all gone. If you didn't want to flee from the Chinese you could have remained in the village. Why did you come here?” The Tindhu Tulku said, “You can leave me here, I don't blame you. I am a monk and I'd rather not succeed in my flight than commit robbery. Just leave me here and you can continue on your journey.”

While the Tulku and I were thus arguing, his brother and two servants had gone to seek some horses. We were arguing in the tent and when I emerged, my wife and her sister were rifling through our things. I asked them what they were doing and they said that they found a nunnery close by and that they would like to donate some of our things there as it was not possible to carry everything with us. I thought to myself. Three of them had gone to look for horses. This was told to me by my wife and her sister.

I was wearing a thick coat, which I removed and had on a cotton *chupa* [traditional coat] and armed with my gun, I went to look for a horse. I was able to catch up with the three men. They asked me where I was going and I replied, “To look for a horse”. They said, “Let's all go together.” I told them they should go their way and I would go mine. The Tulku's brother was very young, but an older servant accompanying him, who died in Nepal last year, insisted that all four of us went together. However, I wanted to go by myself. So they followed the main road and I climbed up a hill. I lost sight of them then.

It was towards evening and upon a mound I saw a man grazing a few *dzo* ‘animal bred from a yak and a cow,’ *dzomo* ‘female *dzo*’ and cows. I asked this man if I could buy a horse anywhere. I would pay silver coins, I said, although I didn't have any, and would have to kill the man who had a horse. He replied that there were no horses left because the *Chushi Gangdrug* guerrillas had taken away most of them. He said that there was one good horse, but it was shot in the leg. It was difficult to understand him because he was speaking in the Lhoka dialect.

Then I carried on and night fell. A family gave me some food and I slept in their house. In the house were a husband and a wife and they were whispering between them. I suspected their motive and in the night left the house. The husband asked me where I was going. I replied that I had to leave and go up the hill. He said I would meet bears and should follow the path on the [lower] ground. But I told him that I was not scared of bears and had my gun. Moreover, I had faced Chinese and I was not afraid of bears, and saying this I climbed up the hill. It was very cold. Then I fell asleep.

When I woke up it was still dark and I was shivering from the cold. When I looked up, I could see the stars and knew that dawn was still far away. I was in a thin clothing and it was extremely cold. I put my gun down and started running about to make myself warm. Then once again I fell asleep and when I woke up, it was daylight. I climbed over the hilltop and on the other side I could see in the distant field what looked like cows, mules, donkeys or horses. I started walking and saw a woman who was grazing her *dzomo* and *dri* and spinning yarn. I called out to her and when she saw me she fainted. I approached her, but

she was speechless and just kept staring up at me. I was hungry and saw that she had a bag with a little *tsampa* kneaded with *chang* 'home-brewed beer.' I ate it.

We couldn't very well understand each other because of our different dialects; she spoke in Lhoka and I in Khampa. I asked her if there were Chinese around there and she pointed downwards and said there were Chinese there. I then showed her the patch of red mark on the side of my face and said to her, "Do you know the Tang Chinese?" She replied yes and then I told her that the mark on my face was made by the Chinese and it was permanent, even though it is a natural birthmark. I asked her if she had seen any rebels around there.

Q: What did you tell her the mark was?

#40: I told her that the mark was made to prove that I was a pure Chinese; that it was permanent and could not be washed away.

Q: You told her you were a Chinese?

#40: Yes, I told her that. I asked her if she had seen any rebels. The rebels were the *Chushi Gangdrug* guerrillas. She said that there was a village down there. There were horses, good horses and poor horses. She also said that there were about 35 Chinese who wore green clothing. Then she went her way and I went down to the village. There were about 40 to 50 houses and in someone's yard, I saw several horses tethered. I counted and there were 13 very good horses. Some looked very healthy.

Then I sat there thinking. My guns could hold 35 bullets each. I loaded them and kept one in the pocket of my coat and the other I held in my hands and sat there for sometime. A Chinese with two Tibetan boys came out to clean one of the horses which had an injury on its back. They removed the loads and fed the horses with grass. Then I prayed. The Tulku had a protective deity, which I too worshipped, called Pema Tensung. I prayed to Pema Tensung saying, "To you Pema Tensung, five incarnations of Tindhu Tulku have worshipped you. I have prayed to you since the time I have been able to stand on my feet without fail and now you have to help me get a horse to save the Tindhu Tulku. I am willing to give up my life to try and get a horse and you have to help me." I spoke to the deity like we are talking to each other now.

At that time a Chinese appeared on the top of the house. He sat there smoking and then another Chinese joined him. Then another joined him who sat next to him and then one more who sat in front. In all there were four Chinese and a young Tibetan boy. They sat there talking. Then I put my gun in automatic mode, prayed to my deity and aiming at those people, pulled the trigger. The gun became silent and I saw that two Chinese were killed and a third was injured and was trying to move. The rest I couldn't see well because of the dust and smoke from the gun. I found that all the horses had bolted out of the yard. The fencing was low, so some must have jumped from there and others perhaps ran out through the big gate. I too ran away from there. I went towards a house and from the window some hats of the type worn by the women of Kongpo and Dhapo were being thrown out. I don't know why. I saw a black horse, which was the best one running

towards me. Its bridle was hanging and I called out to it and caught it. Riding the horse, I sped through the fields.

Q: To where your Tulku was?

#40: No, I didn't know where I was heading. As I was fleeing, two shots were fired at me. I looked back and saw two Chinese near a rock with ordinary guns and two more coming behind them with the type of gun that I had. So bullets from four guns were whizzing by me; I could feel the heat on my earlobes and I prayed to my deity. Even when I was about a kilometer away, I could hear the shots and see the bullets. I just let the horse go where it wanted and then I felt someone was pursuing me. I looked back and it was a mule. Earlier in the yard of the house, I noticed a good horse and a good mule. Now I was riding the best horse and their best mule was following me!

By now the horse was very tired from running. It was sweating and I could see bubbly formations near its ears. It was unable to gallop, so I let it walk at a slow pace. I met two men and a woman leading oxen which were loaded with dry dung. I asked them the way to Dhapo Chokhornyi. If I could get to Dhapo Chokhornyi, I knew the way to my camp. I asked them where they were headed. They said the Chinese who were there between Kongpo Gyamda and Tsethang had ordered them to bring dung for firewood and they were going there. They told me that the way was difficult and my horse would find the going tough. However, they said that there were nomads on the way that would be able to help me.

I met the nomads who told me that the path to Dhapo Chokhornyi was very narrow and difficult for the horse. It was a rocky climb, but both the horse and mule made it. From there I could see the monastery of Dhapo Chokhornyi in the distance. I then went to my camp. The three men from my group who had gone to look for horses were already back there with one old mule. They were waiting for me. My lama asked me how I was able to bring the horse. I told him that I seized it from a Tibetan noble family and he said I should go back with 1,000 *dhayen* 'silver coins' to pay to the owner. That's how honest my lama was. I told him that there was no one to pay the money to. So he rode the horse and his mother, who wasn't very old at that time, perhaps around 51 or 52 years old, rode the mule and we reached the place called Tsari.

Q: What happens?

#40: At Tsari, which is a Tibetan town near the Indian border, I sold my horse to a man, Thupten, who later worked for the *Chushi Gangdrug* in India for a sum of 2,000 *dhayen*. So this is the story of my escape. If you wish to know more regarding the old system of governance, like settling disputes, payment of taxes and going to war, I would be able to tell you. I don't know everything, but I can recount to a certain extent.

Q: First we have to say to you, thank you for that very sad and exciting and scary story.

#40: [Laughs]

Q: Did the Lama get to safety?

#40: Yes, the Lama was here at the Sakya Monastery in Bylakuppe and passed away a few years back. His reincarnation has been recognized by the Sakya Gongma Rinpoche and was enthroned last year.

Q: When did he pass away?

#40: In the year 1999.

Q: Let me ask the people who have been listening. Do you have any questions because we want people to feel free to ask questions?

Q: I don't understand why he told the woman he was a Chinese?

#40: If I didn't tell her that I was a Chinese, and if she learned that I was a rebel, the villagers wouldn't like it because they were living under the control of the Chinese. The Chinese pay people money to find out about the rebels, so it was best not to be honest.

Q: When we began the interview, we were talking to you, you said, "I suffered a great deal" and I think you said because of the Chinese, actually, earlier. Is this the story that is, what you meant by you suffered a great deal because of the Chinese?

#40: Yes, those were the difficulties that I suffered from the Chinese.

Q: What do you think helped you survive all these hardships?

#40: [Laughs] The difficulties I have already suffered. I would feel my problems are solved only when Tibet gains independence from China. If I die before Tibet is free, my sufferings remain with me.

Q: How did you reconcile your Buddhist beliefs in non-violence, not to hurt a bug, nothing, with the actions that you took that were more violent?

#40: Yes, Buddhism says that, not to mention humans, you are not to hurt a louse which infests a human body. But I considered the Chinese an enemy of the Buddha dharma, an enemy of religion, an enemy of Tibet. So I felt killing a Chinese was doing good and I never considered it a sin. It says in the texts that if they were an enemy of the dharma, it's against the religion to show compassion to them. I know for sure that I have killed two Chinese. I have fired shots among thousands, but I don't know if I killed any.

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

#40: To those living in Tibet, since I cannot go there, I cannot offer any advice to them. To the children in India, I don't think anyone will listen to me nor is it my duty to advise them. But to my sons and my friends' children I tell them, "You are born in India and you do not know what the Chinese have done" and I tell them the stories. I tell them that we are now old and nearing death and they should always keep it in their thoughts to work towards gaining complete independence for Tibet. In 1989, I visited Tibet. I went to my house and found that only one nephew, the son of my brother and a sister survived. All the rest had died from starvation. If you'd like to know about the sufferings caused by the Chinese during those times, I have the information.

Q: I would have so many questions, but I think for today—I think it would be important because that's another whole story and if we have time, we would very much like to come back and talk again if our schedule allows.

#40: [Nods]

Q: You advise the younger generation of Tibetans for complete independence. Some Tibetan youth think the Dalai Lama's middle way approach is correct, while others that they like to fight a war. How do you feel about it?

#40: I think that if the Chinese accept it, His Holiness's middle way approach, though it is not complete independence, is the best. However, I think the Chinese will not accept it. The Chinese label the Dalai Lama with various names and say that the middle way defines Tibet's independence, so I think they do not have any intentions of accepting the middle way.

Q: So an open-ended answer.

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Yes.

Q: I think we want to say thank you very much for your time and your story—very moving story, very inspirational and very moving.

END OF INTERVIEW