

Tibet Oral History Project

**Interview #55D – Tehor Phuntsok
May 17, 2012**

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TIBET ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

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INTERVIEW SUMMARY SHEET

1. Interview Number: #55D
2. Interviewee: Tehor Phuntsok
3. Age: 75
4. Date of Birth: 1937
5. Sex: Male
6. Birthplace: Tehor
7. Province: Dhotoe (Kham)
8. Year of leaving Tibet: 1960
9. Date of Interview: May 17, 2012
10. Place of Interview: Bir Guest House, Bir, Himachal Pradesh, India
11. Length of Interview: 1 hr 57 min
12. Interviewer: Marcella Adamski
13. Interpreter: Thupten Kelsang Dakpa
14. Videographer: Pema Tashi
15. Translator: Tenzin Yangchen

Biographical Information:

Tehor Phunsok was born in Tehor in the Tiwu region of Kham Province. Tehor Phunsok's father served as a group leader, overseeing 50-70 families. Two large monasteries, Minyak Gonpa and Jora Gonpa, were the center of people's lives and he recounts the revered reincarnated lamas.

Tehor Phunsok relates his first experience the Chinese, who initially lured the Tibetans with candies, cigarettes and assistance. They took leaders from throughout Tibet on a tour of China to win their support, but the leader from Tehor Phunsok's region remained distrustful. The Chinese began their "liberation" process, declaring that no changes would be implemented for monasteries and nomads, but the farmers must give up their weapons and possessions.

The people of Tehor Phunsok's region attempted to resist the Chinese in 1956, but were defeated. Many were arrested and others including Tehor Phunsok fled into the forest to hide, but were soon coerced to return after the wives and children were threatened. His father was arrested, but Tehor Phunsok was able to join a larger resistance movement in Golok Serta. After a few years of fighting battles, the Tibetans were finally surrounded by the Chinese troops. A few hundred escaped and battles continued as they journeyed towards Lhasa. Tehor Phunsok was shot three times. When they learned that the Dalia Lama had fled to India, the resistance fighters changed their plan and headed to Mustang and then to India.

Topics Discussed:

Kham, childhood memories, first appearance of Chinese, invasion by Chinese army, resistance fighters, imprisonment, escape experiences, life as a refugee in India.

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Interview #55D

Interviewee: Tehor Phuntsok

Age: 75, Sex: Male

Interviewer: Marcella Adamski

Interview Date: May 17, 2012

Question: *Pa-la* ‘respectful term for father,’ please tell us your name.

00:00:13

Interviewee #55D: Phuntshok. Tehor Phuntsok.

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 memories will help us to document the true history, culture and beliefs of the Tibetan people. Do you give your permission for the Tibet Oral History Project to use this interview?

#55D: Yes, [I] do.

Q: Thank you for offering to share your story with us. During this interview if you wish to take a break or stop at any time, please let me know. If you do not wish to answer a question or talk about something, let me know.

#55D: [Nods]

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

00:01:58

#55D: There will be no problem for me because it is what they [the Chinese] have done. There will be no problems for me because I will not tell lies, but talk about what they did. I will speak the truth.

Q: We are honored to record your story and appreciate your participation in this project.

#55D: [Nods]

Q: *Pa-la*, I’d like to begin by asking you to tell us where you were born in Tibet, what location and how many people were in your family?

#55D: I was born in the place called Tehor.

Q: Dekhor?

#55D: Tehor. Tehor.

Q: How many family members were there?

#55D: We were seven siblings, four brothers and three sisters, and the two parents. There were nine.

Q: Where is Tehor located in Tibet? What area?

00:03:19

#55D: Tehor is...Actually Tiwu Kham consists of Hortse, Dhara, Kha, Nga [districts?]. It is similar to Himachal Pradesh [India], which is a large state. There were the Hortse, Dhara, Kha, Nga. From among the five [?], one is the place called Tehor.

Q: What kind of work did your parents do for a living?

#55D: My father? We, the nomads, were three groups with each group of nomads consisting of 50, 60 or 70 families. There were three groups and [my father] was a leader. [He] was the leader of one group. [He] was the leader of the group called Homdo.

There were three groups of nomads and [he was the leader] of one group.

Q: Was [he] the leader of one group?

#55D: Yes, but not the general leader. The name of the general leader was Gundhatsang. I can talk about [him] if you ask me later.

Q: Were the clans similar or were they distinct for some reason?

00:05:17

#55D: The general leader had bifurcated [the nomads] so that it was easier to appoint someone to administer. Hence, three groups had been created.

Q: Did [the nomads] have different types of work?

#55D: There was not anything different. It was the same. However, the nomads would have to be informed about the depletion of grass and water because nomads cannot remain in one place. [They] had to move from place to place when grass was depleted. So each group leader informed his group, "You have to go here or there." Only the people of your group needed to be informed and not the others. Such [group leaders] had been appointed.

Q: You said you had seven siblings. Where were you in that lineup of children?

#55D: I had a sister who was three years older to me. Her name was Tsering Chung.

Q: You are the second one?

#55D: I am the second.

Q: Was there a difference of three years?

#55D: There was a difference of three years.

Q: Can you describe a little bit about your childhood? What kind of memories do you have about your childhood?

00:06:58

#55D: There were not many experiences because during childhood your parents take care of you and it was a happy period. Tibet was an amazingly happy place. The work was not difficult. You earned an income from your fields and a nomad produced curd, milk, butter, cheese, meat and everything for himself. There were no difficulties during childhood because of your parents. Before the Chinese appeared in Tibet we never faced any problems. [We] were happy and the place was beautiful with flowers and plants. It was a beautiful place. I have never been to school.

Q: Do you have any favorite memories of your own about your childhood like what kind of a kid you were?

#55D: Well, special experiences...There is our region and if [I] were to speak about it, it was a very happy place. If it is fine for me to speak about my region, I can describe the region, the leaders, the monasteries, the bordering regions, the monasteries and incarnate lamas. I have a very good knowledge about my region. I was interested right from childhood and used to ask my parents.

Q: We would love to hear your memory of what you saw with your own eyes.

00:09:22

#55D: There were two large monasteries in our region. The Nyingma monastery was called Minyak Gonpa. The Gelug monastery was called Joro Gonpa. [To interpreter] Translate this and then I can recount the names of the incarnate lamas and the number of monasteries.

Q: Is Minyak Kagyu?

#55D: No, it is Nyingma. The name of the monastery was Minyak Gonpa.

Q: Yes, please give me some more details like how large was each monastery and do you remember who was the head at that time? We're talking about what year? 19...say when you were 5. Say 1944, you'd be about 7-10 years old.

#55D: It used to be said that there were 1,500 monks at the Joro Gonpa though I have not counted. They would mention, "There are 1,500 [monks] in our monastery." There were five *tulku* 'reincarnated lamas' in the monastery, five great *tulku*. The five *tulku* were

Choeling Rinpoche, Khaser Kusho, Daser Kuchen [Senior Presence] and Kuchung [Junior Presence]...

Q: Khaser Kusho?

#55D: What?

Q: Khaser Kusho?

00:11:08

#55D: There was one called Khaser Kusho. There was one called Choeling Kusho and there were two Daser called Kuchen and Kuchung.

Q: Daser?

#55D: Daser. There were a senior and junior *tulku* called Kuchen and Kuchung. [To interpreter] Have you noted Khaser Kusho?

Q: Yes, [I] have Khaser Kusho.

#55D: There was one called Gonam Kusho.

Q: Gonam Kusho.

#55D: There were five *tulku* in this monastery. At the Nyingma Gonpa was a great *tulku* called Nyimaydey. There was a great abbot whose name was Khenpo ‘Abbot’ Pema Rabgyal. There were around 300 monks. The Nyingma Monastery had around 300 monks.

Q: Was it 300?

#55D: Yes.

Q: What is a *tulku*? Can you tell people?

00:12:43

#55D: When a good *tulku* passes away, his incarnation is reborn. His Holiness the Dalai Lama is a *tulku* and so also His Holiness the Karmapa. Tibet’s *tulku* are reborn in that way. That is called a *tulku*.

Q: So it’s a reincarnated lama.

[Interpreter to interviewer]: A reincarnation.

Q: A *tulku* is a reincarnated lama. Were you drawn to the Nyingma or to the Gelugpa Monastery? Was there one that you felt more drawn to?

#55D: I am mainly a Nyingma [follower] but have many relatives in the Gelug [sect]. There is not much difference but [I am a follower] of Nyingma. I have many relatives like paternal and maternal uncles in the Gelug [sect]. There was not much difference for us.

Q: Is there a simple way you could explain the difference between the two traditions, Nyingma and Gelug?

00:14:15

#55D: Only the lamas can explain that and not me. We are lay people and have faith in our lamas. Only the lamas can give such an explanation and I cannot.

Q: It's a subject for higher learning?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Higher learning.

Q: People with higher learning.

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Higher learning.

Q: That's difficult for a layperson to do. Okay. Were these monasteries...Do you have any idea how old they were, the Nyingma and the Gelug in your area?

#55D: [I] do not know how old but it used to be said that [they] were extremely old. However, I do not know whether [they were] about a thousand or 500 years. [I] do not know and it will be a lie [if I said so]. I do not know about such things.

Q: You said you were a curious child. Did you ever have an opportunity to study?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: I already answered that I did not go to school.

Q: At all?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: At all.

Q: Oh, I see. I missed that. Sorry. So you did not go to school at all. So, how did you spend your days as a child?

#55D: When [I] was small?

Q: Yes.

00:15:43

#55D: There was not any work when one was small. It was just playing around. Children used to go about naked in our region. One went without clothes until around age 3, 4 or 5. It was a practice that children played around naked. There was not anything else to do but play. Our parents did not assign us any task when we were little and there was no school.

Q: It sounds like a happy childhood.

#55D: Very happy. It was not just me but everyone in Kham and the country of Tibet. Little children were very happy. The parents did not assign any tasks and besides one did not have much to do in our region. One need not work like coolies for everything was produced in your region. Even the poorest person need not worry that he would not get anything to eat on a given day. The six million Tibetans did not face any problems. One owned wealth accumulated by the parents and animals like horses and sheep, and the farmers owned lands. Because of the income from these, there were no difficulties in Tibet. I am old now and feel sad when I remember Tibet.

There are millionaires, people with many millions in India and the United States. There were none like that [in Tibet], but nobody faced any problems.

Q: Were there any games that you remember you playing as a kid growing up that were fun for you?

00:18:13

#55D: There is this game called *kapadi* in India. We had one called *jiwakhyi*. An older person pretended to be a dog and stood a little distance away. A few children would run here and there and he [the dog person] must come rushing to catch [the children]. He had to dab some spit on the ear. The person who came to catch, who was the dog— [the game] was called *jikhyi*, *jiwa* ‘rat’ and *khyi* ‘dog’—if he could catch, unless he dabbed some spit on the ear, he [the rat] got away. Many children would be running here and there.

Q: Was the spit from the mouth and dabbed...

#55D: One must take some spit in the hand and dab it on the ear.

Q: So you are marking him with your spit. What was the name of that game?

#55D: It was called *jikhyi* in our region.

Q: *Chikhyi*?

#55D: *Jikhyi*. There is something called *jiwa* in Tibet. We would call it a rat here. He [points to someone off camera] would know. There is a large thing called *jiwa*. It is *jikhyi*. *Jikhyi* means *jiwa* and *khyi*.

Q: You had a lot of area to run around in then.

00:19:50

#55D: One must run to that side, so a large area was required. If one reached the den, he could not be caught. He must be caught as he ran.

Q: Was the playground large?

#55D: The ground was quite large. There would be no room to run if the ground was not large. The running must be in a large ground.

Q: You were describing the community and you said there were monasteries and what else could you see if you looked around from your house or your neighborhood?

#55D: In our [area]?

Q: In the areas near [your] home?

#55D: There were monasteries and schools near [my] home. There were schools, but I have never been to school. Then there were many farms as we were both farmers and nomads. There were fields and during springtime farmers sowed barley, grains, peas, potatoes and radish.

Q: And then when did your life began to change? How old were you when changes happened to this happy life?

00:21:15

#55D: A drastic change occurred when the Chinese arrived. Otherwise, we have never had any changes. The Chinese arrival changed [our lives].

Q: What year was that when the Chinese came to your area?

#55D: [I] wonder how old [I] was? Perhaps I was 12 years old. I am 75 now. Perhaps I was 12 years old.

Q: Which year was it?

#55D: When [the Chinese] actually came, it was 194... or [19]5... I am not certain. We faced real problems in '55-'56 though [the Chinese] had come earlier. I do not know the time. When the Chinese arrived, the elders and our parents said, "The Chinese are coming and [they] will occupy the country." We called them *gyachak*. *Gyachak* means Gya 'Chinese' *chakpa* 'robber.' They call themselves the Communists but we called [them] *gyachak*. "When the *gyachak* comes, they will plunder because they are robbers."

Saying that the Chinese robbers were coming and they would plunder, doors were strengthened and monks assembled in the monasteries and many such things took place. The older parents used to say, "The *gyachak* are coming. We will be killed." [They] knew that [the Chinese] were coming a few years before [they did]. [The parents] said such things.

Q: So what do you remember at 12 years old, what happened next?

00:23:27

#55D: When the Chinese first arrived in our region, when the Chinese first appeared, they that came were soldiers and on foot. There were no roads and [the Chinese troops] came walking with stuff loaded on horses and mules. That is how [they] arrived.

Q: Did you see this with your own eyes?

#55D: Yes, [I] saw.

Q: What did they look like?

#55D: Before the Chinese came there was a lot of hype but when [they] did, [they] were like the current Chinese and did not seem fierce to look at. Before [they] came there were stories that portrayed [them] almost as man-eaters.

Then they [the Chinese] gave treats like candies. [They] gave candies and various other things to the children to fool us. Those who smoked were given cigarettes. When [they] saw us, [they] did like this [joins palms] and waved [their] hands in glee. [They] were deceiving us.

What they said was, “Lend us space to use for a road. We are going directly to India. We are not going to stay in this region. We are on the way to India with our supplies and will not remain in your region. Allow us the use of road. We possess arms to fight but do not trouble us as we will pay for the wood to make fire. We will pay you for staying overnight.” “There is no need to pay us for the wood” but they fooled us by saying the next day, “This is for the cost of wood” when they stayed overnight by the roadside and used wood for making fire. “There is no need to pay for the wood. Wood is found free in the forest” but [they] deceived us.

Q: They said they were on their way to India. They just wanted to go through your land.

#55D: Yes.

Q: When did the nice behavior change? What did you see change?

00:26:31

#55D: The change they brought was...For many days the Chinese moved on and then a few days later, a party of Chinese in blue dress arrived. They were in blue while the earlier ones were in light colored army fatigues. Those in blue were placed at spots every ten miles and started road construction.

Q: What was the first color?

#55D: They wore light color.

Q: Yes?

#55D: Light color like that...[points off camera]. It was the regular military uniform.

Then they built tin sheet houses for them [road workers] and paid us money. Whoever they were, the owners of the lands were given huge sums of money.

Q: They built steel...?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Steel shelters.

Q: Steel? What are they? Steel shelters?

#55D: Shelters for the road workers to live in.

Q: Were they made of metal?

#55D: They brought tin sheets and built temporary shelters.

Q: Made of tin sheets?

#55D: Yes.

Q: What year do you think? What year are we talking about when you were seeing this...these people coming in blue color uniforms?

00:28:32

#55D: I cannot recall. I cannot recall the year.

Q: How old were you?

#55D: I must have been around 12 years old then.

Q: Did the people in blue uniforms treat you any differently?

#55D: They were just common people engaged in constructing roads. [They] were coolies, these soldiers.

Q: Didn't they have any interactions with the people?

#55D: They did not have any interactions with the people. They had nothing to do with the people. They were coolies.

Q: So when did this transition stage change? What happened next?

#55D: Then they [the Chinese] called the leaders of our region and questioned, "What do you do? Who pays your salary as leaders?" "We are not paid as leaders." "We will pay you a salary. You are very beneficial for looking after the public. It is great that you do such work without any salary." They fooled the leaders by saying [they] would pay them money

and take them to China on a tour. They took our leader to China on a visit and paid [him] money as salary.

Q: Really? Were [they] taken everywhere?

00:29:56

#55D: [They] were taken to China, on a tour of China.

Q: Where in China?

#55D: [They] were taken to Beijing and other places in China.

Q: So this was the administrator of his district. They took him to Beijing to watch movies. What were they trying to do with him?

#55D: They were planning to deceive him by giving bribes. They wanted [him] to say that the Chinese were good by giving him money. [They] wanted the leader to come and tell us that the Chinese were good. Instead of their saying it, [they] made the leader tell us that.

Q: Do you remember the leader's name?

00:31:34

#55D: Our leader's name was Gundhatsang. The family name was Gundhatsang. It was Gundhatsang. The leader was called Gundha Nogchu.

Q: Gundha...?

#55D: Gundha Nogchu.

Q: Nogchu?

#55D: Nogchu, Nogchu.

Q: Did he begin to try to convince the Tibetan people that the Chinese were good? What did he do?

#55D: The leader did not say that [the Chinese] were good. The leader had been taken everywhere on tour in China and told, "We will give you wealth and treat you well." They [the Chinese] said that they had something called "liberation" to implement, implementation of liberation. "Implementing liberation means that the wealth of the rich will be distributed among the poor. We will not take it to China. We will launch liberation that will bring happiness to the country. There will be no enemies and people will live in peace. We will do that." The leader was thus advised and explained.

Q: Did you know this man personally?

00:32:50

#55D: [I] knew.

Q: So when he came back, did the people in the village believe him and did they follow him or were they...

#55D: [Interrupts] The leader was against the Chinese, just like us.

Q: When the leader returned from China, did the people believe him?

#55D: He [the leader] did not trust the Chinese and went along [to China] just like that. He did not like [the Chinese]. He knew in his heart, "The Chinese are deceiving me." He thought that.

Q: What did the people do next? What did you do next?

#55D: It was not only the leader of our region. They [the Chinese] took the leaders of every part of Tibet on tour to China. It was not just from our region, as our leader said that there were 100-200 leaders assembled from Kham and Lhasa. They had taken the leaders in vehicle loads. They [Tibetan leaders] were being deceived by propaganda lessons, taken on tours, feasted with good food and given good clothes. They were fooled. They [the Chinese] took all the leaders of Kham and Tibet [Utsang Province].

They deceived and even took His Holiness the Dalai Lama. Saying it was a tour; they deceived and took [His Holiness].

Q: *Pa-la*, could you please tell us like you said about 200 leaders were taken to China and when they returned, did some of them return to your community?

00:34:58

#55D: [They] returned. The one called Gundha Nogchu was our leader. He returned to our region.

Q: And you were about 12 years old at that time?

#55D: I was more than 12 years old at that time. [I] was older, maybe 13, 14 or 15.

Q: Do you remember anybody telling you what happened in Beijing?

#55D: [I] have heard. What they [the leaders] were told was...without being told anything initially; they were taken sightseeing where there were good houses and parks. They were given food in large dining areas. For many days without being told anything, they were taken on sightseeing tours saying, "Your country can be developed in this way in the future."

Q: What else? Continue. Anything else that happened to them?

#55D: What they were told was, “We will launch this thing called liberation. Liberation will make the society equal and bring happiness. Liberation will not be implemented for the nomads and monasteries. Monasteries will have the freedom to practice and nothing will affect the monasteries. [We] will not bring any changes to the nomads. It will affect only the farmers. The nomads live a hard life raising animals and living in the mountains. It will only affect the farmers and not nomads. The monasteries are free to practice and there will be no changes.”

Q: It was only for the farmers?

00:37:06

#55D: Yes, only for the farmers. “We must bring about the Democratization of Liberation process.” [The Chinese] told them [the leaders] that that was imperative. When the leaders were told that many times, they replied, “This cannot be done. This cannot take place in our region. It will raise problems. Implementing it will raise problems.” “There will be no problems whatsoever.”

First they [the Chinese] said, “You must take away all the guns.” There was not any place in our region where there were no guns. “Initially there will be nothing but to surrender your guns to us. You do not need guns. If you have enemies, our soldiers will fight them. If there are wild animals like tigers and lions, we have guns. Before doing anything, surrender your guns.” The leaders were told, “Go and try to take away the guns.”

Q: I didn’t quite understand. You didn’t need to go to the monasteries or to what else?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: The nomads.

Q: What was the reason they wouldn’t be affected? I didn’t understand that.

00:39:18

#55D: They [the Chinese] were misleading by doing so [implementing liberation] first with the farmers. They feared that the nomads would resist. They [the Chinese] would fool the nomads by carrying out [their plans] with the farmers first. They would apply with one group at first since they feared that doing so at the same time with everyone would give rise to huge problems.

Q: Did your leaders come back and tell? Did somebody in your community go to Beijing and did they come back and tell you this story? How do you know this?

#55D: We had a group meeting of all the people and [the leader] told us, “The Chinese have said this but we cannot accept it as the truth. I cannot tell you to surrender your guns or that liberation is good. The Chinese have told us so. You have to consider as I cannot [do so on your behalf].” We had a meeting where all the people assembled and the leader of our region announced so.

Q: Were you in that meeting?

#55D: [I] attended. I was older then, about 16-17 years old.

Q: The leader, what would be his title? A magistrate or what did you call him?

#55D: What?

Q: A district magistrate or what?

00:41:27

#55D: [The leader] was like the district magistrate, a senior leader and the leader of our region.

Q: What was the leader of the region called?

#55D: Just the family name of the leader and there were no titles like district magistrate. [He] was the leader of the region called Gundha Nogchu, which you noted earlier.

Q: What was his family name? Did you give it to me? His family name?

#55D: Gundha. It's Gundha. Gundhatsang.

Q: Gundhatsang?

#55D: Gundhatsang is the family name. [The leader's] name was Gundha Nogchu. It was Gundha Nogchu. It is just like you have Gyaritsang here. Gyaritsang is the name of the family. That was Gundhatsang. The man's name was Gundha Nogchu.

Q: The administrator came back. He said, "This is what the Chinese said but I don't believe it." Is that correct?

00:42:33

#55D: "The Chinese will not do any good in the end but do not say that I mentioned it. The Chinese will not treat us Tibetans well. They are invaders, come to invade and kill us. They took us [leaders to China] and if we attack all of a sudden, we will suffer loss. So [we] should plan a strategy. Actually they will be the cause of death for the Tibetans," the leader said so to us.

He did not say in so many words during the meeting. He said so secretly to influential people, "I am forced to say so. I have to say that the Chinese are good because they have taken us to China and we have agreed. In the end they will do us no good." The leader said so to the influential people in secret. The Chinese were present during the larger meetings.

Q: What did the smaller group decide to do?

#55D: The influential people were discussing among themselves that there was nothing to do but resist the Chinese. On the outside he [leader] seemed like a Chinese. He had relatives and many family members. If attacked, they would be the first targets. They

would be attacked before us. It was the Chinese practice to attack the influential and then the common people. They [leader's family] knew they would be killed.

Q: The people that went to Beijing, did they go willingly or were they curious or were they coerced into going?

00:44:55

#55D: [They] were coerced into going.

Q: Coerced into going.

#55D: [The leaders] feared not going. [They] were forced and taken along; forced and not because they said, "I want to go." They [the Chinese] forced them into going. Being a leader he [Gundha Nogchu] knew it. He was a leader. His Holiness the Dalai Lama had been taken earlier on a sightseeing tour of China. Had His Holiness refused, there would be big issues that would be detrimental. So, hoping to try and talk... When there were meetings of the influential people for many days, they [Tibetan leaders] said, "Liberation cannot be implemented for us. Tibet has been independent for thousands of years. Initiating liberation would give rise to problems. It would not be good. Please do not implement it." This had been given in writing as well as indicated orally.

Attending the meetings were many leaders hailing from Lithang, Bapa, Nyarong, Dango, Hortse Dharakha; all the influential people came and spoke at length, "Don't initiate liberation. The outcome will not be good. We do not need liberation because we are living in our own country and satisfied with our products. It is not what belongs to another country. We work hard. Do not talk about initiating liberation because it cannot happen." They spoke at length at the meetings in China.

Q: What happens next? In the events, what happens?

00:46:42

#55D: After that they [the Chinese] took our leader called Gundha to Golok Serta. He was not allowed to remain in our region. [He] was taken to Serta saying that [he] had to advise [the people of] Serta. All those senior leaders that had visited China—not just our leader—none of the leaders were allowed to remain [in their region] and were taken to various other regions. [Our leader] was not allowed to remain in our region. Those leaders that had been taken to China from Lithang, Bapa, Nyarong, Tiwu, Dango, Golok Serta—there were numerous leaders from various regions—they [the Chinese] led them to other areas. [They] were not allowed to remain in the regions. Our leader was not allowed to stay in our region. And then they [the Chinese] ordered the farmers to surrender the guns. They forcefully confiscated all the guns of the farmers.

Q: Did the Chinese confiscate?

#55D: Yes, by force. Those leaders that had visited China were no longer there. [They] had been taken to other regions. Though they were not prisoners, they were left there idly

saying, “You have to stay here.” [Gundha Nogchu] was taken elsewhere and not allowed to remain in our region.

Q: Who could force the farmers? I mean just one representative comes back from Beijing and he forces the farmers to give up...

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Not the...the representative was already sent. So they were without a representative.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: The representative is in China?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Already in some other part of Tibet. They never let those representatives who went to Beijing to stay in their own place. So, they were without a leader. The Chinese confiscated.

Q: So the representatives were sent to other places in Tibet and then the Chinese soldiers came in and took away the weapons from the farmers. Is that correct?

00:48:56

#55D: [The Chinese soldiers] confiscated.

Q: Did Chinese soldiers come?

#55D: Soldiers arrived. Then in the year '56 according to their wish they forcefully initiated the “liberation” process upon us.

Q: In '56?

#55D: Yes. First they took away the guns.

Q: And then what happened?

#55D: When the guns were confiscated, [the Chinese] did not do so with the nomads. [They] did not take guns from the monasteries for the time being. When that was happening our leader was staying separately at Golok Serta. And then we held a meeting among ourselves, “[We] must challenge the Chinese for they are up to no good.” They had already confiscated guns from the farmers and robbed all their belongings. They had come and taken away all the things.

Vehicles had arrived by then. The Chinese had constructed motor roads. After constructing roads, [the Chinese] confiscated guns from the farmers and then took away all the things from the homes. There were valuable items and non-valuables like barley and peas. All the grains were taken away in trucks and the homes rendered empty. All the influential people were captured. Husbands and wives were captured with only the children left behind. All the farmers were captured.

Q: Okay, continue please.

00:51:04

#55D: Then we, the nomads, held a meeting. They [the Chinese] had ordered the nomads, “It is better for you to surrender [your] guns.” We had been told. After plundering the farmers they came to the nomads. They [the Chinese] did not come but sent some junior leaders, “It is better for the nomads to surrender the guns.” We had already been told. After being ordered, we sent a man to Golok Serta. The leader had relatives who sent a man to say, “Come back from Golok Serta. Escape from there. Befool the Chinese and come away. It is time for us to fight and challenge the Chinese.” A man had left to relay the message to the leader in secret.

Q: A relative of the leader?

#55D: The relative of the leader did not go but sent someone in secret to say, “Come back. Our region’s suffering loss. Do not remain. The Chinese are deceiving us and are bound to kill us. It is better to fight the Chinese even if [we] are killed. Please come back.” A man had been sent to him in secret.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: And where was he that they asked...?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Golok Serta.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: Is that where he was sent by the Chinese or did he...?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Sent by the Chinese.

Q: And you sent family members and said, “Bring him back.”

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Secretly.

Q: And his name again was?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Gundhatsang.

Q: Gundhatsang.

[Interpreter to interviewer]: His family name.

Q: And is Golok, is that the place where the Goloks lived? No, not Goloks?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Golok.

#55D: Golok Serta. The Chinese could not overcome Golok Serta and our leader was sent to talk and convince [the people of] Golok Serta to be good to the Chinese. Our leader was sent by the Chinese to speak to the people.

Q: This was where the Goloks lived, right?

00:53:44

#55D: [People of] Golok Serta were nomads. It was an incredibly large area.

Q: So he was sent to take care of them. And then your community said, “Get him back here and take care of us.”

[Interpreter to interviewer]: And fight.

Q: Help us fight and not support the Chinese but help...

[Interpreter to interviewer]: He was never a supporter of Chinese.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: I know that. I thought you said they sent him there.

[Interpreter to interviewer]: He had to.

Q: He had to go there. He wasn't supporting them. Good. Continue. Then did he return?

#55D: [Speaks before interpreter] Then their [Chinese] soldiers came to our monastery and captured all the senior lamas. Guns in the monastery were confiscated. All the senior lamas were captured.

Q: Was that to both monasteries? Which monastery?

00:54:42

#55D: [Monks of] one of the monasteries revolted against the Chinese and fled to the mountains, the one called Joro Gonpa. Everyone in the Nyingma Monastery was captured.

Q: All the Joro Gonpa [monks] revolted?

#55D: Everyone in Joro Gonpa revolted. The lamas in the monastery and their relatives at home fled into the forests. The Joro Gonpa [monks and others] made camp and stayed there.

Q: Why does the monastery have weapons?

#55D: There were monasteries that possessed weapons. We were at the border and it was actually to challenge the Chinese. We were at the border. Tehor Dango lay very close to the Chinese.

Q: You said the Gelugpa had already resisted and gone to the mountains?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Gone to the forest with their weapons.

Q: The monks?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: The monks and their family members.

Q: Okay. So what happens next?

00:56:02

#55D: [Speaks before interpreter] The Joro Gonpa [monks] built an army camp in a dense forest with snowy mountains in the backdrop in our region. It was a place called Shipatsorama. The name of the place was Shipatsorama.

Q: Shipa...

#55D: Yes, the Joro Gonpa built an army camp there. There were around 1,500 monks and lay people had also fled. There were 1,500-2,000 monks.

Q: It's very helpful for me to understand, but it's a lot of breaks as you do one sentence at a time. So tell him just to tell the story and then you'll translate it for me. Because I don't need to...It's a story and I can ask for clarifications later. Just tell the story. What happens then?

#55D: After they had stayed for around a week at Shipatsorama, the Chinese attacked them. There were thousands and tens of thousands of Chinese. Chinese arrived from every side, from Nyarong, from Ganze and our region. The Chinese surrounded [them] and both the sides clashed for many days and nights. The Chinese possessed many weapons. The Joro Gonpa [monks] fought and [the Chinese] fought. The Chinese could not overcome [them] for around a week. They [the monks of Joro Gonpa] fought from the forest. The Joro Gonpa [monks] had earlier dug bunkers and waited at the points the Chinese arrived with guns.

The senior commander was Chiling Lama who was a *rinpoche* 'reincarnated lama.' He took charge as commander of the army to challenge the Chinese, the one called Chiling Lama. Then one day the number of Chinese was so overwhelming that [Joro Gonpa monks] could not withstand them. The Chinese enveloped them and killed numerous monks. [The monks also] killed many Chinese. One day everyone was captured. Everyone was captured.

Q: Around how many people died?

00:58:36

#55D: Only around 20-30 from Joro Gonpa was killed. 100-200 Chinese were killed as they [Joro Gonpa monks] ambushed [the Chinese]. A huge number was killed that day.

Q: This leader, he was a monk?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Yeah, a *rinpoche*.

Q: He was a *rinpoche*? What was his full name again?

#55D: Chiling Rinpoche.

Q: Chiling Rinpoche?

#55D: Chiling.

Q: Rinpoche and he became...

[Interpreter to interviewer]: The military general.

Q: The military general. Wow. What happened to him?

#55D: Yes?

Q: What happened to Chiling Rinpoche?

#55D: Chiling Rinpoche was the monastery's commander. [He] was not killed but captured that day. The Chinese captured everyone and brought them to our region. The Chinese captured everyone. I told you about the five *tulku*. They were captured and taken away.

Q: With the Chinese?

#55D: There were many tens of thousands of Chinese soldiers that I saw with my eyes. I saw them leading the lamas [they] had captured. As I looked on, [I] could see the entire fight. [The Chinese] were not shooting at us but towards the army camp. I could see with my eyes.

Q: Were you in that attack where the monks had set up the barriers? Did you participate in that? You were a young boy.

01:01:06

#55D: The Chinese ways are like, when one group attacks they tell another, "You are good." We were not attacked at that time.

That is the Chinese custom. [They] told the Utsang [people], "You are good. The Khampa [people of Kham province] are liars. You Utsang [people] are good." If everybody together fought [the Chinese], we could achieve something but [the Chinese] deceived one group and said, "You are good. You will not do anything." The Chinese always acted in that way.

Q: They were fighting and you were in your area not fighting and then what happened to you next?

#55D: Then the lamas of Joro Gonpa were led away. [They] were taken away at night by a leader who was called Wa Chuedang.

Q: Wa Chuedang?

#55D: [He] was called Wa Chuedang. The name of the highest army commander that inflicted loss on the Joro Gonpa was Wa Chuedang.

Q: Chinese?

01:02:27

#55D: Yes, Chuedang. Chuedang meant leader in their language. Wa Chuedang.

Q: Wa Chuedang.

#55D: Yes, Wa Chuedang.

Q: Was he a Chinese leader?

#55D: Yes. He was the leader that caused us loss.

Q: Was it Wa Chuedang that captured Chiling Rinpoche and the others?

#55D: Yes, it was he.

Q: Did you see this with your eyes?

#55D: [I] did. I saw [Wa Chuedang] later and not at that time. At that time Wa Chuedang detained all the monks in a large house and spoke to the senior lamas like Chiling Lama and others, “We have learned about your opinions. You have surrendered to us and will not face any problems. Your lamas have been killed and so were 200-300 Chinese. [You] cannot be blamed. You will not be harmed now. Live peacefully.” They detained the people in a house and left them overnight.

Then Chiling Lama spoke to some of his influential colleagues, “We must fool them and escape tonight.” While they were held in the house, Chiling Lama made a hole at the back of the house and fled taking along 25 others.

01:04:21

When the Chinese had caught them, they had hidden [their] guns in the forest.

Q: He escaped. Did anybody escape with him?

#55D: The names of the other escapees...

Q: Around how many men escaped?

#55D: Around 25 men escaped. Except for Chiling Lama who was the leader, I do not know the names of the others. It would be a lie [if I said so]. And then they fled north with their guns to Lhasa. Lhasa had not been attacked then.

Q: Lhasa wasn't conquered?

#55D: No. It was in the year '56.

Q: If I understand, all the five *tulkus* got captured and they got sent back to your community and then they were put in this house. And one of the *tulkus*—Was this Rinpoche?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Chiling Rinpoche—He was already the leader.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: He was already the leader. And he was in that same house. And he escaped by himself or with 35 other people?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: With 25.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: And they were in the same house?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Yeah.

[Interviewer to interpreter]: It was like a house and they made a prison out of it. So he escaped with them in the night. And they went to get there guns.

[Interpreter to interviewer]: ...There guns which were already hidden away in the forest and then they went to Lhasa because at that time Lhasa was not lost.

Q: Where were you when all this was happening? When they went to Lhasa where were you?

#55D: I was in my region and I told you earlier that a messenger had been sent to ask our leader to return. I told you that Gundha was at Serta and a messenger had left to tell our leader, "Come back as our region is being attacked. We must counter the Chinese." One day the leader sent a message to the nomads, "Come for a meeting at 8 o'clock tomorrow."

We went to the meeting early the next morning. Our leader had already returned, the one who was at Golok Serta had returned to his nomadic site. [The leader explained], "A messenger sent by my relative came to me and I left by deceiving the Chinese." [He] had cheated the Chinese and brought a large number of weapons from the Chinese. [He] had told the Chinese, "You have many enemies and I could be killed. Give me weapons. Other people will kill me for working with you." He had come with weapons. There were many men with him. When the Chinese took him, 15-20 influential people had accompanied the leader.

Q: Fifteen to 20?

#55D: Yes, men that accompanied him. They were men that belonged to our region. The leader said, "It is useless for me to remain. I am going to leave now." He had three sons who were with him. One of the sons, the older one was my age.

01:08:28

He asked his relative to leave the next day. He was going to flee that day and asked his relative to leave the next. There were many people at the meeting and [he] said, “I am not asking you to leave though the Chinese cannot be overcome. The Chinese are certain to kill us. If you wish to leave, come with my relative. Do not stay back.” We had not lost our weapons to the Chinese then. “Whoever wishes can leave with my relative. Come tomorrow while I leave today.” He secretly gave them the name of the place saying, “I am going there today. You should come there.” He asked his relative to come without fail. A maternal uncle of mine was with his relative. My maternal uncle’s name was Terga.

Q: Terga?

#55D: Yes, Terga. He [the leader] asked Terga to come with his relative without fail. “Come along with my relative. Whoever feels that the Chinese will cause suffering can leave. However, I am not saying who should leave and who should not. The Chinese are bound to kill us one day. It is not good. If you wish to remain, you can.” He asked his relative to leave the next day.

Their horses were saddled and we loaded the tents. He had three sons and 15-20 people accompanying him. They left for the forest. The name of the place was Ganayithang. Ganayithang was a large plain area where the nomads lived. They rode their horses into the valley. All of them were armed with guns. [They] left. The Chinese...

Q: Was it a forest?

#55D: Yes. [The leader had said,] “Tonight the Chinese will attack the nomads for they will know that I have come here. So I will not remain.” His relative was there then. The next day the relative left. My maternal uncle left with the relative along with many other people. Two days after they had left the Chinese attacked us nomads. There must have been thousands of Chinese troops. The Chinese feared the nomads because our leader...

[Discontinuity in video]

[Interpreter concludes translation with “The Chinese were afraid of our leader because we were very ferocious and we had fought really badly before.”]

01:11:40

Then the many thousands of Chinese troops surrounded the nomadic area that was large and we could not go anywhere. Thinking that the Gundhatsang leader was at home and had not fled, the Chinese [commander] had ordered, “The Gundhatsang must be destroyed by shelling them and none allowed to escape, be it woman or man. There will be no discussions. At the crack of dawn...” It was the Chinese called Wa Chuedang.

He had lectured [the troops] at the time of the attack, “All the Gundhatsang families must be annihilated. Whether they are women or children, they must be fired upon and none allowed to emerge from the doors. Announce to the other nomads to surrender and perhaps they will surrender. If they do not shoot, do not shoot at them. If they shoot, we

can retaliate. Do not shoot at the other nomads but annihilate the three or four Gundhatsang families. Do not leave any man, animal or even a little child alive.” The leader had said so the night earlier.

Therefore, we were not fired upon the next morning. Someone shouted, “The Chinese have come.” We heard and fled to the forest with our guns. [We] got up just as we had slept and fled to the forest. There were my father, me and numerous people from many families. [We] escaped into the forest. All the Gundhatsang women and children were killed the next morning while the Gundhatsang men and relatives had left taking along the sons. There were maids and others at home. There were three nomadic families [of the Gundhatsang]. They were shelled and destroyed. The *ba* ‘tents made from yak hair’ were tattered.

01:14:26

Then we stayed in the forest and the Gundhatsang family members were destroyed. We were many days in the forest. While we were in the forest—the nomads lived high on the mountain where there were rocks and snow—all the nomads were driven to a huge open ground where the farmers lived. There were three groups of nomads and all the three were driven to the plains. There were mothers and sisters at home whom the Chinese troops forced to leave for the plains driving the animals and carrying the *ba*. We were in the forest then. We were not fighting but hiding holding [our] guns.

Q: Were all the males hiding in the forest?

#55D: Yes.

Q: Were all the women hiding in the plains?

#55D: The nomads owned animals and everyone was driven to the plains. They drove [the nomads].

Q: Did the Chinese drive [them]?

#55D: Yes, the Chinese drove [them].

Q: What were the men going to do in the forest? What were they going to do?

01:16:05

#55D: We planned to fight if [the Chinese] attacked us. We would not be able to overcome them if we fired straightaway. Then the nomads would be killed. So we were just observing and had not surrendered [our] guns and were holding them. [We] were watching what they [the Chinese] would do.

Q: Then what happens?

#55D: After all the nomads reached there [the plains], the Chinese sent my mother and others in search of us in the forest, “Bring your fathers or husbands or sons. Ask them to come back. The Gundhatsang are liars. They are not good. You are good. Give up the guns

to us and you will not be harmed.” The mothers and others were sent [with a warning], “Should the husbands and sons not come back, we will capture and take you away. Should they come and give up the guns, we will not do anything. [We] will not capture anybody.” It was not just my father and mother. We were 100-200 people hiding in the forest and all their family members were sent saying, “Bring your family members. Should you fail to bring [them], we will take the sons, daughters and mothers to China.”

Q: Take to China?

01:17:22

#55D: Yes, take [them] away, that [they] would be taken away later. They were thus threatened. Then the mothers arrived crying, “Please come. There will be no harm done.” The mothers came to us crying, “You must give up the guns. The Chinese have said that they will not cause any harm. [They] have agreed. [Otherwise] all the sons, daughters and family members will be taken away.” Mother wept and then we surrendered to the Chinese.

Q: Did all the men come down?

#55D: Yes, everyone came down. We came down and gave up the guns to the Chinese. After giving the guns to the Chinese, they said, “You have done well. Now you will not be captured.” [They] deceived and left us alone for a few days.

At that time my father was the group leader. [He was told,] “You are the leader and must look after the group.” In this way [the Chinese] deceived. [We] were deceived and then in a few days, all the influential people were captured. My father was captured as also numerous men of our group. Everyone was captured but I was not.

Q: Was father captured?

01:19:31

#55D: My father was captured. His name was Palden Dakpa. My father was captured and so were all the influential people. [They] were captured and taken away.

Q: The Chinese appointed his father a leader? Why? Why his father?

#55D: There were subordinate leaders under our leader. He [the leader] had appointed [father] and not the Chinese. I told you that the main leader was Gundha and there were subordinate leaders to administer to the various groups. [Father] was one since earlier times and not appointed by the Chinese. The Chinese did not give us money.

Q: What happens then?

#55D: The unrest took place in the year '56, in the year 1956. Then the Chinese and Golok Serta fought in the year '57. After rebelling our leader had fled to Golok Serta taking along all his colleagues. When the Chinese fought at Golok Serta, what the Chinese said was, “The Golok Serta [people] are fighting the Chinese.” We being nomads owned many yaks.

“You have to make deliveries on your animals to Golok Serta—110 yaks and 11 horses are required. Eleven of you must set out immediately to Golok Serta driving 110 yaks of the nomads and deliver supplies.”

Q: Did the Chinese say that?

#55D: Yes, the Chinese said that. [We] were to transport Chinese supplies.

01:22:08

And then we discussed in a meeting, “If the Chinese are fighting at Serta, we should go to Serta to revolt [against the Chinese]. We must go there.” Eleven of us volunteered to go. We volunteered to transport Chinese supplies. We were 11 volunteers. Eleven of us drove 110 yaks and left.

Q: One hundred and ten yaks?

#55D: Yes, 110 yaks.

Q: Around how many horses were there?

#55D: There were 11 horses, a horse for each man. There were 11 men.

Q: Eleven men?

#55D: Yes, there were 11 men.

Q: Was that the *Chushi Gangdrug*?

#55D: No.

Q: No? Just a fight?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Not the *Chushi Gangdrug*.

#55D: There were many such [resistance groups] in Kham.

01:23:09

And then what we did was—if there was a fight in Golok Serta—there were weapons like guns and bullets that we had to transport. We rode the horses...

Q: Were there guns?

#55D: What? We did not have guns because the Chinese had confiscated [them]. We were planning to take the Chinese weapons and revolt. We had discussed and planned to join Golok Serta if they fought. When we reached there, there was no fighting in Golok Serta. We were escorted by many thousands of Chinese troops on horseback armed with sophisticated guns. There was a large Chinese army camp in Golok Serta where we

delivered the arms and all the Chinese supplies. [We] delivered to their army camp. And when we returned driving our yaks, at a distance of a day's journey we met the fighters of Golok Serta and joined them.

Q: [You] joined?

#55D: [We] joined. It was a large unit. The Golok Serta unit consisted of tens of thousands of troops and we thought, "With such a large army, now [we] can defeat the Chinese." There were guns for sale in their army camp. We gave our yaks and bought guns.

Q: Were the sellers Tibetans?

01:24:28

#55D: Yes, [they] were Tibetans. There were many guns for sale in the camp, guns that had belonged to Chinese they had killed. There were bullets and guns on sale. We gave them the yaks, which [they] slaughtered. The soldiers slaughtered the yaks and we bought guns. That is how we revolted.

The name of the chief leader was Washi Rinzin Dhondup. The top leader of Serta was Washi Rinzin Dhondup. There were numerous subordinate leaders and more than several thousand people. There were four groups in Mey Litsa Chushi. All these groups from Mey Litsa Chushi had revolted. There were 18 groups and 25 sub-groups in Golok Serta each having their own subordinate leaders. The top one was called Washi Rinzin Dhondup.

Then there were those from Lithang, Bapa, Nyarong, Derge, Amdo Ngawa, Mewa, everyone had revolted and converged upon Serta. There were many tens of thousands of Tibetans with good weapons and we were very happy thinking, "Now we can defeat the Chinese."

01:26:48

We fought there and then came back to attack the Chinese in our region as we possessed weapons. [We] returned and attacked the Chinese in the Tiwu region and destroyed vehicles. We have done quite a lot. [I] do not think it is necessary to say the names of the leaders though I know many of them, those leaders that fought at Golok Serta. If it is pointless, it is useless for me to say.

Q: How far are we towards the end because we've another interview? So maybe we could hold off on that. Let's get to the end of the story. Maybe at a point we'll do that but I think we better continue because we have to wrap up.

#55D: If it is pointless mentioning [the names, we] can drop it.

Q: I hope you've given that information to somebody.

#55D: [I] have spoken about it once to Voice of America.

Q: Good. So continue with the story.

#55D: We lost Lhasa in the year '59. After Lhasa was lost, Chinese surrounded us from every direction. Many tens of thousands of Chinese enveloped the Tibetans. [Chinese troops] were dropped from planes and from everywhere. The Chinese attacked us in the year '59. The entire Serta unit was attacked. We were destroyed in the year '59. They [the Chinese] dropped many papers from planes in the year '59 when we were destroyed, "We have conquered Lhasa and captured His Holiness the Dalai Lama," they lied. "Now you have nowhere to go. You have nowhere to go, so surrender." [The Chinese] dropped many papers from planes. "Now you have nowhere to go."

01:28:51

There were many encounters and then Washi Rinzin Dhondup said, "Let us all rush through the Chinese [cordon]." Chinese surrounded us and there was no way to advance. Many people were being killed. Many Tibetans were slain and many Chinese were slain. One could not hear due to the sound of numerous gunshots. When the huge canons were fired, the nearby ground was lifted up. [The Chinese] possessed such huge guns. We continued to fight them and they fought us killing many.

There were 100-200 leaders and the top one was Washi Rinzin Dhondup. He said, "Now we must rush upon the Chinese [cordon] and escape. The Chinese have surrounded us and there is no way to advance. [We] must push through come what may." He mentioned the name of our leader Gundhatsang as the person that must lead the way. Gundhatsang and one called Golok Wangchen Thopa were to go ahead. All of us considered [them] to be fierce whether it was fighting the enemy or anything else. We were single men without any women or children with us. [We] were fighters and young. I was 19 years old then.

Q: Nineteen?

01:30:00

#55D: Yes. Then we fled in the night. It became dark when we reached the area where the Chinese lay in wait. There was hailstorm and lightening and it became impossible to proceed. However, we rushed upon the Chinese [cordon] on horseback, regardless of whether one got killed or shot. There was a lot of noise. When many thousands of horses galloped, hearing the thundering sound all the Chinese gave way and fled. Some Chinese may have gotten killed. We just rushed upon the Chinese. [We] were forced to because there are no forests in Golok Serta; it is a plain region. It is a good region with no gravel or rocks. You can ask. There are no forests in Golok Serta; it is plain ground.

Q: So there were 10,000 Tibetans on horses coming towards the Chinese because they said, "We have nothing to lose." And what were the Chinese riding?

#55D: The day we encountered, the Chinese were not cavalymen but infantry. The Chinese were on foot.

Q: Where are we located? Where's this battle taking place again?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Golok Serta.

Q: You are in the battle at this point. You're 19 years old, correct?

#55D: Yes.

Q: You chose your most ferocious leader, the name...?

[Interpreter in interviewer]: Gundhatsang.

Q: Gundhatsang who led the troops, correct?

#55D: [Speaks before interpreter] Gundhatsang, the leader got killed at Serta.

Q: Was Gundhatsang killed?

#55D: What?

Q: Was Gundhatsang killed?

01:33:37

#55D: Gundhatsang, the leader called Gundha Nogchu I told you about. The Chinese killed him at Serta. We killed an incredible number of Chinese on the day he was killed. The Chinese attacked us. It was before Serta was destroyed in around the 3rd month of '59. We were attacked before Serta was destroyed. We were in the camp in tents and the Chinese attacked and killed the leader. That day...

Q: What's the name of the leader that was slain?

#55D: The leader was Gundha Nogchu.

Q: Gundha...?

#55D: Nogchu.

Q: Was [he] killed?

#55D: [He] was slain. He rushed towards the Chinese with [his] sword. Had [he] not rushed with the sword, [he] would not have been killed. We killed an incredible number of Chinese that day. He could not restrain, got up and rushed screaming upon the Chinese with his sword and was shot many times and killed.

Q: So what happened to you? Where were you?

01:35:07

#55D: At that time I was among the common soldiers. Except for three leaders, none of us were killed. We fled towards the other side of the river not able to challenge the Chinese. That day [we] had killed 50-60 Chinese. The leader himself killed many of them.

Q: And then what happened?

#55D: Serta was attacked 3-4 months after this incident. Our leader was killed and there was his sibling called Tenzin who was also a leader. He led us. He had three sons.

And then as I told you earlier we rushed upon the Chinese [cordon] at night. The Chinese had lights that could show up everyone. It was like a flashlight, which they used at night. We had nothing like that. Whether they shone flashlights or whatever, we rushed upon the Chinese. [We] shot at the Chinese with pistols for rifles could not be used. As the horses dashed, [we] fired at the Chinese with pistols. [We] rushed upon the Chinese and they dispersed. There were many horses and when the horses galloped over the large plain, it created a thundering sound. The horses' hoofs made a thundering sound and they dare not remain. Many were killed and all the Chinese fled.

01:37:45

We fled the whole night. One could not see who was there and who was not in the dark and rainy night. Then waking up after a short nap along the route, [we realized] many had been killed. Only 200-300 men had been able to escape. When they [the Chinese] fired many gunshots, the rest with Washi Rinzin Dhondup had reached Dhokhu. All of them had fled towards Dhokhu.

Q: What became of you?

#55D: Then we proceeded to Lhasa along with Gundhatsang. Everyday [we] encountered the Chinese two or three times.

Q: Did [you] kill?

#55D: No, [we] clashed along the way. There were encounters and killing on both sides. [We] continued to clash as [we] journeyed.

We were around 300 horsemen on the move. I forgot something earlier. Before our leader was slain, I had a maternal uncle in the Nyingma [Monastery] called Khenpo 'Abbot' Rabgay who had fled the Chinese and arrived along with a relative. [He] was an abbot of the Minyak Gonpa. He had fled the Chinese.

Q: Fled from the Chinese?

#55D: [He] had managed to escape.

Q: Was [he your] maternal uncle?

#55D: Yes, maternal uncle.

01:39:53

And then as we advanced further [we] reached a place called Nay Athu which was the region of Golok Wangchen Thopa. There were many soldiers with us, around 300 horsemen who said they would not go further. They refused to go saying that even if they died, they would die in their region and that they would not go to Lhasa. They would not go.

We were left with only 100 horsemen of Gundhatsang and continued our journey. At Nay Athu there were only the 100 horsemen of Gundhatsang. The Gundhatsang [horsemen] consisted of men from Serta, Nyarong and Derge. The 100 horsemen were not just Gundhatsang but consisted of people from many different regions.

The Chinese pursued us and [we] faced an encounter. We were able to kill many Chinese that day. On our side, only the leader's son's horse was shot and none of the men got killed. We killed an incredible number of Chinese that day. Since the first encounter, we had not killed as many Chinese as we did that day. The Chinese could not see us as we lay in ambush. The Chinese could not see where we were. We possessed good weapons and fired from many sides. 200-300 Chinese might have been killed.

01:41:43

Our leader that got killed—the day that Gundha Nogchu was killed—he possessed a good protective amulet. Do you know the protective amulet? They are images [of deities] given by lamas that protect one from being hit by guns. Our leader had not taken it on that day. I was carrying that protective amulet. Then [we] encountered numerous Chinese troops at a place called Rakoe. I was shot there. I was shot twice, one here [points off camera; interpreter mentions left leg] and another on the shoulder. The gun did not harm [me] because I was carrying the leader's protective amulet.

Q: Did the bullets hit [you]?

#55D: I fell when the bullets hit [me]. If the protective amulets were good, the guns [bullets] could not penetrate. You do not know that a gun could not harm one when there was a good protective amulet.

Q: The bullets did actually hit, right?

#55D: [Bullets] did hit and had fallen into the pouch of [my] *chupa* 'traditional coat.' Swellings of this size [gestures off camera] developed and the pain was such that you could not breath. [I] could not breath as [the bullet] had hit [me] on the back.

01:43:29

The one that hit [me] on the back threw me down. I became unconscious. At that time I had been carrying my gun on the back and it fell. The Chinese came rushing. [I think] they wanted to capture me but I quickly picked up the gun and did this [action of aiming gun]. He came close by. I fired and he fell. Then [the Chinese] dare not seize me. Otherwise, I was among the Chinese.

Then [we] came to the Drichu ‘Yangtse River’ in Derge. There were people that knew how to make boats by using yak hide. The smart men cut wood and made boats. It took us a week to cross the Drichu at Derge because [the boat] could accommodate only a few people. [We] crossed the Drichu slowly and drove the horses into the river. The guns and saddles were taken in the boat. It took us a week to cross the Drichu at Derge.

Q: Did you reach Derge from the Drichu?

#55D: There is a huge river called Drichu, which they [interview team] might know. The Drichu is one of the large rivers of Tibet. It took us a week to cross it.

Q: Where did you reach in Tibet?

01:45:03

#55D: One must cross the Drichu while coming from Kham [towards Lhasa].

Q: Long journey. And then?

#55D: Then we advanced and acquired some clothes by killing Chinese. I was wearing Chinese clothes. And then we encountered the Chinese. It is said that wearing [Chinese] clothes rendered your good protective amulet powerless. [We] encountered the Chinese in a few days and I was shot that created holes in me here. [bends over] It is difficult to see. [I] was shot here and [the bullet] exited here [gestures off camera].

01:46:15

[Stands to roll up pants on left leg] Here.

Q: Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah.

#55D: It exited here [indicates back of left leg and starts to roll down pants].

[Videographer]: Please hold on a little.

#55D: Yes? [Rolls pants further up to reveal scar]

Q: Oh, yeah. [Interviewer points to scar] See it’s right here. [Camera focuses on scar] I can see it. Is that bullet...? Bullet hole and bullet exit. One and exit in the back.

#55D: The Chinese and I faced each other.

Q: It went right through?

[Interpreter interprets as]: It didn’t touch the bone?

#55D: It did not. The Chinese and I met face on. [Sits down] It was a young Chinese of my age. The one that shot at me was a young man. He was wearing a fur cap and was armed

with a weapon that could hold 35 bullets. He fired once and then the rest [of the bullets] at the same time—tat, tat, tat. The others did not hit me or I would be gone. Only one hit me.

When we met face on I could not fire at once. Our leader's relative fired from a distance and killed him. He fired from a distance.

Q: You couldn't kill him because he was so close to your age?

[Interpreter interprets as]: Why couldn't you kill him? Did [your] gun slip from hand?

#55D: Mine?

Q: Yes.

#55D: I did not lose my gun but was carrying it over my back then. He was holding his weapon in hand. He saw me while I did not see him.

Q: What happens thereafter to the story?

01:48:37

#55D: And then we advanced with the aim to go to Lhasa. Then one day my maternal uncle was killed. Encountering a large number of Chinese, my maternal uncle Terga that [I] told you about who was with the leader, got killed. Then [we] advanced towards Lhasa. [We] journeyed in the northern direction and near the monastery called Jang Gaden Chokhor, [we] met a man who said, "You cannot go to Lhasa. His Holiness the Dalai Lama has left for India. Lhasa has been conquered." We had no understanding until then. Then we went towards the north and came to Mustang and then to India.

Q: What an adventurous story and a courageous story and you survived!

#55D: We were not courageous, but whether it was in Kham or anywhere [people] fought because of the suffering. Even these days it is not about bravery. Take for instance the self-immolations in Tibet. They are immolating not because they are brave but due to desperation. [They] are immolating for the cause of Tibet. It was not because I was brave but I was suffering. I was livid with the Chinese [thinking] about the cause of Tibet, its monasteries and the incarnate lamas, His Holiness the Dalai Lama having to live in a foreign land and that which has never happened in Tibet happened.

It was not because I was brave but all the Tibetans were suffering and desperate. Nobody will willingly immolate. How painful is it if I was pricked with a needle? It is out of desperation that they are sacrificing their lives and that too at a young age. None of us are courageous. It is very difficult to find anyone brave enough to sacrifice one's life.

Q: So what does he think of the people who are self immolating? What does he think?

01:51:30

#55D: I feel deeply, “Poor things. They have parents and relatives. [They] have a land and country. They have sadly sacrificed their precious human lives.” Really I have tears in my eyes every time one of them dies. I have many precious sons and if it happened to one of my sons, how would I feel? It is exactly the same as each one has been brought up by his father and mother.

However, I am very grateful to them for sacrificing their lives for the independence of Tibet. Their act is something that can never be forgotten irrespective of how many human births we take. However, we are refugees and have no power, except it is due to the grace of His Holiness that the Tibetans are known in the world. [I] think we are in a pitiable situation and I feel a great loss when each time a person dies because they are doing so for the cause of Tibet. I am not saying it lightheartedly but with genuine feeling.

As for me I am enthusiastic though I do not have any education. I have held various responsibilities like President and Member of Assemblies in the Settlement in India. Thus I have served [the community] for 30-40 years since arriving in India. Though I have no education, they [the people of the settlement] elect me for my zeal. [I] have attended many general body meetings in Dharamsala [Himachal Pradesh] and His Holiness the Dalai Lama knows [me]. Although not highly familiar, yet His Holiness always...Recently when His Holiness came to Lake Rewalsar he asked me how old I was. [I] replied that I was 75 years old and he said, “You are younger than me.” I have many photographs taken with His Holiness. Whenever [we] meet, even in a crowd of 100-200 people, he calls and asks me, “How are [you]? Are [you] well?” It is because I am used to going everywhere although I have no education whatsoever.

01:53:26

I have a lot of enthusiasm and still feel that though I am 75 years old, if any movement takes place in Tibet, [I] am ready for it. I am not worried about sacrificing my life because it is for the cause of Tibet and it is a service for His Holiness the Dalai Lama. The Chinese will not do anything but deceive us. This is it.

Q: Well, His Holiness will be very glad that we got your story on camera today.

#55D: [Joins palms]

Q: Thank you. Thank you so much.

#55D: If you get the chance to show this and my photograph, His Holiness will recognize me. I will be very happy if you could do it.

Q: What was it like for you to tell your story?

#55D: I am someone who speaks [about his experiences] and have interest in doing so. There is no feeling as such. Actually if you could...we are in a hurry. Otherwise, I could talk about Golok Serta and the names of regions around it. I can relate everything as if I

am looking at it now; the many leaders and influential people that fought the Chinese and were killed. The Chinese killed all these leaders.

01:55:25

My father was taken to Pomaylungtha in China and died of starvation at Rangakha. My father was captured and taken there. My mother also died of starvation. All my family members...They [the Chinese] killed my sister who was three years older to me by starvation. [She] did not have food and was killed by starvation.

[The Chinese] said there was the [symbolic] “hat” that would be given. “You are given the hat,” meant that one could not talk to anybody and must walk looking [looks down on ground] in front where one walked and was not allowed to look around for it is said, “You are given the hat.” If you looked around, it was breaking the law and you would be imprisoned and assaulted. Hence, though my mother did not die in prison, [she] died at home in that manner.

01:56:05

Father died in prison in the year '62 as told by a few colleagues that managed to escape. My father was sentenced to life and initially taken to Pomaylungtha and then moved to Rangakha where he died, died of starvation. “[He] could not walk,” a colleague said. “I used to carry and lay [him] in the sun and bring [him] back in the evening.” My father was a big build, but had become small and thin when [he] died from starvation. [A co-prisoner] told me that father died in that manner.

Q: So all the more important that you told your story and we're now going to end the interview. Thank you.

#55D: Yes, thank you. You are doing this for the cause of Tibet. There is no need to thank us because we are...it will help us...

END OF INTERVIEW