Radrü Ngawang [Tib. dbra phrug ngag dbang] was a Litang (Khamba) monk who became a monastic manager/trader (Tib. Jiso) and then became one of the top military commanders in Chushigandru. In this interview, he discusses encounters between the Chinese and Chushigandru, including the Dokarsumdo battle and the ambush at Wuyug Dzomtang in 1958. He also discusses more encounters between Chushigandru and the Chinese, including battles at the Dam Airport, Drigung Lungshö, Mashung, Gongkar and Tsetang.

Q

After Drigutang you went to Shang Ganden Chöngor. What I heard was that the Chinese knew about it because along with [the Chinese defector called] Lobsang Tashi there was another Chinese [defector] who ran away and informed the Chinese at Lhasa.

A

Yes, that's correct.

Q

Now at Yangpajen there was a small battle right?

A

Yes, a small one.

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When you were at Drigutang, before going to Yangpajen, how many were you?

A
At first, when we had the meeting, there were about 1,300-1,400 and all of us were traders from Kham and Amdo who had come up [to Lhasa] at the time of the revolt. About 700 went with Andru Jinda to Shang to get the arms. When we were in Lhasa, there was internal talk about taking those weapons and we made plans to send 500 riders to Shang. But after we heard that the Chinese had prepared to send the Amdowas and Khambas back home, all of a sudden, on the 16th day of the 4th month, Andru Jinda left. Then others followed. About 1,300-1,400 people were there [in Drigu]. So about 700 had to go to get the arms and it was not okay if Jinda didn't go to do the talking.

The main base was at Drigutang and people were still arriving. If we could procure the arms, then we could get together about 1,000-10,000 people including a militia. If we didn't have arms, then it was useless. So the Tibetan Government's arms at Shang were ready to be taken. There was [also] one armory at Gyantse, but the former was decided on and we planned to go to Shang Ganden Chöngor.

Many Chinese were surrendering. They were mainly traders. Along with them was a Chinese officer who we called Tempa Dargye. We asked Lobsang Tashi what he thought about this man and he replied that he cannot say for sure. This man met a woman nicknamed Khata Lembar [scarf brand] and loved her [note: I think she was a Newari prostitute]. He had left 5-6 boxes of dayan coins and had planned to go to India. So he was really not a Chinese spy. He also had come with a gun when he surrendered as well as a little ammunition. He said that he was a rebel [against the Chinese Communists] [Tib. ngo log pa]. So we thought that was possible.

So he was taken along with us. When we crossed the Chushul river on our way towards Yangpajen, in an area that was very desolate with rocks, water and the alpine willow trees [near Chushul], he hid there in a corner of the mountain. He had changed his mind, thinking that these guys will not be able to fight the Chinese and thought it would be better to slip away, so he fled. We tried to chase him, but it was in vain. He would not have known 100% that we were going to get arms, but he informed Lhasa that we were going towards the north and that Gombo Tashi was also there and how many fighters we were. We were going through Dokarsumdo towards Shang past Shugola. When we were going to Shang, we were 900 riders. We were 700 riders at first, but others joined on the way, so we said that its not good for so many to travel together and we divided the group into two regiments. The first regiment went a day or so ahead, and the other followed. Andru Jinda was in the main one group of 500 and there were 400 in the another group.
The summer river at Dokarsumdo was high and so at Dokarsumdo one had to cross over the bridge. When they were going this way, two nomad women said that since a few days ago the Chinese have been laying in ambush so you should not go on. We were suspicious of them and then three elderly nomads came in the valley. They happened to be spies sent by the Chinese. When we asked them, they said that they had not seen any Chinese. Now a discussion took place and some concluded that the two women were spies and had been sent to make us turn back. Others, the elderly ones, said that it is better to be cautious and discuss this with the main base [Radrü was in the advanced group]. Then there were the show-offish ones who said, "There is no need to consult anyone. We, the crack riders [Tib. bu hrag rta hrag], have been sent ahead and if there are Chinese, we can fight. So they said let's go and then they went.

In Dokarsumdo, from the upper reaches to the valley down, the Chinese had prepared 9 ambush sites. They had planned to totally destroy us. They had as a signal, a cannon fired from a hilltop. Without this signal, they were not allowed to open fire. So our people went as far as the 3rd ambush site where they spotted the Chinese since there were telephone wires in the animal corrals. Some of them said the Chinese were lying down there and they pulled back. Among them was Lonphel Tsültrim, the Chantreng Magji.

What Jinda had ordered was that we should not fight the Chinese until we have achieved our objective [the guns]. Always circle around and try to avoid a fight. But once we have started shooting, then we really have to fight and leave a lasting mark and make people amazed so that we will become famous. Otherwise, the misers will think that we are nothing. So they remembered this and began retreating.

At that time, the cannon signal was fired and at the 3rd ambush site 24 riders were caught. Four of them managed to get away, but the other 20 dismounted and fought at the 3rd ambush site. At the 1st and 2nd ambush site, the fighting lasted all day. The 2nd ambush site was totally wiped out and they got all the arms like cannons. Some Chinese were killed and some fled down to the river. The nomads could not tell us how many Chinese died there, but at the 3rd ambush site the nomads counted 96 dead Chinese corpses. In each of the sites there were more than a hundred Chinese and so there were 200-300 Chinese dead. We got over a hundred weapons, like machine guns and cannons.

On our side there were 49 dead and we lost 3 magji -- Lonphel Tsültrim, Gaba Gelek Phüntso and Gonjo Atsong. Forty nine crack people died and 60-70 were wounded. Then we withdrew and via Shugola went to Ganden Chöngor. So at the first fight at Dokarsumdo, we really fought like wolves attacking sheep. They shot guns and fought
hand to hand with swords. There was nobody taking photos. Otherwise, it really would be a great scene.

Q

What about the earlier one at Yangpajen?

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There the Chinese were patrolling and a skirmish took place for only an hour. One Chinese was said to have been killed. No casualties for us. Two patrols met each other. Then we got to Shang Ganden Chöngor and we sent volunteers to the monastery, the dzong and to the people living below these. We did not know whether there were Chinese there or not.

We sent about 100-200 volunteers. I was among those going to the dzong. The acting dzongpön was there as the dzongpön was not present. He had already left. A monk had been left there as the acting dzongpön. He was a Gyerongpa. He came down and asked where we were going. We said to see the dzongpön. He said you can't go, so go and stay below. He said that they had received many orders from the government saying that the monastery and the dzong should be on guard since there is a lot of commotion, and you cannot give the arms to anybody. We said that we were Chushigandru. He said that he had heard about the Chushigandru, and about the offering of the golden throne. And so if this is the case, then it seems that you are really for the sake of religion and politics, but I don't know whether this is the case or not, so stay below and then we can talk [there].

There were about 30 to 40 young misers and others defending the dzong so they were not listening to us. The acting dzongpön and a few monks were watched over by a few soldiers. They said we cannot go on. However, we went and found the dzong door was closed. We used some large stones to bang on the door saying that there are Chinese inside there and we pointed our guns at it. Then they immediately opened the doors. The elders and fathers approached us saying come in. There are no Chinese here. There were 40-50 people defending the dzong. In one room there were 30-40 303 English Carbines.

Then the two acting dzongpön came and said that they will prepare food and a place to stay, etc. We said we have to come to the dzong since we were sent here, but if a needle or a thread is destroyed let me know. At the door of the dzong we hoisted the Chushigandru flag, the flag of the Volunteer Army to Defend Religion (Tensung Tanglang Magar). The monastery was below, nearby.
However, the monks in the monastery didn't let us in, saying that if you try to force us we will shoot you. So they could not take the monastery and they went below [where the misers lived].

Nearby there was a small monastery called Trelün Gomba. The Chinese had already arrived there. These Chinese were the ones who were supposed to prepare the cannons. They arrived almost simultaneously to us. When we arrived in the morning, they had arrived that previous night. There were about 30 odd Chinese, all horsemen. The misers told us in the evening that in Trelün monastery the Chinese had arrived. When we circled the monastery, the Chinese had already escaped that evening. We chased after them and when they reached rocky part of the land they had abandoned their horses and escaped on foot. Their mules that were carrying their mortars were left behind. All in all, there were about 36 animals. After we took over this small monastery, then the main regiment [of the Chushigandru] arrived.

When they discussed the situation, they said that the monastery was not listening to them, so Andru Jinda ordered that each group should use stones on the various gates at dawn. He said that it had to be forcefully taken since otherwise they were not listening. This was the order that Andru gave to the magji. When the magji told the gyagpön, they said that before doing any fighting it would be very disheartening if we had to do this to a monastery. We are supposed to be the Army to Defend the Religion and if this is what we have to do to our religion it is bad, so please request again. So we spoke with Jinda and he said, "You are fools. There isn't anything else to do. If they shoot first then reply, otherwise don't. It is possible that they will not shoot since they will not be able to challenge us." So the next day when all went to the gates, the abbots and the prominent ones were all in one room. Internally, the abbot said, "You must capture us and tie us up". About 50-60 monks were taken to the orchard [Tib. lcang ra] where we had camped. So that's where we discussed this and then we got the arms.

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How many arms?

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There were 495 303 English Carbines. I can't tell you how many bullets, but in each steel box there were 2,500. There were something like 126 or 156 boxes. Then there were 18 sten-guns, 18 bren-guns, 2 large 16mm cannons and 6 smaller ones. Then we got all of
the pistols and rifles in the monastery. They [the monks] said to take them since they can't do anything against the Chinese. At first the monks said that they wanted to go with us, but Jinda said that they couldn't. The monks said that the Chinese would not leave them alone and insisted that they be taken since otherwise they would be killed. After we got the arms, we had a meeting as to how we should proceed. Jinda said that it is better to go back in two groups.

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The idea was to return to Drigutang, right?

A

Yes. Then there was talk of going to Gyantse since there were also arms there. Jinda spoke as if we could also get those, and he said that they were still in Tibetan hands. He said if we accomplished our goals here then we could also go there. However, at the meeting everyone said that they wanted to go back together, even if they were to die. So a divination was done and then we once again returned together. It was said that there was one route via Chushul and another via Nyemo. Once again we returned via the Nyemo and Dokarsumdo route.

There were Chinese moving around Tsang in Yangpajen and in Takdruka, so we sent 100-200 riders ahead as an advance patrol to collect intelligence. Our spies said that from Takdruka, about 4-5 vehicles were moving and at the summit of Shugola Pass [in the north] there were many trucks. So we sent 100-200 riders to Takdruka and told them to destroy the trucks since now is the time to fight.

Then [south of] Shugola is Wuyug Dzomtang and there we laid an ambush. The area was extremely rocky. Only about 7 trucks entered our [ambush] site while the others were still arriving. In those 7 trucks there were 6-7 Chinese girls in military uniforms and insignias who were showing films at Shigatse. They were all killed, including all of the Chinese. The rest of the vehicles did not come down. We held this area until our main group had crossed and we set fire to 2 trucks. In the trucks was a thing filled with watches as large as a refrigerator. The Chinese Lobsang Tashi said that these were Russian made and they were wireless communications used by the intelligence. This watch-wheel can tell directions [radar probably] and after this is used then they decide where to sent the army. So we stoned and shot them up.
So then we passed Dokarsumdo towards Nyemo. We sent 200 riders ahead to the guard the ferry site near Nyemo. There they met up with the Chinese who had come from Chushul. It seems the Chinese got there first. [dog barking Interruption] So we got to Nyemo. A section of the Chinese were coming from Dokarsumdo via Yangpajen. From Tsang via Takdruka another group of Chinese were arriving. We sent some miser as spies and they returned and said that there were perhaps more than 1,000 Chinese both cavalry and foot soldiers on the Takdruka side. We had made all preparations at Nyemo. At the ferry site we had about 200 riders and the Chinese there were overcome since they were not many there. The area was rocky and there was the river and so not many could be killed on both sides, right? So we fought there and established a base. At Takdruka we had another group waiting there. Another group was at Dokarsumdo.

Before dawn, around 2-3 in the morning, the battle began. This was a really big one. Many Chinese were there and we had also prepared ambush sites. Here there were about 1,000 Chinese killed. On our side the casualties were only 7-8 killed, but many were wounded. We held the area and were waiting for them, right?

Now we could not hold on to the area. We fought the whole day and the same night we left. We backtracked [north] to Nyemo Karkhang and tried to go through Chushul but if that was not possible we would go via Yangpajen to the North. There was no other way. So we went to Nyemo Karkhang, but via Yangpajen, the Chinese had sent 5-600 Chinese towards Karkhang. The next day we fought the Chinese and the main group went towards Yangpajen. At this battle, a famous Litangba named Simga [Tib. gzim 'gag] was lost. We were able to kill many Chinese at this battle and the rest of the group escaped via Tsurphu. So after a day's battle, the group fighting rejoined the main group towards Yangpajen. When we went towards Yangpajen the place was filled with Chinese vehicles. The misers were saying that the Chinese were waiting everywhere. But if we did not go this way there was no other route because from the Nyemo side the Chinese were coming up. So we said that whatever happens we would go. When we did, there were no Chinese waiting. Then from Shigatse one jeep and one truck were coming. We ambushed them and then went to join the main group. We went via a narrow pass that was all forest. The next morning we all regrouped and Chinese trucks were going back and forth around Yangpajen.

We were far away from them in a forested and hilly area where trucks cannot go. Then we boiled tea and made preparations. In this area there was a narrow route which was really not travelled and was filled with boulders. When one has to go in a desperate
situation, even the horses went on the narrow route. So we crossed the pass and went via Chang Namtsokha [Tib. byang gnam mtsho kha]. We stayed there for a few days. Their planes were flying over to see where we were, but we had some training and when the planes came we all stood up among the trees and rocks so that they would not see us. Then at Namtso we stayed for a few days to rest. There were nomads there and food was available there.

Then we said that the Dam airport had to be attacked. We sent a spy and he said that the place was very well protected and we would lose so then we crossed the pass called Jogtsela [Tib. lcog rtse la] to Reting. About 100-200 riders were prepared to attack the airport, but they did not attack the airport and instead went to Reting. Near the pass there were airport workers and 15-20 Chinese in a Road Maintenances unit [Ch. dao ban]. At the summit of the hill, 2-3 vehicles were coming, which were destroyed. The Road Maintenance unit was attacked, but we were not able to kill all of the Chinese. They were well prepared with many grenades. One or two of our people were wounded, but none were killed. It coincided with their meal time and so our soldiers were bringing back steamed momos, pork and other food. Then the group went to Reting.

At Phöndo [Tib. phod mdo] the Chinese had come and we found out about that. Then we went via the upper reaches to Drigung Phowa Dzangka [?] and to the upper reaches of Drigung valley and then to Mashung [Tib. rma gzhung]. The idea was to go from there to the south [to Lhoka]. We said that whatever it is we have to go via Mashung. When we got to Drigung Lungshö in the upper part of Drigung Yarigang, however, the Chinese were lying in ambush. There were about 2-3 ambush sites but not many Chinese had come. So that evening we sent 2-300 riders for a night raid. The Chinese were killed and the others escaped. We got all of their horses, about 30-40. When the main group passed that way, there were so many Chinese corpses that the horses and mules were frightened and would not go ahead. The two ambush sites were probably all destroyed. It is possible that some were left. So in Drigung Lungshö we put on an excellent show. One or two died on our side. There were some wounded, but we did not suffer anything bad.

Then when we went down via Lungshö, the nomads and others were saying that everywhere in Lungshö the Chinese had been preparing for many days. They had made bunkers with tree covers. On the hillside they had lined up over 100 cannons. So then we had a meeting and it was said that we must make up our minds and go on this route [to return to Lhoka]. The 10-20 riders we had sent as scouts said that they [the PLA] were waiting in ambush and we could not proceed via this route. When we discussed this, Jinda
said let's set a fire. We were not disciplined like the army, right? Some said if we set a fire, then the animals wouldn't go. I was near a tree and then looked through the binoculars. All of the Chinese got up and it seemed that they were going to fire their cannons at us so I said," Oh, they are about to fire and just then they fired over 100 rounds at one time. The place where we were meeting was not hit and the shells fell probably about 100 yards below. So then the command was given for us to retreat up the hill and we scattered here and there. But then they increased their range. It was all cannon fire and there was no way for [our] guns to reach them. In one valley they were firing over 100 shells. The whole place was filled with dust. At a certain point when the dust cleared, I had the feeling that Jinda was hit. I dismounted and ran over. There was Rara whose leg was hit and blood was streaming out. He said, "Its useless, useless. Jinda has been hit. Now its better to die valiantly."

So I went to where Jinda was and blood was streaming over his eyes. All the servants were hit and bloody. But there was one, Tamdrin Wangye [Tib. rta mgrin dbang rgyal], who was not hit at all. He was saying "Gyechen Dorje Shungden has saved me! [Tib. rgyal chen rdo rje shugs Idan mkhyen]". The shells were just whistling by. So I wiped the blood from Jinda's eyes and he said, "Oh, it's Ngawang. I'm alright. Is there some water?" I said, "Tamdrin Wangye, get some water." He brought some water in his hat and Jinda gulped it down. Jinda's wound was tied with a sash. He was wounded badly and would not let me touch him. He said, "I've been saved by my protective talisman" [Tib. mtson srung]. So I took him to a sheltered spot at the corner of the mountain. There we made a fire. He would not let me touch him. His clothes were all tattered. Nearby was Phegye [Tib. 'phel rgyas] and an elderly person who said "don't touch me, I'm useless. Take my gun." And he pushed it forward. He was so badly hit that he was useless. So in this place, the cannons did all of the damage.

Then Jinda told me to go up to the pass immediately with about 50-60-100 others and take the pass. If we lose that, then not one of us will be left [alive]. He told me that 2-3 times, but I did not listen. I was thinking that he would die and I did not want to leave his body lying around. Then the magji came. Kelsang Chönzin [Tib. skal bzang chos 'dzin] came with many others. They said you must take about 100 riders and take over the pass. If we loose this Pass, not one of us would be able to leave. Now everyone was telling me to go and our [top] magji had been made useless by the cannon shell. Then Jinda said nothing will happen to me. Then they all swore that, until the end, we would look after him, but you must go. So I said alright. I said "don't worry. If the Chinese reach the pass then
that means I'm dead." So I got 100 riders or so and said "however many die, just pile the bodies up. If we loose this pass then the 500-600 of us will not be alive. So there is no greater cause than this today." I had an excellent horse which belonged to my servant. Shalotsang too had an excellent one. We got to the pass, dismounted and saw that the Chinese had also arrived at the same time. They had come walking from the other side. They could not shoot. Immediately I fired my sten-gun and the shooting began. When three of their people were killed we were able to take over the area. The others escaped below. It was all very dusty and later when our companions looked, they thought that we both were dead [they had really just been knocked unconscious]. They took the area so all the soldiers were able to cross over. Then we got separated from the main troop. [which left them behind thinking they were dead.]

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So there were only two of you on the pass?

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We got there first, but with all of the firing, there was so much dust, and I could tell that I was hit. So when the others crossed over they thought that we were both dead.

The next morning when I looked, I had been hit 18 times and was bleeding. My companion was hit everywhere on his clothes, but not one bullet had hit his body. He had a protective talisman which he was very proud of. I did not for one minute think that my protective amulet would protect me because when Andru Jinda was hit I concluded that the deities and protector deities were nothing. However, when I looked in the morning, it had protected me from so many bullets. Once again my faith returned. We could not go during the day, so for 3 nights and 5 days we only survived on the blessed pills in our amulets and water. We could not move much. Only about 1-2 kilometers per night. Then we met a Drigung Labrang nomad and we got some food. Then the 3 of us went to Yarigang [Tib. yang ri sgang] where the Drigung Kyamgon Rimpoche was. He was very young [11 years old]. He was son of Tsaarong. His teacher was there and the monastery was in session, so we got things to eat and asked for a divination. We said our leader was hit by cannon fire and we told the story. It was divined that the situation was quite critical. Then he said we should do rituals and spare lives. He said that the rituals will be done at Yangri Gomba and that his life [Gombo Tashi's] is tied on a pillar [Tib. sog ka ba la btags 'dug], but if the rituals are done, nothing will happen. He asked what are you going
to do to handle the sparing of lives? I said I will send a messenger and do that at Lhasa. Andrutsang Chödra was there, so we can spare the lives of 100 of whatever number of sheep and goats. So he said," Yes spare 100 or 200 lives; do whatever you can." We had given some horses to Yangri Gomba and asked them for one horse. Then we met some of our soldiers who had [also] gotten separated and we went to Phembo. We didn't know where the main group was, but it was divined that it was good [for us] to go via Phembo. At Phembo we met about 12-13 other soldiers. We left them there at a Sera Mey estate and I told Shalotsang Chöndze that the two of us should go to Lhasa. The reason was to send messengers from there to Lhoka regarding Andru Jinda so they will try and get in touch with him and also to tell them to organize well at Lhoka. The other reason was to get in touch with Trapchi Gyagpön Kelsang Dramdrü and Rupön Wangden Tashi. They were the main contacts of Andru Jinda from the Trapchi Regiment. Internally, we and the Trapchi and Gusung Regiments were all one. I left my partners in Phembo and we went straight to Sera where we had relatives who were studying. We left behind our rifles and took our pistols under our robes, since we were monks and were clean shaven. At Lhasa, Shalotsang's wife and daughter and all were staying in the Ramoche area. When we went there, they were all surprised. So we stayed there and made connections with Trapchi Kelsang Dramdrü and all, and told them to come and see us. They came and we told them the whole story of our battles and we prepared flyers to be stuck up in the Barkor, the stone pillar in Shöl and in the three great monasteries. Kelsang Dramdrü wrote the flyers and had monks copy it so that the handwriting was unrecognizable. Phala Drönyerchemmo said that they would arrange for an audience for us with the Dalai Lama and they told us all about the situation in Lhasa. They said that the Chinese were insulting the Dalai Lama. [They had found] Jigje Mahe amulets in the dead Khamba’s amulets and they took these to him and said that for the sake of this, many [Chinese] lives have been lost. The Dalai Lama told them that they should not say this, "These are not mine. It has existed since the time of the 13th Dalai Lama for the believers and it is not a situation where I gave to the reactionaries. Many Tibetans have this. If you have belief in this then I can also give it to you." They said, "This is not religion, but is only wearing the mask of religion so that the reactionaries can continue their activities. We told the Kashag that they will start militancy [fighting], and now you see that it is true." In Tibet, the area west of the Yangtze River was peacefully liberated and if it becomes forcefully liberated then you are responsible for this.
Unlike the early days, now the Chinese were going directly to the Dalai Lama and saying things. So they were telling me all about this and that it had become very dangerous. So they asked us what we can do and what they could do from the inside. We had by now already sent messengers to Lhoka about Andru Jinda. Our thinking was very simple. We said that for the All Knowing Dalai Lama we will sacrifice everything. He is our Sun, our precious Jewel and we must make sure he does not fall into Chinese hands. Since this is the case, have faith and let us take the Dalai Lama with us. We only had 13-14 soldiers but we said leave the Dalai Lama in our hands. This was very simple thinking and it was not that easy, right? Their reply was sent to us said that this is not possible. However we must think broadly and the time has come for those working within to work with those working outside. So we said whatever orders you have we will do it on the outside. So we approached Panglung Gyalchen [Shungden] through the medium. We had done this twice already.

We said [to Phala that] for our work please arrange arms. We requested 100 303 English Carbines, 8 bren-guns, one large cannon [mortar] and 6 smaller ones, and 20-30 sten-guns. They asked us how we are going to take them. We said that we have reliable Bombora Khamtsen monks at Sera and Drepung. They said "how are you going to collect them since the Chinese are very strict and they check the arms every week? We just can't take the arms out from the armory. It has to be arranged. However, if you can do this, then do it." So we discussed this with the gyagpön and they were to arrange the theft [of the arms]. We would send the monks to get them (laughs). Then suddenly, early one morning, Gyagpön Kelsang Dramdrü, Rupön Wangden Tashi and the Ramoche Police Gyagpön came. They brought gifts from the Dalai Lama and the Drönyerchemmo that included scarves, sacred thread, 300 dotse, dried meat, bread and many others things, as well as 1,000 bullets for the 303 rifles and 600 sten-gun bullets. And they said you must leave immediately since the situation now is very bad. I was wondering what it was that happened [to make them say that] but they said that they did not know the reason, but this is what the Drönyerchemmo [Phala] ordered. There were many fighters who had gotten separated and they were told to immediately leave Lhasa and go to Phembo.

The two of us decided to find out what had happened, so the next day we told Andrutsang Chödrak to go immediately to Kelsang Yeshe, the monk official who was the main contact of Andru Jinda and ask him what this situation was all about. He returned saying that it is all true. That it is something everyone discussed and not just Phala Drönyerchemmo. The situation was very bad and so we have to be cautious and you have
to leave. So we were not able to immediately get the arms together, so don't be angry. He arranged from here and there and gave us about 1,500 bullets through Chödrak. He said the situation is critical and it is not that the secret has been let out from your side.

We were not told what exactly happened. Later we found out that at a Kashag meeting, the main Chinese magji said that they had captured Andru Gombo Tashi and asked if the Kashag had any suggestions regarding what form of punishment should be given. The Drönyerchemmo said that his hair was standing up and he saw an image like Andru watching a movie. Kelsang Yeshe said, "You have captured the leader of the reactionaries and we can give Tibetan and Chinese punishments. But first you should not punish him and should hand him to the Dalai Lama's government. A letter should be sent to all of the reactionaries saying that "Andru has been arrested and when all have surrendered, then we can give the punishment." They believed that it was true and that Andru would be brought to the Barkor and so it was necessary that we be ordered to leave immediately. So the Chinese told such a big lie. The Chinese asked Phala what form of punishment he thought best.

Andru Jinda's wife's father was at Lhasa. They told him that they have captured Gombo Tashi and what did he think. He said, "Let me be the first to hold a struggle session against him." Since deep inside he knew that Andru would die rather than be captured, he had felt it was a lie. So for 5-6 days everyone held their breath wondering when Andru would be brought to the Barkor. Then after about two weeks time, a messenger came from Shotalhosum via Lharigo to Lhasa. This courier brought a letter from Andru for the Drönyerchemmo which was concealed in a snuff container made of horn. The letter said that he was well and he described the fighting down there. So the lie was revealed.

The courier also knew that Andru was better and all about the battles fought there. The Chinese were trying to see what the secret connections of the government were. So this was the reason I had to leave. This was told to me by the Drönyerchemmo when he [later] came to Lhoka. He also said not to be disappointed that we could not give you arms when you were fighting at Gongkar. Now, all of the work is done. The head of our religion and politics has been able to come out and all your hard work to keep the south clean [of Chinese troops] has now gotten fruit. Now many have laid down their lives, but the fruit has been born. So he was full of praise.

So at Phembo we made a base and we were really united. We had about 60 fighters and then from the Kham side, relatives and others came. Altogether there were 62 fighters. On the 25th, the Ganden Ngamjö [holiday], Gyagpön Kelsang Dramdrü, Wangden Tashi
and my elder brother Sonam Phüntso were at Lhasa. They consulted Panglung Gyalchen [Shungden] and along with the prophesy they sent a letter. It said that great preparations are being made at Lhoka. That 105 trucks have gone with arms and ammunitions and have returned. Now another convoy is about to go. The letter said that though it is important for you to stay at Phembo, it is imperative that you join the main base at Lhoka. The prophecy also said that and stated that I should immediately go via Chushul. The letter reached me on the 25th. On the 29th the deity Phembo Tsöra Chemmo makes a prophecy for the government and after the government prophecy, I consulted this deity through the medium and it said that I should do my work whether I want to stay at Phembo or leave. But the work has to be done before the 5th. So there were only a few days left. So we got the riders ready and we travelled at night. We got to Chushul exactly on the 5th.

There was not one Chinese around and we got hold of the ferry and on the 6th, we comfortably crossed the Yarlungtsangpo river. On the other side there was a Drepung estate. There was not a single Chushigandru patrol but there was meat and grain that was well-prepared for the Chushigandru patrols. The Drepung estate was also close by. We thought we would stay here comfortably. Then far away the dust was kicking up and the Chinese vehicles were coming. The 105 trucks were once again on the move. If we had not gotten there on the 5th but had delayed getting the ferry boat by one day, we would not have escaped.. When we were at Chushul, the Chinese called all of the men, women and children and they must have said that there were around 100 Chushigandru riders. Then they got their cannons ready. Around dusk their vehicles were coming via the Jagsam area so we had a meeting. Some said that we had to fight. I said "It's a waste of ammunition to just kill [Chinese] as we would not be able to achieve our aim, though it would just a little comfort to our minds. I said "We must think about shooting in order to get arms." They said "That is a good idea so give the command." So we planned to ambush the trucks in a rocky and remote area. We had now crossed the river. This side was where the main Chushigandru base was so we were confident that we had some place to go if needed. So we waited [for the trucks]. Over 100 trucks crossed the Jagsam ferry site, but they did not come down that night. They were suspicious, right? It was winter, we felt very cold. At dawn we ate our food and decided to go to Gongkar dzong.

When we got there we got in touch with the misers, the monks and the dzongpön, who was an excellent man. We asked him to arrange defensive patrol [Tib. sa srung] and not to send any of the donkey herders who belonged to Gongkar and to Lhasa [as they might tell the Chinese their fighters were waiting in ambush]. But we asked them to not stop the
ones coming from Lhasa. [We told them that] "If the trucks come at night, you will see their headlights so let us know. We are going to sleep in the dzong since we have not slept." He agreed. When we asked where the Chushigandru [Headquarters] was, the dzongpön did not know. It was said that they were at Thowa Dzong, at Drigu and at Lhagyari. So we wrote letters, put seals their sashes so that they would not be allowed to sleep, and sent about 6 messengers who would travel day and night. The letters said that Radrū Ngawang is at Gongkar Dzong and we are fighting the Chinese, though we were actually yet to fight. At dawn, the misers were shouting that the Chinese were coming. My brother Sonam Tsering was there and I told him to look through the binoculars. All of the roads had been blocked by the Chushigandru. He [my brother] said that you better hurry since 30-40 trucks are fast approaching. Then I told our men where to wait and what to do. We had 62 fighters and those with arms were told to be ready and those without arms were told be ready to leave if needed. If we could hold on, then that’s it. If not, we have to leave right? I took a look and about 37 trucks were coming together. Most of them then were near the Drepung estate but were not coming down.

But then the trucks started to come to where we were waiting and the Chinese in the front truck shouted a signal and they all stopped and got out. There was a path from the main road and the Chinese were coming that way. I saw them when I was behind a heap [Tib. phung po] of thorns bushes. I told the men to stand up and stay here while I said I'll be ready with my sten-gun. Just then he [the Chinese man] shouted and turned back. He was close by and I could have killed him, but I was more interested in the Chinese going on into our ambush site and I was praying to the protective deities for that. The Chinese man was at first suspicious, but then he returned. The protective deity was indeed helpful and immediately the Chinese [trucks] started moving again.

They went straight into the ambush where my elder brother, our servant Atso Ngödrup [Tib. dngos grub], Pema Rinzin [Tib. pad ma rig 'dzin] and others were really prepared. They were in the 1st and 2nd ambush sites. We could hear them firing. Two trucks had passed by and the 3rd came to where Könjog Semsang [Tib. dkon cog sems bzung] (who later died in Switzerland) and Tsempel Dökar [Tib. tshe 'phel ??] were waiting. They began firing and then we started firing. Twenty nine trucks came exactly into our ambush site. For about an hour, the Chinese could not reply. Then some started getting out of their trucks and shooting from under the vehicles. Otherwise they could not respond. In one of the trucks all of the Chinese were killed, but those from another truck started escaping towards the river. My relative said, I'll go after them and he went. From among some rocks, one
of the Chinese military officers just wouldn't let us get the arms [from inside the trucks]. When I went down he threw a grenade which came whistling by. I laid down and then got up. He started coming out and I shot at him with my 303 rifle. He was hit and his gun fell, but he got up again to shoot. All in all, he was shot 26 times. Still he was not dead. What a fierce military officer he was. When we got the arms from the two trucks there were over 100 rifles and 8 bren-guns. However, Shalotsang Chöndze lost his life near the dzong. His talisman had protected him before, but that day it was his karma to die. The Chinese did not know that they had killed him. When the Chinese left we asked the monks to do the prayers for him. Then the Chinese asked the monks and the misers how many reactionaries were dead. This was told to me by the Doctor Amchi Yeshe Thonden [Tib. ye shes don Idan] who was a monk at the monastery there at Gongkar Dzong. The monks and the misers had given us tea. The Chinese made them build fences with stones and really gave them a difficult time. So the Chinese have never had a more difficult time than in this battle. This battle became well known at Lhasa and Phala Drönyerchemmo really regretted that he had been unable to arrange guns for us. Whether it was the Lhasa people or the three great monasteries, they all became very proud and inspired by this [victory].

Q

Tell me about the fighting at Tsetang. How was the battle fought and why did the Chinese have a base there?

A

The Chinese base was there since much early on.

Q

Was the place strategically important?

A

They had an office there and later established a base. If one looks at the way they prepared at Tsetang it was fantastic. The bunkers were made on the hill and they had dug trenches so that where they lived and all their water and food supplies were underground. This was made later and they did not have this when we first came to Lhoka. When we first got to Lhoka. we would not fight right? Since we had to make all of the preparations.
The Americans said not to fight the Chinese immediately, but first do training. So we listened to that. If we had gone immediately and destroyed the Chinese there, they were not so well prepared.

At first, if they did not bother us, then we were not bothering them. So the Chinese were there from before the Chushigandru came. Later we thought that if we did not fight at Tsetang, then the way [path to India] for the Dalai Lama was not absolutely clean and reliable, right? So when we met at Lhasa and had such talk and then we came to Lhoka. At that time, Andru was not there and the situation was such that there was a great possibility that the Dalai Lama could not remain in Lhasa. So at the main Chushigandru base we had a meeting. This I told you about last time, about the base being divided into two. At this meeting I related everything, about all the difficulties and the stories that would only make one cry. At the meeting we decided to establish camps everywhere, in Kongpo, Dakpo and everywhere, and hold on to [all] of the land almost up to Chushul. There were plans to send militias also to Tsurphu, though the ones at the Jagsam ferry site could not go. In our plan, orders were sent that they had to go.

Q

Where did the meeting take place?

A

The meeting held was at the Lukhang ferry site. All the leaders had come from Lhagyari. The ones who were at Wölga Dzingche, Namgyel Dorje [of Derge] and all were there too. We discussed how the main base would function and where to send soldiers to fight. Everything was being planned for making war. I hoped for battles to be fought everywhere.

However, the deity had said through the oracle that the fight at Tsetang is to be left to Radrü Ngawang so I could not refuse. I was the only one who had the connection with Lhasa. The main base did not [have any] and I don't know if Tsipön Namseling had contact or not through messengers. But it did not look like he did. The reason is that when I said that the situation has come to such a dangerous juncture [where the Dalai Lama might not be able to remain], Tsipön Namseling sent a messenger saying what is this Radrü Ngawang saying. If what he says is not certain, then it is mostly dangerous. And he is correct in that, if what I had said, "that the situation is such that the Dalai Lama might not be able to remain," if the Chinese heard about that, then it would be dangerous, right? So signs were there that they did not have connections with Lhasa. I was sending people
through Gyagpön Kelsang Dramdrü and Trijang Labrang. The Dalai Lama himself had said that if Radrü Ngawang could come to Norbulinga it would be good. We Commanders (magji) had a meeting and they said how can you go, we will not be able to give the orders, so send any of us. So I sent some of them, but since they had patrol duties they could not go. So immediately, I sent messengers and when the Dalai Lama had crossed the Ramagang ferry site, I send my servant and a monk from Tsetang Ngamjö Monastery. My letter was given to Gyagpön Kelsang Dramdrü and the Dalai Lama said, "Who sent this, bring it here." The sealed letter stated that the areas in Lhoka are free of Chinese and that we have such and such areas under our control and that not one Chinese has been let out from Tsetang. I had a servant Yeshe Tsültrim [Tib. ye shes tshul khrims]. He said that he led the Dalai Lama's horse. He is dead now, poor fellow.

It is important to immediately think, right? So whether it was regarding the battle at Tsetang, we had such connections. The important thing regarding Gyagpön Kelsang Dramdrü and Wangden Tashi was that it would be good if they could send ammunition. If you cannot do this, then send some tea since we could not get any. They said they will send boxes of tea. Later, we got tea from Mon Tawang.

So this is how the war at Tsetang started. The period was the 12th month, day 10 [19 January 1959]. We looked for an auspicious day. That’s when we started and it continued until 3rd month, day 5 [13 April]. So for 3-4 months the fight went on daily and we had no rest at all. There was no fighting during the day, only at night. We also dug trenches. The misers were made to dig the trenches and so were the soldiers. That’s all the work there was to do, right? Later the Chinese were just amazed at what we did, thinking that we did such a spiteful thing. While the Chinese went around in the trenches, we did too and we met and fought in the trenches. So at Tsetang for more than 3 months we fought without a single day of break. From night till dawn. At night till day the Chinese were shelling us 300-400 times. So for months they had that much ammunition. Below Tsetang Monastery there were 200-300 shells that did not explode. So they had endless ammunition. So at Lhasa they were saying that Tsetang has been taken, but there was nothing that we could do because of the trenches. We put so much effort and so many were wounded and many killed. On our side there were 170-180 wounded and 30-40 dead.

Q

Did you use bombs. Since they were underground, it must have been very difficult.
We destroyed their house, their trenches and they suffered heavily. It is not possible to relate day by day what happened and so this in brief is how the battle at Tsetang took place.

After the battle at Tsetang, I consulted the deity at Chongye Dragtsen [Tib. drag btsan] through the medium. It was a most awesome deity. He did not say that I could take Tsetang but said, "Until your goal was achieved, you should not let up and go out and you should stay there." One day, when we asked for the prophecy, He said, "You should prepare the room for the Dalai Lama at the monastery and keep it clean. And your goal is getting nearer. Do not be discouraged." That was a sign that the Dalai Lama would be able to come.