

Tibet Oral History Project

Interview #87 – Wangdu (alias)
July 2, 2007

The Tibet Oral History Project serves as a repository for the memories, testimonies and opinions of elderly Tibetan refugees. The oral history process records the words spoken by interviewees in response to questions from an interviewer. The interviewees' statements should not be considered verified or complete accounts of events and the Tibet Oral History Project expressly disclaims any liability for the inaccuracy of any information provided by the interviewees. The interviewees' statements do not necessarily represent the views of the Tibet Oral History Project or any of its officers, contractors or volunteers.

This translation and transcript is provided for individual research purposes only. For all other uses, including publication, reproduction and quotation beyond fair use, permission must be obtained in writing from: Tibet Oral History Project, P.O. Box 6464, Moraga, CA 94570-6464, United States.

Copyright © 2009 Tibet Oral History Project.



TIBET ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

www.TibetOralHistory.org

INTERVIEW SUMMARY SHEET

1. Interview Number: #87
2. Interviewee: Wangdu (alias)
3. Age: 73
4. Date of Birth: 1934
5. Sex: Male
6. Birthplace: Chongye
7. Province: Utsang
8. Year of leaving Tibet: 1959
9. Date of Interview: July 2, 2007
10. Place of Interview: Community Hall, Village No. 16, Chowkur, Tibetan Dickey Larsoe Settlement, Mysore District, Karnataka, India
11. Length of Interview: 1 hr 27 m
12. Interviewer: Marcella Adamski
13. Interpreter: Tenzin Yangchen
14. Videographer: Jeff Lodas
15. Translator: Tenzin Yangchen

Biographical Information:

At age 17, Wangdu joined the Tibetan army as a form of tax payment for his family. The Tibetan peaceful policies were supported by the fact that the Tibetan army was more engaged in construction work than in military training and exercises. Wangdu provides a description of the unique construction methods used to build a palace in Lhasa.

Wangdu served as a Potala Palace guard from 1956 to 1959. He was an eyewitness to the shelling of the Potala Palace by the Chinese and the Tibetan uprising on March 10 and 12 of 1959. Wangdu explains how the Tibetans in Lhasa attempted to protect Norbulingka and prevent His Holiness the Dalai Lama from being captured by the Chinese.

Wangdu refused to surrender and escaped from the Potala Palace with a group of fellow guards to collect more weapons from a far away storage depot. They were unable to complete their mission because the Chinese had already taken over that area and the guards decided instead to follow the Dalai Lama's trail into exile.

Topics Discussed:

Childhood memories, Norbulingka defense, March 10th Uprising, Dalai Lama's escape, invasion by Chinese army, resistance fighters, escape experiences.

TIBET ORAL HISTORY PROJECT
www.TibetOralHistory.org

Interview #87

Interviewee: Wangdu [alias]

Age: 73, Sex: Male

Interviewer: Marcella Adamski

Interview Date: July 2, 2007

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

Interviewee #87: Yes, you can use it. I appreciate your working for the cause of Tibet and forming this project to record the old stories. In one way the youngsters may think that the old stories are not worthwhile, but that is the main base. I am very happy that you are doing so much for this cause and I would like to thank you very much.

Q: It is an honor to hear your story.

#87: [Nods]

Q: So to begin could you please tell us where your family is from?

#87: Lhoka Chongye.

Q: What did your parents do to earn a living?

#87: They were farmers.

Q: Were there many children in your family?

#87: There were three children in the family.

Q: Where were you in the line?

#87: I was the youngest boy and my elder brothers were monks. I had a sister.

Q: Did you all grow up on the farm together?

#87: Yes, we were all together until my brothers went to join the monastery.

Q: Can you tell us a little bit about your childhood? What kind of chores and work you did on the farm?

#87: As a young boy, I used to tend the animals. I used to look after the goats and the sheep.

Q: Was that unusual to have two boys from the same family become monks?

#87: That was usual. Both my brothers were sent to different monasteries.

Q: Was your family very religious?

#87: Yes, we were very religious.

Q: Can you tell me a little bit about your parents? What were they like, your mother and your father?

#87: My parents were very good-natured people. Especially my mother was renowned in our village for her good nature and kindness. People showed great respect and treated me differently because of my parentage. If any of the neighbors wanted to borrow things from our house, my mother would very gladly lend it. She also gave alms to the beggars.

Q: When your brothers went to the monastery that left you as the only son to help on the farm. Was that difficult?

#87: Yes, it made me uncomfortable in my heart. The old system in Tibet was such that if your father belonged to a *shungpa* or a *tretpa* 'tax payer,' my father was the Jang Ratengtsang's *tretpa*, the son automatically became a *tretpa*. So our family was obliged to send a person to serve in the army [as a form of tax]. The person our family had sent had run away from the army to marry someone during one of His Holiness' journeys to and from India. The Chinese were invading and the army was ordered to assemble, so I was sent to the army in place of the person [who eloped].

Q: To take the place of the person who ran away? How old were you when you had to go?

#87: I was 17 years old when I joined the army.

Q: How did you feel about having to join the army and leave the farm?

#87: I was very sad to leave my parents, who had most lovingly brought me up, and now when I had reached an age to be of help to them, I could not and had to join the army.

Q: What was going on in the army at that time? What year was that?

#87: As a new recruit in the army, I had to learn the basics. Mostly we were sent out to work. We constructed the Tenzin Phodang [a palace for His Holiness the Dalai Lama] at Norbulingka [summer palace of the Dalai Lama]. At the base of the Potala Palace, we soldiers constructed the Jigji Lhakhang [a temple]. Although we were supposed to be in the army, instead of fighting we engaged in constructions.

Q: You built the Norbulingka?

#87: There is a palace called the Tenzin Phodang at Norbulingka, named after the present Dalai Lama that we built. There was an old palace, but this was especially built for His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama.

Q: What do you remember about that experience?

#87: I have vivid memories of those times, which age has not diminished. These days I tend to forget things that need to be done around the house, but I never forget those days, which are imprinted in my heart.

Q: Can you paint us a picture of what happened to you during those days?

#87: During those days nobody had any idea that Tibet would come to such a position. We labored on the construction sites and when we returned to the army base, we practiced the drills. Then we were again called to build the Jigji Lhakhang. We [the soldiers] transported all the stones [for the temple] because the public cannot be forced to work and there were no other laborers.

Q: How far is your village from Norbulingka?

#87: It was five days' walk.

Q: And did you have to walk there?

#87: Yes, I used to walk.

Q: Were the people in the army, were they paid any salary?

#87: There was no salary. Long, long ago, there used to be a system called *sa-sum-shong*, in which a soldier was annually paid an amount equivalent to half a *rupee* in the present times. The army in Gyantse received 25 measures of grains instead of the *sa-sum-shong*. That was some sort of a custom that was continued since long ago. There was no salary as such.

Q: Who received the half rupee?

#87: You wouldn't know about it. It was 10 *tanka* [a currency unit] and it had seen no change since the early days. In 1959, even when the cost of grain shot up to three

or four *dotsa* [a currency unit] this remained the same. The government distributed us [the soldiers] two *khel* of grains per month. In terms of kilograms, a *khel* would be 16 kilograms, which meant a total of 32 kilograms.

Q: Is the *tanka* the same today?

#87: No, these days the *tanka* is not used.

Q: How many *rupees* is that?

#87: Around one-and-a-half *rupees*.

Q: Per day? Per month?

#87: Per year. That was the custom carried down since ages. It had never changed.

Q: The 25 measures of grains, that was given to each person every year or what?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: That was provided to the army based in Gyantse and he was not in based in Gyantse.

Q: Was the presence of many Chinese soldiers in Lhasa when you were there?

#87: There were many Chinese. They had a festival called *riya* in August. During this time every Chinese troop stationed in Tibet gathered at the ground. They held a parade and displayed their tanks. They came in large numbers.

Q: What was your reaction when you saw such a big Chinese parade?

#87: I wondered what the plans of the Tibetan nobles were at that time. The Chinese commanded the entire Tibetan army to assemble at the ground and we'd be there standing in rows with our band. There were also the Chinese soldiers with their arms and ammunitions. A parade was held and, compared to the Chinese army's large strength, our army looked like a little apron, even though the Tibetan army, consisting of the Kunsung, the Drapchi and everyone in Lhasa, were there in full strength. We were so little in number while their [the Chinese] army seemed unending. I felt that our government was not doing anything and that it was inevitable we would fall under their power. I thought that was what the Chinese had in their mind.

Q: When you came to Lhasa to build the Norbulingka, you were a farm boy and you had never been to a big city like that before. Is that correct?

#87: I realized what an isolated life I had led immersed in my life with the animals. When I saw the place [Lhasa], I wondered why my parents did not come here, where there were so many monasteries, monks and people from different parts of

the world. I felt sad and I thought they were so backward. So many more opportunities in terms of livelihood, like businesses, were available here.

Q: What was your first impression when you saw the Potala Palace?

#87: When I had my first glimpse of the Potala Palace, I thought I must have done something good in my previous life to be able to see it now. I was so happy.

Q: When you were building the Norbulingka, you knew it was for the Dalai Lama?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: It was another special palace for His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama. Norbulingka was already built.

Q: It was another palace? Where was it going to be?

#87: It was inside the grounds of Norbulingka. It was called Tenzin Phodang.

Q: How did you feel about building the palace for the Dalai Lama?

#87: I considered myself very fortunate to be able to serve His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama. As I told you earlier we transported the stones. There was a type of superior quality stone called *nyangti*, which was used to build the temple. We carried them on our backs.

Q: Where did you transport the stones from?

#87: From the quarry which was located between Sera Monastery and Drapchi Army Camp. The stones were found at this rocky mountain and nowhere else.

Q: How many years or days did you work on this palace?

#87: It took us one whole year from the time the foundations were dug until the final completion.

Q: How is your health during this time? You were coming from the country, eating good country food and now you are living in the city. How did you manage?

#87: My health was perfect. I went to break the *arka* and singers came from Lhasa. I was young and did not mind the hard labor.

Q: What is *arka*?

#87: That is like cementing the floor here. A certain type of stone was used for the flooring. First the *arro* was laid and on top of that, a layer of *arship*. Then we watered the ground and pounded with a wooden implement. That's when the song "*a la la*" was sung.

Q: Do you remember the song?

#87: Yes, some parts though not the complete song.

Q: Do you want to sing a little bit?

#87: [Sings the song] That's how it goes.

Q: Thank you. When you were singing, were you beating and crushing?

#87: Yes. We would be in rows and pounded the floor as we sang. The ground was sprinkled with water and pounded until it became as smooth as this floor here. Then powder was spread on it and polished until it shone.

Q: A lot of work but it must have felt very satisfying to do something so beautiful.

#87: Yes, I was young at that time and with so many people working together I never felt tired. I never felt in my heart that this was a hard task.

Q: And the women who helped; were they Tibetans or Indians?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: They were Tibetans.

Q: What happens to you when you are done finishing the palace? Where do you go next?

#87: After that I was sent on duty to the Potala Palace. I served there for three years.

Q: What kind of training did you get in order to be on duty at the Potala Palace?

#87: We were armed and every evening went in pairs to guard the particular side assigned to us for two hours.

Q: At night? Did you have two guards on one side?

#87: There were guards on all the sides. In the east was the *sharjenjong* gate, then *tenyangsha*, *thagoegyab* and then the side towards Namgyal Datsang.

Q: How many men?

#87: We were about 300 soldiers.

Q: What kind of training did you have?

#87: As guards we had no special training. However, at the military camp we trained in handling the guns.

Q: Aside from the Chinese, what would you protect the Potala Palace from?

#87: We were guarding the Potala Palace, so that the Chinese did not forcefully enter it and raise their flag over the Palace. Below the Potala is the Marchikhang.

Q: During those years, did anything memorable happen that stands out?

#87: There were no special experiences as such, but as a guard at the Potala Palace I had knowledge about and can relate what was going on among the public of Lhasa, and about what the Chinese were doing.

Q: What kind of knowledge did you have then?

#87: The Chinese falsely claimed that it was the Tibetans themselves who started the protests armed with weapons. They made a propaganda movie on this, which is totally false. On the 10th of March, which in the Tibetan lunar calendar is the eighth day of the second month, the Chinese extended an invitation to His Holiness the Dalai Lama to attend a reception at their camp at 8 o'clock. It was their trick to capture His Holiness if he accepted the invitation.

A Chinese officer who sympathized with the Tibetans sent word to His Holiness' private office that His Holiness should not attend the party, as he was bound to be captured. The public of Lhasa formed groups, like the Women's Association, *Bumthang Cholak* and others. Hearing about the developments they resolved that they would not allow His Holiness to proceed to the venue the next day. They decided that all of them would lie on the streets in front of Norbulingka and stop His Holiness from going there at any cost. People were crying as they went there. These stories I relate are what I have seen as I was very close to the place. I never like to say things that I am not sure of. This is what truly happened; not maybe or perhaps.

Q: And what happened?

#87: The 10th March Anniversary we observe here is a commemoration of that day. At that time there was a businessman of the Chamdho Phakpala [a wealthy, high lama] and the father of the Samdup Phodang [a noble family], who was a commander in the Tibetan Army. They were suspected to be spies for the Chinese. The businessman of Chamdho Phakpala and the father of Samdup Phodang were the ones who came to invite His Holiness to the Chinese reception. The public came to know about this and the businessman of Chamdho Phakpala was killed on the steps of Norbulingka.

Q: What about the father of Samdup Phodang?

#87: He was hit on the head with a stone, but managed to escape on horseback.

Q: So the Tibetan people thought this was another ruse, a secret plan to abduct the Dalai Lama? Is that correct?

#87: That's right.

Q: Were these people that were going to do that, were they Tibetan royalty?

#87: They had agreed to bring over His Holiness the Dalai Lama to the Chinese [camp]. Chamdho Phakpala was a high lama whose businessman was involved and the Samdup Phodang is a noble family.

Q: Why do you think that they would betray the Dalai Lama?

#87: They had formed contacts with the Chinese earlier and the Chinese must have sweet-talked and deceived them into doing it.

Q: And so you spent three years on guard duty. Was there a particular part of the Potala Palace that you were responsible for guarding?

#87: I was responsible for guarding the east side called *sharjejong*, which faced Lhasa.

Q: When you said you did that for three years, it would have been from 1951 to 1954 according to the calculations I have. Is that correct?

#87: No, it was in the year 1956 that I joined guard duty because in 1959 when I escaped, I left from the Potala Palace.

Q: And before that, where were you?

#87: Prior to 1956 as I told you, I was engaged in the construction of the Tenzin Phodang and then we went back to the base camp. Then I worked on the construction of the Jigje Lhakang. It is right at the base of the Potala Palace.

Q: What happened in 1959 then?

#87: After the 10th of March events that I told you about, His Holiness left secretly on the night of the 12th. There were over 200 of our soldiers stationed at Norbulingka. He left so secretly that even his usual bodyguards did not know about it. The Nechung oracle was consulted and the advice given was that His Holiness should leave. He left through the Dip [river] side and nobody knew about it, not even the Chinese who had a camp at Nordheling, very close to the river. It was our protective deities who helped us.

Q: What were you doing at that time?

#87: I was at the Potala Palace.

Q: When did you find out that the Dalai Lama had escaped?

#87: The soldiers at the Potala Place and Norbulingka interchanged their duties, so I came to know through them. The order from the Tibetan army was that soldiers should be ready with *tsampa* ‘roasted barley flour’ enough to last for three days and that they might be called to either Dip, *Tseri* ‘hilltop’ or Gaden Ozi. And further that, if they [the soldiers] wore golden earrings or rings on them, they should hand them over to their wives.

Q: Where is Gaden Ozi?

#87: It’s a hilltop close to Drepung Monastery. The strategy in calling the army to the hilltops was to shoot down on the Chinese, but that was such a silly idea when I look back on it. The news was relayed through telephone from Norbulingka to Machikhang.

Q: Why were you told to give the gold to the wives?

#87: That [was to indicate that] there would be war and that they might get killed.

Q: To leave your riches possession to your family?

#87: Yes.

Q: So what happens next?

#87: That night from 2 to 4 o'clock in the morning, my colleague and I were on duty at Sharjejong. It was very cold, so we took a blanket to cover our knees and guns. That was the time the war started.

Q: What was the date?

#87: It was on the 13th of March.

Q: Bombarding the palace? Do you remember which part they bombed first?

#87: There was a Chinese army camp at Dip, another at Nordheling and one at Magasapa. Our people have made mistakes. The Samdup Phodang building was sold to the Chinese, so was the Surkhang and the Yuthok. So the Chinese army was living in these estates. The firing started from Dip and Nordheling. My colleague and I heard a loud bang early that morning and wondered what it was. Then other sounds like “*tat, tat, tat, bak, bak bak*” followed. We thought the *Chushi Gangdrug*

Resistance Force was arriving from the riverside. Then came a *dhing* sound from Nordheling and a flash of light, red light, yellow light, green light—the Chinese signaling to each other.

Q: Which three noble families were they [who sold their houses to the Chinese]?

#87: The Samdup Phodang, Yuthok and Surkhang.

Q: Where did these families go after they sold them?

#87: With the money that they received from the Chinese, they had already constructed new houses.

Q: Why would they sell their house and build another one?

#87: Because they received a lot of money.

Q: Big profit.

#87: That's right. It was for the profit. Their intellect was not correct.

Q: Meaning the moral decision to do that was not correct?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Right.

Q: You are being bombed. What do you feel when this bombing starts?

#87: We as guards at the Potala Palace were in a situation where we could not go anywhere and we feared that the Chinese would come and destroy the Palace.

Q: So what did you do?

#87: Then that evening the guards discussed among us. One group was of the opinion that we should give ourselves up to the Chinese. We could tie a *khata* 'white ceremonial scarf' to the end of a stick and hang it outside a window and perhaps some Tibetans among the Chinese would understand its significance. Another group said we would never surrender to the Chinese.

Q: What position did you take?

#87: I was among those who said we would never surrender.

Q: Why did you take that position?

#87: I was in the army to serve His Holiness the Dalai Lama. We were being paid whatever it may be, by the Tibetan government and we had been serving the

government for generations. I was determined to kill even one Chinese and die myself if it came to that.

Q: How long did the bombing go on?

#87: It went on for quite a long time. The windows of the eastern part of the Potala Palace were destroyed and so were the pillars of the *tenyangsha* [one side of the Potala Palace]. However, most of the shells fell behind the Potala Palace in the lake near the Lukhang. There was absolutely nothing we could do. It felt almost like surrender, just sitting there and doing nothing.

Then the monks of Namgyal Datsang and the guards who didn't want to surrender decided to leave and go toward the north at Jang Nachuka. A storage house for the army's weapons was located there. Twenty-five soldiers were left to guard the depot. About 180 soldiers had left along with His Holiness' entourage. Those of us who had vowed never to surrender to the Chinese decided to proceed towards the storage house. However, that night the moonlight was too bright to risk an escape, so the monks of Namgyal Datsang performed prayers for the clouds to eclipse the moonlight. We also had with us holy incense from the previous Dalai Lama. Then we exited from *thagoegyab*, through the back of the Potala Palace. It was only when we reached Nyari did the Chinese learn of our escape.

Q: Where is Nyari?

#87: It is a small valley near Sera Monastery.

Q: What was there at the Jang Nachuka storage house?

#87: Arms and ammunition belonging to the [Tibetan] government.

Q: Were you able to get the guns from there?

#87: No, we never reached there. Initially, that was our plan, but Jang Nachuka was very far away. Then we reached Phenpo. We stayed one night at Phenpo Lhundup Zong. Some people from Jang Nachuka arrived and they asked us where we were headed. We replied to Jang Nachuka. They said that there was no point going there as the Chinese have captured it. It was as if the Gods had sent us a warning. At that time we had not yet started the climb up the mountain.

Q: Did the clouds come [and eclipse the moonlight]?

#87: Yes, the clouds came and that's why we were able to escape.

Q: How many escaped with you?

#87: Up until Phenpo there were many of us, maybe 300 or 400. At Phenpo 92 of us said we would follow the trail of His Holiness the Dalai Lama and the figure was the same when we reached Tsethang.

Q: Why such a drop?

#87: At Phenpo, our army officer told us, "From this day onward, each of you is on your own. You can go back to wherever you belong. If your family lives in Lhasa, you are free to go there or Tsang or wherever your wife and children are. If you want to accompany us, you can do so." Many either went to Lhasa or Tsang and 92 were determined to carry on.

Q: When you left the palace, did you still have guns and ammunition with you?

#87: It is very difficult to exult about oneself, but I must say that I faced the most difficult time among all the soldiers. There was a soldier with me at the Potala Palace who received a bullet on his shoulder, so I carried his gun. I did not own a gun myself as it was said that my forebears were not entitled to guns, since they looked after the horses of the army in Kham. Even during my time, I was not provided a gun. When I asked for one, my superior said that since I had a mortar, I didn't need a gun.

On the escape journey I carried the mortar, which was very popular at that time. I had requested that the officers provide each soldier with a mortar shell, as we may meet some Chinese on the way and that would enable us to resist them. He declined saying, "No way at all. A bullet may hit you and everyone around would get killed [if the soldiers carried shells on them]." So I put the six shells of the mortar in the pocket of my dress. They were very heavy and I also carried the mortar. Our trainer had told us that shells could be used as bombs, but that was not so. I carried six shells, a mortar, a gun and 250 bullets.

Q: Did you have a gun yourself?

#87: My weapon was the mortar.

Q: The gun belonged to your colleague?

#87: Yes, that's right.

Q: And what happened to the colleague?

#87: He was left at the Potala Palace.

Q: So you carried your colleague's gun and 250 bullets?

#87: Yes, I carried them. I brought them until Mon Tawang . There were six people in my group and none of them helped me carry them. During a battle at Yarlung Harigang, we were able to use two of the shells, while four were worthless. I carried them until Jor Gonpa and requested a monk of the monastery to drop them into the river there.

Q: You had to be very strong even though you suffered a great deal.

#87: Yes. Due to the weight of the arms, I hadn't even realized that I'd dropped my bag of *tsampa* along the way. It was only when we reached Nyari and I wanted to eat that I realized my *tsampa* bag was missing. Much later, a soldier who found it gave it back to me.

Q: Why do you think the other men didn't help you?

#87: It was their way of saying that I didn't listen to them when they told me that I shouldn't carry so much ammunition.

#87: They did not agree with your carrying all that ammunition?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: That's right.

Q: Why did you want to bring it when other people said not to?

#87: I thought we might at least use some of it to defend ourselves from the Chinese.

Q: Did that opportunity arise?

#87: Yes, we used two of the shells, which helped us a great deal during a fight with the Chinese.

Q: Two of the mortar shells?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Yes, mortar shells.

Q: How did you feel leaving the palace when you realized you'd have to surrender or you'd be captured or killed? How did you feel about leaving your post?

#87: When we reached Nyari, the sun was just beginning to rise. To me it looked like there were two suns shining in the sky. I turned towards Lhasa, to the Potala; I prostrated and prayed that His Holiness the Dalai Lama and the people should be back soon with the world's help. The Chinese always talked to us about the United States of America. Once I was on duty with five Chinese and they made us go around the riverbank. I asked them why they were taking us to the riverbank. Actually, they were worried about the *Chushi Gangdrug* guerrillas, but they replied,

"The Americans may come. These people have a lot of technology and they may come from the waters."

Q: When were you with the five Chinese?

#87: There were five Tibetans and five Chinese. We were on guard duty, patrolling around Lhasa and their army camps.

Q: And then what happens?

#87: We continued on the trail of His Holiness to India. I thought that with some help from somewhere we would be back to fight the Chinese. I knew that our ammunitions would be over and without support coming from outside, there was no way we could face the Chinese. On the way I reached my home, but I carried on.

Q: Was anybody in your house?

#87: My father was there while my mother had passed away.

Q: What was your father's reaction to seeing you?

#87: My father was in a state of shock. He didn't have anything to say. The people of my village had collected to resist the Chinese. They had formed 500 men to fight the Chinese and then another 500 as backup if they failed. In all this commotion, my father was sort of lost. He seemed completely lost.

Q: Were the 500 villagers going to fight?

#87: They were like soldiers. Men of the village ranging from ages 18 to 60 collected to defend the village.

Q: Meaning the Tibetan people?

[Interpreter to interviewer]: Yes, the villagers.

Q: Had the Chinese come to attack the village yet?

#87: They had not yet arrived [at the village], but were at Tsethang, a day's journey away.

Q: Was your father going to stay in the village?

#87: Yes, my father was in the village.

Q: And he was going to stay?

#87: He did not talk about escaping.

Q: Do you know what happened to your brothers who were monks and to your sister?

#87: They were at their monasteries and I did not meet them.

Q: How many days were you on the road after you left the Potala Palace?

#87: It was almost a month.

Q: Did you carry the heavy equipment the whole time?

#87: Yes, that's right. During the journey, some people acquired donkeys, some mules and some horses. I got a horse.

Q: That must have been a big relief.

#87: That's right.

Q: Was the idea that the soldiers would return and defend Tibet again if they could get more help? Where were they going to get the help?

#87: It was like an omen how the Chinese in Lhasa talked on and on about the United States. They had put up posters on the walls of the *Bakor*, showing a Chinese soldier with a gun in hand and an American soldier lying at his feet. They would go on and on about the 'expansion-oriented Americans', so I thought perhaps they [the Americans] might come to our assistance, hearing how the Chinese talked about the Americans.

Q: So when you finish your travel for one month, what happened? Where do you land and what happens next?

#87: We reached Mon Tawang and then we came through Assam.

Q: Were you still intact as an army, the 92 people?

#87: Yes, we were together.

Q: What happened when you got there?

#87: When we arrived at Assam, the Indian government gave each of us a sum of 60 rupees, a blanket, a pair of flip flops and a pair of cotton pajamas.

Q: How did it feel to be in India?

#87: I had heard about Mussoorie, Dharamsala and Simla before. So I hoped I could go to one of these places to work as a coolie. I was not educated enough to earn a livelihood in any other way except by hard labor. We were in a group and the government was taking care of us. They told us to stay in Bomdila, but we didn't. We came to Gangtok.

Q: What did you do when you get to Gangtok?

#87: The government of Sikkim gave us work as road construction workers.

Q: We are finishing the story about Lhasa and the attack by the Chinese. Is there anything that we left out that you think we should record about that experience you had?

#87: As far as I can remember now, that's about it.

Q: What made it possible for you to endure so many hardships?

#87: The Chinese invaded our country. Since His Holiness the Dalai Lama has safely managed to escape the Chinese and is in India, I feel that our foundation is still intact and that is my inspiration. Because of His Holiness, I think wherever the Tibetans are; they will work hard and not lose courage.

Q: What do you think should have been done to help the Tibetan people at that time?

#87: I feel that if support had come to us then if possible in the form of men and if not, at least weapons; that would have gone a long way. We wanted to fight, but lacked weapons. We knew our way in the hills and the valleys and could have put up a fight. Later when I joined the ITBP [Indian Tibetan Border Police] and underwent training, I realized that what we had done was really deplorable. If only we had arms and ammunitions we would have managed to fight. For example, if a group of men was fighting at a certain place and a message had to reach them, we had to send a man across with a letter to do that because there was no communication system.

Q: What do you hope will be preserved about Tibet for future generations?

#87: The important things to preserve are the culture, traditions and the stories about Tibet, so that the children will know their parents. They can learn about their parents' past, understand and help them. We are living as refugees here. If one builds a huge house, but is asked to leave the country tomorrow, he has no choice. It is very important to educate the younger children about the history and politics of our country.

Q: In conclusion I would ask what advice would you give to the children of Tibet.

#87: The main thing is to respect the wishes of His Holiness the Dalai Lama. Right from kindergarten stage, the children should know that it is not only about earning a good livelihood, but one should think of serving the country. There should be love for one's country. The younger generation leaves for greener pastures after receiving a good education. Chasing money by going to foreign countries is very sad. It is a loss for the country. I feel it is important to tell the younger generation not to be influenced by money, but to think of one's country.

Q: Thank you for the good advice and the wonderful interview. I think the Dalai Lama will be very proud of the story you have shared about Tibet.

END OF INTERVIEW