

Tibet Oral History Project

Interview #54D – Jiga
May 17, 2012

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INTERVIEW SUMMARY SHEET

1. Interview Number: #54D
2. Interviewee: Jiga
3. Age: 77
4. Date of Birth: 1935
5. Sex: Male
6. Birthplace: Derge Yilhung
7. Province: Dhotoe (Kham)
8. Year of leaving Tibet: 1958
9. Date of Interview: May 17, 2012
10. Place of Interview: Bir Guest House, Bir, Himachal Pradesh, India
11. Length of Interview: 1 hr 14 min
12. Interviewer: Rebecca Novick
13. Interpreter: Tenzin Yangchen
14. Videographer: Ronny Novick
15. Translator: Tenzin Yangchen

Biographical Information:

Jiga hails from a nomadic background. He remembers women in the family milked the *dri* ‘female yaks’ and made dairy products. At the age of 16-17, Jiga became a transporter, delivering goods on yaks. He describes the journey of the transporters who carried tea leaves for traders towards Lhasa. Later the yak transporters worked for the Chinese by moving their army supplies. Thousands of yaks were hired and they were paid very well with silver coins.

Jiga’s livelihood of transportation slowly ended due to changes in the Chinese attitude toward the Tibetans. Many people were being arrested and property confiscated. Unable to bear the Chinese oppression, his region’s people fled to the mountains and tried to hide from the Chinese. They suffered from lack of food and were only able to eat meat from stolen animals or hunted wild animals. Occasionally they tried to raid the Chinese communes to get supplies. Jiga gives a detailed description of their numerous encounters with Chinese troops and the casualties they suffered that reduced the group of 112 to 38 people.

Jiga traveled for months to reach the Nepalese border and then joined the *Chushi Gangdrug* [Defend Tibet Volunteer Force] in Mustang. They attempted several attacks on the Chinese troops and Jiga believes he survived due to the blessing of his protective amulet.

Topics Discussed:

Childhood memories, Kham, herding, first appearance of Chinese, resistance, escape experiences, guerrillas in Mustang, life as a refugee in Nepal.

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Interview #54D

Interviewee: Jiga

Age: 77, Sex: Male

Interviewer: Rebecca Novick

Interview Date: May 17, 2012

Question: Could you please tell us your name.

00:00:13

Interviewee #54D: My name? It is Jiga.

Q: His Holiness the Dalai Lama asked us to record your experiences, so that we can share your memories with many generations of Tibetans, the Chinese and the rest of the world. Your personal memories are going to help us to document the true history, culture and beliefs of the Tibetan people.

#54D: Okay.

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

#54D: Yes.

Q: Thank you very much.

#54D: [Silent]

Q: During the interview if you want to take a break at any time, just let us know.

#54D: Okay.

Q: If there's any question you are not comfortable answering, that's fine.

#54D: Okay.

Q: If this interview was shown in Tibet or China or anywhere else in the world, would it create a problem for you?

00:01:56

#54D: [I] do not think I will face any problems. [I] am old and will not live for many years. [I] will not live for many years.

Q: Thank you so much. Can you tell us a little bit about your family life growing up in Tibet?

#54D: We were nomads in our village in Tibet. The farmers lived close by. [I] can recall from the age of 13-14. All the nomad women engaged in milking *dri* ‘female yak’ and making curds. That was the livelihood. The men drove yaks for transportation for which [the yak driver] received yak hire charges though the men [driving the yaks] were not paid. That is how all the men earned a living by transporting goods on the yaks. The women did the milking, removed dung and prepared butter, which was exchanged for barley and that is what the nomads ate. That is what we did.

Q: How many people in your family?

00:04:10

#54D: When [I] was small?

Q: Yes.

#54D: There were 8-9 members when I was small.

Q: What was your job? What were you doing when you were 13, 14 years old??

#54D: Just as [I] said now [work pertained to] the *dri* and yaks. [I] grazed [yaks] at the age of 11-12; took [them] up the mountains and brought them back. Once you were 16-17 years old, you engaged in loading and driving the yaks. The work was transportation.

Q: Tell us more about the transportation. What were you transporting and to where?

#54D: When I was younger than 11-12, goods belonging to merchants were transported to Lhasa.

Q: Did [you] have to go to Lhasa?

00:05:23

#54D: It was not exactly to Lhasa but the merchants’ goods were transported from point to point. The merchants’ goods packages numbered thousands, which were transported from the Chinese border to Lhasa. Then when [I] was 16-17 and it was 1949, the Communist Chinese arrived in our region. And then [we] transported goods belonging to the Chinese. There were loads of rice, flour, boxes of pork and various other things. There was a huge quantity. The roads were not good and they brought [the supplies] by truck to a certain place between Derge and Hor. From there yaks must carry it to wherever the destination. There were many yaks and it was not just me but everyone in the region that engaged in transportation.

The Chinese paid the hire charge in *dhayen* ‘Chinese silver coins.’ Initially [they] paid in *dhayen*, wheat and tea. [They] paid very well for the yaks. The person [yak driver] did not receive any wages [for his work]. You drove around 25 yaks loaded with packages. The money received for that was [our] livelihood.

Q: Were [you] transporting goods of the Tibetan traders prior to '49?

#54D: Yes, big traders of Lithang and Hor transported huge quantities of tea to Lhasa to sell as well as for the three great monasteries of Sera, Drepung and Gaden.

Q: After '49 [you] transported goods belonging to the Chinese?

#54D: Right. Prior to that [we] transported tea belonging to the merchants. There was nothing else but boxes of tea from China. There were not a variety of goods except perhaps a little *buram* 'brown sugar cubes.' It was mainly tea belonging to the Tibetan traders that were taken to Lhasa. We did not travel up to Lhasa but for a distance of 8-9 days and then another transporter took it further. The Chinese had many things to transport to Lhasa like money, different items and clothes for the soldiers.

Q: How much did the animals get paid?

00:08:55

#54D: [The payment] depended upon the distance. We were based in Lhariga or Manikhengo and the transportation charge from there to Nagchukha, which is not exactly Lhasa...each yak carried two packs that had already been readied, perhaps weighing 40 or 50 kilograms. The payment for transportation to Lhasa was 80 *dhayen*.

Q: Until Nagchukha?

#54D: That was the amount whether to Nagchukha or Lhasa. My yaks did not go to Nagchukha but then the payment must be shared.

Q: Where did [you] start?

#54D: Manikhengo.

Q: Manikhengo?

#54D: It is near Derge Gonchen. It is on the border of Tiwu from Lhathok.

Q: So you were saying that actually before the Chinese came you were going regularly to Lhasa with these caravans of yaks. Can you describe what that journey was like and some of the things you saw on the way because not many people have this opportunity to travel in Tibet at that time? So what were you seeing on that journey?

00:11:00

#54D: Before the Chinese arrived we did not transport the tea a great distance. [We] started from a point to a distance of 3-4 days and then someone else took over. After the Chinese came, their supplies had to be taken to Nagchukha. There used to be huge groups of people, 100-200 men driving thousands of yaks.

Q: During this time when you were transporting goods for the Chinese, what were they doing during this time? What were they up to in Tibet during this time?

#54D: The Chinese left by themselves and did not accompany the supplies. There were villages dotted throughout the journey. They had already left. We would be given charge of the packs at a place and must transport and deliver at the destination. There was not anyone to oversee during the journey then.

Q: What were the Chinese doing to the people? Were any problems being caused?

#54D: Initially [the Chinese] did not create any problems.

Q: Were these PLA soldiers that you were dealing with?

00:13:10

#54D: The supplies belonged to the PLA. The supplies were handed to us to be delivered. It was around '51-'52 and they never accompanied the packages but gave [them] to us and left separately. We travelled in the north where grass was available and they never came along to inspect until at Nagchukha. When the supplies were delivered, [they] checked to see if everything was intact. That was the time the Chinese were at their best. Initially [they] were very good and paid in *dhayen*, such that it used to be said, "It is raining silver *dhayen*!" [Laughs]

Q: Oh, really? What's a *dhayen*? [was pronounced like "time"]

[Interpreter to interviewer]: 2:30

[Interviewer to interpreter]: Sorry?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: 2:30

[Interviewer to interpreter]: No, not what's the time? What's a *dhayen*? [Laughs] We're all giddy today.

[Interpreter to interviewer]: 1951-52

[Interviewer to interpreter]: No, you said they were paid in something.

[Interpreter to interviewer]: *Dhayen*.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: What is that?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Oh, Chinese silver coins.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: Chinese silver coins! A new word for me. *Dhayen*, Chinese silver coins. Great.

[Interpreter to interviewer]: I thought you knew that.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: I did not. I learned something.

Q: So the drop off point, what was that? What was the drop off point? Was it some kind of an encampment? Where were they staying?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: The delivery point?

Q: Yeah, was it an encampment? Was it a town they'd taken over?

#54D: There were only a few people that took delivery of the supplies. The packs must be dropped at Lhasa, in the city of Lhasa where only a few people came to take charge. Lhasa was teeming with Chinese but only one or two people came to receive the supplies. Our yaks went only until Nagchukha and the packages must be handed over in Lhasa.

Q: [You] mentioned that [you] went to Nagchukha. Did you deliver at Nagchukha?

#54D: Yes, [we] went to Nagchukha. We did not drive our yaks further. The supplies were dropped there and then must be taken onwards.

Q: The people who organized the transportation, were they Chinese who spoke Tibetan or would they get Tibetans to translate for them?

00:16:48

#54D: There were different kinds. There were Tibetan interpreters and there were people in the army that were in charge of sending the things.

Q: Were the people that handed over the things to you Tibetans or Chinese?

#54D: They were Chinese along with Tibetan interpreters. At the dropping point, when the number of supplies was found correct, they took over and that was it. When the correct number of packages was delivered, they took over and nothing was said.

Q: Were you ever short of items? Did you ever have a problem?

#54D: It did not happen on the way to Lhasa, as the supplies were in boxes. However, provisions for the soldiers that were transported over short distances like rice would spill. However, nothing was said in '51, '52 or '49 whether [rice] got strewn or spilled. They began only in '56-'57.

Q: Yes, tell us how this changed, how your work changed?

00:18:45

#54D: There were no problems if sacks were ripped. Transport charges were paid. It was very good. [We] could scold and [the Chinese] would not retaliate. It was very good. Then from '54-'55 they gradually became worse and worse. Offices were formed in various

regions and numerous leaders arrived. Then Chinese soldiers came along on the transport journey. Many [Tibetans] rebelled and left for the mountains and fought [the Chinese]. So [the Chinese] became suspicious and the soldiers accompanied us. They would not let us travel ahead.

Q: What were you thinking during this time? You were observing what they were doing and what was in your mind about what the Chinese were doing in Tibet? What was your opinion?

#54D: There was nothing to do but stay back. They [the Chinese] took away all [our] guns. [I] think it was in '55. [I] think so. Some people did not surrender their guns and fled to the hills. Fearing that they [the Chinese] would confiscate all the animals and properties, some gave up [their] guns. There was nowhere to go and [we] remained. Then they [the Chinese] became worse and worse, started cooperatives and implemented liberation. All the poor people were appointed as leaders. They were appointed leaders and awarded titles like *chudang* and given money. They were appointed leaders.

The wealthy [people] were brought out to be subjected to physical struggle and charged, "You are a landowner. You have oppressed the poor and confiscated their properties." They were imprisoned. All the leaders were demoted. The lamas were accused, "You have deceived the people and grabbed their riches." It began in '55-'56 and many people revolted, and many remained. There was nowhere to go.

They [the Chinese] would say, "If you place a fish in a water [tank], it will move here and here [gestures off camera] but it cannot come out. [Likewise,] there is nowhere for you to go." And [they] were right because wherever you went in Tibet, they [the Chinese] were present.

Q: So in the years '56 and '57 you were still running goods for the PLA that time or had you stopped by then?

00:23:21

#54D: [I] was in '55-'56 and then we fled to the mountains. Then people were captured.

Q: Did you flee to the mountains?

#54D: In '57. It was at the end of '57 and close to '58. The whole of Tibet turned into hell, and through bribes, our people became theirs [Chinese]. There were physical struggles and arrests. All the prominent lamas were caught and jailed. The worst year was '58...it began in '59. Then we fled. We did not possess guns as they had been surrendered earlier in '55. When we fled to the mountains [we] had swords but no guns. There were other Tibetans from who [we] bought guns and fought the enemy.

[In villages] where there used to be 70-80 families, they were combined together. The nomads' animals were housed together and their wealth merged. Everyone was assigned tasks. Wealth and animals were pooled. Cooperatives were formed and leaders appointed. The rich people were labeled as landowners and if the man [of the family] was gone, [his] mother and sisters were arrested and thrown in prison.

Q: Could we just go back a little bit to...I'm curious about the time when you were working for the PLA and then at what point did you sort of realize "Oh, this is getting serious. I can't do this anymore." At what point did you start to get really nervous about what it was you were doing?

00:26:22

#54D: [We] said that but continued to work. [We] would say, "This is not good. One day the Chinese will arrest us." However, [we] continued because there was nowhere to go. When [they] began capturing, beating and killing, it was then that [we] fled.

Q: So how long did you stay in the hills? What was your life like there?

#54D: There was not much to do on the mountaintops. If you happen to espy someone, it was a Chinese. There were numerous people that had fled to the mountains. People were there on that mountaintop and this mountaintop. Chinese troops were in pursuit. We had nothing to eat on the mountaintops unless one managed to steal an animal. [We] stole an animal or killed a wild animal. For months on end [we] had nothing but meat to eat, not even hot water to drink. They were in pursuit [makes gesture of gun in hands]. You stayed two or three days atop a mountain and then they [Chinese] reached there.

Whatever the color of the ground was during summer, their soldiers were dressed accordingly. As per their rules, the soldiers were trailed and not allowed to retreat or else the superior at the back would shoot. They were trained and marched in twos, which we observed from atop the mountains. There were numerous Chinese troops and they arrived steadily. A great number were killed. The Chinese killed many of our people [too]. From among our strength of 112-113, all were killed except for 38-39. Some injured were left behind. Many were killed and captured too. We told the women and children to surrender and go back. When we reached the border there were only 38-39 from the 112-113.

Q: How many people were there initially?

00:29:07

#54D: There were around 112 including the aged and children. Initially we raided the cooperative when it was formed, loaded the animals with our supplies that were piled in the cooperative and fled to the mountains. Then the Chinese pursued [us]. For a few days [we] had enough to eat and then were encircled by the Chinese. [We] lost everything, including the horses. Then we attacked and retrieved the horses. [We] were bereft of even cups and utensils [laughs]; except for the clothes [we] wore, there was nothing else. [We] could not remove or change clothes for many months. It was in the Changthang [Northern Plateau] region. [We] were there for many months. For a long time there was only meat to eat in the northerly journey.

Q: What happened to your yaks, the ones you had before, before you fled?

#54D: They [the Chinese] drove all the yaks to the commune. Many that had been shot and injured were left on the mountains. All the yaks had been collected for the commune in the beginning. They had been collected and pooled in the commune before [we] fled to the

mountains. There used to be a great number of yaks. We attacked the commune once. [We] managed to attack them only twice. When the Chinese attacked us in the hills, people managed to flee but they [the Chinese] took away all our assets. Only the people escaped. [We] had 18-19 encounters. [We] only attacked twice or three times; once on the cooperative and another time on the soldiers. [We] had to leave the [few] yaks on the mountains and flee while the majority had already fallen into their hands. They had taken [the yaks] right at the beginning.

Q: Can you describe the two times you were able to attack them?

00:32:40

#54D: [Chinese] troops had surrounded us. [To interpreter] You know Ogyen Tenphel—his mother had just given birth to him. They were captured and put in prison. When [the Chinese] attacked, she could not flee with the child and was imprisoned. There were killings on both sides. The attack was not much but we were able to retrieve the supplies. And then lost them after a few days.

Q: As you are moving with these other people, can you describe the route that you were taking through Tibet?

#54D: They [Chinese] had covered all the escape routes. You could not flee to Lhasa if you wished. There was the huge Drichu ‘Yangtse River’ that had been blocked too. [We] initially went towards the northerly direction but the Chinese were present there also and had begun communes. Communes had been set up in the whole of Tibet and a few people had already taken flight. [We] moved in the northerly direction because there were not many villages and thus fewer Chinese. Though there were Chinese present, they were not in every region. [We] went to the north and came through Ladakh into Tsokha in Nepalese territory. [We] could not come through any other route.

Q: By north, do [you] mean Changthang?

#54D: Yes, Changthang is Tibetan territory. It is Tibetan territory. There are no mountains and valleys. Chinese were present but not in the whole region. Whereas in our region, there was not any place where there were no Chinese. They were making preparations for battle. [They] were making preparations for battle in Tibet in ’58-’59.

Q: Can you describe the journey a little bit, the journey across the Changthang, what was that like?

00:35:46

#54D: There were many Tibetans living in the Changthang where the Chinese had already formed communes. There was not a huge Chinese army. Communes had been set up. The weather was very cold in the north and whenever possible, [we] stole animals. There was a wild animal called *kyang* ‘Tibetan wild ass’ that [we] killed. Besides meat, there was not anything to eat. For many months or around a year, [we] only ate boiled meat. [We] raided communes from where you could get utensils. There were no tea leaves or *tsampa* ‘flour made from roasted barley,’ which [I] never set eyes on for around a year. [We] only ate

meat during the journey in the north. [We] killed [domestic] animals or wild animals whenever possible. [We] killed and ate *kyang* that resembled horses.

Then [we] reached Tsokha that was a tribal region. Tibet lay on the other side of a mountain pass, which the Chinese had not obstructed. There was a route to Nepal and the border was not covered. Numerous Tibetans had passed on that route. Most of the people of Ngari traversed through it. We were among the last, arriving there only around '61 from the north.

Q: How long did the whole journey take you?

00:38:12

#54D: From the north? We began from our region and [the journey] took many months avoiding the Chinese. We rode horses for around six months from our region to the Changthang. Then [we] walked for around seven months.

Q: Where did you reach after seven months?

#54D: Earlier there were horses, which were then killed by the Chinese.

Q: Initially you fled to the mountaintops and then escaped to India through the Changthang. How long did it take?

#54D: The journey?

Q: Yes, and until you reached India.

#54D: It was '61 when [we] reached Nepalese territory.

Q: When did you start from there?

#54D: [We] left in the year '58.

Q: How many people did you start with and how many people did you finish with?

#54D: Yes?

Q: When you started from your village, how many people were there in the group?

#54D: Companions?

Q: Yes.

00:39:43

#54D: The whole region was on flight. However, there were 30 people in our group that had planned to escape jointly. This figure increased to around 112 after raiding the Chinese communes. The additions were women and children while single men consisted of

the initial figure of around 30. Most of them were women and children. When we first started out in the Changthang area after raiding the commune, there were around 112. ...[not discernible] the enemy attacked. My mother was imprisoned. [We] could not get [her].

Q: Yes?

#54D: The Chinese arrested my mother. [She] was in prison and alive then but [we] could not get her when we raided the commune. Ogyen Tenphel's mother had him as an infant and they were in the prison in our region and [we] were able to bring them along. Likewise, [we] managed to rescue some of the prisoners, perhaps three or four. Including family members and children, the figure increased to around 112.

Q: How many were left when [you] reached India?

#54D: There were only 38 or 39 when [we] reached India...the Nepalese border. The rest were no more. The Chinese shot some dead and some that were injured had to be left behind. Many like the women and children surrendered and went back. In that way many returned [to the village]. Also many of the aged were left behind during the journey. We suffered so much from lack of food that we would have welcomed being killed at that time. It rained and there was nothing to wear.

00:41:34

The Chinese were not present on the hills. Communes had been formed and the Chinese were there wherever the communes were. Many other people were also on the run. One trekked over routes that others had taken. It would not be safe to take any other route during those years of '60 and '59.

Q: Can you describe some of these encounters with the Chinese like particularly they have encounters when they came to try to take your women? What actually would happen then? Can you describe one of those encounters in detail?

#54D: How the Chinese attacked?

Q: [The Chinese] attacked your group during the escape journey...

#54D: They were armed with guns and [crawled] on the ground and could not be seen until they had reached close by. You could not see them until [they] started shooting. By then many people were shot. Then everybody must run.

Q: Were the women on the run?

00:44:13

#54D: Yes, yes. If one could not run, they would catch you. [The Chinese soldiers] fired shots and killed, irrespective of whether you were a woman or child. There were instances of women who were killed and their children left behind. [They] were little children. A

woman was shot and [her] little child had to be left behind. When [we] returned to check later, the woman was dead and the Chinese had taken away the child.

Q: Taken away the child. But you said they were taking women also? What were they doing with the women that they took away?

#54D: Someone returned to the village in '81-'82 [from India]. [He said] that once [the children] were taken to our village, they were entrusted to people of our village. Many still live there. The children grew up.

Q: What about the mothers, the women?

#54D: The mothers had been killed.

Q: What about some of the women [the Chinese] took?

00:45:43

#54D: Nothing was done to those [women] that surrendered and went back. However, those that were shot, if injured were left to die. Some of the aged that had to be left [along the journey] were taken back and left in our village.

Q: Can you maybe describe just an incident where you personally were very much involved in one of these incidents?

#54D: What?

Q: Was there an incident when you took part in resisting the Chinese?

#54D: There were many colleagues. We did fight because there was no other way but to fight. A few Chinese were killed but you would not know who it was that killed [them] because I was not alone. There would be 5-8 or 10-11 men; altogether there were around 30 men that fired. Five to six shots were fired together and a few Chinese got killed. One could not say who it was that killed.

In a retaliatory firing, a person called Sonam was shot in the thigh and here [points to forehead] and he fell. We took his gun and bullets. There were two or three of us. Then the Chinese were upon us and [we] had to flee. We did not have supplies of bullets while the Chinese had as much as they could use. If they fired a hundred bullets, they would be replenished with a box of bullets whereas none in our group possessed a hundred bullets. If someone with 50 bullets fired 10, there were only 40 left. And then there were only five or six left. Once that was fired, it was the end; [the gun] was similar to a stick. [Laughs]

Q: Anything else you want to say about the journey, any other memories that you want to share about this journey, this epic journey of yours.

#54D: What?

Q: Do [you] have anything else to say?

#54D: About the journey?

Q: About the difficulties faced on the journey...

00:49:17

#54D: The difficulties during the journey were lack of food. [We] encountered the Chinese only at times and did not have to be scared during the other times. However, [we] suffered immensely from lack of food during the journey.

Q: When you got to Tsokha, it's north of Mustang, is that right?

#54D: Yes, near Mustang. There were many villages along the route to Tsokha and Mustang lay close by.

Q: When you crossed the border into Nepal, what happened with the Nepali authorities?

#54D: The Nepalese permitted us to stay but [we] were not allowed to carry arms. Though the bullets were exhausted, [we] had the guns, which were taken away at the border by the soldiers. [We] did not face scarcity of food. Though [they] did not give us food, [we] were allowed to enter the border. The guns had to be left behind at the border. There were guards at the border who did not allow the guns. Some of the people stole them at night and hid [them] underground.

Then there were problems with food and nowhere to steal from. [We stole] turnips from the fields. Without the guns, [we] could not hunt wildlife and faced food shortage for a few months. [We] got to eat only once a day. [We] ate a yak or two that had been brought along from the north. Yaks were eaten, as it used to be in our region. There was not anything else to eat.

Q: What happened next?

00:52:32

#54D: The women worked in the fields and received wages. All of us men joined the *Chushi Gangdrug* [Defend Tibet Volunteer Force] army that was formed. [Laughs] We joined the army.

Q: What did [you] say the women did?

#54D: [They] harvested the crops of the tribal people. Normally there was not any work because the tribal region was poor. However, [they] hired during the harvesting season. There were not many women.

Q: *Aku-la* 'respectful term for paternal uncle,' if you could tell us anything that you want to tell us and I'm going to interrupt you as little as possible, that anything you want to tell us, about

your time in Mustang with *Chushi Gangdrug* from the time you joined and want to just carry on and I won't interrupt you.

#54D: There were 1,500 soldiers when the *Chushi Gangdrug* army was first established [in Mustang]. When the army was initially formed, there were no weapons. Assistance had to come from abroad. The Chinese were there in Tibetan territory but they did not venture into Nepalese territory. They were in Tibetan territory. [We] carried out a few attacks though not many. Initially, [our troops] went to scout. Around 10 people went to survey the region. You must go into Tibetan territory at night and hide during the day. One could not make tea, but observed the Chinese troops' movements. You wore camouflage so as not to be noticed and then came back.

00:55:11

Soldiers rode horses and carried out numerous attacks on the Chinese. However, [we] were not able to attack the Chinese camps. I too joined in the attacks with many other men. There would be 40 men along with a leader. Chinese [convoys] used to transport things from the Tibetan territory to Mirik. I heard there were around 20 Chinese along with Tibetans. They were killed in ambush. Two from our side were killed. They did not possess machine guns. I was riding a horse, which was killed, and the fur coat [I] was wearing filled with dust. The guns were small, not machine guns. There were numerous men and I was not alone. [We] lost many men.

During one expedition 7-8 men were killed from a group of 10-15. Another time six men left [on a raid] and all six were slain. [They] could not escape. Actually they were armed with guns from the United States. Many such incidents took place. [I] was there for 11-12 years, beginning in 1963 to '75. Then [I] left and came away. [I] stayed in the army and trained in warfare because the work one was accustomed to like farming and animal herding were not available. [We] joined the army and received guns.

Q: From '63 to '67?

#54D: Seventy...

Q: Until around '75?

#54D: Yes, it was around '75.

Q: Can you tell us about some of the raids that you were involved with, like the things that happened to you personally?

00:58:30

#54D: [My] fur coat was hit but nothing much happened to me because we wore protective amulets. [I] was wearing a fur coat and saw later that it had holes. Three or four men were hit that time and my horse was killed. My colleague was hit here [indicates lower lip] and here [points to left elbow region]. [He] was taken to the hospital and the hand amputated. [He] is no more now. He survived then and recovered at a hospital in Pokhra.

Q: So you think your protective amulet helped you?

#54D: Yes, [I] had the protective amulet from the village. Without the protective amulet, [I] would have been killed right in the village. There were many encounters with the Chinese. Though [we] carried out only two raids, the Chinese attacked us 18-19 times. Gunshots were fired [indicates around feet] in the rain but one was not harmed as long as there were the protective amulets. They were very fine protective amulets, not just mine. Protective amulets did not protect when your life span was over.

[Interpreter mistakes *tse* 'life' as *tse* 'night']

Q: When did it not protect? When it was night?

#54D: [Laughs] [It did not protect] when your life span was over—at the time of death. It is [also] said that it will not protect when there is bleeding.

Q: Can you describe this amulet? Did it have a name?

01:01:08

#54D: It was called a *namcha phurpa* 'three-sided dagger used in rites of subjugation of hostile forces made of meteoric metal.' It is rare and only a few are available. It was not man-made. My father's grandfather found it. It is made of metal and three-sided.

Q: A *phurpa*?

#54D: Yes, a metal *phurpa*. It was not man-made. It was discovered long ago.

Q: Where did your grandfather get it?

#54D: There were places of local guardian spirits [looks upwards]. It used to be said that my grandfather discovered it a long time ago. We possessed [the *namcha phurpa*]. There were also idols that used to be discovered. Such will give protection. Not only that, a talisman granted by a holy lama can give protection if one's life span is not over. There are people who say so.

Q: What by a lama?

#54D: A talisman that has been blessed. [Reaches into shirt] However, one must have faith. There are like these given by lamas that can be worn [shows cords around neck]. Such will give protection if given by a reliable lama. [I] do not have the *namcha phurpa* now. I offered it to His Holiness the Dalai Lama when [he] came here.

Q: Your *namcha phurpa*, why was it considered so powerful? You said it was a particularly powerful one? Why so?

01:04:00

#54D: *Namcha phurpa* were rare. There were none like it in our region. A hundred or 200 protective amulets cannot be compared to a *namcha phurpa*. There were none like mine. It was not man-made but formed naturally. It is similar to the *dzi* ‘special beads made of agate stone’ that are not man-made. Guardian spirits that people could not see created [them] and [they] could be discovered. Only one or two existed.

When I arrived in India and did not have money, selling it would have fetched a lot of money but [I] did not dare sell it. It is said that selling it would be very sinful. [I] offered it to His Holiness the Dalai Lama during the Kalachakra. [I] do not have it now and I do not need to fight any enemy.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: When he said it’s not man-made...he’s not talking about *terma* ‘concealed and rediscovered treasure/teachings,’ is he?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Hmm...?

[Interviewer to interpreter]: He’s talking about *terma*? He said his grandfather found it. It’s not man-made.

[Interpreter to interviewer]: It’s not man-made.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: It’s like a stone. It’s a stone? It’s just a stone?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Similar to a *dzi*, which is a stone.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: Yeah.

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Yeah, this *namcha phurpa*...

[Interviewer to interpreter]: He’s calling it a *phurpa*. So what makes it a *phurpa*?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: It’s in the shape of a *phurpa* but it’s made of iron.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: Right but it’s not man-made. It’s sort of miraculously turned out.

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Miraculously. It can be found but it’s rarely found.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: This is sounding like a *terma* to me, like a *terma*, like a hidden treasure.

[Interpreter to interviewer]: I see. Okay.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: You know, that reveal tradition? Hidden items and manuscripts? I don’t know...

Q: There are *ter* ‘hidden treasures’ that are not man-made and revealed by *terton* ‘revealer of hidden treasures/teachings.’ Is it like that?

01:06:36

#54D: Those [items] revealed by the *terton* were created by Guru Rinpoche long ago. Such things like golden statues will give protection.

Q: The *namcha phurpa* that you owned, was it from the time of Guru Rinpoche? It’s said that there are treasures hidden everywhere...

#54D: Yes, it has been many generations. My great grandfather discovered it.

Q: Can you tell us about the meeting you had with His Holiness the Dalai Lama at the Kalachakra when you gave this *namcha phurpa* to him? Can you describe what that was like?

#54D: It was in Bodh Gaya [Bihar]. [I] could not get the opportunity to offer it to him personally. [I] was not allowed in. There were some people collecting donations a little away from His Holiness and [I] left it there. One was not allowed in. It was long ago during the first Kalachakra in Bodh Gaya.

Q: Did you have any feeling of reluctance though because this item had been such a special thing for your family and you gave it so freely, you know? Did you have any sad feeling to let it go?

#54D: No, [I] did not. [I] had nothing to offer then. It was the first time [I] was seeing His Holiness the Dalai Lama. [I] had never seen [His Holiness] in Tibet. It was around the year ’74-’75. [I] had nothing to offer and so made this offering. There are many similar *namcha phurpa* made in India. They fetch a good price. Now similar ones are being manufactured. If you observe, the manufactured ones look better.

Q: You’ve had such an active life. You’ve had such an active life. So what do you do these days to keep occupied, to keep from getting bored?

01:10:14

#54D: [I] do not have any work these days. After coming to India, for many years [I] sold sweaters and earned a living. Since five years ago [I] could not go due to old age. I have a son called Pema Jinpa who works in the office—you might have seen him. His wife continues the sweater trade. I have pain in both my knees and now have no responsibilities at all. My son Pema Jinpa has a child who [I] take to the kindergarten and bring back. Besides this, [I] have no responsibilities at home. Pema Jinpa’s wife goes to sell sweater in winter. One can earn a living in India by selling sweaters. [I] have a daughter who lives abroad and she is married with a child.

Though it is not much, we have been depending on the revenue from sweater business since coming to India. From the surplus money, we built a low quality house, one part at a time. It has been five years since I could not go. It must have been around 30 years, perhaps 28

or 29 that I engaged in sweater selling. Since leaving the army and arriving in India, [I] sold sweaters.

Q: Alright, so you're busy with your family. Thank you so much. It was so interesting to talk to you. Thank you very much.

#54D: [I] chant the *mani* 'mantra of Avalokiteshvara.' [I] do not have any responsibilities and just wait for death to come. [I] have pain in my hand joints [points to shoulders] and both the knees due to old age. [I] do not have any responsibilities and go to circumambulate and chant the *mani*.

Q: Can you tell us what it was like to share your story with us today?

#54D: I have not been able to tell you in detail about all the happenings that took place in my region because that will take more than a day or two. Events like the journey, being attacked, fleeing, lack of food, companions being killed, losing animals and repossessing them the next day, narrating the whole story will take many days. I was a nomad in my village until the age of 13-14. When one was too young to work as a transporter, you engaged in herding animals to make a living. Then one worked as a transporter. From the year '55, [I] had to escape from the Chinese. Staying back would have brought more misery with no food and fear of being killed any moment. Most of the people were killed. [I] told you that we were 38 people that reached Nepal from 114. From the 38, except for six, the rest are dead. They were not killed but died [naturally]. Now some of us old ones survive. I have suffered so much. My region Derge is very far away; it is at the border of Tiwu.

END OF INTERVIEW