

Interview H0005: with Phu Dündül Chöying [tib. bu bdud 'dul chos dbyings], (/China, June 1993) : Part No. 2 of 2

Phu Dündül Chöying was from an important family in the Pembar which was part of the Shotalthosum area in Chamdo, Eastern Tibet. On this tape, the interviewee discusses the events in Pembar after the uprising failed in Lhasa and Central Tibet. He was a leader in Pembar at this time and discussed the 15 people trained by the CIA who were parachuted into Pembar and the chaotic events that followed this. He talks about the huge number of refugees who flooded into Pembar in 1959 and the resulting shortage of food which led to robberies and fights between the outsiders and the Pembar people.

Q

What happened after Andrutsang ran away? He told you to defend your place, right? I saw in a book that 15 people were parachuted into your area. How did that happen?

A

After they [Gombo Tashi] left, I was there, and my main supporter was Pembar Trülku [Ngawang Lobsang [tib. ngag dbang blo bzang]. We two were the main ones, and we recruited the people that Gombo Tashi had organized and we held a meeting again and we said that we were [Chushigandru](#) and we set up the Military Headquarters [tib. dmag spyi las khungs] and made a pledge for the 4 [dzong](#) to defend our own place and set up soldiers. We did more than when Gombo Tashi was there, and made preparations for opposing the [Chinese]. At that time, nobody was suppressing us.

Q

At that time, you knew that revolt took place, right?

A

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Yes, we knew about the revolt and the loss of the revolt and that they were doing big things like implementing democratic reforms. But we did great things until the end of 1959. At the end of 1959, lots of people came fleeing into our area. Some came from the upper area [tib. stod] and some came from lower area [tib. smad] when those places were taken over by the Chinese.

Q

[another person speaking] At that time, did you have weapons?

A

In the beginning, when we organized the people, the well-to-do households like me had a few weapons, but we didn't have the military strength to oppose the state, and we also didn't have the training for the people we recruited - 1 person from each household. People came at this time from 13 different dzongs.

Q

They came to Pembar, right?

A

Yes. The main ones were Derge Gyelpo, Nangchen Gyelpo, Chamdo Shiwala [tib. zhi ba lha] and Karupön. These were the 4 big leaders.

Q

[another person speaking] Wasn't Gonjo Chime Gombo [tib. go 'jo 'chi med mgon po] there?

A

There was not a single person from Gonjo. All of them had fled. At this time, the 15 who were parachuted were dropped in Pembar Dzong. When they were first dropped, we had a good organization.

Q

Who was parachuted?

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A

Of the 15, there were 5 Amdowas and there were [some] also from Markham [tib. smar khams] and Lithang, Chantreng, and Ba.

Q

Did they come to Pembar? Where were they dropped?

A

They were dropped in Pembar, not far from my house.

Q

After they landed, with whom did they make relations? Did they say they were trained and sent by the US?

A

At first, from among them, I knew two who used to be traders. Thönyö [tib. don yod], who was the son of the daughter of Derge Jago [tib. bya rgod], was also there. As soon as they landed, we were friends.

Q

Did they say who sent them? Did they say that they had relations with the US government?

A

At that time, our discipline was very tight; we were not like before and we stayed in the mountains. They didn't say anything about where they came from or where they stayed or which country helped them, even though we asked them. Even when I was imprisoned, I didn't know where they came from or where they got the weapons.

Q

When you asked them "Where did you come from?" what did they say? Did they say that they were not allowed to say this?

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A

They said, "We don't know where we came from. We came at night and got training and stayed for a short time. But we didn't know in which foreign country we had arrived. We were given good accommodation and food but we were not allowed to go outside. When we came from there, we came in a plane and they flew at night and stayed in daytime and they stopped 1-2 times. So we don't know which country trained us and what weapons we have."

Q

Probably, the pilots might have been foreigners, right?

Q

Yes, but they didn't say anything.

Q

Did they say that they were [Chushigandru](#) or did they say that they were the soldiers of Gyalo Thondup?

A

They said that after Tibet was lost and they fled India, Andru Gombo Tashi was given a title by the Tibetan Government and the Khambas decided to stay in Tibet. We went to the foreign country for training, and then we were sent here from the foreign country.

Q

Didn't they say which foreign country?

A

However much we asked them, they didn't say a word.

Q

Probably, they didn't know; this was a top secret.

A

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Yes, this was very secretive.

Q

Among the 15 people, the 3 people you knew went from Tibet, and after training they came back, right?

A

Yes.

Q

Did they say that Andrutsang sent them?

A

Yes. At that time, Gombo Tashi and the Tibet [government] had become the same because he was given a position in the Tibetan Government. Later, they made close relations with Derge Gyelpo because there were relatives in the group. In prison, I was accused and interrogated. They asked, "Because the place was surrounded by the [PLA](#), how did you send the wireless message telling them [parachuted people] to come?" I had to take all the responsibility. Actually, I didn't know anything.

Q

I guess that in the prison they had asked you if you had made the relations with foreign countries and if you had called those people, right?

A

Yes. After I was arrested, this was what they said and this was the main crime. They were saying that I had a wireless. But I didn't have anything to hand over.

Q

When they said that they were sent by Gombo Tashi, what was their plan? Was it to make war?

A

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Regarding Andrutsang's plan, they said, "If you want to make war, as for the weapons, we will contact the Tibet Government's representative and you will get the weapons. If you do not fight well and do not make a good organization [we wont]. We have come here sacrificing our lives. We will not tell you to fight". This was what they told us.

Q

Did they tell you that their future goal was to expel the Chinese and attain Tibetan Independence and for the Dalai Lama to come back to Tibet?

A

They were saying, "Pembar is an important strategic place with a good conditions for making war. If you can make a better war and take Powo since it is near the Indian border. So then we could make war, if we could make war and if we couldn't, we could flee to India. They didn't say anything more than that.

Q

Did they say anything like they were sent by the Tibetan Government or they were part of Andrutsang?

A

They said that since they got there [India], Andrutsang and the Tibetan Government became the same and Andrutsang had obtained a Tibetan Government title.

Q

Yes, he was the Commander-in-chief (tib. [magji](#)), right? Did the 15 people give training to the fighters you had collected in Pembar?

A

No. There were many people gathered together by the system of recruiting in which 1 person from each household was sent, but there wasn't any military training. And the people were also young kids and old men; there weren't strong people (adults) who could make war.

Q

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Where did those other people go?

A

At that time, they summoned 1 person from each household and they [the airdropped people] told us, "You do not have a good organizational structure. So even if you get weapons from the Tibetan Government, it would be useless. You need troops who can fight and then who can flee, if you lose. If you have this kind of organization, we can ask for arms support".

Q

Did they have wireless equipment to ask for the weapons?

A

They had a wireless set and came well prepared. They didn't trust the organization and they knew about the soldiers conduct and they thought that we would not be able to make war and they didn't send for weapons for about a month. They just stayed there.

Q

Did they stay in the village or in the mountains?

A

In the beginning, they went through the motions of staying in the mountains. Later, they gave up [tib. sbo lug] and stayed in the town, but 5 went to the north. At that time, there was a chief called Sogdepön [tib. sog sde dpon] [tib. Norbu Tsering [nor bu tshe ring]. In his area and in my area the [PLA](#) had not arrived and the democratic reforms had not been done. So these areas were decided to be the weapons drop zone. The organization was not that good, so we were in a dilemma - if we didn't take the weapons, we didn't have anything to do in the future.

If you took the weapons, you didn't have the people, right?

We had many people, but we didn't have strong people to make war. So it was delayed for 1 month. At this time, a lot of refugees from the upper area and lower area came to Pembar and there wasn't enough grain and food, so some started robbing from the [miser](#). We gave a lot, but we couldn't handle them because there were too many people. When we lost the fight at that time, I heard that there were 30,000 people.

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Were these all refugees?

Yes.

Q

This figure included wives and children and the elderly, right?

A

Yes. After some time, people wouldn't give them things and they had fights and people were killed from both sides. In the end, there were so many outside people, and no one listened to our orders anymore. At this time, I didn't know what the airdropped people were doing but they dropped lots of weapons from planes for us. Then we didn't get along well with the leaders coming from outside, and internally I didn't get along with Pembar Trülku. He had a bad manager (tib. [chandzö](#)), and finally I didn't dare to stay in Pembar and went to Shopando with some of my troops.

Q

What was the main cause of the internal fighting?

A

In the beginning, we didn't get along well with the manager of Pembar Trülku and when the time came closer, Pembar Trülku also didn't act stable. Since I had grain and money, the outsiders were thinking of robbing me. The main cause was money and grain. I gave them a lot of grain, but they were still not satisfied and they planned to rob me. Therefore, I went to Shopando with the troops.

Q

Did you kind of flee to Shopando?

A

No, I went leading the troops there.

Q

You could no longer stay in Pembar, right?

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A

Internally, it was not okay for me to stay there because they were planning to rob and also harm me. Most of the weapons were dropped when I was not there, and Pembar Trülku couldn't give orders to the [miser](#) and couldn't collect the weapons when they were airdropped. In this way, the place was lost. In the beginning, the Pembar Chandzö and we were together, but later he took all the soldiers with him, and I had a small amount of soldiers with me. So it was useless to get the weapons.

Did you get a chance to get the weapons?

We took most of the weapons and distributed them to the soldiers, but most likely they were not able to get the latest airdrop. I heard about that, though I was not there.

Q

How many troops did you take to Shopando?

A

I went to Shopando with about 200 troops.

Q

How many troops were there with the [trülku](#)?

A

There were no soldiers with the [trülku](#). And Pembar Chandzö was with me with 200 troops.

Q

Later, the manager and you got separated, right?

A

The Chandzö and I were about 6 days apart, and there was a wide space in between, like the place of Karupön. But internally, we didn't have good leadership, and the soldiers didn't have food to eat, and the leaders couldn't make good arrangements. At this time, the [PLA](#) surrounded us from 9 areas and attacked us. All the mountains and valleys were filled with [PLA](#) troops. At that time, probably, nobody wanted to fight, and even if some people

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thought of fighting, we didn't have unity, and the soldiers became ineffective and we had to leave Shopando. My plan was to go to a mountain near Shopando and make war in Shopando. The manager, however, said there was no point in fighting now, and that it was best to flee through the main road. So all the soldiers fled with the manager through the main road. I had about 30 men with me who wanted to fight.

Q

Did you have new weapons with you?

A

All our guns were new.

Q

Did you have mortars?

A

All the better cannons, like the anti-aircraft cannons were at Pembar. I heard that they fired a lot at Chinese planes, but that it not that effective.

Q

In Pembar, who kept these cannons?

A

The airdropped people kept them. The ten from the first drop and 1 person dropped later had the anti aircraft cannons at Pembar. In Pembar, they couldn't organize the masses well, and they also got scattered.

Q

What kind of war plan did you have to fight with the Chinese along with these 11 people?

A

They [11 people] stayed with the Pembar Lama in Pembar. At that time, we, the military leaders couldn't have all the soldiers united and give unified orders. All the leaders from

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the different dzongs signed our names many times to get united and gave the name of the [Chushigandru](#).

Q

Why couldn't you make unity?

A

At that time, we decided to organize and give orders to the soldiers in one's own area. Pembar Chandzö and I had the soldiers from 4 [dzong](#). We were able to give the orders relatively easily, so until the [PLA](#) made a large-scale attack on us, the soldiers were not scattered. But there was no unity among the other 13 dzongs. When the [PLA](#) attacked, everyone handed over the weapons before even opening the loads and fled.

Q

Besides you and Pembar Chandzö, who else was there.

A

There were many people under Chamdo Shiwala. He had many soldiers. Then Derge Gyelpo had many soldiers.

Q

They came to your place and formed groups, right?

A

Yes. Then there was Nangchen Gyelpo. There were also people from Traya [tib, brag g.yab], and Markham. All together there were 13 [dzong](#). There were the leaders from 18 [dzong](#). There were three Senior Commanders [tib. [magji](#)]; Derge Gyelpo, Pembar Trülku, Biru [tib. 'bri ru] Shabdrung Lama [tib. zhabs drung bla ma], and Khedrub Tendzin [tib. mkhas grub bstan 'dzn]. There were 15 deputy commanders. So there were 18 [magji](#) altogether. I think I am the only one of these 18 left alive.

Q

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When the three senior commanders held a meeting and said that we have to do this and that, would the deputy commanders say, "We were not going to do this"? Why wasn't there unity internally?

A

The commanders were appointed according to their previous rank. Otherwise, the people would not obey them. As for the individual commanders, they didn't have the education and strength to be qualified to give orders. So they were unable to have unity. They just held some meetings, but didn't do anything about war. When Pembar was lost, I was not there, and the people didn't listen to Pembar Trülku who was leading them, and they didn't get support from the air-dropped people, and they were unable to collect the equipment that was airdropped. Of the 11 parachuted men, 6 were killed and I heard that 5 deserted and made it back to India. The 6 of them fought as much they could and were killed. Most of the people from other areas immediately surrendered to the [PLA](#). A few of them fought till the end, until their bullets ran out, then they killed their wives and kids, and then killed themselves.

[Trindor: [not on the tape] his friend was fighting for the [PLA](#) in Biru and there was a terrible battle. The Tibetans were entrenched in a cave and had a machine gun and were firing and refused to surrender. They killed many [PLA](#) soldiers. Finally, one [Khamba](#) man said he would surrender and came out. When he was among the [PLA](#), he had a hand grenade in his pouch and pulled the pin, but a [PLA](#) soldier pushed him into a foxhole and the bomb exploded killing him but didn't hurt other [PLA](#) troops. When they went to the cave they found his wife and kid dead - he had killed them.]

In the Pembar fighting, a lot of [PLA](#) troops were killed. But only in Pembar is there a burial site for [PLA](#) troops. After I was captured, they took me on a tour of the burial site. I counted about 130 grave markers. I am not sure whether there was only one corpse under a grave, or whether there were several and whether there were pits.

[Trindor [not on the tape]: there was a tough battle at Jagra [tib. lcags ra] Pembar where many [PLA](#) died. The monastery was on a steep hill. In back, there was no way to go for it was too steep; in front there was a river and then a long climb up. The [PLA](#) crossed the river and started up the hill. As they got near the monastery, the Tibetans inside opened fire and killed many [PLA](#), who fell back into the river. Many were killed, and the others dug little foxholes and hid there. The [PLA](#) contacted Chengdu to send planes, and the next day, 5 planes came and bombed the monastery. The fighters then fled upward into the

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snow and ice on the mountain, but there was no way out the back so they were trapped and all were killed. The [PLA](#) lost about 900 in this battle.]

I wasn't able to fight effectively against the [PLA](#) because the manager and I got separated and he got most of the weapons, so finally I had to flee and hide on a mountain. Since I was the one who had the bigger name, the masses told the [PLA](#) about me, so the [PLA](#) surrounded us very quickly. When they came to arrest us, we fled, and on the way we fought and also shot the [PLA], but I don't know whether I killed any [PLA](#) troops. So then I went back to Pembar to my homeland. After 1-2 days, about 600 [PLA](#) surrounded us. We were 5. [Me](#), my 2 kids, one relative, and one from Chamdo. So I was captured. I didn't fire at them on this occasion.

Q

How many soldiers were there under the senior 3 commanders?

A

When I was there, probably there were 6 airdrops that I know of. These were not all in one night. Each day about 2 planes came. At that time, the weapons were not that good. Among these, there were three pieces of long artillery. And there was a 5-clip weapon called a "phosar" rifle. Then an 8-clip automatic rifle with short barrels. These I divided among my own force. I don't know how many soldiers came from outside to Pembar. In our group, we collected 1 person from each household. We had about 4,000 troops from the 4 dzongs. Most of these stayed in Pembar. My people and I went to Shopando.

Q

Were there 10,000, counting inside and out?

A

There were about 30,000. But, most of them didn't have weapons.

Q

How many troops got the arms dropped by plane? Was it 2-3 thousand?

A

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I know of 6 drops, each with about 200 guns, so that is 1,200. I heard that in the loads that we couldn't collect, there were machine guns, pistols, and good mortars and hand grenades.

Q

When the 15 were dropped, if Andrutsang had come with them, would there have been better unity?

A

No. We wouldn't be able to do anything but have a little hope for the future. If we had taken Powo, it would have been excellent. Otherwise, we wouldn't have been able to make war in another place. That would have been just like a dream.

Q

Did you have any idea of attacking Potramo a second time? Did you send soldiers there?

A

No. At first, there was hope since there were no [PLA](#) troops there. But later, a lot of [PLA](#) came, so we couldn't handle them at all.

Q

Would there have been more unity if they had send a relative of the Dalai Lama, even though they would lose in the end?

A

No. It would be hard. At that time, the unity didn't depend on a person, but on food. If we had had an abundance of grain, we could have also given the orders and made a good organization. All the troubles and fights were about grain. There was no food, so the troops wouldn't listen to the leaders. So all the soldiers had to go find their own food. There was no salary from the government. We had a little bit grain, but there were too many people for the amount of grain in our area. Even if we had collected all the grain in that place, it

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wouldn't have been enough. First, in the previous year, Andrutsang came and used a lot of our grain, then, in the next year, the outsiders came.